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LAUDATIO

On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University

At the beginning of the new academic year 2025-2026, our academic community is experiencing a moment of special celebration: the 35th anniversary of the existence of "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University. Three and a half decades of work, perseverance, and faith in the ideal of education represent not only a moment of jubilation, but also proof of a robust construction that has grown alongside post-December Romania and the transformations of European society. "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University has proven over time to be an exceptional paideutic project, created by two brilliant minds, endowed with much courage and practical wisdom. Thus, the late Professor Dr. ***MOMCILO LUBURICI*** *founded this institution in 1990, being the first rector and president, together with Professor Dr. Adriana Corina Dumitrescu, the current president of the University. We owe them the vision to establish a private university during a time of great turmoil, in a context where the idea of a private university seemed almost impossible. The founders had the strength to open new paths during a time of uncertainty and social reconstruction. They set in motion the legal process of establishment but also the deep moral and intellectual foundations of the university. Through dedication and vision, they created a framework in which teachers and students could build together a sustainable academic community. Without their enthusiasm, spirit of sacrifice, and faith in the power of education, this project would not have taken shape. This is not an apologetic exercise, but rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's: recognizing the merits of those who laid the foundations of this institution, which has now become a landmark of Romanian education. Without the much-regretted Professor Dr.* ***MOMCILO LUBURICI*** *and without Professor Dr. CORINA DUMITRESCU, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University would not have been possible. Founded with the generous vision of combining Romanian cultural tradition with European and universal values, DCCU has established itself over the years as one of the first private universities in the country. It has managed to provide a solid and credible alternative in higher education, placing not only the transmission of knowledge at its core, but also the building of character. Through its faculties - Law and Administrative Sciences, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Business Faculty,*

Faculty of Educational Sciences - and through the work of hundreds of dedicated professors, the university has created a true academic community, with graduates integrated into the professional, cultural, and civic life of the country. Their merit is complemented by professors convinced that authentic education is not limited to the transmission of information, but is built on values, such as ***integrity***, ***responsibility***, ***freedom***, *and* ***faith***.

Today we celebrate not only a jubilee, but also the life of an academic community, the spirit that has shaped and given meaning to generations of students. "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University has grown like a cathedral of the spirit, built from faith, science, and love of truth. What has been built in 35 years is measured not just in diplomas, but especially in characters, destinies, and communities. During this time, DCCU has shown that modernity and tradition do not exclude each other, but can fertilize one another. Faithful to classical academic values - respect for culture, for science, for the holistic education of the young - the university has simultaneously cultivated openness to innovation and continuous adaptation to the demands of society. Quality teaching, diversified programs, and emphasis on interdisciplinarity have made the university a space for the training and affirmation of new generations. One of the strong pillars of the institution's development has been and remains internationalization. Institutional partnerships with prestigious universities from Europe, as well as from the USA and Asia, have opened the doors to academic exchanges and Erasmus mobilities. At the same time, the awarding of Doctor Honoris Causa titles to top personalities and involvement in international projects have strengthened the visibility and credibility of DCCU. International scientific research has itself become the rationale for recognition and visibility through two academic journals - COGITO and EUROMENTOR - genuine platforms for international scientific dialogue, bringing together professors, and researchers, from around the world, as well as Romania, on their pages. These publications not only convey ideas but also amplify the university's image in the global academic environment, confirming its vocation as a center of excellence. In recent years, DCCU has embarked on the path of becoming a SMART UNIVERSITY, exploring the possibilities offered by digitization, new educational technologies, and the integration of artificial intelligence into teaching, research, and academic administration processes. This innovation-oriented approach places the university among institutions that insightfully confront the challenges of the present and transform them into opportunities for the future. On the occasion of its 35th anniversary, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University reaffirms its place in the

Romanian and European academic landscape as a modern institution, founded on solid values and open to innovation. The anniversary is not only an opportunity to recall the tradition and express gratitude towards its founders, but also a moment for reflection on the future. The challenges of the digital age, the transformations brought by artificial intelligence and globalization call upon the university to continue its adaptation process and to strengthen its role as a Smart University, capable of combining humanistic tradition with emerging technologies, for the benefit of students, professors, and the community. Through these achievements, DCCU asserts itself as an academic space where the founding tradition organically intertwines with openness to universality and integration into the circuit of European and global values. Today, "Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University is not only a landmark of private education in Romania, but also a credible partner in the international dialogue of knowledge. Surely, the coming years will confirm its vocation to form not only competent specialists but also moral personalities, driven by critical spirit and civic responsibility. The legacy of the founders is alive and fruitful, and the future of the university is marked by a two-fold fidelity: to tradition and to the mission of innovating in education and research.

At 35 years old, DCCU shows us that the true strength of a university does not lie in its age but in its ability to reinvent itself. In the name of tradition and innovation, of faith and science, we express today a single word: gratitude. And a single wish: MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY, CANTEMIRIAN ALMA MATER!

Professor PhD. Habil Gabriela Pohoață
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THE RECEPTION OF EMIL CIORAN IN THE WORLD CULTURE, AFTER 30 YEARS OF POSTERITY

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Abstract: *The present text is intended to be a tribute to the Romanian thinker and writer Emil Cioran, on the occasion of his 30th anniversary of posterity. A Romanian thinker by origin, born and educated in Romania, Emil Cioran chose to complete his education and work in France. Thus, Cioran presents himself as a homo duplex, belonging to both cultures, although he wanted to be a metaphysical stateless person. It can be appreciated that Emil Cioran was a universal spirit, through his vision of existence "the skeptic on duty of a declining world, not a philosopher", as he called himself, in his work addressing themes such as the contingency of the human being, the original sin, the end of civilization, the tragic meaning of history, the role of life and death, the refusal of consolation through religious faith. What we aim to highlight in this article is the fact that although he wrote perfectly in French, he thought and lived in the homeland of the Romanian language. Romanian culture was the foundation of his being. Although he was considered the greatest French philosopher alive, he remained a Romanian citizen until his death, according to his birthright. Due to the fact that he was not a French citizen, today all the world dictionaries write the Romanian nationality under Emil Cioran's heading. His work is integrated into the universal culture, both through its problematic, and especially through the depth and originality of his ideas, whose influence continues to echo throughout the world.*

Keywords: *culture, education, work, language, Romanian citizen, stateless person*

Emil Cioran, one of the most prominent philosophers and essayists of the 20th century, is well-known for his skeptical and negative vision of existence, without being a nihilistic thinker, as he has been perceived over time. I have in mind, in this sense, the thinker's confession: "I am not a nihilist, although negation has always tempted me"[1] or the statement: "I suffer from an

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[1] E. Cioran, *Conversations with Cioran,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1996, p. 195.

incurable doubt"[2]. It is from doubt that the metaphysical suffering that dominated his entire life was born, his philosophy being somehow the expression of this suffering. Cioran was aware that "the drama of the one who doubts is greater than the drama of the one who denies, for the reason that living without purpose is much more tormenting than living for a bad cause.....when you deny, you know what you want; when you doubt, you end up not knowing anymore".[3] Thus, always in self-psychoanalysis, the author admits: "...the failure of my life was that I did not go all the way. I was fascinated by mysticism and mystics, I also reached a certain point, but I did not manage to reach that final one".[4] Between skepticism and mysticism, "these two forms of despair confronted with knowledge"[5]. Cioran chose the hopeless knowledge of skepticism, unable to opt for the escape from knowledge that is mysticism because of its lucidity, but also his inability to believe in God.[6] In this sense, Cioran states: "I do not know how people can believe in God, although I think about him every day".[7]

Thirty years after his passing away, it is worth reflecting on his life and philosophical contribution to Romanian and universal culture. Emil Cioran is ranked by G. Călinescu[8] alongside with Lucian Blaga, N. Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Celarianu, Anton Holban, etc. The critic places him in the lineage of Nae Ionescu's thought (whose student he was) and of some echoes of Kierkegaard, Schiller and Hegel.[9]

Thirty years after his death, his work remains relevant, offering a deep exploration of the human condition and existential questions people have been concerned with for centuries. His legacy lies not only in his literary and philosophical contributions, but also in his courage to explore the depths of despair and address the darkest aspects of human existence, and in an ever-changing world, his ideas remain a powerful reminder of the fragility and complexity of life.

Today, in a world marked by suffering and wars, the words of the great philosopher are relevant, "the problem is not to be, but to be what you are", which express the essence of his profound philosophy, somehow inspired by

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[2] Ibidem, p. 196.

[3] Idem, *About God,* Anthology, texts selected by Aurel Cioran, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1997, p. 99.

[4] Idem, *Conversations with Cioran, op. cit.,* p. 270.

[5] E. Cioran, *Tears and Saints,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1990, p. 17.

[6] G. Pohoaţă, *Emil Cioran - The Nihilist Thinking of God,* Cogito, 3rd vol., no.3/2011, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria Publishing House.

[7] E. Cioran, *About God*, *op. cit.,* p. 243.

[8] G. Călinescu *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present*, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1986.

[9] www.agerpres.ro/ Documentation-Cerasela Bădiţă, editor: Liviu Tatu, online editor: Irina Giurgiu.

Fr. Nietzsche's Ecce Homo[10], but with the imprint of his thinking imbued with the importance of authenticity and the difficulty of accepting one's own existence, in a context in which the identity and meaning of life are constantly questioned. We can find in the above statement a deep reflection that invites us to confront our inner truths and find the courage to live in accordance with them, even when confronted with the current existential uncertainties and challenges.

Emil Cioran between Romania and France

Emil Cioran was born on April 8, 1911 in Răşinari, Sibiu, into a family of Orthodox priests. His father, Emilian Cioran, was a priest, and his mother, Elvira, was a woman with a strong personality and a skeptical vision of life, having deeply influenced the young Emil. His childhood was marked by the picturesque landscapes of Transylvania, appreciating it as a period of initial, primordial happiness that began to fall apart at the age of 17, when his insomnia attacks appeared. In fact, Emil Cioran's first drama, as the author confesses[11], was when he had to leave his home village, where he had attended primary school, to go to Sibiu where he studied at the Gheorghe Lazar High School.[12] Cioran attended the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest (1928-1931), concluding with a thesis on Henri Bergson (1936), then he was a Humboldt Foundation scholar in Berlin (1933-1935). In 1937, he settled in France, obtaining a scholarship at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Paris, remaining an "eternal student", as he himself declared. He dedicated his college years mainly to reading German philosophy, readings that he had begun long before, in 1926, becoming over time a form of existence in France. It is also known that, under the guidance of Nae Ionescu, Cioran began to develop and crystallize his philosophical ideas, being deeply influenced by thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Ah. Schopenhauer and Fr. Nietzsche.

Emil Cioran published his first book, "On the Heights of Despair", in 1934, a work that deeply reflects his turmoil and existential pessimism, written in a lyrical and dense style, a cornerstone of his literary and philosophical career, for which he received the Commission for Unpublished Young Writers Award and the Young Romanian Writers Award of the Royal Foundation. In the following years, Cioran published "The Book of Delusions" (1935), "The Transfiguration of Romania" (1936) and "Tears and Saints" (1937). Before leaving for France, more precisely in

[10] Fr. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2013.

[11] *Conversations with Cioran, op. cit.*

[12] *The Dictionary of Romanian Writers,* Bucharest, The Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, 1995 *& The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*, The Encyclopaedic Universe Publishing House, 2004.

1936, he returned to Romania and became a professor of philosophy at "Andrei Şagun" High School in Braşov, but he gave up his teaching career after a year, declaring that philosophy should not be learned, but judged. In 1940 he wrote "The Twilight of Thinking", and between 1940 and 1944, he wrote "The Passionate Handbook", his last book in Romanian. In 1945 he settled permanently in France, a country where he would spend the rest of his life and where he wrote most of his works. During his stay in France, Cioran adopted the French language for his writings, believing that it offered him greater precision and clarity in expressing his complex ideas. The first book noticed by the French critics was "Précis de décomposition" (1949): "A Short History of Decay" (1992), for which he was awarded the "Rivarol" Prize. This remained, in fact, his only prize, the author refusing, over the years, along with any publicity surrounding his person, all the great distinctions that the French culture offered him, continuing to live modestly until his death. He never asked for French citizenship. Among his reference works, we also mention: "Syllogismes de l'amertume" (1952), "Tentation d'exister" (1956), "Histoire et utopie" (1960), "La Chute dans le temps" (1964), "Le Mauvais démiurge" (1969), "De l'inconvénient d'être né" (1973), "Écartèlement" (1979), "Execises d'admiration" (1986), "Aveux et anthèmes" (1987), works that explore themes such as the absurdity of existence, the futility of life and human suffering, true landmarks in philosophy and world literature.

Emil Cioran died on June 20, 1995 (according to some sources on June 26), in Paris and was buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery. In the year of his death, the publishing house "Gallimard" dedicated to him the volume of over 1800 pages, Oeuvres (Works), in which all his books were gathered, thus his work being published entirely in French. His work, appreciated and contested at the same time, consists of the six books mentioned above, published in the country and more than ten published in France, at the prestigious "Gallimard" Publishing House in Paris. After leaving his native country, everything was written and published in French. It is very interesting that Emil Cioran wrote "About France" (De la France) in 1941, in Romanian in Paris, and it was published by Humanitas in 2011. Equally, the works published in France were published in Romania after the 1990s, at Humanitas Publishing House. "Précis de décomposition" (Gallimard 1949): "A Short History of Decay" (1992), Humanitas, "Syllogismes de l'amertume" (1952): "Syllogisms of Bitterness" (1992), "La tentation d'exister" (1956): "The temptation to Exist" (1992), "Histoire et utopie" (1960): "History and Utopia" (1992), "La chute dans le temps" (1964): "The Fall into Time" (1994), "Le mauvais Démiurge" (1969): "The Evil God" (1995), "De l'inconvénient d'être né" (1973): "On the Inconvenience of Being Born" (1995), "Ėcartèlement" (1979): "Drawn and Quartered" (1992, 1995),

"Exercices d'admiration"(1986): "Exercises of admiration" (1993), "Aveux et anthèmes" (1987): "*Confessions and Anathemas*" (1994), "Essays" an anthology published in his native country (1988), "Conversations" (1993), "Letters to Home" (1995), "Mon pays; My Country" (1996), (writings in Romanian). In 2009, he was declared a posthumous member of the Romanian Academy, which has been preserving the manuscripts from the Cioran fund, donated by the businessman George Brăiloiu, since 2011. In memory of the great man of culture, a bronze bust was unveiled in Bucharest in 2015, a work by the plastic artist Valentin Duicu. Also, images of the great philosopher remained in the films made by Gabriel Liiceanu in Paris in June 199: *Exercises of Admiration*, and *The Apocalypse According to Cioran*, broadcast by the Romanian Television in 1992.

Emil Cioran had a significant impact on literature and philosophy, his aphoristic style, full of emotional intensity and deeply pessimistic, influencing numerous writers and philosophers. Although often controversial for his opinions in his youth, Cioran managed to establish himself as one of the most influential figures in modern philosophy. His life and work remain a testament to the complexity and paradoxes of the human condition, offering a unique perspective on existence and the limits of human knowledge. In Romania, he is considered one of the most important thinkers, and his works continue to be studied and appreciated for their depth and originality.

Emil Cioran's life and work deeply reflect his philosophy: "I had, more than anyone else, exactly the life I wanted: free, without the constraints of a profession, without stinging humiliations and petty worries. A dream life, almost a lazy life, like not many in this century"[13], the philosopher said, words that reveal his deep desire for freedom and intellectual independence, highlighting social distancing and conventions, as well as commitments that limit the spirit and creativity. Few thinkers dared, at the age of thirty, Cioran's age in 1941, to compare the rhythm and evolution of the culture of great countries, in the famous essay "On France". While France loved the style and the "pleasures of intelligence", extending "the thoughtful veneer of refinement over every passionate outburst", and developed "regularly from birth to death", this thing did not happen with Germany, England and Russia. They "are the countries of brilliant inequalities. Their lack of internal form determines their evolution through ups and downs".[14] Convinced that he had penetrated and understood the natural inclinations of peoples, Cioran aspired to define them substantially, the comparisons falling, more often than not, in favour of France. For him, France "is the

[13] E. Cioran, *On the Inconvenience of Being Born,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2017.

[14] E. Cioran*, About France*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2011, 2019.

country of fulfillment, with a peak moment in the Age of Enlightenment and with Napoleon". At the opposite pole, "the Slavs and Germans... did not have a normal course, while France was given a measured destiny... The Slavic world - he writes - rises up threateningly for Europe because of its excess of soul. Russia has too much..."[15]. "The spirit of culture," Cioran emphasizes, following into Spengler's footsteps[16] "is exhausted, it no longer creates, it is touched by boredom" (cafard, with the French term). Thus, he concludes with a memorable sentence: "peoples begin in epics and end in elegies". From this perspective, the essayist leaves the strict framework of French realities and delays in analyzing a state that qualifies him as a visionary. Subjective and visionary is the parenthesis focused on the idea of "citizen of the world", of leaving the immediate geography replaced by the preference for the global, "universal city". Thus, he silences the voice of his native land into himself. But, the essential idea of the entire text lies at the heart of the essay dedicated to France, the psychological preparation for integration into the French culture. Among the historical and general human truths formulated aphoristically, as everywhere in the rest of the work, here are also phrases specifically addressed to us, forcing self-knowledge, then and also today. Somehow, Cioran already felt welcomed on the land of France, when he wrote from the high altitude of historical perspective: "a nation is creative as long as life is not the only value, but values are its criteria. To believe in the fiction of freedom and to die for it; to go on an expedition for glory; to consider the prestige of your country necessary for mankind; to substitute yourself for it through your beliefs, these are the values"[17]. Throughout the 91 pages of the manuscript, we become acquainted with a general picture of the history of France, in Emil Cioran's vision/ a culture that grows and declines, from the superlative values of the past to the precipitate decadence that occurred in 1940. Analyzing the decadence in short definitions, the author saves something by returning to moments of grandeur. Moreover, even in decadence, "France will serve as a model for the great modern nations... Because France foreshadows the destiny of other countries..." "A country is great not so much by raising the level of pride of its citizens, but by the enthusiasm it instills in foreigners"; a reprimanding phrase, for us, if we think of Cioran's psychoanalysis in "The Transfiguration of Romania"[18]. The Romanian thinker proved to be a fine connoisseur of the Romanian people's virtues, but the psycho-moral portrait created in this work is dominated by negativity. However, Cioran

[15] Ibidem.

[16] O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Bucharest, Beladi Publishing House, 1996.

[17] E. Cioran, *About France*, *op. cit.,* pp. 48-49.

[18] E.Cioran, *The Transfiguration of Romania*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1993.

never stopped hoping for the transfiguration of Romania's destiny. Thus, he emphasizes: "out of passion for Romania, I cannot accept its eternal condemnation to a mediocre destiny that it has had so far."[19]. The literary critics claim that the novel "The Transfiguration of Romania" cannot be read without having first read the text "De la France", written in Romanian by Cioran in 1941, as mentioned above. Here, the young author praised "the measure of France and France as a measure". Rejecting the heated furors of nihilism, Cioran chose the classical clarity and balance, preferring the art of conversation to racist discrimination, culture to nature and a sense of proportion to excess. Cioran was only 30 years old at the time of the publication of "The Transfiguration of Romania", being a desperate young man, marked by reading the book "The Decline of the West" written by O. Spengler, at the same time, being outraged because he was born in a country lacking a great history. But he admired France enormously, writing reverently about it, because it was the place where he chose to live and perfect his work, being permanently torn by his longing for Romania, which he loved infinitely, with its good and bad things. "*I love the history of Romania with a bitter hatred*" he wrote in "*The Transfiguration of Romania"*[20]. It is the great Romanian thinker's irony over time, indisputably, a philosopher of the absolute and of the Romanian issue.

If the Frenchmen have a philosophy of consciousness developed by Descartes or Sartre, and the Germans are proud of Hegel and Kant, we, the Romanians, have Emil Cioran whose work represents a perpetual examination of a lucid and restless consciousness.[21] Cioran himself states: "A man who has not lived the drama of consciousness is a naive."[22] Indeed, the story of Emil Cioran's life embodies the "*drama of a Romanian consciousness*."[23]

Why is it worth reading Emil Cioran?

In times of crisis and abandonment, Cioran is the provider of melancholy that invites self-knowledge, lucid and realistic analysis of our own lives. We find ourselves in his writings, each of us, but we must be cautious in interpreting his texts, avoiding any risk of distorting the meaning. With impeccable lucidity, Cioran never stopped denouncing the illusions of his time, and the 20th century disappeared under his imprecations, just as the

[19] Ibidem, p. 31

[20] Ibidem, p. 32.

[21] G. Pohoaţă, *Philosophy and Consciousness with the Romanians*, chap. *E. Cioran or Consciousness as Fatality,* Bucharest, Pro Universitaria Publishing House, 2018, pp. 272-285.

[22] Emil Cioran, in G. Liiceanu, *The Apocalypse According to Cioran*, Humanitas Publishing House, 1995.

[23] G. Pohoaţă, *Emil Cioran or the Drama of a Romanian Conscience,* Cogito, vol. III, nr.4/2011, pp. 15-20.

19th century had ended under the anathemas of Fr. Nietzsche. It is remarkable that Emil Cioran had a personality as well-defined as Nietzsche's, although there is no essential convergence, except for hostility towards Christian metaphysics and contempt for a bourgeoisie that identifies excellence with material success. Nietzsche considered himself a reformist, a pedagogue. His attacks on the Judeo-Christian tradition and democratic egalitarianism were aimed at establishing the aristocratic values of the Greco-Latin antiquity, while Cioran limits himself to destroying the notion of value, without offering any alternative. From his point of view, everything is completely meaningless. The human being lacks sense and any appreciation is arbitrary and irrational. It is indifferent to him whether he acts or remains inactive. In the end, everything will be lost in the same void without substance. Cioran inverts Spinoza's well-known sentence, according to which, "the free man thinks of nothing else than death."[24] It is not true: the rational and consistent free man longs only to move towards the end, Cioran appreciates. "A free man cultivates disinterest and understands that birth is the most serious and intolerable of evils"[25], he explains. Nietzsche claims to philosophize with the hammer blows, but when he finishes demolishing, he saves the *amor fati* of stoicism: life must be loved, even when it brings us unhappiness. Cioran finds no reason to love life and even dedicates many pages to suicide, without hiding his fascination for a gesture interpreted as a liberation: "suicide is the nirvana of violence"[26], he says. Only naive people believe that, by promoting pessimism as a lifestyle, Emil Cioran urged his audience to commit suicide through his writings. What the Romanian thinker achieved with masterful talent in his works – the achievement that defines his merit – is one of the most serious contemplations of earthly life – miserable, unpolished, harsh, unsweetened by promises with the due date tending to infinity. It is a reality that some people have the opportunity to contemplate extensively throughout their lives – at least episodically – and others, happier by nature, only when the untimely appearance of some misfortune forces them to do so. It is a reality from which all of us seek refuge through faith or through a counterfeit substitute.

With a life built like an unbalanced game and inevitably punctuated by tragedies, marked by small moments that we call joys from time to time, in which God sometimes gives the impression that he is playing hide-and-seek with humanity and with each individual person, an act of categorical heroism – Cioran teaches us – is represented by simply going through life, with all its inherent misfortunes, until its very end, even assuming the

[24] B. Spinoza, *The Ethics*, chap. VI*, On the Freedom of the Intellect,* Bucharest, The Encyclopaedic and Scientific Publishing House, 1986.

[25] E. Cioran, *On the Inconvenience of Being Born, op. cit.*

[26] Idem, Syllogisms of Bitterness, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1994.

possible lack of ultimate meaning that some claim in the post-modernist present, even under the circumstances of human proprioception bringing suicide within our reach, at any moment. The simple confrontation of each moment becomes an achievement in itself, but – daring a paraphrase that goes beyond Cioran's philosophical field – it can also be an act that expresses a subtle hope that someone (Someone?) will nevertheless recognize and positively appreciate, in the end, the crawling through the misery, confusion and uncertainties of life. Although the actual contemplation of suicide always has psychopathological valences, Cioran's thought on the possibility of suicide can be applied on a smaller scale to many aspects of life that have the potential to become heavy burdens, such as the commitments assumed or the responsibilities acquired over the long term: completing a study program, being in a marriage, fulfilling parental obligations with dedication. These too bear "suicides", obviously, on a metaphorical level, but it is precisely the emergence of the temptation to give up that confirms the merit of having assumed that commitment. It is not worth committing suicide, because you always do it too late"[27]. It is Emil Cioran's paradoxical way of urging one to live both defeated and heroic, his version of promoting the assumption of the personal cross with dignity – a message with unexpected and probably unintentional Christian valences, camouflaged in the form of references to the abyss of despair. Perhaps this is why his friendship with the Christian philosopher Petre Ţuţea has remained anthological, because by expressing at length the bitterness of being abandoned by God, Emil Cioran not only does not deny Divinity *per se*, but reminds us that this existential sadness is not abnormal, all the more so since the Scripture assures us that Jesus also suffered it before his tragic and heroic death on the Cross. A lucid analysis of the texts is necessary, because there is the risk of falling into idolatry and of identifying with the author, with his will, problems and solutions[28]. Very few people are prepared to taste Cioran's darkness without the risk of fascination, and those who do, lacking the inner resistance, end up falling in love with the violence, blood and death that the writer exalts. Cioran's thinking is, apparently, chaotic, he follows Nietzsche's example, introducing "blood" into his writing: "I would like to write something with the left.... Like everything in me is a wound and bleeding"[29]. Cioran tempts the reader by indirectly inviting him to the "heights of despair", where "one can only breathe with one foot beyond life."[30] Only in this way can one live intensely, totally, restlessly: with access to the tragic. Although E. Cioran's work often seems like a "tempting advertisement for combustion, destruction and

[27] E. Cioran, *op. cit.*
[28] https://www.voci.ro/emil-cioran-sau-capcanele-lecturii/
[29] Idem, *On the Heights of Despair,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1990, p.63.
[30] Ibidem, p. 123.

death", the author does not transform his feelings into propaganda. On the contrary, his experience is strictly personal and leaves each reader the freedom to live their own experience. Cioran's only "fault" is that his texts are never neutral; impersonal (Petre Ţuţea noticed that Emil Cioran did everything possible to rid himself of the obsessions of an expository philosophy, existentially uncommitted). The author probes his own abyss, plunges into himself to explore his obscure areas, populated, it is true, with monsters. For him, writing is provocative and a way to free himself from obsessions. Although he confesses his intention to "resign from both life and humanity", Cioran does not choose suicide. In fact, in Cioran's work, suicide does not appear as a solution, as most readers understand. This is the risk of a passionate perception, without lucidity. All the texts regarding suicide should be viewed from the perspective of the author, who chose to die a natural death. Those who will read *Letters to Home*[31] will be able to notice that most of the passages dedicated to suicide are assumed terrors through which Cioran fights more easily against the absurd. It is a way of sabotaging death. Cioran succeeds wonderfully in the "Game of Death", although he is equally absorbed by life. All his drama stems from this continuous pendulum between Good and Evil, Life and Death. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of Cioran's work is the fact that revolt and negativism are transformed into an apology for life. Devoured by metaphysical anxieties and internal contradictions, Cioran disappoints all those who believe him to be a convinced nihilist, confessing in the end that... he was passionate about life. Also, reading Emil Cioran's work can be confusing, given the writer's permanent quarrel with God. Due to a misunderstanding, many theologians have declared him a "heretic and dangerous" or even an atheist. There is confusion between Cioran's relationship with God and his relationship with religion, both of which are closely related to the steps of a difficult, winding, even traumatic spiritual development. On a simplistic reading, Cioran seems to be a blasphemer. Here we can recall harsh titles like "The Evil God"[32], "Confessions and Anathemas"[33] or "A Short History of Decay"[34]. On a careful reading (if we assume the risk of such a reading!), we will notice in Emil Cioran's writings a revolt that has its source in an essential disappointment with the despiritualized times we live in. Almost all of Cioran's "dialogues" with God are angry invocations, full of revolt. However, this revolt does not prevent him from saying, in *Tears and Saints*, that "without God everything is darkness, and with Him light is no longer useful."[35] Approaching God, the author feels threatened, which leads him to

[31] E. Cioran, *Letters to Home*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1995.
[32] Idem, *The Evil God*
[33] Idem, *Confessions and Anathemas*
[34] Idem, *A Short History of Decay*
[35] E. Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

cry out: “God, without you I am crazy and with you I am going crazy!” Often, Cioran's anger and imprecations against God turned into true testimonies of love: “this absurd force that makes you embrace God, as if he were a being hidden in agony, to ask him for a final proof of love...”[36] In order not to distort Cioran's relationship with God, I would bring into analysis two more ideas that urged me to a serious reading of Cioran's texts, namely: ”There is no self-knowledge without Him” or “I don't know how others think while I think about God all the time”. This is how the first article dedicated to Emil Cioran's thinking appeared.[37] The reader should know, in order to avoid any distortion, that when Cioran had no one to talk to in the middle of the night, he would talk to God. This is how Cioran's book “On God” was born, bringing together many of his reflections on divinity. Cristian Bădiliță revealed Cioran's hidden face very well: “You don't find anything revolting in Cioran’s work. You only find a seductive fierceness and a discreet self-flagellation. To which a lot of humor is added.”[38] Cioran is worth reading, indisputably, because all his books, without any exception, invite us to self-knowledge, to a deep dive into the depths of our being and to a lot of courage in facing the vicissitudes of life. The lesson of suffering offered by Cioran is a guide to learning how to overcome it, positioning ourselves above it. ”What is best in me - Cioran wrote - is due to suffering. I do not love it, but I do not condemn it either”[39] or ”it is not through culture or spirit that man fights against mediocrity, but through suffering. Suffering transfigures the human being, it can even change his temperament”[40]. But, it is necessary to approach his work with care. For those who take him too seriously, in a tragic way, the encounter with Cioran can be extremely painful. Cioran can be read and understood only without prejudice and with an appetite for knowledge and truth. Indeed, the ideas of the Romanian thinker are based entirely on the reality of human life, aspects that appear in the life of every individual in this world: disappointment in non-essential actions, sometimes important or less significant for everyday life; deception in the daily routine, in your fellow being, but also in your own being, depending on the case and situation. Such things can happen in the existence of any person and can occur at various stages of life; but these states of mind that are oppressive to the human psyche can pass or be improved only by finding an adequate emotional balance or by implementing an appropriate activity that distracts from the depressing thoughts and condition. Thus, the great Romanian philosopher, finding his refuge in writing, ultimately left

[36] Ibidem, p. 95

[37] G. Pohoaţă, *Emil Cioran - The Nihilist Thinking of God*, Cogito, 3rd vol, no.3/2011.

[38] Cristian Bădiliță, *The Gordian Knot,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1997, p. 86.

[39] E. Cioran, *The Temptationto Exist*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1992.

[40] Ibidem.

humanity an extremely precious literary treasure, the content of the philosophical works being about the world and the evil in this universe, about the culture and identity of his own people, but also about his own manifestations conditioned by everyday life and the environment, and, last but not least, about the personal destiny transposed into autobiographical memoirs. Regardless of everything, the work of the great Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran is a universal masterpiece, and the fundamental quality of his personality is his impressive and full of lucidity intelligence. Emil Cioran was in the service of writing for 60 years, and through his preoccupations that went through states and processes of vital deception, also attracted by negative phenomena, this philosophical work relevant to universal culture was created.

Instead of conclusions

As a great philosopher and writer, Emil Cioran is well-known in the world culture, his work representing the direct interdependence with the individual's vital processes, aspects that were outlined through themes about the significance of human history, the ancestral sin, the non-acceptance of faith as a reference system in existence, the obsession of the conscious, the dangers that intervene through the mediation of negative attributes, the consoling refuge (French asylum) as a form of social protection through the philosophy of life experiences, the implacable effects on the identity and cultural development of man and his society, as well as many others. The expositions made in Cioran's work, especially those recommended in the field of ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics, and the human spirit, have meanwhile been studied by numerous literary critics and philosophers from Romanian society and beyond. In this sense, we recall their reviews, articles, studies and monographs, written in Romanian and in many foreign languages, respectively literary criticism referring both to the works published in Romania in the Romanian language, and to those edited in French after his exile in France. Known as an important philosopher in the world culture, Emil Cioran is present in numerous encyclopedias in Great Britain, the USA, France, Italy, Germany, Portugal, etc. obviously also in Romania, respectively, present in renowned libraries in the world. Emil Cioran's philosophical work is examined and valued with great interest by literary critics, philosophers, writers, teachers, actors from all over the world[41]. The irony of fate was that Emil Cioran would become famous precisely in the French language, whose constraints he had repudiated in his youth. If the French idiom calmed his excesses and gave him the secret of form and formulation, his Romanian roots provided the

[41] Galina Martea, *Emil Cioran in the Universal Critique*, Literary Current Affairs, November 2021-https://actualitatea literara.ro/emil-cioran-in-critica-universala-i/

sap that gave brilliance to his work. Retired, he lived in the "Latin Quarter" in Paris, which he did not leave, avoiding publicity; instead, he cultivated the gift of conversation with his numerous friends (Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionesco, Paul Celan, Barbu Fundoianu, Samuel Beckett, etc.); he maintained an extensive correspondence, revealing himself as a remarkable epistolary author..."Le Centre National du Livre" in Paris awards an annual scholarship in honour of Cioran; in Paris, Bucharest, Sibiu, Cluj, Răşinari there is a street named after him; he was declared a posthumous member of the Romanian Academy. Emil Cioran was a complex thinker, passionate about history, which he knew well from his vast readings and especially from the authors and memoirists of the periods of decadence, hence the gnostic and anti-modernist reflections, somewhat in the Spenglerian line, on the destiny of man and civilization: *As long as he kept the connection with his origins and did not alienate himself, man resisted. Today, he is on the verge of destroying himself through self-objectification, irrepressible production and reproduction, excess of self-analysis, transparency and through the triumph of the artificial*[42]... Cioran's warning seems like a prophecy over time, which makes the Romanian thinker present *in aeternum, in the universal culture.*

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[42] E. Cioran, *History and Utopia,* Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 1997, p.48.

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MYTH, CULTURAL VALUES AND JAVANESE PHILOSOPHY IN THE COSMOLOGICAL AXIS OF YOGYAKARTA PALACE

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Abstract: *This study examines the cultural values embedded in the myths of the Yogyakarta Palace's Cosmological Axis, a spatial and symbolic structure rooted in Javanese cosmology. It is guided by two key philosophical concepts: Sangkan Paraning Dumadi (the journey from origin to return) and Manunggaling Kawula Gusti (the unity of subject and ruler), which frame the relationship between humans, nature, and the divine. Using a qualitative approach that combines literary anthropology and content analysis, the research draws on interviews with Abdi Dalem (palace servants), cultural experts, and historical texts. It focuses on how myth shapes five cultural domains: human life, work, space and time, the environment, and social relations. The findings show that the Axis functions as both a cosmological narrative and a living cultural system. It informs identity, leadership, and ecological values through rituals, spatial design, and everyday practices. These elements support the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations and help maintain cultural resilience in the face of modernization and tourism. This study contributes to cultural and heritage studies by showing how local cosmological narratives can support sustainable, community-based cultural preservation.*

Keywords: *cosmological axis; cultural studies; cultural values; myths; Javanese philosophy*

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Introduction

The Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) is widely regarded as Indonesia's cultural heartland. It uniquely maintains the nation's only surviving monarchy, rooted in Javanese philosophical traditions, earning it the title "City of Philosophy"[1]. At the heart of this cultural legacy is the Ngayogyakarta Palace (Keraton), which continues to uphold classical forms of expression such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), gamelan music, and traditional dance. These practices help preserve a shared sense of identity among the Javanese people. One of the most prominent expressions of this worldview is the Cosmological Axis, a six-kilometer symbolic alignment recognized by UNESCO[2]. It connects three major sites: Panggung Krapyak in the south, the Palace at the center, and Tugu Pal Putih in the north—symbolically linking Mount Merapi and the Indian Ocean. This alignment is more than a spatial feature; it reflects a sacred order grounded in the concept of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, which views life as a journey from origin to return. Through its landmarks, rituals, and spatial symbolism, the Axis embodies the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine. It continues to shape local beliefs, behaviors, and cultural practices to this day.

The Cosmological Axis is a vital cultural feature in Yogyakarta, with each of its elements carrying layered symbolic meaning. One prominent example is Tugu Pal Putih, a landmark that embodies the city's collective memory and serves as a powerful symbol of regional identity. Studies indicate that it shapes how space is perceived and reinforces the area's visual and historical character[3]. Beyond its symbolic significance, the Axis functions as a cultural and educational corridor. It has been integrated into place-based learning, particularly in biology education, where local plant species along the route serve as teaching resources[4]. The Axis also supports Yogyakarta's tourism industry, attracting visitors and contributing to the local economy through its historical and spiritual appeal[5]. Architecturally,

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[1] M. Syahdani and L. Kardanardi, "Yogyakarta's Philosophical Axis: A Dynamic Interplay Among UNESCO's Selection Criteria," *The Indonesian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 151–162.

[2] UNESCO, "The Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta and its Historic Landmarks," 2023, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1671/./

[3] A.S. Sadana, L.E. Prasetya, and A.P. Dharmaraty, "Citra Visual Tugu Pal Putih Sebagai Landmark Kota Yogyakarta," *LATAR: Jurnal Arsitektur Universitas Nusa Nipa Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2024): 63–71.

[4] A. Kurniawan, "Analisis Potensi Tanaman di Sepanjang Sumbu Filosofis Keraton Yogyakarta sebagai Sumber Belajar Biologi Berbasis Budaya," in *Prosiding 3rd Symbion: Symposium of Biology Education* 2019, ed. D.R. Ma'rifah and I.R. Aziz (Yogyakarta: Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, 2019), 323–329.

[5] F. Rizki, R. Pamardhi-Utomo, and M.J. Rahayu, "Kesesuaian Koridor Sumbu Filosofis Kota Yogyakarta Bagian Utara terhadap Komponen Fisik Urban Tourism,"

developments along the corridor are expected to reflect its philosophical principles, emphasizing balance, harmony, and sustainability[67]. In this way, the Cosmological Axis operates as a bridge between tradition and modernity. It not only preserves cultural identity but also adapts to the demands of globalization, offering a model for integrating heritage into contemporary urban life.

The Cosmological Axis plays a central role in shaping Yogyakarta's communal identity by fostering social cohesion and reinforcing a shared sense of heritage. As the cultural core of the region, the Keraton actively maintains traditions whose continuity is further supported by public engagement and tourism[8]. Regular interactions with sites along the Axis deepen residents' connection to place and contribute to the formation of local identity. The Axis also enhances the city's appeal as a cultural tourism destination. Landmarks such as Tugu Pal Putih not only attract visitors but also serve as visual and symbolic anchors for Yogyakarta's identity[9]. Meanwhile, public spaces like Taman Budaya Yogyakarta function as cultural nodes that promote social interaction and artistic expression[10]. In this context, the Axis serves as more than a heritage site; it operates as a dynamic interface between tradition and modern life, sustaining cultural values while adapting to contemporary social and economic demands.

This study investigates the cultural and philosophical values embedded in the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta, focusing on how this spatial and symbolic system expresses key elements of Javanese cosmology. It examines how myths, rituals, and community practices associated with the Axis articulate relationships between humans, nature, and the divine. In doing so, the research addresses the broader challenge of preserving traditional cultural meanings amid the pressures of urban development and

Region: Jurnal Pembangunan Wilayah dan Perencanaan Partisipatif 19, no. 1 (2024): 269–291.

[6] A. Habibah, M. Ischak, and J. Iskandar, "Penerapan Karateristik Bangunan di Kawasan Sumbu Filosofi Yogyakarta terhadap Perancangan Desain Jogja Planning Gallery," *Jurnal Penelitian dan Karya Ilmiah Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Trisakti* 9, no. 1 (2024): 191–202.

[7] D. Permadi, "Empat Jalan Menuju Ketuhanan: Memahami Sumbu Filosofis Keraton Yogyakarta dalam Perspektif Filsafat Kebudayaan," *Nuansa: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Sosial dan Keagamaan Islam* 21, no. 1 (2024): 1–20.

[8] S. Rahmawati and I. Agustina, "Perspektif Pengunjung terhadap Bangunan Keraton Kasepuhan dan Keraton Kanoman Cirebon," in *Bandung Conference Series: Urban & Regional Planning*, ed. M. Satori (Bandung: UPT Publikasi Ilmiah UNISBA, 2024), 482–487.

[9] Y. Sari, A. Maria, and R. Hapsari, "Kolaborasi Kreatif Kegiatan Pariwisata dan Pelestarian Budaya di Taman Budaya Yogyakarta (TBY)," *Journal of Indonesian Tourism Hospitality and Recreation* 3, no. 1 (2020): 85–101.

[10] S. Putri, "Pemaknaan Ruang Terbuka Publik Taman Budaya Yogyakarta sebagai Pusat Kesenian dan Kebudayaan di Yogyakarta," *Nalars* 20, no. 2 (2021): 99–108.

globalization. Building on previous scholarship, this study approaches the Axis not merely as a heritage landmark but as a living system that continues to shape social, spiritual, and ecological life in contemporary Yogyakarta. It adopts a qualitative methodology, combining interviews with Abdi Dalem (palace servants) and cultural experts with a review of historical texts and secondary sources. The analysis reveals how the Axis functions as a dynamic repository of meaning, sustaining local identity and guiding value-based practices. By exploring how traditional cosmological narratives adapt to modern contexts, the study contributes to cultural heritage discourse. It offers insights into how symbolic landscapes can support inclusive, sustainable cultural continuity in urban environments.

Theoretical Frameworks

Myth as a Cultural System

In this study, myth is understood not simply as a traditional narrative, but as a cultural system through which societies organize meaning, transmit values, and shape behavior. Scholars have long emphasized myth's foundational role in framing human understanding of existence. Noth Martin traces the etymology of myth to sacred stories centered on divine figures, positioning it as a vehicle for religious knowledge[11]. Similarly, Joseph T. Shipley argues that myth offers interpretative models for abstract religious and moral concepts rather than literal historical events[12]. Nyoman Kutha Ratna extends this view by highlighting myth's function as a cognitive framework that encodes a community's worldview and regulates its social practices[13]. Taken together, these perspectives affirm that myths are not obsolete legends, but living systems that continue to influence cultural expression and individual conduct.

In the context of the Yogyakarta Palace's Cosmological Axis, myth operates on both symbolic and functional levels. It informs spatial orientation, ceremonial life, and architectural design, reflecting Javanese cosmological principles. The alignment of landmarks—Panggung Krapyak in the south, the Keraton in the center, and Tugu Pal Putih in the north—is not arbitrary; it embodies the philosophical ideals of keseimbangan (balance), keselarasan (harmony), and the cyclical nature of life[14]. Ritual practices along this Axis, such as offerings and silent meditations, reenact

[11] M. Noth, *The History of Israel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

[12] J.T. Shipley, *Dictionary of World Literature: Criticism, Forms, Technique* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962).

[13] N.K. Ratna, *Teori, Metode, dan Teknik Penelitian Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007).

[14] S. Cahyani, P. Sukandar, J. Wiryono, and R. Jati, "Pengejawantahan Konsep Filosofi, Sejarah dan Masa Depan pada Perancangan Mozaik Jogja (Galeri Pusat Budaya DIY Yogyakarta)," *Mintakat: Jurnal Arsitektur* 23, no. 2 (2022): 109–119.

mythic themes and reaffirm community values. Through this lens, myth is not merely a narrative to be remembered, but a guiding structure that shapes spatial organization, ritual behavior, and community identity. Thus, the theoretical lens of myth provides a foundation for analyzing how symbolic meaning is sustained and enacted in the physical and social dimensions of the Axis.

Comparative examples further clarify the role of myth in structuring cultural landscapes. In Navajo sacred geography, spatial alignments and ceremonies are used to maintain harmony with the cosmos, while the Māori concept of whakapapa connects genealogies to specific landscapes, embedding myth in the experience of place[15]. These parallels illustrate a broader pattern: in many Indigenous traditions, myth not only interprets the world but also actively shapes it. What distinguishes the Javanese context, however, is the integration of myth with contemporary civic and religious life. The Cosmological Axis supports tourism, education, and governance, demonstrating how myth continues to serve as a flexible and adaptive framework

Cultural Values and the Javanese Worldview

Culture, in this study, refers to the shared system of values, beliefs, and practices that shape how communities interpret and organize their lives. It is expressed through language, rituals, customs, and spatial arrangements, and passed down across generations[16]. Anthropologists such as Aloysius Liliweri[17] emphasize that culture is both learned and dynamic, encompassing visible behaviors as well as the underlying meanings that inform them. Within this framework, cultural values are the core principles that guide social behavior and reflect what a society considers meaningful or morally important.

This study draws on Koentjaraningrat's framework to examine how these values are reflected along the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis. According to Koentjaraningrat, cultural values function as abstract ideals that influence how communities behave, structure institutions, and relate to their environment[18]. His model distinguishes between descriptive, social, and perceptual layers of culture, helping to reveal how values are embedded in both thought and action. In the Javanese context, values such as rukun

[15] K. Indriyanto, "Decolonizing Discourses of Tropicality: Militourism and Aloha ʻĀina in Kiana Davenport's Novels," *ETropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics* 22, no. 2 (2023): 82–103.

[16] K. Indriyanto, "Reconciling Locality and Globalization through Sense of Planet in Kiana Davenport's The House of Many Gods," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13 (2021): 1–9.

[17] A. Liliweri, *Pengantar Studi Kebudayaan* (Bandung: Nusa Media, 2014).

[18] Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985).

(social harmony), keselarasan (balance), respect for hierarchy, and a cyclical understanding of life are central to the cultural worldview. These values are not only preserved in oral traditions or teachings, but are also embedded in spatial design, ceremonies, and daily life. Concepts such as Sangkan Paraning Dumadi and Manunggaling Kawula Gusti (unity between ruler and subject) encapsulate broader ideas about duty, leadership, and human purpose. Along the Axis, such values are expressed through symbolic landscapes and rituals performed by the Abdi Dalem and the wider community. For instance, the alignment from Panggung Krapyak to Tugu Pal Putih represents a moral and spiritual journey, reflecting stages of life and ideals of governance. This study applies Koentjaraningrat's framework to examine how cultural values shape community identity along the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis[19]. The analysis focuses on the Yogyakarta Palace community and draws on interviews with Abdi Dalem. It highlights key Javanese principles such as harmony, interconnection, and the cyclical nature of life. These values are closely tied to the philosophy of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, which emphasizes the balance between humanity, nature, and the divine. Koentjaraningrat defines cultural values as meaning systems that guide human behavior and support social organization. In this context, the Cosmological Axis functions not only as a spatial arrangement but also as a cultural structure that embodies these values. Through myth, ritual, and spatial symbolism, the Axis continues to express and preserve the community's worldview. It remains a living system that connects people to their environment, their heritage, and one another.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative descriptive design with an ethnographic orientation to explore the cultural values embedded in the myths of the Yogyakarta Palace's Cosmological Axis[20]. This approach allowed for close engagement with participants and direct observation of cultural expressions in their natural context[21]. Ethnography was well-suited to the study's aim of understanding how meaning is created and sustained within the palace community. The research was also informed by literary anthropology and cultural analysis, which treat myth as more than narrative—as a tool for transmitting values, beliefs, and spatial logic. In this framework, myth shapes how people act, interact, and relate to their environment. By

[19] Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2009).

[20] L.M. Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Method* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008).

[21] J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007).

combining ethnographic insight with interpretive analysis, the study examined how the Cosmological Axis operates as a living system rooted in Javanese cosmology.

Data Sources and Collection

Data were obtained through two primary sources: documentation and interviews. Documentation involved the review of historical texts, scholarly literature, and cultural records related to the Cosmological Axis and its associated myths. These sources helped identify key philosophical concepts, spatial-symbolic alignments, and ritual practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect in-depth, firsthand insights from individuals with lived experience and cultural knowledge. The fieldwork took place over six months, from August 2024 to February 2025. Prior to interviews, the researchers conducted a literature review and informal consultations with cultural experts to refine the sampling criteria.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on three criteria: (1) active involvement as Abdi Dalem, (2) age above 50 years, and (3) recognized expertise in cultural or ritual practices associated with the palace. The final sample included 13 individuals, mostly male, whose demographic profiles are summarized in Table 1. All participants gave informed consent and participated voluntarily.

Table 1. Informants' Profile

No	Initial	Age	Occupation	Role/Description
1	KRT. RI*	65	Palace Servant	Senior Abdi Dalem
2	KRT. JT	78	Palace Servant	Senior Abdi Dalem
3	KRT. RB	68	Palace Servant	Ritual/ceremonial advisor
4	KRT. SH	58	Palace Servant	Mid-level cultural officer
5	KRT. A	54	Cultural Office Staff	External affairs liaison
6	EP	80	Palace Servant	Senior knowledge holder
7	KRT. SW	67	Palace Servant	Historical narrative contributor
8	KRT. KSS	73	Palace Servant	Architecture and space specialist
9	KRT. C	70	Palace Servant	Spiritual practice informant
10	KRT. WCI	74	Palace Servant	Ethics and leadership advisor
11	KMT. P	76	Palace Servant	Oral tradition informant
12	KRT. W	78	Palace Servant	Community-religious interface
13	MJ. SAJ	54	Palace Servant	Daily practice and ritual guide

*Titles such as KRT (Kanjeng Raden Tumenggung), KMT (Kanjeng Mas Tumenggung), and MJ indicate formal ranks within the palace system.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using content analysis, with attention to recurring themes, symbolic structures, and culturally significant patterns. The analysis focused on how myths express and reinforce the five domains identified in the theoretical framework: human life, work, space and time, the environment, and social relations. An interactive model, as proposed by Miles and Huberman[22] was used—comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure validity, the study employed triangulation by cross-referencing interview data with textual sources and expert input. This process strengthened the credibility of findings and allowed for the comparison of lived experiences with formal cultural narratives.

The Myth of The Cosmological Axis Represented in Landmarks

The Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta is not merely a linear sequence of monuments but a spatial expression of Javanese cosmology. Rooted in the philosophy of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi—the journey from divine origin to earthly life and back to spiritual unity—the Axis reflects a life cycle encoded into the city's geography. Each major landmark along this six-kilometer line corresponds to a phase in human existence, from conception to maturity, civic responsibility, and eventual transcendence. These physical spaces are intertwined with myths, trees, rituals, and architectural forms that together construct a living narrative of life's meaning and purpose. This section explores how the Axis functions as a cultural map of the human journey, revealing Javanese values of balance, spiritual interconnectedness, and harmony between humans, nature, and the divine.

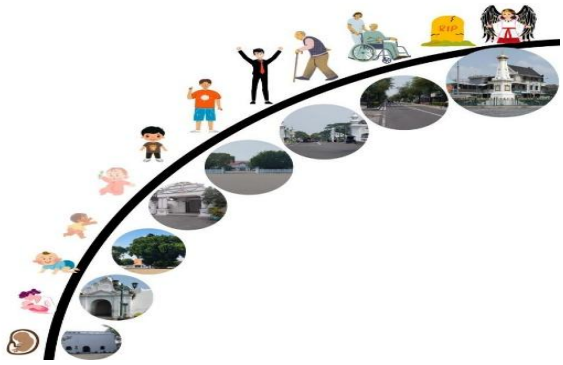

Figure 1. Visual Representation of the Life Cycle

The Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta traces the Javanese life cycle through a sequence of architectural and spatial symbols. Rooted in the

[22] M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994)

philosophy of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi—the journey from origin to return—each major landmark reflects a distinct stage in human development. The journey begins at Panggung Krapyak, which represents Alam Arham, the metaphysical womb. This quiet southern site, with minimal built structures, evokes the stillness of conception and spiritual preparation. Nearby Kampung Mijen, derived from wiji (seed), reinforces the symbolism of potential life not yet fully formed. The path continues to the Southern Square (Alun-Alun Selatan), marking the stage of childhood. Here, the Ringin Kembar—twin banyan trees—symbolize duality and protection, key themes in early social development. Adjacent to this space, Plengkung Nirboyo, a palace gate, suggests guardianship and moral guidance, reflecting the cultural imperative to nurture and protect the young as they grow into social beings.

Adulthood unfolds in the central palace grounds. Bangsal Kemagangan, a hall for palace apprentices, represents the period of learning and preparation, where individuals take on civic and ethical responsibilities. Nearby, Sasono Hinggil Dwi Abad reflects the integration of opposites—masculine and feminine, self and society—found in marriage and mature leadership. This stage emphasizes personal discipline, service, and social contribution.

In the northern zone, the life cycle reaches its culmination. Regol Brojonolo, the gateway to the palace's sacred core, marks the threshold of enlightened leadership. It embodies the Javanese principle of leading with both reason (akal) and compassion (rasa). Beyond it lies the Northern Square (Alun-Alun Utara), a space for civic communion and reflection, where rituals like topo bisu symbolize unity between ruler and people. The journey concludes at Tugu Golong Gilig, a monument of spiritual return. Its form—circular top and cylindrical base—represents completeness and strength, capturing the final harmony between human duty and divine origin.

The Cosmological Axis offers more than a spatial layout—it serves as a lived expression of Javanese cosmology. By mapping the life cycle onto the city's architecture, it transforms the urban landscape into a moral and philosophical narrative. Each landmark does not simply mark a location, but carries symbolic weight that guides individuals through the stages of life, from birth to spiritual return. Rooted in the principle of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, the Axis reflects a worldview in which human existence unfolds as a continuous cycle of growth, duty, and return to the divine. At the same time, the ideal of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti finds form in the spatial convergence of civic, spiritual, and symbolic centers. Viewed through Koentjaraningrat's lens, the Axis functions as a cultural meaning system: its architecture and rituals sustain shared values not through instruction, but through embodied experience.

Discussions

This section discusses the cultural values embedded in the myths surrounding the Cosmological Axis of the Yogyakarta Palace. Drawing from both narrative analysis and interview data, the findings reveal how these values are not only expressed in myth but actively shape the daily practices and worldview of the palace community. Guided by the conceptual framework of Koentjaraningrat, the analysis is organized into five cultural domains: the meaning of human life, the role of work, conceptions of space and time, the relationship between humans and nature, and the structure of human relationships. Each domain illustrates how myth and spatial symbolism work together to articulate Javanese philosophical principles such as harmony, balance, and interdependence.

The Essence of Human Life

In Javanese cosmology, human life is conceived as a sacred journey that unfolds in harmony with the universe. This view, grounded in the principle of *Sangkan Paraning Dumadi,* frames life as a cyclical passage from divine origin to worldly existence and eventual return to the spiritual realm. The concept is widely expressed through *tembang macapat*, a traditional form of Javanese poetry that narrates the stages of life—from birth to death—as a process of learning, purification, and reintegration with the cosmos[23]. These lyrical compositions serve not only as cultural artifacts but also as philosophical tools that embed ethical and spiritual teachings within everyday life. Myth also plays a central role in shaping this worldview. The legend of Nyi Roro Kidul, guardian of the Southern Sea, illustrates the Javanese reverence for unseen spiritual forces that influence human destiny. Her presence along the southern end of the Axis reinforces the belief that life is governed not only by social order, but by metaphysical relationships with nature and the divine[24]. These narrative forms—poetic and mythic—reflect a cultural understanding in which life is both embodied and spiritual, individual and communal, finite and eternal.

The cosmological view of life's origin is not only preserved through narrative forms but is also materially encoded into the structure of the Yogyakarta landscape. This integration is most evident at the southernmost point of the Cosmological Axis—Panggung Krapyak—which symbolizes

[23] I. Setyami and Faruk, "The Meaning of Macapat Song as Reflected in Kuntowijoyo's Novels," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Early Childhood Education in Multiperspective*, ed. M. Roqib, F. Fauzi, and S. Sunhaji (EAI Conference Proceedings, 2022), 1–9.

[24] A. Andayani and J. Jupriono, "Representation of Nyi Roro Kidul in Myth, Legend, and Popular Culture," *Anaphora: Journal of Language Literary and Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019): 28–36.

Alam Arham, the metaphysical womb from which life begins[25]. The site's quiet seclusion, absence of grand architecture, and surrounding natural elements evoke the stillness and potential of pre-existence. Nearby, Kampung Mijen, whose name derives from wiji (seed), reinforces the symbolism of conception and divine intent. These spaces do not merely mark the starting point of the Axis; they enact the first stage of the life cycle in built form[26].

The sacredness of life's origin was a consistent theme in the reflections of Abdi Dalem. One informant described Panggung Krapyak not merely as a geographic starting point, but as "the place where the soul first descends" [Informant 1]—a sacred threshold between the unseen world and earthly life. Another informant emphasized the natural setting of the area, explaining that "the quiet and openness around Panggung Krapyak remind us that life begins in a state of emptiness and dependence."–[Informant 3] He associated the absence of architectural grandeur with the vulnerability and spiritual purity of the human soul before birth. A third informant reflected on Kampung Mijen, just beyond Panggung Krapyak, as a continuation of this symbolism. He explained that the name mijen, meaning "seed," represents the potential carried by every person at birth. According to him, this space teaches the lesson that "life begins in surrender, not in ambition" [Informant 12]—a view that aligns closely with the values embedded in Sangkan Paraning Dumadi.

Koentjaraningrat's concept of cultural values as meaning systems offers a useful lens to interpret how the Javanese view of human life is both shaped and transmitted. Through the philosophy of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, the beginning of life is not merely a biological event but a stage imbued with cosmological and moral significance. As embodied in sites like Panggung Krapyak and Kampung Mijen, the myth of origin becomes a spatial narrative that teaches humility, dependence on divine will, and the sacred nature of becoming. Informants described how children are traditionally taught that life begins from wiji (seed), formed by divine will, and must be approached with humility. In this way, the Cosmological Axis becomes a cultural framework through which the palace community orients individuals toward a life that must begin—and continue—with spiritual awareness and ethical grounding.

The Essence of Human Work

In Javanese thought, work is not merely a means of economic survival, but a reflection of moral character and social responsibility. Grounded in

[25] A. Jafar, "Cosmology of Time and the Spiritual of Life in Javanese-Islamic Tradition," *Al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* 19, no. 1 (2022): 136–150.

[26] A.N. Lita, S.T. Widodo, and S. Suyitno, "Javanese Philosophy in Novel Jadilah Purnamaku Ning by Khilma Anis," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 8, no. 7 (2021): 215–221.

the cosmological principle of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, human labor is seen as a continuation of the spiritual journey—an act that must maintain balance with nature, society, and the divine. The ideal of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti reinforces this understanding by positioning the ruler not above the people, but among them, sharing in their duties and obligations. Work, in this worldview, is valued not for accumulation, but for its ability to uphold harmony, serve others, and express ethical intent. This perspective transforms daily tasks—whether trade, craftsmanship, or palace service—into forms of devotion and discipline.

The Javanese philosophy of work finds spatial expression in several key sites along the Cosmological Axis, particularly in the central zone where civic and communal roles are most visible. One of the clearest architectural representations is Bangsal Kemagangan, a pavilion traditionally used for training palace servants. Its name, derived from magang (apprenticeship), reflects the principle that work must be preceded by learning, discipline, and moral readiness. This space is not just a site of instruction but a symbolic gateway into service—where work is framed as both a privilege and a responsibility.

Further along the Axis, Pasar Beringharjo represents the economic dimension of human labor. As Yogyakarta's oldest traditional market, it symbolizes the Sultan's duty to provide for his people, but also highlights trade as a respected and ethical form of work. Nearby, Masjid Gede Kauman complements this representation by anchoring labor in spiritual purpose. Together, the market and mosque emphasize that work is not merely material; it must be balanced by devotion, honesty, and social care. These spaces form a tightly linked triad—apprenticeship, provision, and prayer—that embody the integration of skill, service, and ethics in Javanese views of meaningful work.

Informants from the palace community consistently emphasized that work, in the Javanese context, is inseparable from service and moral responsibility. One Abdi Dalem explained that Plengkung Nirboyo—a southern gate associated with protection—was constructed not merely as a physical barrier but as a symbolic act of care by the palace for its people. For him, "building the gate was not just architecture, it was a form of guarding life," [Informant 10] showing that labor, when directed toward the well-being of others, becomes an extension of leadership. Another informant focused on Pasar Beringharjo, highlighting its role in sustaining the livelihoods of palace-affiliated communities. He noted that many Abdi Dalem once engaged in trade not only to survive but to serve a broader communal function. The market, in his view, was "a place where working and helping others became the same thing," [Informant 11] reflecting a belief that labor must be rooted in social purpose, not just individual gain.

A third informant pointed out that such spaces reflect prophetic ethics, where trade is dignified and grounded in trust. He explained that ethical conduct in work—fairness in commerce, modest profit, and community care—was part of what made market labor spiritually meaningful. In his words, "working in the market was never just about money; it was about contributing to a just and balanced society." [Informant 12] These accounts affirm that the palace community does not view work as a separate economic category, but as a moral practice shaped by responsibility, protection, and shared well-being.

Viewed through Koentjaraningrat's framework, work in the Javanese worldview is not limited to function or productivity but is embedded in the cultural value system as a form of moral and social regulation. In this context, labor is guided by ideals of balance, harmony, and communal responsibility, which are repeatedly emphasized in both myth and spatial organization. The Cosmological Axis expresses these ideals materially—through spaces like Bangsal Kemagangan, which symbolizes discipline and ethical formation, and Pasar Beringharjo, where religious and communal obligations frame economic activity. The principle of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi helps explain why work is understood as a continuation of the soul's journey—a phase where individuals enact their role in maintaining social and spiritual equilibrium. The mythic and spatial framing of labor encourages individuals not simply to perform tasks, but to embody ethical principles in their daily roles.

The Essence of Space and Time

In Javanese cosmology, space and time are not abstract or neutral dimensions but are embedded with meaning, rhythm, and orientation. Guided by Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, space is conceived as a cosmological structure, organizing life according to sacred principles of direction, alignment, and balance. Time, similarly, is seen as cyclical, not linear—marked by recurring rituals, seasonal rhythms, and stages of life[27]. These beliefs create a worldview where the physical environment and temporal order are closely interwoven, guiding both individual behavior and communal life[28]. The Axis itself embodies this view. It does not simply connect points on a map—it reflects the order of the cosmos, linking Mount Merapi (north) to the Indian Ocean (south), and aligning sacred, civic, and economic spaces in relation to both the divine and human realms. Through

[27] M. Wardhani, "Titik Nol Kilometer Kota Yogyakarta sebagai Ruang Terbuka Publik Ditinjau dari Dimensi Fungsional, Sosial, dan Visual," *Jurnal Planologi* 15, no. 1 (2018): 1–16.

[28] S. Sugiarti, "Representasi Konsep Ruang dan Waktu dalam Novel Glonggong Karya Junaedi Setiyono Perspektif Ekologi Budaya," *KEMBARA: Journal of Scientific Language, Literature and Teaching* 5, no. 2 (2019): 262.

this orientation, space and time become active frameworks for ethical and spiritual living, shaping how people move, gather, worship, and lead.

The north–south orientation of the Cosmological Axis reflects the Javanese conception of cosmic order, aligning divine power from Mount Merapi with the mystical forces of the southern sea. The palace, positioned at the center, mediates between these realms, expressing a worldview in which space mirrors the structure of the universe. Along this Axis, landmarks are not just physical markers but symbolic stages in the human journey, reinforcing the idea that space is experienced through time. Spaces such as the twin banyan trees and Jalan Pamengkang guide ritual movement and life transitions, marking stages of growth and social responsibility. Ceremonies aligned with the Javanese lunar calendar occur at specific points on the Axis, integrating spatial orientation with cyclical time. This spatial logic reveals a cultural understanding in which time is not linear, but relational—measured through one's movement within cosmic, social, and spiritual patterns.

Informants emphasized that spatial elements along the Axis reflect different stages of human life. One Abdi Dalem noted that the Ringin Kembar "represent the phase of youth—still strong, but needing direction," [Informant 2] and explained that their placement signals the importance of early guidance as individuals begin navigating social responsibilities. Another informant described the pakel tree nearby as a symbol of growing maturity, stating that "it marks the point where a person must begin to think clearly and carry responsibility." [Informant 4]. For him, this tree represents a turning point from dependence toward self-awareness and social duty. A third informant associated the kweni tree with courage, saying that "it reminds us that as we grow older, we must have the bravery to make decisions and face consequences." [Informant 9] In his view, this tree marks the transition into moral independence. Together, these interpretations reflect how space along the Axis is experienced not just physically, but as a moral and temporal journey.

Koentjaraningrat's framework positions cultural values as systems that shape perception and behavior through socially embedded meanings. Within the Cosmological Axis, the values associated with space and time function as such a system—guiding not only where individuals move, but when, why, and how. The palace community does not perceive time as abstract or linear, but as cyclical and embodied in space. As expressed by informants, spatial elements like the Ringin Kembar, pakel, and kweni trees signal key moments in life's progression—youth, maturity, and moral responsibility. This aligns with findings by Muhadiyatiningsih et al, who argue that palace architecture encodes philosophical meanings rooted in

Javanese-Islamic views of life and growth[29]. Similarly, Qomaria and Wulandari show that the layout of the palace reflects an ethnomathematical logic—where spatial symmetry and temporal cycles are integrated into a coherent system[30]. Thus, Sangkan Paraning Dumadi is not just a belief—it is spatially enacted. The Axis teaches that as individuals move through space, they also move through culturally defined stages of time, each requiring specific virtues such as bravery, accountability, and balance.

The Essence of Humanity's Relationship with Nature

In Javanese cosmology, nature is regarded not as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred presence that demands respect, care, and moral responsibility[31]. This worldview is rooted in the principle of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi, which frames all life—human and non-human—as originating from a common spiritual source. The Cosmological Axis embodies this relationship by aligning key spatial elements—from Mount Merapi in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south—thereby placing human society between powerful natural realms. The palace, located at the midpoint, serves as a mediator between these forces, reflecting the ideal of living in harmony with nature rather than in opposition to it. Along the Axis, sacred trees such as ringin, pakel, and kweni symbolize virtues like protection, maturity, and courage, linking human moral development to natural elements. This interdependence is most clearly expressed in rituals such as the Labuhan ceremony at Parangtritis Beach, where offerings are made to honor Nyi Roro Kidul, the spiritual guardian of the southern sea[32].

Informants expressed a strong belief that nature holds spiritual agency and must be approached with reverence. One Abdi Dalem reflected on the Ringin Kembar, explaining that these trees are "not just symbols of youth, but a bridge to the unseen world of the ocean." [Informant 5] In his view, they mark a threshold between the human realm and the sacred forces of nature, particularly the southern sea. Another informant spoke about the Sultan's historical connection to Nyi Roro Kidul, describing it as "a relationship of mutual respect—he protects the land, and she watches over

[29] N.S. Muhadiyatiningsih and S. Bakri, "Makna Filosofis Bangunan Masjid Agung Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta dan Masjid Gede Kraton Yogyakarta," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24, no. 1 (2022): 29–45.

[30] N. Qomaria and A.Y.R. Wulandari, "Etnomatematika Madura: Keraton Sumenep sebagai Sumber Belajar Matematika," *Indiktika: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Matematika* 5, no. 1 (2022): 76–89.

[31] N. Dewi and K. Indriyanto, "Reimagining Nature and Identity: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Exploration of Rice in Four Asian Poetry," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 15, no. 4 (2023): 677–692.

[32] A. Jalil, "Memaknai Tradisi Upacara Labuhan dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Masyarakat Parangtritis," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 17, no. 1 (2015): 101–113.

the sea" [Informant 7]. He emphasized that the bond was not based on fear or superstition, but on the recognition that nature, like leadership, demands balance and humility. A third informant underscored that rituals such as the Labuhan are still practiced as acts of ecological and spiritual acknowledgment. "We give offerings to the sea not to control it," he explained, "but to show that we know our place in the order of life" [Informant 13]. These perspectives affirm that for the palace community, nature is not separate from the sacred, but part of a living cosmology where space, ritual, and ecology are intertwined.

Koentjaraningrat's concept of cultural values as meaning systems helps explain how the Javanese relationship with nature is embedded in both belief and ritual practice. Nature is not viewed as external or passive, but as a spiritual force that requires ongoing moral attention. Along the Cosmological Axis, this view is spatially expressed through sacred trees, ritual sites, and landscape alignments that symbolize balance and interdependence. The principle of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi reinforces the idea that all life shares a common origin and must return in harmony. Rituals like the Labuhan ceremony, and the symbolic presence of Nyi Roro Kidul, affirm this cosmological order—where offering, restraint, and reverence become ethical acts. As the palace community shows, maintaining harmony with nature is not a cultural ornament but a living expression of Javanese cosmology.

The Essence of Human Relationship

The human dimension of the Cosmological Axis reflects an integrated view of relationships—spiritual, social, and ecological—shaped by both Javanese and Islamic values. Extending from Mount Merapi to the Southern Coast, the Axis symbolizes the connection between humans and God (hablumminallah), between people (hablumminannas*)*, and between humanity and nature. Each element along the Axis holds meaning tied to life's journey and its moral obligations. This alignment expresses a worldview where relationships are not incidental, but central to maintaining harmony. Spatial design, ritual practices, and public engagement along the Axis serve to sustain this interconnected order, reinforcing balance and mutual responsibility as core cultural principles[33].

The Cosmological Axis functions as a spatial representation of human relationships grounded in Javanese ideals of harmony and service. This is most clearly reflected in the symbolic bond between the Sultan and his

[33] K.A. Halim, A.H. Prabowo, and S. Tundono, "Konsep Arsitektur Kontekstual pada Desain Hotel dan Konvensi di Prambanan–Kawasan Bokoharjo, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta," in *Prosiding Seminar Intelektual Muda* #6, ed. P. Puspitasari, A.O. Irlan, and R. A. Safitri (Jakarta: Universitas Trisakti, 2021), 142–152.

people, exemplified through Manunggaling Kawula Gusti. The Northern Square plays a central role in this dynamic, particularly during the topo bisu ceremony, where citizens walk in silence to communicate their collective hopes to the Sultan. This ritual is not merely ceremonial; it reinforces the idea that leadership must remain responsive and connected to the community it serves. Beyond formal rituals, the Axis also expresses social values through everyday spatial arrangements. Public spaces such as those used by street vendors along the corridor illustrate how economic activity, cultural identity, and social interaction are managed in a way that reflects the broader Javanese ethic of balance[34].

Informants emphasized that leadership in Javanese culture is rooted in service, not authority. One Abdi Dalem explained that Tugu Golong Gilig stands as "a reminder that a leader must be united with the people, not above them" [Informant 1] He interpreted the monument's form—golong (unity) and gilig (strength)—as a guide for rulers to lead with both firmness and humility. Another informant described the monument as a symbol of balance in leadership, stating that "it teaches us that power without compassion leads to disconnection" [Informant 6]. For him, the structure reflects the Sultan's role in promoting harmony and ensuring the community's well-being through just and ethical governance. A third informant highlighted how this ideal is echoed in ritual practice, particularly during topo bisu, where citizens silently express their aspirations to the Sultan. "It shows that the people are not passive—they are part of leadership too" [Informant 13].

According to Koentjaraningrat, cultural values function as meaning systems that structure how individuals relate to one another within a society. In the context of the Cosmological Axis, these values are embodied in spatial arrangements and civic rituals that emphasize social harmony, mutual responsibility, and ethical leadership. The principle of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti illustrates this clearly: leadership is not a hierarchical position of dominance, but a moral relationship rooted in unity and service. The symbolic and ritual use of space—such as the silent procession of topo bisu or the form of Tugu Golong Gilig—translates these values into everyday experience. They serve as public reminders that relationships in Javanese society are both spiritual and practical, and that governance is grounded in listening, humility, and shared purpose. Through these forms, the Axis reinforces a cultural system where relationships are maintained not by command, but by reciprocity and moral alignment.

[34] A. Ardiata, "Penataan Pedagang Kaki Lima di Jalan D.I. Pandjaitan Kawasan Sumbu Filosofis," *Thejournalish: Social and Government* 4, no. 2 (2023): 223–234.

Conclusion

This study shows that the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta is more than a historical or ceremonial path—it is a spatial narrative that encodes the Javanese worldview. Through myths mapped onto physical landmarks, the Axis expresses a cultural understanding of life as a cyclical journey: from origin and growth to service, connection, and spiritual return. The principles of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi and Manunggaling Kawula Gusti are not only remembered in stories but practiced through movement, rituals, and spatial orientation. Each domain explored—life, work, space-time, nature, and relationships—reveals how the Axis functions as a cultural system that binds individual experience to collective meaning. Rather than being a static symbol of tradition, the Axis continues to shape how the palace community lives, leads, and relates to the world around them. It grounds ethical practices in space, turning leadership into service, labor into devotion, and the environment into a partner in balance. In a rapidly modernizing context, the Axis offers a model of cultural resilience—not through resistance to change, but through the active adaptation of core values. As this study has shown, the Axis remains a living expression of Javanese cosmology.

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CULTURAL DIPLOMACY AND TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract: *The field of political philosophy, in conjunction with cultural diplomacy, is closely interwined within the realm of international relations. Cultural heritage has the pivotal role to organize, encourage, and promote cultural diplomacy, as it reflects the identity of a nation. The protection of cultural heritage is inherently linked to the values and principles upheld by a country. Intangible cultural heritage includes the arts, language, traditions, customs, commercial and cultural products, cultural values, and the way of life of a society. In Greece, the Ministry of Culture is legally responsible for the protection of cultural heritage. The present study aims to explore the influence and protection of intangible cultural heritage through the utilization of human capital. Qualitative research tools, such as questionnaires, were employed to investigate the contribution of human capital to its preservation. The research sample consists of 460 anonymous employees with university education from the Ministry of Culture of Greece, working in the field of cultural heritage preservation. The primary data were processed and analyzed using the SPSS software. These findings provide valuable insights for the Ministry of Culture in terms of enhancing the support and preservation of intangible cultural heritage through the effective use of human capital.*

Keywords: *Cultural Diplomacy; Cultural Heritage; Greek Culture; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Political Philosophy.*

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1. Introduction

Diplomacy constitutes both the skill and how a state chooses to manage the entirety of its external diplomatic relations, particularly those involving services or individuals deemed overly critical[1]. Within this broader framework, Cultural Diplomacy emerges as a strategic component, focusing on the exchange of cultural goods and services, as well as on fostering networks and cooperation among museums, cultural institutions, governmental bodies, and the arts across different countries and continents. Its aim is to strengthen ties between peoples, while simultaneously advancing political and social influence[2].

Cultural diplomacy seeks to exert influence through culture and operates as a state-led policy that leverages various cultural assets to design and implement foreign policy. Ultimately, it aspires to achieve cultural outreach abroad and secure a range of strategic benefits[3]. These may include, but are not limited to, the promotion of arts, language, traditions, customs, commercial and cultural goods, cultural values, and ways of life. According to this expanded definition, cultural diplomacy can also serve to advance specific political interests or support broader economic and trade policies[4].

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy often serves as an extension of foreign policy efforts, particularly when more traditional diplomatic channels prove insufficient or are no longer accessible. Within this organizational framework, it reflects the integration of various cultural diplomacy tools into numerous institutional actors, enabling them to exercise their influence more effectively[5].

Cultural heritage serves as a vital link that encapsulates the diversity of human expression, belief systems, and values within the broader context of human experience. It manifests itself in various forms—such as the dialect of a language, the architectural identity of a city, or the traditions of a local festival. Importantly, cultural heritage is a dynamic concept, continuously

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[1] Nikolaos Vasiliadis and Sofia Boutsiouki, *"Cultural Diplomacy, Greek and International Dimensions,"* Athens: Association of Hellenic Academic Libraries, 2015.

[2] Len Ang, Yudhishthi Isar and Phillip Raj, Mar, "Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21(4), 2015, pp. 365-381, https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042474.

[3] Claudia Patricia Maldonado-Erazo, Nancy P Tierra-Tierra, María de la Cruz del Río-Rama, and José Álvarez-García. "Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: the Amazonian Kichwa people," *Land*. 2021, 10(12), pp. 1395. https://doi.org/10.3390/land10121395.

[4] Jessica Eichler, "Intangible cultural heritage, inequalities and participation: who decides on heritage?," *The International Journal of Human Rights,* 2021, 25, 5, pp. 793–814. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2020.1822821.

[5] Giorgos Pagoulatos, Foreword. In: Kizlari, Dimitra and Siehate, Maria, *"Greek Cultural Diplomacy. Contemporary Approaches – Future Challenges,"* Thessaloniki, Epikentro Publications, 2021.

shaped by social, historical, and political processes. In addressing the imperative of its preservation, particular attention must be paid to two key dimensions: tangible and intangible cultural assets.

Intangible cultural assets, or intangible cultural heritage (ICH) are non-physical aspects representing the culture of a community passed down through generations and thereby representing their cultural identity. Such assets may include traditional practices and rituals, performing arts, oral traditions, indigenous skills and knowledge systems, as well as a range of social practices and customs that reflect the lifestyle of a community[6].

The preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage is reinforced through the development of enduring and institutional collaborations between the Ministry of Culture in Greece and non-governmental organizations, as well as with local business entities. A key issue concerns the extent to which the specialization of Ministry personnel, along with its cooperation with citizens and other public bodies, influences the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

Both tangible and intangible cultural assets constitute fundamental components of a community's heritage. They play a critical role in shaping cultural identity, preserving historical memory, and fostering a sense of continuity and belonging across generations[7].

2. Political Philosophy

The idea of cultural diplomacy and by extension culture as a means of political sovereignty belongs to Isocrates. Politics, like rhetoric or the works of the sculptor Phidias (Isocr. *Ant*. 2), is an image that exerts charm and, by extension, control. Isocrates here confirms the dominance of appearance in his political philosophy. Everything is appearance, an image, and whatever convinces the senses or the intellect of its truth does not need further analysis, its value is self-evident. In the Isocrates universe, whatever has value, it can convince of its value. Phidias' works convince of their value by themselves without the need for rational justification of this value. Where persuasion dominates, science comes second[8]. No one is interested in the rationally justified science that underlies the grandiose artistic construction, but in the beauty that flows from it and captivates the senses. The coercive creation of a correct opinion must precede violent subjugation in the context

[6] Jessica Eichler, "Intangible cultural heritage, inequalities and participation: who decides on heritage?," *The International Journal of Human Rights,* 2021, 25, 5, pp. 793–814. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2020.1822821.

[7] Eirini Gallou, "Heritage and pathways to wellbeing: from personal to social benefits, between experience identity and capability shaping," *Wellbeing Space and Society,* 2022, 3: 100084. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2022.100084.

[8] Cf. Elias Vavouras, "The Machiavellian reality of Leo Strauss", *Dia-noesis: A journal of philosophy*, 12, 2022, pp. 249-284. https://doi.org/10.12681/dia.37834

of political action. At a macroscopic level, however, at an international level, the struggle for rational supremacy takes the form of a cultural conflict. Rhetoric at a macroscopic level must be a cultural rhetoric. Greek culture, Greek reason, as crystallized in the intellectual landscape of Isocrates' era, is superior to other intellectual directions; Greece, with Athens as its stronghold, is a school of thought for the world, a living source of civilization and knowledge, the supreme perspective of "philosophy." Isocrates is not at all interested in proving the superiority of the Greek spirit with scientific and epistemological parameters. Greek reason, even as it is perceived by the common mind, convinces and imposes its dominance and its expansive momentum. If conquered by force of arms, "barbaric" Asia will hardly be able to react to the conquering onslaught of the Greek spirit and the Greek way of life; Greek rational domination will be almost definitive and irrevocable. Greek civilization as a rhetorical plausible opinion will shape the world and will realize the isocratic final goal. The combination of the personal merit of the leader who will exploit the historical circumstances and with the power of arms will shape the appropriate conditions *(ἐνεργεῖν)* with the persuasive-rhetorical effect of the Greek reason *(νοεῖν)* will give the expected political and historical end; a global empire[9] that will be based on the non-negotiable power of the Greek culture as thought but also as action. Isocrates' goal was not only the autonomy or definitive freedom of the Greek cities but also a) their political and national unification under a strong force capable of ending inter-Greek conflicts, b) the definitive destruction of the Persian power, which was a terror to the Greek world and constantly incited the civil strife of the Greeks through its practice of *divide and rule*, c) the domination of the Greeks in the East not only through arms, because such a thing, although more feasible, might have had temporary success, but through Greek culture, which through its superiority would provide permanent dominance and assimilate the culturally "inferior" barbarians by imposing irreversible domination. Greek cultural superiority cannot be justified by Isocrates. Greek culture is superior, since it is almost automatically convinced of its superiority, just like the creations of Phidias or the epics of Homer (Isoc. *Hel.* 65; Ad *Nic.* 48) and therefore becomes more useful and therefore more beneficial in the historical context[10] of the orator's era.

[9] For the issue of the expansion and empire of a state in relation to ethics cf. Elias Vavouras. “Machiavelli’s Ethics on Expansion and Empire”, *Conatus* 2023, 8, pp. 703-723. https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35110

[10] Cf. Elias Vavouras, “Natural right and historicism: from Thucydides to Marx”, *Cogito*, 13, (1), 2021, pp. 7-20; Kyriakos Demetriou, “The logical status of history and the paradoxes of historicism”, *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 12, 2022, pp. 145-162.

3. Cultural Diplomacy: A Strategic Instrument of Soft Power in International Relations

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of a nation's cultural resources - such as language, art, education, heritage, and values - as tools to promote mutual understanding and strengthen diplomatic relations between states and peoples. It is a key component of soft power, a concept developed by Joseph Nye[11], which emphasizes the ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or economic incentives.

Unlike traditional diplomacy, which often operates through formal political channels, cultural diplomacy functions through people-to-people connections, international cultural exchanges, academic collaborations, and the promotion of national culture abroad. It aims not only to improve a country's image but also to foster dialogue, peace, and long-term cooperation.

In the contemporary global context - marked by cultural interdependence, geopolitical shifts, and the rise of non-state actors - cultural diplomacy has become an increasingly vital strategy in international affairs. Institutions such as the British Council, Goethe Institute, Confucius Institutes, and UNESCO play significant roles in promoting cultural diplomacy as a means of building sustainable international relationships.

Diplomacy more broadly can be defined as the main state mechanism for concluding agreements with other countries and detecting opportunities to increase the burden of power in the international system[12]. It has existed since antiquity and is an important instrument of foreign policy to serve specific interests and settle state disputes[13]. Also, diplomacy is the practice and art of conducting negotiations between representatives, individuals, groups, and states. Its definition most often concerns international diplomacy and more specifically the process of conducting international relations[14].

Besides, it is in no way identical with foreign policy or international relations, but it is a necessary means for strategy and one of their main tools. More specifically, through diplomacy, all the people and services related to the international relations of a country are declared, while it itself helps states to be represented in other countries and in international organizations. Its usefulness is not in doubt even in wartime[15].

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[11] Joseph Jr. Nye, "Public diplomacy and soft power," *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 616(1), 2008, pp. 94-109.

[12] Spiridon Litsas, *"ILIAD and International Politics,"* Athens: Poititas Publications, 2014.

[13] Paris Varvarousis, *"International Relations and Foreign Policy in the 21st Century,"* Athens: Papazisis Publications, vol.21-22 (1993), 2004, pp. 325-352.

[14] Ronald Peter Barston, *"Modern Diplomacy,"* Harlow, England, 2006.

[15] Chistos Giannaras, *"Cultural Diplomacy,"* Athens: Ikaros Publications, 2001.

The concept of diplomacy was well known because it was a key tool to define foreign policy. Its major features are negotiations, information exchange and representation. More specifically, representation was the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while the negotiation of diplomas and the exchange of information were based on traditional methods[16].

Now these three features have been reformulated in terms of the participation of each official organization. This means that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assigns specific functions to other bodies, while government bodies have increased and their role has changed from important to auxiliary. Accordingly, the development of technology has changed the data and the speed with which information is exchanged[17].

3.1. The Meaning of Cultural Diplomacy: Definitions, Functions, and Contemporary Relevance

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural assets - including arts, language, education, and heritage - as instruments to foster mutual understanding, build relationships, and influence foreign publics in ways that advance a nation's foreign policy objectives. Rooted in the broader concept of soft power, as articulated by Joseph Nye, cultural diplomacy functions as a non-coercive form of influence that emphasizes attraction rather than force or financial inducement. While traditionally associated with state-led initiatives, contemporary cultural diplomacy increasingly involves non-state actors, including NGOs, academic institutions, artists, and diaspora communities. As global interdependence deepens and traditional forms of power are reassessed, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a key component in international relations, capable of promoting dialogue, reducing conflict, and enhancing a country's global image.

Cultural diplomacy is an evolving term, which includes various definitions related to modern diplomatic practice and theory. Regarding it, Gienow-Hecht & Don[18] fried give a simple definition of the specific term, since they consider it to be a tool and a way to interact with the outside world. Accordingly, Pajtinka[19] expands this definition even further, emphasizing that cultural diplomacy is directly related to the effort to develop the culture of a country to support the goals it has set in its foreign

[16] Didzis Klavins, *"Understanding the Essence of Modern Diplomacy,"* Berlin: The ICD Annual Academic Conference on Cultural Diplomacy, 2011.

[17] Wilfired Bolewski, "Diplomatic Processes and Cultural Variation. The relevance of culture in diplomacy," *Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations,* 2007, 8, p. 146.

[18] Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried, (Eds.), *"Searching for a cultural diplomacy,"* (Vol. 6), Berghahn Books, 2010.

[19] Erik Pajtinka, *"Cultural diplomacy in theory and practice of contemporary international relations,"* Politické vedy, 2014, 17(4), pp. 95-108.

policy. In an analogous way, Schneider[20] in his definition states that cultural diplomacy is a two-way exchange of information, art, ideas and cultural characteristics between nations and peoples, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding.

At the same time, Vasiliadis & Boutsiouki[21] argue that cultural diplomacy should be limited to all processes that occur in which official diplomats, who most often operate in the service of their governments, utilize available cultural resources to promote the national interests of states.

Similarly, Schneider[22] states that the main characteristic of cultural diplomacy is the effort to enhance mutual understanding and not the corresponding effort to promote the national interests of states.

Based on all that has been mentioned, there is no commonly accepted definition of cultural diplomacy, however, most agree that it is considered a field of public diplomacy. In this regard, Topic & Sciortino[23] state that the effort to build long-term relationships is the characteristic that makes cultural diplomacy stand out from its public counterpart.

Culture can be leveraged by countries to attract public interest as well. This means that cultural diplomacy is an especially valuable tool for implementing the interests of states. Countries whose culture dominates the world stage often hold leading positions of power, which means that the goal of leveraging their cultural diplomacy initiatives is to strengthen their established position. On the other hand, countries with less dominant cultural identities may use it with the dominant cultural influence of states[24].

According to Mark[25], draws a distinction cultural diplomacy from propaganda, emphasizing that the former is directly related to the presentation of some partially or fully accepted and known facts, while the latter is related to a mixture of information and facts. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy is a positive concept and therefore stands out from the

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[20] Cynthia P. Schneider, "Cultural diplomacy: Hard to define, but you'd know it if you saw it," *The Brown journal of world affairs*, 2006, 13(1), pp. 191-203.

[21] Nikolaos Vasiliadis and Sofia, Boutsiouki, *"Cultural Diplomacy, Greek and International Dimensions,"* Athens: Association of Hellenic Academic Libraries, 2015.

[22] Cynthia P. Schneider, *"Cultural diplomacy: Hard to define, but you'd know it if you saw it,"* The Brown journal of world affairs, 2006, 13(1), pp. 191-203.

[23] Martina Topić and Cassandra Sciortino, "Cultural diplomacy and cultural imperialism: a framework for the analysis," *Cultural diplomacy and Cultural imperialism: European perspective* (s), 2012, pp. 9-19.

[24] Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox, "Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture," *Springer,* 2010.

[25] Simon Mark, "A greater Role for cultural diplomacy. Discussion Papers in Diplomacy," *Netherlands Institute of international relations clingendael,* 2009.

corresponding propaganda, which if defined neutrally concerns the dissemination or promotion of specific ideas.

The tools used to select cultural diplomacy practices are based on a nation's culture. For this reason, they include exhibitions, artwork, cultural and educational programs, as well as religious or literary works[26].

All the tools used by cultural diplomacy aim to promote understanding of a state's culture outside of it. They work most effectively when supported by both governmental and non-governmental actors and when they extend their operations both within and outside states[27].

3.2. Culture in Cultural Diplomacy: Mechanisms of Influence and Soft Power Projection

Culture serves as a fundamental instrument in the practice of cultural diplomacy, functioning as a channel through which states and non-state actors can communicate values, foster cross-cultural dialogue, and build long-term relationships with foreign societies. By leveraging elements such as language, literature, music, cinema, visual arts, and heritage, cultural diplomacy enables countries to project a positive image abroad and promote mutual understanding. This strategic use of culture aligns with the principles of soft power, emphasizing attraction and persuasion over coercion. Particularly for states with limited military or economic capabilities, culture offers a cost-effective and impactful means of participating in global affairs and shaping international public opinion. Thus, culture is not merely a reflection of national identity but also an active diplomatic tool with tangible geopolitical significance.

Many states increasingly recognize the strategic value of culture as a means of articulating their national identity and advancing their political objectives on the international stage. Cultural diplomacy, as a form of soft power, enables countries - particularly those lacking significant military or economic strength - to enhance their global influence without resorting to coercive mechanisms. In this context, culture functions as an effective and non-confrontational tool through which smaller or less powerful states can engage in international relations, promote their values, and shape global perceptions in their favor[28].

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[26] Michael J. Waller, "Cultural Diplomacy, Political Influence, and Integrated Strategy," In "Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare," *Lulu.com,* 2009.

[27] Christina Luke and Mogan Kersel, *"US cultural diplomacy and archaeology: soft power, hard heritage,"* Routledge, 2019.

[28] Eleni Tzoumaka, *"Cultural Diplomacy: International Data and Greek Perspectives,"* Athens: Sideris Publications, 2005, pp. 70-77.

Through interpersonal interaction and understanding their morals and values, prejudices can be combated and at the same time trust and respect between cultures can be fostered.

It has been proven that people can more easily accept others, find similarities with them and question them less when they come into interpersonal contact with themselves[29].

The exploitation of culture as a new means of communication can be achieved through education and the circulation of cultural goods. The declarations on heritage, which UNESCO mainly deals with through its seven international Conventions to preserve cultural diversity, contribute significantly to the balance between peoples. The success of a cultural communication strategy presupposes the existence of a model, based on which specific goals and objectives that are achievable and clear should initially be formulated. It is necessary to evaluate the advantages, disadvantages and the internal or external environment. Furthermore, harmony between cultural understanding and communication strategy should be possible during the planning of each cultural program.

Therefore, culture, when used as a communication tool of cultural diplomacy, can help any country. The basic prerequisites, however, are the understanding and adaptation in an appropriate way of its practical application, as well as the availability of greater funding. If all this is done, then states will be able to connect with each other and with people[30].

4. Cultural Heritage: Definitions, Dimensions, and Its Role in Contemporary Society

Cultural heritage refers to the legacy of tangible and intangible assets inherited from past generations, preserved in the present, and transmitted to future generations. It encompasses monuments, sites, works of art, artifacts, oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, traditional knowledge, and skills that reflect the identity, values, and history of communities.

According to UNESCO, cultural heritage is categorized into two main forms:

1. Tangible Cultural Heritage – Includes physical artifacts such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, and artworks.

2. Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) – Refers to non-material cultural expressions such as languages, folklore, customs, music, dance, and social practices.

[29] Cynthia P. Schneider, "Cultural diplomacy: Hard to define, but you'd know it if you saw it," *The Brown journal of world affairs*, 2006, 13(1), pp. 191-203.

[30] Simon Mark, "A greater Role for cultural diplomacy. Discussion Papers in Diplomacy," *Netherlands Institute of international relations clingendael,* 2009.

Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in shaping collective memory, fostering cultural diversity, and promoting intercultural dialogue. It is not merely a record of the past, but a living and dynamic resource that contributes to sustainable development, education, and social cohesion. In a globalized world where cultural identities are increasingly at risk, the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage have become essential tasks for states, international organizations, and local communities alike.

After the signing of the 1972 Convention, UNESCO proceeded to compile the World Heritage List, which needs protection. By 2000, the concept of Cultural Heritage had been expanded to include cultural landscapes, industrial and modern rural architecture, as well as routes[31].

Cultural heritage includes various aspects. One of them is cultural resources, which include natural resources, human capital, the cultural environment and in general any cultural asset of any category, along with cultural services. Natural resources are the beauty of the environment of a region, the sunshine that characterizes it, its climate, its beaches and coasts, the way in which its soil is formed, the rare vegetation that it may have, the forests, lakes, rivers, hills, mountains, plateaus, ravines, canyons, and even the fertility of its soil. For the cultural categories, which were mentioned above, these include folk tradition and folk culture, cultural heritage, modern creations, cultural industries of mass culture, interculturality, multiculturalism and Cultural Heritage as well[32] .

However, in addition to cultural resources, cultural heritage also includes cultural goods. Various definitions have also been formulated for this specific concept, the content of which is characterized as multifaceted. This has the consequence, based on the conventions, recommendations that have been signed between states and their internal legislation, that there is no commonly accepted definition[33].

As far as Greek legislation is concerned, cultural goods have been defined through article 2 of law 3028/2002. According to this, cultural goods include modern or ancient monuments, which may be immovable or immovable, historical sites, archaeological sites and intangible cultural goods. Precisely because of the existence of many definitions for cultural goods, attempts are being made to delimit them by establishing various criteria, such as the value they have, the information they provide and their age. Over time, the meaning of this specific term changes, since in modern

[31] Silvia Soldano, Patrizia Borlizzi and Marco Valle, *"Report on Current State-of-Art of Use and Re-Use of Medieval Ruins,"* Brussels, Belgium, European Union Interreg Central Europe, 2017, p. 29.

[32] Eugenia Bitsani, *"Cultural management and regional development. Design of cultural policy and cultural product,"* Athens: Dionikos, 2004, pp. 36-40.

[33] Eugenia Bitsani, *"Cultural management and regional development. Design of cultural policy and cultural product,"* Athens: Dionikos, 2004, pp. 36-40.

times value is given mainly to its historical and cultural aspects and not so much to its aesthetic value[34].

The Greek Constitution outlines certain values and principles that are also found in international conventions. According to the law on the natural and cultural environment, these align with what is established in international law. In Greek domestic legislation, cultural property is further specified and categorized, resulting in a different approach to ensuring its protection. Additionally, another proposed definition states that cultural property consists of immovable or movable assets of great value to the cultural life of a place[35].

Cultural property belongs to the realm of intellectual culture, and more specifically to cultural events, sciences, folk culture, and the arts.

For cultural creation to occur, various factors must interact. More specifically: the creator, meaning the person who produces cultural goods; the existence of appropriate infrastructure and legal framework; the necessary financial resources; specialized knowledge; a high cultural level; and, of course, freedom. All these factors have led to a different development of cultural creativity in each country. Cultural creation, therefore, can on the one hand maximize a state's cultural capital, and on the other hand strengthen the cultural identity of its society. At the same time, its contribution to the exploration and cultivation of all citizens' intellectual level is also highly significant[36].

Monuments are material representations of human activity in each era. They are categorized according to their dating as ancient or modern, and according to their nature as immovable or movable. Ancient are the cultural assets that originate from prehistoric, Byzantine, post-Byzantine, and ancient times, dated up to 1830. This category also includes caves that are connected to human presence. On the other hand, modern cultural assets are those preserved from 1830 onwards, whose protection is necessary due to their artistic, scientific, or historical value. As for immovable monuments, these are those directly connected to the ground or the seabed and remain in place. This category also includes all monuments found on the beds of rivers or lakes and cannot be relocated without the risk of diminishing their value as testimonies of a specific era. Movable monuments, on the other hand, are constructions, decorative items, and installations that are considered integral parts of their environment. Lastly, immovable

[34] Gianna Karympali-Tsiptsiou, *"Legal status of monuments,"* Athens, Sakkoulas Publications, 2009, p. 12.

[35] Eleni Trova, *"The concept of the cultural environment according to the Constitution of 1975/86,"* Athens, Sakkoulas Publications, 1992, p. 102.

[36] Eugenia Bitsani, *"Cultural management and regional development. Design of cultural policy and cultural product,"* Athens: Dionikos, 2004, pp. 36-40.

monuments are all those that do not belong to the category of movable ones[37].

Cultural monuments also include archaeological sites, which, according to Law 3028/2002, are areas located in the sea, on land, in rivers, and in lakes, for which there is evidence that they contain ancient monuments or that, up until 1830, formed funerary or residential monumental ensembles. Archaeological sites also include the surrounding environment in which the preserved monuments exist, maintaining their functional, aesthetic, and historical unity[38].

Finally, a cultural asset is also considered to be the landscape, a concept which, over time, has been subject to various interpretations and misunderstandings due to its abstract nature. According to the European Landscape Convention, the landscape is defined as an area perceived by people, whose character is the result of the interaction between human beings and natural factors (Law 30A/2010). Based on this interpretation, two fundamental aspects of a landscape become evident. The first views it as a geographical area with defined boundaries, which meets specific cultural, historical, and geomorphological criteria, within which human activity and daily life take place. The second emphasizes the observer's perspective, as a landscape is often regarded as a specific composition of distinctive lines, which are selected in an arbitrary way to form shapes[39].

The landscape, then, is a geographically defined surface of the earth, which reflects the human-made environment and human activity upon it. It is a dynamic whole, consisting of biotic and abiotic factors, as well as elements of the environment which- either individually or through their interaction - create specific visual experiences. To highlight even further the great value of landscapes and the simultaneous need to protect and manage them properly, they have been characterized as "landscapes of outstanding natural beauty" and as "cultural landscapes." The concept of the cultural landscape first appeared in the context of the World Heritage Convention, where it was recognized as a key part of international cultural heritage, something that significantly strengthened its protection[40].

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[37] LAW: 3028/2002. "FOR THE PROTECTION OF ANTIQUITIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN GENERAL". Retrieved 10-05-2025 from https://opi.gr/images/library/nomothesia/ethniki/nomoi/3028_2002.pdf.

[38] Eleni Gavra and Georgios Tsotsos, (2015), *"Culture and Space in the Balkans. 17th-20th century,"* Thessaloniki, University of Macedonia Publications, 2015, p. 266.

[39] Panagiotis Doukelis, *"The Greek landscape: Studies in historical geography and perception of place,"* Athens: Hestia Bookstore, 2005, p. 36.

[40] Sofia Katsafadou, and Alexios Defner, "Landscape, man, identity- mutually defining concepts: The examples of Dubai and New Zealand," 2015 Retrieved 23-04-2025 from https://www.citybranding.gr/2015/11/blog-post_18.html.

According to UNESCO, in 1992, cultural landscapes were classified into specific categories, while simultaneously being characterized as combined works of humans and nature. The first category is "clearly defined landscapes," which were deliberately designed and created by humans. These include parks, gardens, and generally any designed space. The next category is "organically evolved landscapes," which are the result of human responses to certain social and economic imperatives or specific parameters of the natural environment. These landscapes are further categorized into "relict landscapes," whose features indicate that the evolutionary process has been interrupted, and "living landscapes," whose features are related to the ongoing process of evolution. Finally, there are "associated cultural landscapes," in which there is a direct connection between the natural element and artistic expressions or spiritual values. The material assets of these landscapes are sometimes considered significant and sometimes non-existent.

4.1. Intangible Cultural Heritage

According to UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) encompasses the knowledge, practices, expressions, representations, and skills that form an integral part of a community's cultural identity. It refers to the non-material dimensions of cultural heritage, including oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, traditional craftsmanship, as well as the knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. As such, ICH embodies the spiritual, intellectual, and symbolic wealth of a people, manifesting through language, belief systems, customs, folklore, and collective memory. Its preservation is essential not only for the continuity of cultural diversity, but also for fostering a sense of identity, belonging, and social cohesion across generations.

4.2. The Identification of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Concepts, Criteria, and Challenges

The identification of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) constitutes a fundamental step in safeguarding practices, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their cultural legacy. According to the 2003 UNESCO Convention, ICH includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, traditional craftsmanship, and knowledge related to nature and the universe. The process of identifying such heritage involves not only documentation and classification but also active participation of local communities in defining what is meaningful to their cultural identity. However, this process is not without challenges, as it must balance academic, legal, and community-based perspectives while ensuring the dynamic and living nature of ICH is respected.

In the context of Intangible Cultural Heritage, inherited traditions and practices of modern life belong to this category. As for the practices, whether they are modern or come from the past, various groups of society take part in them. The transmission of cultural heritage takes place within the community to which it is addressed, and of course in this way the great value it has for the tradition of a place is disseminated and recognized[41].

The main way of transmitting Intangible Cultural Heritage is through oral speech. In some cases, there are specific people who help to achieve its dissemination. Most of the time, it presupposes the existence of a broader framework, which goes far beyond the knowledge and skills of an individual person. All actions related to the transmission of knowledge of the past are at the same time some of the most important aspects of human heritage. All members of society possess parts of the common knowledge, which is transmitted through all the activities that occur in the community, without however being an end[42].

5. Materials and methods

5.1. Data Collection and Analysis

The intangible cultural heritage of each country represents a valuable cultural asset that contributes significantly to national identity and collective memory. In Greece, the responsibility for its protection and preservation primarily lies with the Ministry of Culture and, by extension, its personnel. This research aims to examine the practices and policies related to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, with particular emphasis on the role of human resource management within the Ministry. The employees of the Ministry of Culture play a central role in this process, while the Ministry itself - often in collaboration with local authorities and other relevant institutions - shapes and implements strategies that ensure the effective preservation and transmission of cultural heritage.

Table 1: Gender (of the sample)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Men	114	24.8	24.8	24.8
Women	346	75.2	75.2	100.0
Total	460	100.0	100.0	

[41] UNESCO, "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?," 2021, Retrieved 25-04 2025 from https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003 102

[42] Paolo Davide Farah and Riccardo Tremolada, "Desirability of commodification of intangible cultural heritage: The unsatisfying role of intellectual property rights," *Transnational Dispute Management, Special Issue,* 2014, 11(2), pp. 1-2.

The research was an online survey using an online questionnaire with 460 respondents. The entire sample is employees of the Ministry of Culture in Greece. In particular, 114 men and 346 women of various ages from 18 years and above. The study involved anonymous responses by an online survey that took place with Google Forms from 1st of February 2024 until 11th of March 2024.

Table 2: Age (of the sample)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	28-37	10	2.2	2.2	2.2
	38-47	116	25.2	25.2	27.4
	48-57	272	59.1	59.1	86.5
	58-67	62	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

The sample is satisfactory, as it was collected using objective methods and randomly selected from employees of the Ministry of Culture in Greece. Therefore, it can be considered representative and capable of supporting generalizations and predictions about the broader population[43].

The questionnaire contained different scales to measure the variables, which were adapted from the works of several authors. All the items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated 'never' and 5 indicated 'always'. SPSS was used to answer research questions guiding this study.

Table 3: Education (of the sample)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Technology	56	12.2	12.2	12.2
	University	106	23.0	23.0	35.2
	Msc	227	49.3	49.3	84.6
	PhD	57	12.4	12.4	97.0
	Post Doc	14	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Female respondents consisted for 75.2% of the sample. Most respondents (59.1%) were in the age category 48-57 years old. A total of 64.7% of the participants possess a minimum of postgraduate qualification.

[43] Janice M. Morse and Peggy-Anne Field, "Nursing research: The application of qualitative approaches," *Springer*, 2013.

Additionally, only 17.8% have been working for less than 9 years at the Ministry of Culture but 61.5% of the respondents have been working for more than 19 years.

Table 4: Experience (in years) at the Ministry of Culture

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-9	82	17.8	17.8	17.8
	10-18	95	20.7	20.7	38.5
	19-27	198	43.0	43.0	81.5
	28-36	82	17.8	17.8	99.3
	<=37	3	0.7	0.7	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

At the central service of the Ministry of Culture are working 22.4% of the respondents and most of them (77.6%) are working in Regional Service which are in each Prefecture of Greece.

Regarding the employment category of participants in the field of culture, 23.9% hold a position of responsibility, while 76.1% do not hold such a position. This finding highlights a clear majority of employees without administrative or executive duties within the sector.

Table 5. Central Service or Regional Service (of the Ministry of Culture).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		103	22.4	22.4	22.4
		357	77.6	77.6	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

An overwhelming majority of employees, amounting to 77.4%, assert that there is a sufficient availability of qualified human resources to effectively promote Greek cultural heritage.

A substantial proportion of employees within the Greek Ministry of Culture - specifically 70.5% - believe that a system for managing change and innovation is being implemented to a considerable extent, with the promotion of Greek cultural heritage serving as its central focus.

Table A6. Employment Category (of the sample).

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	110	23.9	23.9	23.9
	No	350	77.1	77.1	100.0
	Total	460	100.0	100.0	

5.2. Reliability Statistics

The research tool provides us with a set of variables that were studied. The selected eleven correlated variables had an excellent Cronbach's Alpha of 0.913.

Table 7. Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.913	11

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy had an excellent value of 0.928, indicating that the sample is well-suited for factor analysis.

The factor solution (two factors explained 65.46% of the total variance) provides a solid basis for conclusions. The results revealed two factors that present on the one hand, the contribution of cultural organizations and public institutions to the protection and transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage. On the other hand, the role of public sector personnel in safeguarding and promoting Greek Cultural Heritage.

Table 8. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser- Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.928
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3089.909
	Df	55
	Sig.	.000

- The contribution of associations and institutions to the preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (40.59% variance) and
- The contribution of public employees to the preservation and promotion of Greek Cultural Heritage (24.87% variance)

The first factor, the contribution of associations and institutions to the preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage, describes 40.59% with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.929 and the KMO had a very high value of 0.913.

Also, first factor includes employees who believe that the Ministry of Culture in Greece develops highly effective collaborations not only with citizens and non-governmental organizations, but also with groups, associations, businesses, and other public institutions for the preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In addition, the cooperation of the employees with the local social agencies for the preservation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is considered satisfactory.

The second factor, contribution of public employees to the preservation and promotion of Greek Cultural Heritage, describes 24.87% with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.766 and the KMO had value of 0.756.

Additionally, the second factor includes employees who consider that the training and the monitoring of the training activities contribute to the promotion of cultural heritage as a central element. They also estimate that there is a sufficiency of suitable human resources for Cultural Heritage's promotion.

Furthermore, they advocate that personnel are effectively engaged in the promotion of intangible cultural heritage, and they consider their own roles as employees to be instrumental in its preservation. At the same time, innovative management and change programs are implemented in the organization with the aim of highlighting Cultural Heritage.

5.3. Independence Test

One of the most frequently used nonparametric procedures in psychology, and the social sciences in general, is the chi-square analysis of contingency tables/ as early as 1949, D. Lewis and C. J. Burke[44] cited no less than nine common errors made by practicing researchers who employed the chi-square test, which offers an updated review of potential pitfalls when applying the chi-square test and examines supplementary and alternative approaches.

Firstly, the test examined whether the service in which an employee of the Ministry of Culture in Greece works is related to whether the Ministry of Culture in Greece develops permanent collaborations with non-governmental organizations with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Table 9. Crosstabulation I

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.120[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	32.392	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.037	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	460		

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.34.

[44] Lewis Don and Burke C.J., "The use and misuse of the chi-square test," *Psychological Bulletin*, 1949, 46(6), pp. 433–489. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0059088.

The null hypothesis was that the two variables were independent. H0: Employees' service does not affect the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with non-governmental organizations with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

An alternative hypothesis was that these two variables are dependent. H1: Employees' service affects the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with non-governmental organizations with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

There is a statistically significant association between employees' service and the Ministry of Culture's development of permanent collaborations with non-governmental organizations aimed at preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage (χ^2=31.120, p<0.001). The strength of this association is moderate to strong, as indicated by Cramér's V=0.260.

Secondly, test examined if the service in which an employee of the Ministry of Culture works is related to whether the Ministry of Culture in Greece develops permanent collaborations with enterprises with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The null hypothesis was that the two variables were independent. H0: Employees' service does not affect the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with enterprises with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Table 10. Crosstabulation II

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.768[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	21.624	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.982	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	460		

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.24.

An alternative hypothesis was that these two variables are dependent. H1: Employees' service affects the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with enterprises with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

There is a statistically significant association between employees' service and the Ministry of Culture's development of permanent collaborations with enterprises aimed at preserving Intangible Cultural

Heritage (χ^2=21.768, p<0.001). The strength of this association is moderate, as indicated by Cramér's V=0.218.

Table 11. Crosstabulation III

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34.937[a]	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.398	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	19.768	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	460		

a. 4 cells (20.0%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.64.

Thereupon, test examined if employee's specialty is related to whether the Ministry of Culture in Greece develops permanent collaborations with citizens with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The null hypothesis was that the two variables were independent. H0: Employee's specialty does not affect the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with citizens with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

An alternative hypothesis was that these two variables are dependent. H1: Employee's specialty affects the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with citizens with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

There is a statistically significant association between employees' specialty and the Ministry of Culture in Greece's development of permanent collaborations with citizens aimed at preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage (χ^2=34.937, p<0.001). The strength of this association is weak to moderate, as indicated by Cramér's V=0.159.

Finally, the research examined if employee's specialty is related to whether the Ministry of Culture in Greece develops permanent collaborations with other public institutions with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The null hypothesis was that the two variables were independent. H0: Employee's specialty does not affect the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with other public institutions with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

An alternative hypothesis was that these two variables are dependent. H1: Employee's specialty affects the fact that the Ministry of Culture develops permanent collaborations with other public institutions with the aim of preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Table 12. Crosstabulation IV

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.426[a]	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	45.906	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	27.486	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	460		

a. 2 cells (10.0%) have expected countless than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.38.

There is a statistically significant association between employees' specialty and the development of permanent collaborations by the Ministry of Culture in Greece with other public institutions aimed at preserving Intangible Cultural Heritage (χ^2=44.426, p<0.001). The strength of this association, as measured by Cramér's V, is weak to moderate (V=0.179).

6. Conclusions

In the context of cultural heritage management in Greece, human resources play a critical role in the successful implementation of preservation and promotion strategies. According to recent survey data, an overwhelming majority of employees assert that there is sufficient availability of qualified personnel to effectively promote Greek cultural heritage. This perception underscores a general confidence in the capacity of institutional frameworks to mobilize and utilize human capital appropriately in the cultural sector. It also suggests that ongoing investments in training and staffing may have had a positive impact on operational efficiency and cultural output. However, while the presence of capable personnel is a significant asset, it must be accompanied by sustained policy support, funding, and infrastructure to ensure long-term impact and global visibility for Greek cultural initiatives.

Intangible Cultural Heritage constitutes a critical and dynamic dimension of a nation's cultural identity, and this is particularly true in the case of Greece, a country with a deep-rooted and diverse cultural continuum. The safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage - including oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, and traditional craftsmanship - has been increasingly recognized as a central pillar of cultural policy both at the international level, as advocated by UNESCO, and within national frameworks.

In Greece, the Ministry of Culture holds the primary responsibility for the protection, promotion, and transmission of intangible cultural

expressions. This responsibility is not merely symbolic or procedural; it involves the coordinated efforts of specialized human resources, whose actions are grounded in legal and administrative mandates. According to national legislation and internal policy documents, personnel within the Ministry are tasked with the identification, documentation, and transmission of intangible heritage practices, often in collaboration with local communities, academic institutions, and international bodies.

Consequently, a particularly significant role is attributed to employees occupying positions of authority or administrative responsibility within the Ministry. These individuals not only supervise routine operations but are also strategically engaged in heritage-related initiatives. Evidence suggests a strong correlation between employees and the Ministry's systematic deployment of human capital in heritage safeguarding. The constant collaboration of staff with non-governmental organizations and businesses, as well as citizens and other public bodies, safeguards the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. This implies that the preservation of intangible heritage is not treated as an isolated cultural objective but is structurally embedded in the Ministry's administrative planning.

Moreover, the preservation of intangible cultural assets signifies a commitment to safeguarding cultural diversity for future generations. It fosters social cohesion by reinforcing collective memory and shared experiences. Therefore, the protection of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage is essential to maintaining the richness and diversity of human cultures.

Furthermore, recent findings indicate that this institutional reliance on managerial staff for Intangible Cultural Heritage preservation may reflect both the Ministry's confidence in their expertise and the increased demands placed on them. These employees often serve as liaisons between policy and practice, ensuring that the broader goals of cultural sustainability are translated into effective programs and actions. Their dual role - administrative and cultural - amplifies the complexity of their responsibilities and underscores the need for targeted training, resources, and institutional support.

In conclusion, the preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Greece is deeply intertwined with the performance and strategic deployment of the Ministry of Culture's human resources. Particularly, those in leadership roles bear a dual burden that reflects both their administrative function and their cultural mission. Strengthening institutional mechanisms that support these professionals - through training, policy clarity, and interdepartmental collaboration - is essential for ensuring the long-term viability of Greece's Intangible Cultural Legacy.

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CRITIQUE OF KARL POPPER'S INTERPRETATION OF PLATO AND THE PROBLEM OF MODERN VS. ANCIENT DEMOCRACY

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***Abstract**: In* The Open Society and Its Enemies *(Vol. I,* The Spell of Plato*), Karl Popper offers an extremely critical reading of Plato's political philosophy, accusing him of "totalitarian" tendencies and portraying him as an enemy of the "open society." Popper argues that the Platonic political ideal expressed in the* Republic *represents a threat to the values of the open society, being a model of a "closed society" built on the principle of rigid authoritarian order. In Popper's view, Plato was an ideological precursor of modern totalitarian regimes, as he advocates a utopian state in which change is suppressed, a ruling class claims exclusive access to "truth," and individual freedom is absent. This interpretation became influential in 20th-century political philosophy, but it has also drawn significant criticism. This essay offers a critical analysis of Popper's position, arguing that he misinterprets Plato by applying an anachronistic and reductive framework to Platonic philosophy. Furthermore, we will argue that the modern liberal democracy defended by Popper as the ideal "open society" is, in the words of historian Paul Cartledge, a "thinly disguised oligarchy," fundamentally different from the classical Athenian democracy that Plato criticized. Thus, our approach integrates the perspective of the history of political ideas: we will reassess the relationship between Plato's political thought, Popper's modern interpretation, and the actual nature of ancient vs. modern democracy, drawing on the indicated sources (Popper, Plato, Cartledge, Rosenblatt) to support the argument.*

***Keywords:** Plato, Popper, Democracy, anachronistic, reductionist*

Popper and "The Spell of Plato": Plato as Enemy of the Open Society

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), Karl Popper presents Plato as the first major theorist of the closed society, alongside other "enemies" such as Hegel and Marx (discussed in Volume II). According to Popper, Plato's dialogue *Republic* contains a dangerous political program aimed against the values of the open society and in favor of a static, authoritarian

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regime. Popper summarizes the key elements of Plato's "political program" as follows: (A) a strict division of society into classes, with a ruling class (philosopher-kings and guardians) clearly separated from the masses; (B) the identification of the good of the state with the exclusive interest of this ruling class, whose unity is maintained through eugenics and collectivist education policies; (C) the monopoly of the ruling class over military virtues and education, combined with its exclusion from economic activities; (D) censorship of thought and culture, with a propaganda apparatus aimed at shaping the minds of the rulers; and (E) the economic self-sufficiency of the state, avoiding dependence on external trade.

Popper explicitly states that such a political program can, without exaggeration, be described as "totalitarian" — thus anticipating the traits of 20th-century totalitarian regimes (Nazism, Fascism, Communism), in which a single party or self-proclaimed elite monopolizes power and suppresses freedom[1].

Popper emphasizes that although Plato proclaims noble goals such as the *Good*, the *Beautiful*, *Justice*, and the happiness of the citizens, these are merely appearances that disguise the oppressive nature of his political scheme. Popper rejects the argument that Plato's high moral intentions distance him from modern totalitarianism. On the contrary, he argues that Plato's ideal state is, morally and politically, fundamentally identical to totalitarianism: **"**In spite of such arguments, I hold that Plato's political programme, far from being morally superior to totalitarianism, is fundamentally identical with it."[2] In Popper's view, the difference between Plato and modern tyrannies is one of form, not substance — Plato's "philosopher-kings" would fulfill the same repressive role as the dictators of the 20th century, even if they claim to pursue *Justice* or the common *Happiness*. Thus, Popper accuses Plato of a kind of authoritarianism disguised as idealism: Plato, he argues, sought to freeze the evolution of Greek society by reverting it to an archaic model of stable tribal patriarchy, ruled by a wise elite — in opposition to the egalitarian and individualistic tendencies of democratic Athens[3]. This desire to "return to the original

[1] Popper summarizes the fundamental requirements of Plato's political program and shows that, derived from them, it reflects "the totalitarian tendency of Plato's political philosophy which I shall try to analyze and criticize" (*Karl Raimund Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies: The Spell of Plato,* vol. 1, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 60), being based on a static society and the absolute control of the ruling elites.

[2] "In spite of such arguments, I hold that Plato's political programme, far from being morally superior to totalitarianism, is fundamentally identical with it." – Karl Raimund Popper, *op. cit.* – states Popper, rejecting the idea that Plato's moral idealism sets him apart from modern tyrannies.

[3] Popper interprets Plato's vision as an attempt to halt the course of history and return to a mythical past: "Arrest all political change! Back to nature! Back to the original state of

nature" of society—to the Golden Age of the tribe ruled by the "wise" before the fall into the diversity and corruption of history—is interpreted by Popper as evidence of Plato's historicism: the belief that history follows a path of decline and that political salvation lies in restoring an idealized past.

In conclusion, Popper paints a portrait of Plato as an anti-democratic and proto-totalitarian ideologue, whose political philosophy represents the most profound and ruthless attack on the liberal values of freedom and equality. This interpretation resonated in the post-war period, as The Open Society and Its Enemies was written in the context of the Second World War, serving as an indictment of the intellectual roots of European totalitarianism. However, we must ask to what extent Popper succeeded in offering a faithful and contextualized interpretation of Plato's thought—or whether, on the contrary, he subjected his analysis to an anachronistic ideological lens, thereby distorting the true intentions of the Athenian philosopher.

Plato in his context: the aim of Platonic political philosophy

As Quentin Skinner reminds us, invoking the authority of Ficino, "the dialogues of the divine Plato must be regarded as the first and most important philosophical treatises of the ancient world."[4] This perspective compels us to approach Plato's work as a profound philosophical reflection rather than as an authoritarian political manifesto. Plato's dialogues should be read as part of a tradition in which philosophy is a way of life and a pursuit of truth, not as a technique for coercing the citizen.

To critically assess the accuracy of Popper's interpretation, it is necessary to (re)situate Plato's ideas within the context of Classical Greece and his own philosophical work. Plato's *Republic* (*Politeía*) is a complex philosophical dialogue (written around 380 BC) that primarily explores the nature of justice in the human soul and, by analogy, in the city. The dialogue begins with a moral question — what is justice, and why should a person be just? — and proceeds to construct an ideal state as a theoretical model to better understand virtue.

It is important to emphasize that the *Republic* is not a treatise in applied political theory or a manual for governance, but rather a philosophical utopia used as a pedagogical tool. Socrates, the main character of the dialogue, proposes an imaginary city, perfectly ordered, precisely in order

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our forefathers, to the tribal patriarchy of the days before the Fall, to the natural rule of the wise few over the ignorant many."

— Karl Raimund Popper, *op. cit.,* Chapter 6: Totalitarian Justice. This Popperian naturalistic formula attributed to Plato reveals, in Popper's view, the historicist tendency to idealize a "Golden Age" of beginnings.

[4] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1 The Renaissance*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p. 116.

to uncover the principle of justice as a harmony between the parts of a whole (reason, spirit, and desire in the soul; rulers, auxiliaries, and producers in the city).

At the end of the dialogue, Plato himself (through the voice of Socrates) warns that such an ideal may never be realized in practice, but its value lies in serving as a standard to which we can aspire: *"Perhaps it is laid up as a pattern in heaven, where he who wishes can see it and found it in his own heart. It makes no difference whether it exists anywhere or ever will; this is the only city in whose politics he can take part."* (*Republic*, 592b–c)[5].

This famous remark (*Republic* 592b) shows that Plato was fully aware of the utopian and normative character of his construction: his goal was not necessarily to outline a concrete political project for Athens, but rather to define an idea of perfect justice and order — even if such a model could never be fully realized in practice.

Moreover, the *Republic* is part of a philosophical dialogue rich in paradoxes and subtle ironies, which complicates any strictly literal reading. For example, the concept of the philosopher-king is deliberately paradoxical — how can a philosopher, dedicated to the contemplation of truth, also be a ruler involved in the affairs of the city?

Through this paradox, Plato suggests that no real state will ever be truly just until statesmen become genuine philosophers — a condition that is, as Cartledge notes, "practically unattainable." Malcolm Schofield emphasizes that Plato's political project is fundamentally motivated by the ideal of virtue and knowledge, not by a desire for authoritarian control. The purpose of the philosopher-kings is to govern precisely in order to realize the common good, not to impose a despotic order. This vision stands in direct contradiction to Popper's interpretation, which ignores the ethical dimension of authority in Plato's philosophy — *"Plato's central political thought is that the best life for a community, as for an individual, is one governed by knowledge and virtue."*[6] In the hierarchy of actual political regimes presented by Plato in the *Republic* (Book VIII), democracy actually occupies the lowest position, as a degenerative stage that inevitably slides into tyranny (*Republic* 562a–564a). Paul Cartledge vividly summarizes Plato's antipathy toward Athenian democracy, noting that in the *Republic*, "democracy lies at the rotten bottom

[5] Plato, Republic, 592b: "Perhaps [the ideal state] is laid up as a pattern in heaven, where anyone who wishes can see it and found it within himself. But it makes no difference whether it exists anywhere or will ever exist; this is the only state in whose politics he can take part." (adapted translation based on the Hackett 1997 edition). Here, Plato suggests the utopian and normative character of the ideal city — as a standard to aspire to, rather than a concrete political reality.

[6] Malcolm Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 218.

of Plato's political barrel" — being the final step before tyranny[7]. Plato's critique of democracy was based on his direct experience of Athens' political decline: he lived through the consequences of the Peloponnesian War, the breakdown of law and civic order, factional strife that tore apart the Athenian *polis*, and the unjust execution of Socrates by a democratic jury. In this context, the "excessive" freedom of the *demos* appeared to Plato as a source of chaos and injustice—demagogues manipulated the masses, laws were disregarded, and uninformed citizens (the masses, unguided by truth) made decisions of state. Plato's radical solution was to theoretically re-found politics on the basis of philosophical knowledge of the Good—hence his claim that only the wise and virtuous (the philosophers) should rule, and that society should be organized according to moral competence rather than chance or inheritance.

Brisson interprets the famous "noble lie" in the *Republic*—"Le mythe vise à établir un lien symbolique entre les différentes classes sociales, fondé sur l'idée que chacun a une place naturelle dans l'ensemble"[8] —not as a tool of ideological manipulation, but as an educational myth intended to strengthen social cohesion.

This reflects an organic view of society, in which each member occupies their place according to their nature, not through coercion. Popper's reading fails to distinguish this pedagogical and symbolic intention, treating the myth merely as a mechanism of domination.

By understanding these nuances, we see that Plato's primary concern was moral and epistemic, not tyrannical: he sought to identify the theoretical conditions of the best possible state, in which each part fulfills its proper role, mirroring the inner harmony of the just soul.

Many of his proposals (such as the communalization of the family for the guardians, the control of education and the arts, etc.) may appear shocking to modern sensibilities, but they must be interpreted within the internal logic of his utopia: Plato aimed for unity and stability within a small civic body (a city no larger than Athens) where virtue could be cultivated without obstruction.

At the same time, Werner Jaeger considers Plato to be a radical reformer of education, proposing a complete system designed for the formation of all citizens. We are not dealing with a doctrine of elite control, but with a *paideutic* vision that seeks to cultivate an entire civic culture.

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[7] Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016, p. 99. Cartledge highlights Plato's deep opposition to Athenian democracy: in the *Republic*, all actual regimes are seen as degenerate in comparison to the ideal state, and democracy is placed "on the lowest rung of the Platonic heap," dangerously close to tyranny.

[8] Luc Brisson, *Platon, les mots et les mythes*, FRANÇOIS MASPERO 1, place Paul-Painlevé, PARIS, 1982, p. 70.

This contradicts the authoritarian image promoted by Popper[9]. It is debatable whether Plato ever intended for the practical implementation of the *Kallipolis* (the Beautiful City) described in the *Republic*. In a later dialogue, the *Laws*, he himself adjusts his vision toward a more pragmatic model, admitting certain compromises compared to the ideal (for example, accepting private property and the family, as well as the existence of deliberative institutions). This suggests that Plato's political thought was evolving and nuanced, far from being reducible to a static blueprint for philosophical dictatorship. Thus, the *Republic* can be interpreted more as a model for inner life than as a coercive plan for social organization. What Popper sees as repressive ideology is, in this key, an ethical path of self-perfection.

All these contextual elements indicate that Popper's reading risks overlooking Plato's true intent, treating the *Republic* as a literal manifesto for totalitarianism, when in fact it is a thought experiment in the search for the definition of justice. In other words, Popper reads Plato's work through the eyes of someone living after 1945, seeing in it the specter of Hitler or Stalin, rather than reading it within the context of 4th-century BCE Athens and the philosophical debates of the time (Sophism vs. Platonism, virtue vs. relativism, etc.). This hermeneutic leap produces what we will discuss further as **anachronism** and **reductionism** in Popper's interpretation.

Anachronism and Reductionism in Popper's Interpretation

The central argument against Popper's position is that he applies an anachronistic framework—specific to the 20th century—to Plato's thought and reduces it to the simplified categories of that framework, neglecting the historical and theoretical complexity of Plato's work. Thus, Popper sees Plato virtually as a totalitarian ideologue *avant la lettre*, yet the notion of totalitarianism is a modern concept, nonexistent in Antiquity. To say that Plato was "totalitarian" amounts to projecting the political traumas of the 20th century onto his philosophy, ignoring the fact that Plato operated with entirely different concepts and concerns (for example, the idea of *kalokagathia*—the unity of moral beauty and goodness in rulers—or the problem of the polis's decline). It is precisely in this sense that J.G.A. Pocock observed: "Virtue, once threatened, was forced to rely on itself, and there was no other remedy Americans could seek except a renewal (*rinnovazione*) and a return to first principles (*ridurre ai principii*)"[10].

[9] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, vol. III, 1998, p. 245 "Plato's creation of a complete system of elementary education, to be the paideia of the people [...] was one of his boldest innovations, well worthy of his enormous educational genius."

[10] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 506

Such concepts show us that ancient political vocabulary cannot be directly translated into modern political language. Popper reduces Plato's motivations exclusively to the lust for power of an elite and to hatred of freedom, whereas in reality, Plato was motivated by the ideal of knowledge and the establishment of justice. Certainly, the way Plato envisioned achieving these ideals involves severe constraints (which we today view as illegitimate). But to interpret them simply as evil or hypocritical may be an oversimplification.

An example of Popper's reductionism is the way he treats Plato's ethical goal. Popper suggests that when Plato speaks of the common good or the happiness of the citizens, he is being insincere—using these values as a facade for a project of domination by the ruling class. Essentially, Popper insinuates that Plato did not genuinely believe in the ideals he proclaimed, but was consciously seeking only power and stability in the interest of an intellectual oligarchy. This is a serious accusation, tantamount to claiming that Plato was cynical or even hypocritical in promoting virtue. However, there is no evidence in Plato's texts that his intention was so petty; on the contrary, his dialogues abound with a sincere search for virtue, a questioning of his own assumptions, and an acknowledgment of difficulties. It is far more likely that Plato truly believed that a state governed by philosophical minds would bring good to all—even if, from our modern perspective, the means he proposed seem unacceptable. To accuse him of being knowingly an "enemy of freedom" who "enchanted" his readers with rhetoric only to rob them of autonomy (as Popper insinuates by portraying Plato as a pioneer of manipulative propaganda) resembles more a trial of intentions than an objective historical analysis. Popper goes so far as to suggest that Plato, by making Socrates the main character in his dialogues, was hiding his own anti-liberal tendencies behind the prestige of the martyr for freedom of thought. This is, of course, a possible interpretation—but a highly speculative one, which demonizes Plato without indisputable textual support.

Speaking of anachronism, it must be emphasized that Popper directly compares Plato's city with modern totalitarian states, ignoring fundamental differences of scale, social structure, and context. The *Kallipolis* imagined by Plato was a small community (the Greek ideal being a city-state small enough to be governed directly by all citizens), culturally homogeneous, in which relationships between individuals resembled those of an extended family. By contrast, the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century were massive nation-states with millions of anonymous citizens, where control was exercised through bureaucracy, technology, and industrial mass ideologies. To claim that there is identity between the two ignores these essential differences. Moreover, Plato was unaware of the modern concept of inalienable individual rights or the separation of powers—concepts that

structure our discussions of freedom and oppression. Critics of Popper's interpretation have often pointed out that he applies the standards of modern liberalism to Plato, declaring him authoritarian for not conforming to those standards, which is methodologically incorrect (it is as if we were reproaching an ancient thinker for not being a liberal democrat in the 20th-century sense—a sense entirely foreign to him). Certainly, by our standards, Plato's state is illiberal; but the question is whether Plato himself can be judged solely through this lens or whether he should first be understood in terms of his own era.

There is yet another aspect of Popper's anachronism: he effectively recruits Plato into a modern narrative of the "struggles" between the open society and its enemies—a narrative heavily shaped by the experience of the 20th century. In this story, Plato becomes the first anti-liberal "reactionary," while Popper (and modern liberalism) represent progress and enlightenment. However, such a teleological reading (which views the history of political thought as a battle between the forces of freedom and those of reaction, culminating in liberalism) crudely oversimplifies the history of ideas. Plato could not have anticipated liberalism—indeed, the terms *liberal* and *democrat* were practically nonexistent or had vastly different meanings in Antiquity. What Popper does is remove Plato from the continuous context of Greek debate (where he was in dialogue with positions such as those of the Sophists or the radical democrats around Pericles) and arbitrarily insert him into a modern imaginary framework—as Popper's own ideological adversary, an opponent of the open society. Thus, the imaginary dialogue is more between Popper and a caricatured version of Plato than between Plato and his contemporaries.

This does not mean that Plato's vision should be idealized or excused for its evident anti-democratic tendencies. Critics such as Popper are right to be alarmed by the authoritarian elements found in the *Republic*. However, Plato must be criticized with historical and theoretical rigor, not through facile analogies. A more nuanced critique would acknowledge, for example, that Plato correctly identified certain vulnerabilities of Athenian democracy (the manipulation of the masses by skilled rhetoricians, the instability of popular decision-making, the potential for degeneration into anarchy and tyranny—as indeed occurred in Athens). Plato's solutions to these problems are legitimately contestable and even dangerous from the perspective of individual liberties—but they stem from a sincere attempt to respond to the crises of his time using the conceptual tools available to him. By reducing this effort to a mere anti-democratic conspiracy, Popper misses the complexity of the transition from ancient democracy to later political theories, and also fails to see the lasting influence of Platonic idealism (for instance, the idea that politics should be subordinated to ethics and the

pursuit of truth—an idea that would strongly influence Western political thought, even if only to be later contradicted by realists and liberals).

In conclusion to this section, we may say that Popper's interpretation, though valuable as a warning (it urges us to watch for illiberal tendencies in classical political thought), suffers from serious methodological flaws. Anachronism—by transplanting Plato into the 20th century—and reductionism—by ignoring the multifaceted nature of Platonic philosophy in favor of labeling it "totalitarian"—make Popper's position, in many respects, unfair to Plato. This intellectual injustice becomes especially clear if we extend the discussion to the concept of democracy itself, which Popper defends in its modern liberal form. As we shall see next, the very liberal democracy that Popper places on a pedestal proves, in the light of the history of political ideas, to be quite different from the Athenian democracy condemned by Plato—and, in an irony of fate, modern liberal democracy incorporates elitist elements that were once defended by both Plato and early liberal thinkers.

Modern Liberal Democracy – a "Poorly Disguised Oligarchy"? Differences from Athenian Democracy

Popper wrote *The Open Society* as a defense of liberal democracy in the face of totalitarian threats. For him, the open society is essentially the Western-style democratic society, based on liberal institutions: free elections, representative government, rule of law, individual rights, freedom of criticism, and the peaceful change of government. Popper praised the modern world's achievement of having moved beyond the "tribalism" of closed societies (such as Plato's) to a society in which individuals can shape their own destinies and power can be checked and changed without violence.

However, from a comparative perspective, modern liberal democracy differs radically from the Athenian democracy known to Plato. Moreover, some contemporary authors argue that our democracies are far from the ideal of popular power, displaying oligarchic characteristics masked by democratic rhetoric.

In 5th–4th century BCE Athens, democracy meant the direct rule of the people (*demos*). The very word *demokratia* signified power (*kratos*) exercised by the *demos*—that is, by the body of citizens (free men born of Athenian parents). The Athenian system involved the People's Assembly (*Ekklesia*), in which all present citizens voted directly on laws and major decisions; the Council (*Boule*) of 500 members was selected by lot each year from among the citizens, as were most public offices, in rotation, to ensure broad participation and equality among equals. Justice was administered by citizen jurors, also selected by lot. In other words, Athenian democracy operated without permanent representatives and without political parties;

it was a direct and participatory democracy, albeit limited in its definition of citizenship (excluding women, slaves, and metics—significant limitations from a modern perspective). This radical form of democracy, in which the people deliberated and decided directly, is the one Plato considered problematic and unstable.

By contrast, modern democracy today is almost synonymous with representative and liberal democracy. Citizens exercise their political will primarily by electing representatives (MPs, presidents, mayors) at regular intervals, delegating decision-making power to them. The people do not deliberate or decide directly on laws (with the rare exception of referendums). Furthermore, modern democracy is liberal in the sense that the power of the majority is limited by constitutions, minority and individual rights, the separation of powers (legislative, executive, judiciary), and independent institutions (constitutional courts, central banks, etc.). These mechanisms prevent the tyranny of the majority, but at the same time distance political decision-making from the direct control of citizens. Paul Cartledge notes that, today, the concept of democracy has come to describe virtually any legitimate regime, but in practice, "in the stable governmental regimes on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere, democracy firmly means representative and liberal democracy—which is to say anything but 'pure', in the ancient Greek style".[11] The sovereignty of "the people" is mediated through elections and institutions, and "We, the People" are kept at a distance from the everyday exercise of power—unlike the situation in classical Athens. Moreover, Cartledge emphasizes that there is no direct institutional lineage between Athenian democracy and modern forms of government; modern democracies drew more inspiration from the Roman model of the *res publica*, in which an elite body (the Senate) ruled in the name of the people, combined with elements of constitutional monarchy and the liberal philosophy of rights. In other words, liberal democracy is a modern creation, born of different traditions than the Athenian one.

This fundamental difference has led some scholars to argue that today's democracies bear oligarchic features. Oligarchy—"rule by the few (and wealthy)"—stood in direct contrast to democracy in the Greek conception. Aristotle clearly defined democracy as rule by the poor majority, and oligarchy as rule by the wealthy minority, with the essential distinction being wealth, not numbers. If we apply this Aristotelian lens to the modern world, we observe that in most large democratic states, political and

[11] Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, *op. cit.,* pp. 306–307. In his analysis of the present, Cartledge states that today the term "democracy" in practice refers to liberal representative regimes that are "anything but pure democracy in the style of ancient Greece." "We, the people" are kept at a distance from the direct exercise of power, which makes modern democracy very different from the Athenian model.

economic power tends to be concentrated in the hands of a relatively small group: professional political elites, campaign financiers, large corporations, and interest groups that shape legislative agendas. Even as suffrage became universal, liberal democracies inherited an institutional framework that favors elite continuity. Historically speaking, the first liberal regimes (in the 19th century) were in fact electoral oligarchies, with property and education requirements—such as the French Constitution of 1795, defended by Madame de Staël and Benjamin Constant, which imposed property qualifications for voters and officeholders under the motto of "government by the best," explicitly opposed to pure democracy[12]. Helena Rosenblatt shows that at the origins of liberalism (in post-revolutionary France), being "liberal" was by no means equivalent to being a democrat; on the contrary, liberal principles were intended to temper and limit popular power, which was considered dangerous after the experience of the Terror. Neither Constant nor de Staël were democrats in the modern sense—they supported a regime of law, civil liberties, and constitutional representation, but with limited participation—what de Staël called "the government of the most meritorious" (hard to reconcile with the full sovereignty of the people).

Therefore, modern liberal democracy, which emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, was essentially a hybrid: a representative republic with constitutional institutions and the rule of law (inherited from the Enlightenment and classical liberalism), gradually combined with the expansion of electoral participation to the masses (through the emancipation struggles of the middle classes and later of workers, women, etc. in the 19th and 20th centuries). As Rosanvallon observed, in England, "the progressive process of extending the vote—symbolized by the reforms of 1832, 1867, and 1884–1885—demonstrates that the figures of the individual and the citizen were never factually considered contradictory".[13] And according to a broader historical perspective on representation, "representative democracy entails a withdrawal of the individual and of 'the people' from direct participation, but coincides with a vast expansion of party activity and an appeal to a responsible electorate"[14].

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[12] Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2018, pp. 52–53. Rosenblatt shows that at the end of the 18th century, liberalism emerged in opposition to democratization: "One thing is clear: to be a liberal was not the same as to be a democrat. Today we are so accustomed to speaking of 'liberal democracy' that we conflate the terms. But in that early period, when liberalism was just emerging, liberal and democratic principles were often opposed. [...] De Staël advocated 'government by the best,' which should not be confused with democracy." This illustrates the initially elitist character of liberalism, which was oriented toward moderating popular power.

[13] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future*, Columbia University Press, 2006, pp. 119–120.

[14] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 522.

Therefore, the modern liberal democracy that emerged in the 18th–19th centuries was essentially a hybrid: a representative republic with constitutional institutions and the rule of law (inherited from the Enlightenment and classical liberalism), gradually combined with the expansion of electoral participation to the masses (through the emancipation struggles of the middle classes and later of workers, women, etc., in the 19th and 20th centuries). The result is a political system that proclaims the sovereignty of the people in theory, but in practice delegates that sovereignty and maintains numerous aristocratic or technocratic filters. This is what Paul Cartledge calls a "hollowed-out democracy" or one "masked" in terms of actual popular power. He notes, for instance, that today we are witnessing a phenomenon of democratic depletion: the general public is kept at a distance from major decisions (sometimes justified by the technical complexity of issues or economic stability), and participation is often reduced to voting once every few years, while policies are shaped by a network of "insiders" (career politicians, bureaucrats, lobbyists, experts) who constitute the new elite.

Sociologists like Robert Michels theorized this tendency as early as the first decades of the 20th century under the name of the "iron law of oligarchy" – the idea that any democratic organization, as it grows in scale and complexity, inevitably develops an internal ruling class, effectively transforming into a functional oligarchy[15]. Applied to modern nation-states, the Iron Law suggests that mass democracy will always produce leaders and institutions that are relatively autonomous from the direct popular will. Moreover, in contemporary democracies, the phenomenon of concentrating knowledge and decision-making within an elite is also explained by Josiah Ober, who states: "Good policy-making in a democratic community dedicated to freedom and social justice, whether in antiquity or today, requires a system for organizing what is known by many different people"[16]. This observation provides a relevant framework for understanding how modern democracies filter and aggregate knowledge in a way that may appear oligarchic. Moreover, the idea that popular participation is often replaced by managed forms of expertise or technocratic governance is articulated by Pierre Rosanvallon as follows: "Modernity, everywhere and

[15] Robert Michels, a sociologist cited by Cartledge (*Democracy: A Life*, pp. 307–308), formulated the "Iron Law of Oligarchy," according to which "any political organization, at any scale, inevitably ends up generating a functional oligarchy" due to unavoidable operational necessities. This principle helps explain why even mass democracies tend to concentrate power in the hands of a small group (the political class, bureaucracy, elites), calling into question just how "open" our societies truly are.

[16] Josiah Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2010, p. 5.

in every way, is the problem. The problem is always one of a crisis of politics and a debate about democracy"[17].

If we accept this line of analysis, it becomes clear that the liberal democracy Popper so enthusiastically praised is not a direct continuation of Athenian democracy, but rather a different type of regime—one that combines oligarchic elements (the dominance of elected and appointed elites) with democratic features (legitimacy through elections, free public opinion, etc.). In fact, one could argue that liberal modernity resolved Plato's fears about democracy not by eliminating it, but by domesticating it—through a mixture with oligarchy.

The result is a system in which, from the perspective of classical Athens, the people no longer govern directly but consent to be governed by a narrow group (which they can periodically replace). From this angle, a radical Athenian democrat from the 5th century BCE might see our democracies as "elective oligarchies": real power still lies with a (chosen) few, not with the whole demos on a daily basis.

And a thinker like Plato might be surprised to see that many of the safeguards liberal democracies implement—constitutions that limit what the majority can do, institutions designed to be independent of politics (courts, regulatory agencies), the representative filter—are, in fact, an implicit acknowledgment of the very problems he identified in direct democracy. In other words, liberalism has recognized that popular will must be channeled and moderated, or else it risks degenerating. This is what ancient aristocracies sought to do as well, and Plato himself, in his utopian way, proposed strict governance by the few and the wise.

By comparison, today's liberal democracies offer a gentler and more pluralistic form of control—but it remains a control by the few nonetheless. As John Dunn aptly puts it: "Today, in politics, democracy is the name for what we cannot have—but also cannot stop desiring"[18].

This formulation perfectly captures the gap between the proclaimed democratic ideal and the realities of modern institutional structures.

Cartledge's claim that current liberal democracy is a "poorly disguised oligarchy" should be understood in this light: the oligarchic aspect is concealed by formal democratic mechanisms, yet it becomes evident in the actual distribution of power and influence. Of course, we no longer live under a static, hereditary oligarchy like in Antiquity, but rather a dynamic one—elected officials can be replaced, and anyone (in theory) can run for office. Still, in practice, there exists a fairly closed political and economic

[17] Pierre Rosanvallon, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[18] John Dunn, citat în Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 5.

class, with its own rules of access, which often renders democracy more procedural than substantive.

This observation is not meant to delegitimize liberal democracy, but rather to place it in historical perspective: if we idealize it, as Popper did, we risk overlooking its structural imperfections.

Returning to the main thread: Popper, therefore, contrasted a supposedly "totalitarian" Plato with a liberal democracy he considered morally perfected. The present critique shows that this opposition is, at least partially, distorted by contextual differences. Plato was criticizing a form of democracy (direct, unfiltered) that modernity has already moved beyond, adopting instead a filtered system (which many would call mixed rather than purely democratic).

At the same time, Plato proposed a regime led by the best (an aristocracy in the etymological sense), intended to serve the common good—an idea that, although expressed radically in his work, also echoes through liberal ideals. For instance, John Stuart Mill's concept of "representative government" implies that those elected should be more educated and virtuous, capable of discerning the public good beyond the immediate passions of the masses.

Therefore, the boundary between Plato's political thought and the foundations of liberalism is not as absolute as Popper suggested.

Conclusion

In light of the above analysis, we can conclude that Karl Popper's interpretation of Plato in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is highly ideologically charged and, in many respects, unfair. Popper portrays Plato as an enemy of the free society, but he does so using twentieth-century language that distorts the original meaning of the Platonic project. By applying an anachronistic (totalitarianism vs. liberalism) and reductionist framework (ignoring the context and philosophical substance of the dialogues), Popper misses essential nuances: Plato's moral idealism, the utopian and heuristic dimension of the *Republic*, as well as the historical causes that fueled Plato's skepticism toward democracy.

We have argued that, far from being a Machiavellian proto-totalitarian, Plato was a philosopher concerned with virtue and truth, whose extreme solutions reflected both the context of his time and the limitations of the political thought available then. Our critique does not absolve Plato's political philosophy of its authoritarian tendencies, but it interprets them as part of the history of ideas—not as a timeless conspiracy against liberty.

On the other hand, the open society that Popper defends—namely, modern liberal democracy—is not itself an unambiguous ideal. The Athenian democracy that Plato criticized did not resemble the

representative democracy that Popper praises; in fact, as we have seen with the help of the analyses of Paul Cartledge and Helena Rosenblatt, modern liberalism was born in tension with democracy and incorporated numerous oligarchic elements to avoid the excesses of popular power.

Therefore, opposing Plato (a convinced anti-democrat) to a modern ideal of "democracy" requires careful attention to what we mean by democracy. If democracy means the direct participation of citizens in decision-making, then modernity has only partially achieved this, and only in limited contexts; but if it means liberal institutions and representative government, then modern democracy fundamentally differs from ancient democracy.

Popper idealized liberal democracy as the antithesis of Plato, but this liberal democracy can be seen, in a certain sense, as a moderated oligarchy, periodically held accountable through elections—by no means the direct rule of the *demos*. This realization, emphasized by Cartledge with the phrase "a poorly disguised oligarchy," invites us to be more critical of our own political premises.

In the same vein, Josiah Ober underscores that "the availability, beginning with [John] Adams, of the opportunity to 'let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing,' combined with the ability to organize that knowledge for learning and innovation, constitutes the core capacity of democracy".[19]

This offers us a final key to interpretation: not only institutional forms matter, but also the way a democracy manages access to knowledge and participation.

In conclusion, the reassessment proposed in this essay does not aim to "rehabilitate" Plato as a democrat (which would be inaccurate), but rather to highlight the historical complexity of the relationship between his thought and the concept of democracy. Popper presented us with a stark dichotomy—Plato the tyrant vs. virtuous liberal democracy—but the reality of the history of ideas is far richer in shades of grey. By critically examining both the Platonic text and the evolution of the concepts of liberalism and democracy, we come to the conclusion that Popper forced the past to justify his present—and that the present he defended is not without its own contradictions.

Political philosophy, as an argumentative discipline embedded in the history of ideas, compels us to avoid such simplifications. Both Plato, with his utopia and anxieties, and Popper, with his ideals and prejudices, must be placed in context. Only then can we critically appreciate their intellectual legacies and better understand the fragile nature of democracy—ancient or

[19] Josiah Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

modern—as it constantly balances between the power of the people and the power of the few.

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THE FLAME AND THE LYRE: PROMETHEAN ECHOES IN HOMERIC EPIC

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Abstract: *This article reinterprets Homer's epics through the lens of "political Prometheanism," a theoretical concept grounded in Aeschylean and Protagorean thought, symbolising political participation without placing unlimited trust in the human capacity for moral judgment on the other hand. While Homeric society lacks formal democratic institutions, it incorporates core features of participatory politics, most notably in the presence of synaxes (assemblies of public deliberation). Drawing on Hammer, Feldman, Castoriadis and Arendt, I argue that Homer prefigures the democratic concept of the human being as a political animal (zoon politikon), endowed with the capacity for speech, judgment, and collective responsibility. These traits are symbolically represented by the Promethean gift of fire. Through close readings of The Iliad and The Odyssey, I examine how characters such as Achilles, Thersites and Telemachus dramatise both the potential and the limits of public agency. Particular attention is given to the notions of aidōs, aischynē, and themis (or dike, in Protagoras' terms), which are central to the Promethean emphasis on self-limitation in the wake of the limits of human judgments. Ultimately, this paper presents Homer not merely as a mythmaker but mainly as a political and moral thinker, engaged in an early critique of power and injustice.*

Keywords: *Homeric Epic; Prometheanism; democracy; Participatory Politics; Aidōs and Aischynē; Themis and Justice; Kleos; Hammer; Protagoras; Aeschylus.*

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, the American anthropologist and social theorist Lewis Henry Morgan published his groundbreaking research, discussing the dynamics of social interaction and political decision-making within the ancient Greek world. He concluded that Homer's epic poems emphasise popular participation in the process of political decision-making through public assemblies[1] (or *synaxes*), the so-called *boulephorous*

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[1] L. Morgan, *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress From Savagery, through Barbarism to Civilization,* London, 1877, p. 245.

agoras (*βουληφόρους ἀγοράς*).[2] Following this view, Abraham Feldman identified primitive forms of democracy in the Homeric world, based on unanimous public voting.[3] The distinguished political philosopher, Cornelius Castoriadis, argued that the *political animal* – a term he uses to suggest a democratic form of existence – is present in Homer's epic.[4] Dean Hammer identifies in Homer's mythological narratives "embryonic" elements of a *polis* organisation.[5] Homer's poems, he claimed, "provide an opportunity to explore the operation of politics in its elementally human, rather than its institutional, form."[6] In short, the people do not vote in public assemblies, as is evident in the context of the Athenian *polis*. However, they are not "compliant, inert, absent, or silenced."[7] We see, in many instances, decisions taken collectively in the *synaxes*. The enactments of such decisions take a variety of forms: "consultation with the people before a decision is made, the appeal by a leader for approval of a decision, and even debates between [charismatic] leaders before the people."[8] Thus, the *demos*, *laos* or *plethos*, the members of a political community, in other words, *piphauskētai* (πιφαύσκεται) – stand up – and *agorevein* (*ἀγορεύειν*) – speak/argue.[9]

This study builds on Morgan, Feldman and, more particularly, on Hammer, who approached Homer "as a political thinker" and understood the *Iliad* "as a work of political thought".[10] It begins with the concept of Prometheanism, which I introduced in previous research. In brief, political Prometheanism suggests that power should be distributed among the *demos*. The idea is rooted in interpretations of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Plato's *Protagoras*. Section One further discusses Aeschylus' and Protagoras's versions of the myth, shedding light on the way Homer's epics vividly picture the so-called "Promethean human." In this way, I challenge the view that in Homer's world, political debates were the exclusive prerogative of men of aristocratic origin.[11] Furthermore, political

[2] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus,* Translation: X. Giatanas, Athens 2007 (in modern Greek), p. 139.

[3] A. Feldman, "Homer and Democracy", *The Classical Journal,* 47, no.8, 1952, p.338, pp.341-2.

[4] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, p. 140.

[5] D. Hammer, "Homer and Political Thought", *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Political Thought,* Cambridge, 2009, pp. 15-19.

[6] Ibid., p. 21.

[7] D. Hammer, "Homer, tyranny, and Democracy", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies,* 39, no. 4, 1998, p. 337.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 31-2; cf. Hammer, *Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy,* p.337; p. 339.

[10] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* Oklahoma, 2002, p. 5.

[11] W. Gladstone, *Studies on Homer*, Oxford, 1858, p. 129, pp. 141-1.

Prometheanism (as I explained) is not solely tied to democratic politics (modelled after the example of the Athenian *polis*) or to Western traditions in general.[12] Non-democratic societies could also include elements of popular involvement in government. Therefore, Homer's world might not fit the definition of "democratic," if we consider ancient Athens as a model of comparison; but within its "plebiscitarian" (per Hammer) model of political organisation, we can identify elements of political participation. Hence, Homer's epics are integral parts of the broader Promethean universe. In short, Homer described in a quasi-archetypal fashion this Promethean being, long before Aeschylus crafted his influential tragedy to underscore the tension between despotism and democracy.[13]

With this in mind, Section Two focuses on the role of "publicness" in the epics. Put simply, numerous passages underscore the active role of the *laos* in the *synaxes*, suggesting that popular involvement in collective decision-making was meaningful and important. In Section Three, this (Promethean) approach is vividly echoed in Homer's critiques of unjust leadership, best exemplified by the case of Agamemnon.[14] Of utmost significance are the notions of *aidōs* and *aischynē* (both referring to different expressions of shame) as well as that of *themis* (implying justice). These notions are deeply connected to the themes of public duty and civic responsibility; they are also associated with the pursuit of self-limitation, which constitutes an essential prerequisite of all participatory politics. More to the point: collective governance, as Hammer argued, is not immune to the destructive consequences of misguided human judgments; for leaders often capitalise on popular demands and "imperil the good of the community."[15] As I explained elsewhere, political Prometheanism does not place unlimited trust in participatory politics; it suggests an awareness that human participation is not a panacea, as it is constrained by human nature or behaviour. By considering this, the present study elucidates how, in Homer's poems, the concepts of *aidōs*, *aischynē* and *themis* serve as

[12] M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy: Prometheus in Political Theory,* Edinburgh, 2025, pp.9-10; cf. M. Theodosiadis and E. Vavouras, "The Pursuit of Cosmic Wisdom and 'Promethean' Leadership in the Pythagorean and Al-Fārābīan Political Philosophy", *Religions,* 15, 2024.

[13] L. Lewis, *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley,* Columbia, 1992, p.4.

[14] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.25. As S. Stuurman claimed while discussing Agamemnon's "selfish egotism,", the *Iliad* should be "[c]onsidered politically … a story of failed leadership" (The Voice of Thersites: Reflections on the Origins of the Idea of Equality. *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 65, no. 2, 2004, p.174). By the term "failed leadership" the author refers to Agamemnon's disregard for equality and the common good, prioritising instead his own personal gain (see also Sections Three and Four).

[15] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.30.

means of self-limitation,[16] counterbalancing the risks of flawed judgments in political participation. To do so, in Section Four, I will focus on the concept of *κλέος ἄφθιτον* (*kleos áphthiton*), implying worldly fame and reputation, attributed to the brave and courageous men in battle.[17] The demand for *kleos* is considered a reflection of the dominant culture of that era, shaped by beliefs and ways of life appropriate for the society of that time.[18] I will turn to Ahrensdorf's approach on *kleos,* while reflecting on the figures of Thersites and Odysseus, to illustrate how the epics dramatise the challenges of participatory politics and the ethical fragility of collective judgment, highlighting the importance of *aidōs, aischynē* and *themis*.

1. The Flame: Homer's "Promethean" Universe (Theoretical Foundations)

In Aeschylus' play, the titan Prometheus is portrayed as the fire-bearer to the mortals («πυρὸς βροτοῖς δοτῆρ»).[19] I have argued that the fire symbolises human agency, initiative and political capacity.[20] In turn, the Greek verb *promethévein* («*προμηθεύειν*») implies "to supply," "diffuse," and "spread" or "disseminate".[21] More precisely, by reflecting on Protagoras' mythological account of Prometheus, I claimed that the divine fire he sought to bestow upon humanity is the fire of political knowledge, which is identical with the virtues of respect and shame (*aidōs*) and justice (*dikē*). *Aidōs* is commonly defined as an internal inhibition, usually created by external pressures;[22] it is an internalised emotion of embarrassment,[23] shaped and determined by how communities understand and evaluate honour, moral respect and abashment.[24] These collective norms and values often become part of a person's belief system and self-regulation mechanisms. Hence, *aidōs* guides behaviour *before* an action by demotivating persons to commit certain deeds. In other words, *aidōs* is a type of shame elicited in the absence of an audience or actual criticism;[25] it is a preemptive moral sensibility. In Homer, this inhibitory type of shame

[16] Concerning *aidōs* as a force that restrains human behaviour, see: N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality,* New York, 1994, pp.156-173.

[17] I. Tripoula, "The ethics of war leadership as seen through ancient Greek poetry", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy,* 15, 2024, p.126.

[18] A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values.* Oxford*,* 1960, p.55.

[19] M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.4.

[20] Ibid*,* pp.20-1.

[21] Ibid*,* p.4, pp.111-2.

[22] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame,* New York, 1991, p.64; L.D. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology of Ethics and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature,* Oxford, 1993, p.2; N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality,* p. 156.

[23] L.D. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology of Ethics*, p. 5; p. 12.

[24] Ibid, pp.11-14, p.70.

[25] Ibid, p.17, p.70.

is often indicated by the verb *aideomai*.[26] On the other hand, Aristotle's *aischynē* (αἰσχύνη) is an "*after-the-fact*" emotion; it is "defined as a kind of fear of disrepute, and it has an effect very like that produced by the fear of something horrible,"[27] or – as articulated by Homer – the committing of "shame-causing" (*aischres*) actions that involve disrespect towards communal customs, like (for example) the dishonouring of a warrior's dead body and the refusal to perform proper burial rites.[28] Such actions excite anger or bring divine *nemesis* (retribution).[29] Moreover, the feeling of *aischynē* is not appropriate to every age, Aristotle says; the young "should be properly disposed to feel shame, because they live by feeling and so make many errors."[30] And they are praised when they change mindsets by experiencing *aischynē,* admitting guilt. On the contrary, no one praises "an older person for having a sense of shame, since we think that he should do nothing to feel shame for."[31] In short, moral persons do not do shameful things; they have no need to feel *aischynē*, which arises from the recognition of wrongdoing. They are guided by *aidōs* and, consequently, avoid disgraceful actions. For example, the suitors (in the *Odyssey*) are ignorant of moral shame; "they are not restrained from promoting themselves at the expense of Telemachus. Availing themselves of their natural superiority, they commit deeds which are αἴσχεα for Telemachus."[32] They feel no *aischynē* as they have not learned to act in accordance with internalised *aidōs*. Thus, they are incapable of moral self-restraint. Homer describes them with the word *anaideis* (ἀναἰδεῖς); here, the privative "a" prefix implies "without" and the root aid- (αἰδ-) comes from *aidōs*. Therefore, *aidōs* is "an exhortation to "friends," and a call to social responsibility";[33] it "has a social, or horizontal, dimension" that *aischynē* lacks.[34] For example, "[i]n a competitive encounter of two parties, the inferior suffers [*aischynē*], and the triumph of the superior party can be envisioned as a step up the vertical scale."[35] However, when persons are properly disposed to feel *aischynē* for the deeds they committed towards others and change their attitude, they demonstrate *aidōs*. We could call this

[26] Ibid, p.48. For example, the Achaians "felt *aidōs* to refuse, but feared to accept" (*The Iliad,* Book 7, 93; quoted from L.D. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology of Ethics*, p.48).

[27] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1128b.

[28] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame,* p.14; pp.36-7. Etymologically speaking, *aischros* and *aischistos* are closely related to *aischynēn*.

[29] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame,* p.33, pp.38-9, pp.42-3.

[30] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1128b.

[31] Ibid.

[32] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame,* p.64.

[33] Loc.cit.

[34] Loc.cit.

[35] Loc.cit.

aischynē active, since it initiates a dynamic process in building new ethical perceptions by prompting self-reflection and re-evaluation. Hence, *aidōs* is closely linked to "what the people say," as Adkins defines it;[36] *aidōs* and active *aischynē* invoke the public as an active agent, to whom the Promethean fire of wisdom has been disseminated. As Protagoras also argued, *dikē* and *aidōs* are common properties; they are distributed to all human beings ("ἐπὶ πάντας"); they are utter obligations for all people,[37] who must shape common standards by relying on their wisdom and agency.

Much like *aischynē*, *dikē* addresses wrongdoing after the act. However, *dikē* is explicitly concerned with active retribution and restoration of justice, rather than with feelings and emotions. Furthermore, since (per Protagoras) *aidōs* and *dikē* are accessible to everyone, they must not be conflated with *technē* (expert knowledge), which are skills acquired only by those who have received appropriate training.[38] *Aidōs* and *dikē* are the foundations of all politics and guarantee well-being and cohesion within the community by ensuring that individuals act with a sense of restraint and justice. We understand again that since *aidōs* and *dikē* are the foundations of all political institutions and originate from shared laws and norms, and if these virtues are properties of everyone, political action – from which such laws arise – rests in the people themselves. Hence, Protagoras' Prometheus supports a theory of inclusive involvement in political life as essential for advancing justice among citizens.[39]

However, associating Homer's poems with participatory politics is contentious. Homer's world, Dobbs claimed, was monarchical and tribal.[40] Classicists often approach the poems by looking at the role of formal institutions of authority and then commenting on the functions they performed.[41] Politics, from this perspective, "came to be identified with the emergence of an autonomous polis,"[42] that is, of a formal body that directs and oversees the process of political legislation, thereby providing legitimacy to all government decrees and decisions. As, for example, Scully

[36] A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*.

[37] Plato, *Protagoras,* 318.E, 323.D; cf. M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* pp.20-1.

[38] Plato, *Protagoras,* Pro 318.E; cf. M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* pp.20-1.

[39] M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p. 21; cf. E. Vavouras, "The distinction between nomos and 'physis", pp. 33-154, in Plato, *Gorgias,* Thessaloniki, Zitros 2008 (in modern Greek), pp.68-9.

[40] D. Dobbs, "Reckless Rationalism and Heroic Reverence in Homer's Odyssey", *The American Political Science Review,* 81, no. 2, 1987, p. 491.

[41] For example, W. Dolan, The Pre-State Community in Greece, *Symbolae Osloenses* 64, 1989, p.16; cf. G. Runciman, "Origins of States: The Case of Archaic Greece", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, 1982, p.24.

[42] D. Hammer, *The* Iliad *as Politics,* p.25.

writes, in the Homeric world, there is no "trace of a polis in its political sense."[43] The absence of such an organisation, as in the case of the Achaian camp, "almost invariably led to a view of the Homeric world as prepolitical."[44] For Runciman, a true state requires concentration of power, institutionalised judicial roles and specialisation of governmental roles. In contrast, most Homeric societies lacked a well-developed and fully structured form of governance; and common life, he assumed, revolves around patriarchal rule.[45] Thus, Homer's world was a collection of "semistates," in which most people are neither citizens nor subjects, but more like "an audience."[46] Cleavages (especially in the *Iliad*) are the consequences of personal rivalries rather than political disagreements.[47] Conversely, Hammer sees politics as "a realm in which people think about themselves, and constitute themselves, as communities,"[48] instead of locating political action solely in systems of formal representation. This approach to politics confined to institutions of formal legislating "constrain[s] our understanding" of how, in the Iliadic world, power was, to a great extent, diffused in the *demos*.[49] Moreover, Hammer builds on Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist and speaks of the political fields as bodies of decision-making that are not associated with "institutional and territorial boundaries."[50] The political field, he argued, is a broad and fluid arena (or network); it is the place of *agora*, where the *synaxes* take place, and disputes (among the members of the *laos*) are expressed. In such fields, power is often contested and negotiated. Here, emphasis is given to performative relations.[51] Hence, even if formal democratic institutions are absent, such relations display a good deal of "Promethean" characteristics; that is, persons participate in collective decision-making processes. Thus, a political space is not exclusively a parliament building or a senate; it can include local communities or networks of transnational cooperation. Hence, one might consider several activities as political: for example, the questioning of the legitimacy of an authority, the exercise of force, peace-building efforts, debates concerning specific demands on behalf of the members of the community, the encounter with ethical dilemmas in civic

[43] S. Scully, "The Polis in Homer: A Definition and Interpretation", *Ramus,* 11, no. 1, 1981, pp.55-6, p.107, pp.11-2; M. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, New York, 1982, p.34; M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, 2012, pp.51–52.

[44] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* 25.

[45] W. G. Runciman, *Origins of States*, p.351, p.358, p.355, p.360.

[46] Ibid.

[47] E. Lowell. *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, Cambridge, 1989, pp.27–28.

[48] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.32.

[49] Ibid., p.44.

[50] Ibid., p.26.

[51] Ibid., p.82.

obligations and responsibilities, and so on.[52] Hammer focuses on the way cities, such as Delos, Delphi, Thermon, and Eretria, were constructed, emphasising the role of the *agora* as well as the role of temples in facilitating *synaxes* for the purpose of collective decision-making.[53] Hence, in the Homeric world, power relations are staged within spatially arranged arenas of communal life, designed to promote public interactions, "in which the people seem to play some role in expressing their opinion."[54] Here we see the blazing fire of Prometheus warming the souls and minds of noble men, sparking their desire to act and speak, to discuss and negotiate, taking upon themselves the course of their common world.

This informal *polis* that Hammer identifies in the Homeric "political fields" is echoed in other aspects of the epic, particularly in the poet's emphasis on *themis*. We can suggest that *dikē* is to *themis* what (active) *aischynē* is to *aidōs*: In the same way *aidōs* informs the establishment of a mature moral compass before the execution of an act, *themis* informs perceptions that precede *dikē,* which rests on formal administration of justice. In other words, *themis* represents divine order, custom and tradition.[55] Thus, she is associated with the pre-legal sense of order, while *dikē* is linked to more developed systems of law and government. But in the absence of a codified justice system, *themis* serves as the primary expression of justice in Homer's world. Additionally, much like Prometheus's gift of fire, *themis* is of divine origin;[56] it descends to the world of the mortals and becomes part of their daily living experiences. Though she manifests in a primal way, human agency remains crucial in enacting her decrees. However, to what degree human agency in the Homeric world is truly free, given the influence of fate and the intervention of the gods, remains a critical question. This has been another point of debate among classicists. For example, Bruno Snell assumes that in Homer most events are engineered by divine will, and therefore "human initiative has no source of its own; whatever is planned and executed is the plan and deed of the gods."[57] Human action and thought in the poems, Erbse argued, depend upon divine providence.[58] But while divine action decisively influences the outcome of certain events, the protagonists can still express agency; thus, recklessness and utter ruin are a matter of personal

[52] Loc.cit.

[53] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p. 36, p.47.

[54] D. Hammer, *Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy,* p.340.

[55] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.23.

[56] N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality,* p.19.

[57] B. Snell, *Lexikon des Frühgriechischen Epos*, Göttingen, 1982, pp.29-30.

[58] H. Erbse, *Untersuchungen zur Funktion der Götter im Homerischen Epos*, Berlin, 1986, p.297, p.299.

responsibility.[59] Conversely, Hammer asserts that neither fate nor the gods themselves control all aspects of human action.[60] In the *Iliad,* we see fate (αἶσα) imposing her grand designs without controlling the consequences of the frantic human impulse for exaggeration, which often leads to the violation of all moral limits (that is, to *hubris*).[61] Quite often, fate or divine will undermine someone's status, causing (for example) a hero to lose a fight or get dishonoured. The hero responds to this challenge not by giving up; he attempts to retrieve his status through brave actions, speeches or revenge.[62] For example, in Book 23 (of the *Iliad*), funeral games are held by Achilles to honour his fallen friend Patroclus.[63] We read about Diomedes initially trailing Eumelos; he is hindered by Apollo but aided by Athene, who restores his whip and sabotages Eumelos's chariot, driving his "shaft in the ground" and "causing Eumelus to fly over a wheel," allowing Diomedes to take the lead.[64] While Eumelos finishes last, Achilles honours him with a special prize.[65] The response to this accident, caused by divine intervention, is to neither "conform nor act contrary to divine intention but,

[59] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.53; A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, pp.2-3, pp.22-23.

[60] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.54.

[61] This definition of *hubris* is provided by Castoriadis: see, *The Greek Imaginary*, p.152, p.154, p.177. It is also discussed in my previous works: M. Theodosiadis, Republican Perspectives on Populism and Hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch), *Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths (University of London),* 2021, p.7, pp.21-2; Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.18; cf. the "the hubris of Agamemnon" ("ὕβριν ἴδῃ Ἀγαμέμνονος") is translated by Ahrensdorf as "folly" (or madness) (Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.143). In the *Iliad,* misguided judgments that lead to *hubris* are often personified by Ate, Zeus's daughter; Ate "has skill to blind" (Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 19, 92) the minds of kings, warriors or rulers out of ignorance or false confidence of excessive pride**,** encouraging them to transgress moral limits. According to Castoriadis, *hubris* occupies a central position in the poem's thematic concerns. The protagonists constantly invoke moral transgression (*hubris*), causing disasters. This rekindles continuous action. For example, Agamemnon ruthlessly insults Apollo's servant; in response, Apollo unleashes a plague of cholera on the Greek camp. When Agamemnon is forced to return Chryseis, he commits an act that exceeds his rights; he takes a woman who belonged to Achilles' spoils, inciting Achilles's rage. But when the Trojans enter the Achaian camp, Achilles sends Patroclus to fight against them, urging him to remain defensive. Patroclus oversteps his limits and is killed (ibid). For more concerning this definition of *hubris,* see: M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.18; cf. C. Castoriadis, *A World in Fragments,* California, 2007, p.93; C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus*, pp.139-40.

[62] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.59, pp.64-5.

[63] These events include: chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, footraces, and more. In the Homeric world, these games promote the values of heroism (*kleos*) and respect for the dead. They also strengthen social bonds among warriors and reaffirm heroic status through athletic competition and excellence.

[64] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 23, 392-4.

[65] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 23, 558-565.

instead, to rectify the results created by chance."[66] As we see, the author affirms the meaningful exercise of human agency without, on the other hand, ignoring its limits.[67] The gods in the *Iliad,* he explained, act as a force "originating outside of, and upon, the human will."[68] Therefore, agency is exercised in accordance with divine will.[69] There is, in other words, no "free-floating" human agency, seeking to reaffirm its autonomy in the world; instead, action "occurs within the realm of one's allotment," in which "the characters … argue … judge … appease and are appeased."[70]

However, Homeric society does not limit human agency solely in light of fate or divine providence. Much like political Prometheanism, Homer highlights the flaws of human initiative, reminding us of the inherent vulnerabilities and limitations of human judgment. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* the knowledge the titan gifted to humanity is considered as "*thnatous āgan*" ("θνατοὺς ἄγαν");[71] that is, excessive (*āgan*) for the nature of the mortals (*thnatous*).[72] Because of this, Prometheus installed in men and women false promises ("blind hopes") ("τυφλὰς ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐλπίδας κατῴκισα"),[73] that they could someday end up "living the eternal and indestructible life of the Gods."[74] Put differently, he endorsed a form of excessive optimism, encouraging humanity to set up ambitious plans that their frail (human) nature could scarcely sustain. This view undermines the assumption that humans are always morally reliable. Thus, humanity's very capacity for reason is often clouded by various selfish passions. Likewise, Homer was cognizant of the implications of the weaknesses of human judgment in participatory politics:[75] the *demos* can often make misguided decisions, fuelled by error and *hubris*. The author highlights how the people of Troy "shouted agreement with Hector, / like children," approving his "ruinous plan," scorning Polydamas, who offered

[66] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.66.

[67] Cf. C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*; G. P. Bifis, P. Giannopoulou, and A. M. Argyrakoup. "Cornelius Castoriadis. The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus", *Conatus,* 2, 2023, p.329.

[68] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.51.

[69] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.51. As the same author argued, "[n]either the individual nor the community simply accepts the results of chance but seeks, instead, to manage chance by restoring aretê [*excellence*] to accord with one's status" (ibid, p.72).

[70] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.77.

[71] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* 533.

[72] M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p. 19.

[73] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound,* 263.

[74] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.19; cf. Vavouras. "What is Prometheanism? Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism", *Dia-noesis: a Journal of Philosophy*, 2025, 17, pp. 417-8.

[75] A. Feldman, *Homer and Democracy,* p. 342.

sound criticism.[76] But while the poet underscored the vulnerabilities of political participation in the light of the inherent limits of the moral capacities of humans, he did not go as far as to propose "the abolition of the people's right … by a baronial state."[77] In Feldman's view, Homer does not support the concentration of political power in a noble class of moral experts, who exclude the *demos* from the political realm, imposing despotic rule in the name of decency. Likewise, Hammer speaks of the dangers demagogues pose in the plebiscitarian/participatory politics; leaders can either use their personal authority in seeking acclaim, or "they can play upon the more autocratic elements of charisma by "hid[ing] behind" a legitimacy that appears to be derived from "the will of the governed.""[78] The author offers a hint of this by discussing Agamemnon's moves in Book 2: the king summons the Achaians to assembly and tells them that the "will of all-powerful Zeus" is to "sail to our cherished fatherlands, / for we will never take the streets of Troy!"[79] The "[f]uture generations" will consider this move "disgraceful," but the war is lost, he argued, and the Ahcaians can do nothing against the will of the father of the Olympian gods. Agamemnon tests if the desire of the Ahcaian camp to continue fighting remains firm; he intends to examine whether the soldiers would challenge his discouraging words, responding with renewed determination and confidence in victory. Odysseus warns that the people may impulsively follow ill-considered words, driven by passions and emotions.[80] Nestor reinforces this view by comparing the assembly to children, who so many talk like children and "who care nothing about the deeds of war."[81] Indeed, Agamemnon miscalculates the reaction of the people; the entire *synaxis* "stirred and, shouting / raced for the ships,"[82] and is restored "through the personal authority of Odysseus, as he is instructed by Athene."[83] Interpreted through the lens of political Prometheism, this event reveals the fragility of the human capacity for moral reasoning. Consequently, a *thnatous āgan* knowledge and power must be cautiously used; in the absence of self-restraint and moderation, it could engender disastrous impacts. In other words, human agency must be exercised within the bounds of self-limitation. We find this idea resonating with Protagoras' *aidōs* (the internalised shame that directs behaviour *before* action, as noted earlier) and *themis* (restoration of justice). The following sections examine

[76] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 18, 310-2.
[77] A. Feldman, *Homer and Democracy,* p.342.
[78] D. Hammer, *Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy,* pp.341-2.
[79] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 111-141.
[80] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 142.
[81] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 337-8.
[82] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 149-150.
[83] D. Hammer, *Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy,* p.342

how Homer's poems touch upon these concepts (of *aidōs*, active *aischynē*, and *themis*), examining their roles as mechanisms of self-restraint, intertwined with political agency. I will begin by analysing how Homeric society, despite its aristocratic leanings, emphasises the significance of collective participation in decision-making processes. To do so, I will identify passages that highlight the poet's emphasis on political participation through the means of *piphauskētai* and *agorevein*. To cut a long story short, in the poet's (Promethean) perspective, the *demos* (*laos* or *plethos*) is portrayed as having a notable role in influencing public life, while kings maintain a significant role, without influencing all collective decisions nevertheless.

2. The Lyre: Power, *Doxa* and the Public Realm

Both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* open with an emphasis on public *synaxes*, "described as the "voice of the people"', where the members of a community "put forward and argue."[84] In these "political fields" the Achaians could "passed their judgments";[85] in these open spaces *timountai oi andres* ("τιμιούνται οι ἀντρες"); men can, in simple terms, receive *timē* (glory and great reputation fame), or according to a different translation, "wisdom and polish."[86] In Ahrensdorf's terms, they ""come to be distinguished"."[87] Similarly, in the democratic assemblies of ancient Athens, orators had to set themselves apart by tirelessly striving to persuade others, presenting their personal opinion as the most excellent[88] and "showing oneself to be the best of all."[89] For Arendt, this "uninterrupted contest of all against all, of *aein aristeuein*," was the most characteristic aspect of the "agonal spirit of the Greek city-life,"[90] ruled by *action,* that is, with "active political discussions," and simultaneously with "the critical evaluation of all opinions expressed."[91] This term (*aein aristeuein*) is found in *The Iliad*: "αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν καὶ ὑπείροχον ἔμμεναι ἄλλων"; it is translated as "strive to excel and surpass all others" in the pursuit of *timē* through word and speech, that is, through *doxa* (opinion) and rhetoric (or, to use Homer's words, through through *piphauskētai* and

[84] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.30.

[85] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 11, 806; cf. D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.46.

[86] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 9, 441.

[87] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy,* Cambridge, 2022, p.89.

[88] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus*, p.239; Arendt, *The Human Condition,* Chicago, 1988, p.41.

[89] H. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics,* New York, 2005, p.16.

[90] Loc.cit.

[91] M.Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.32; cf. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.27.

agorevein). The Greek word *doxa* is also translated as glory; it corresponds to a type of *timē* attributed to the speaker who is distinguished and praised for the sharpness of his rhetorical wisdom and clarity. In Homer's world, one "stands out from his audience" and others "gladly look to him" if "his speech is steady, with calm dignity."[92] In the context of democracy, *ἀγορεύειν,* that is, relying on *praxis* (πρᾶξις) and *lexis* (λέξις), on action and (public) speech, is essential for ""the immortalization of oneself through famous deeds" and the acquisition of worldly fame.[93] Hence, the term *doxa* captures both *lexis*, public opinion and glory; for opinion itself is not a merely passive belief; it is directly associated with one's capacity to *aristeuein* in speech and wisdom publicly demonstrated, earning a good reputation and enduring fame in respect. As Arendt argued, (political) action is coextensive with Aristotle's conception of man as a *zōon politikon* (political animal). However, the political animal "can be fully understood only if one adds his second famous definition of man as a *zōon logon ekhon* ("a living being capable of speech")."[94] "[T]he specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of acting and speaking that it can be represented and "reified" only through a kind of repetition," namely, through imitation (or *mimēsis*), which according to Aristotle is appropriate to the *drama*, whose name derives from the Greek verb *drō̃* (δρῶ), implying, "to act."[95] For Hammer, action requires a realm "for the exercise of logos," for the practice of the "distinctively human facult[ies] of language and reason," which "in a political setting included questions of what is just and unjust."[96]

In other words, the political being uses *logos* to distinguish between just and unjust; here *logos* implies the capacity of engaging with open debates, of moving ahead and speaking/arguing («πιφαύσκεται ἠδ' ἀγορεύει»)[97] in the *synaxes*; for political engagement is never possible in isolation, in the intimate life of the private sphere.[98] According to the Greeks, living outside an organised *politeia*, where public interaction and

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[92] Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 8, 17-1.

[93] M.Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.33; cf. H. Arendt, *The Life of The Mind,* New York, 1978, p.71.

[94] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.27.

[95] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.187; cf. D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.12; M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.18. In short, drama was "μιμοῦνται δρῶντας," namely, the *mimēsis* (imitation) of people in action (Aristotle, *Poetics,* 1448a.3); it drama "indicates that playacting is actually an imitation of acting" (H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.187).

[96] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.49.

[97] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 31-2.

[98] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p.118.

mutual responsibility establish the necessary conditions for men to become political animals, was a characteristic of the barbarian way of life,[99] or of tyrannical and despotic kingdoms.[100] The barbarians were *aneu logou*; that is, they were deprived not merely of the faculty of speech as such, but "of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other."[101]

The same (Promethean) emphasis on publicness is also demonstrated in Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops (giant one-eyed creatures) in Book 9. These creatures rely on primitive technology[102] and *boulephorous agoras* to make judgments of *themis*;[103] they have "no common law[s]"[104] and each decides "for his own wife and children".[105] According to Deneen, the Cyclops "do not meet in order to deliberate, neither to settle conflict … nor to satisfy what Aristotle described as the characteristics of political animals."[106] Hence, they are not men of action; they are far removed from structures that safeguard public interaction and dialogue; they live in "monstrous" (or barbaric) communities.[107] Confined to a private existence, they share no concern "for what the others think" ("οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσι");[108] they do not take into consideration the words and deeds of others in common associations. Thus, having relinquished their duty to engage with processes through which their individual demands and expectations are continuously evaluated through means of standing up (*piphauskētai*) and speaking/arguing (*agorevein*), they are bound to a crude philistinism of daily labour that clings to the barest instincts of survival and devours political freedom and intellectual wisdom *in toto*.[109] Here we see Homer describing in a quasi-archetypal fashion the tension between the "civilised" (or Promethean) life of the public sphere and the subhuman (according to Arendt) private realm.[110] This realm, Arendt emphatically stressed, escapes the eye of the *polis*; it is entirely consumed by activities revolving around the necessity of meeting material (or

[99] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* p.25.

[100] Ibid, pp.4-5; p.87.

[101] H. Arendt, *Human Condition,* p.27.

[102] P. Deneen, *The Odyssey of Political Theory: The Politics of Departure and Return*, New York, 2014, p.33.

[103] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, pp.139-40.

[104] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 112.

[105] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 9, 115.

[106] P. Deneen, *The Odyssey of Political Theory*, p.34.

[107] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary*, pp.139-40.

[108] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 9, 115.

[109] Vavouras, The Place of Wisdom: From Antiquity to Machiavelli, *Cogito - Multidisciplinary Research Journal,* 17, 1, 2025, p.8

[110] H. Arendt, *Human Condition,* p.27.

biological) human needs.[111] As opposed to the Athenian public realm, which is characterised by political freedom and equality before the law, the private sphere is hierarchically instituted, under a despotic structure.[112]

We see, therefore, that (as Caostoriadis also argued) this distinction between the non-human and monstrous types of life with the political community of public life is echoed in the Cyclopean life.[113] Moreover, Homer's emphasis on "publicness" is also evident through his critiques "of leadership as premised on personal prerogative," best exemplified by Agamemnon (as demonstrated in the preceding sections).[114] Simply put, *themis* is not the ruler's personal entitlement, but a standard by which leaders must be held accountable. Though invoked by an aristocratic elite,[115] she represents collectively negotiated norms about fairness, leadership and collective responsibility within the *synaxes* of the common people. This topic will be further discussed in the next section, where I will also examine how such critiques (on leadership) shed light on the importance of *aidōs* and active *aischynē* in shaping an ethic of self-limitation. I will, finally, explain how *aidōs* counterbalances the *hubris* of the *dēmos*, a significant transgression the poet treats with deep concern.

4. Who Owns the *Politeia*? Homeric *Basileia*, Public Responsibility and the Ethics of *Aidōs*

In the Homeric world, the capacity to *aristeuein* (through speech and deed) played an important role in establishing one's social status. Royal titles undoubtedly confer significant prestige and social admiration; however, they do not guarantee total social recognition.[116] Paris demonstrates that being the prince of a city is not enough to receive praise; one must gain recognition through rhetoric, deed, effort and discipline.[117] Hereditary succession in the position of the *basileus,* Wess argued, was highly competitive and contested in the *synaxes*.[118] Likewise, Hammer stressed that appointment to the throne was contingent upon election or formal confirmation by the *synaxes* of the *agora*.[119] Homeric societies are

[111] Loc.cit.

[112] Aristotle, *Politics,* 1253b.9.

[113] C. Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary,* pp.139-40.

[114] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.25.

[115] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, pp.172-3, p.175; D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* p.25.

[116] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.82.

[117] I. Tripoula, "The ethics of war leadership," *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy,* 15, 2024, pp.125-6.

[118] V. Wees, *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History.* Amsterdam, 1992, pp.81-83, pp.89-125.

[119] L. Morgan, *Ancient Society,* p.146-7, p.225; A. Feldman, *Homer and Democracy,* pp.339-340.

organised in political associations, rather than in families and clans.[120] For Morgan, in the event "it were known that the office had passed from father to son this might have suggested the inference of hereditary succession, now adopted as historically true, while succession in this form did not exist."[121] According to Aristotle, in most ancient constitutions "as depicted by Homer," the *basileis* had to inform the people about their moves and decisions; in turn, these decisions had to be publicly deliberated; they were, in other words, subjects to debate, because (in Aristotle's mind) good decisions are always made through *prohairesis* (προαίρεσις), that is, through procedures of public discussion and dialogue.[122] More importantly, a king (or *basileus*) must always remain loyal to the public.[123] Thus, "[t]he voice of the people was the supreme law for *basileus* and *boule*."[124] In Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, we find Medon describing Odysseus "greatness" with the following words: the king "never spoke or acted without justice, / among the people. / Lords are mostly biased ["ἤ τ᾽ ἐστὶ δίκη θείων βασηλήων"]; / they favour one person and hate another."[125] Here, Wilson's translation of Greek "θείων βασηλήων" (*theiōn basilēon*) as "lords" obscures the exact meaning of the passage; the *basilēon* refers to kings whose power is considered *theíon,* namely, ascribed by god. This power is unquestionable. Such kings demand devotion and praise because of their status alone; they "act without justice." They often "favour one person," literally, the person who actively supports their self-serving goals, and "hate another," namely, the individual whose interests conflict with their rapacious desires. In simple terms, absolute rulers treat the *politeia* as their private property. In this regard, the power they wield is "anti-Promethean"; they expel the *demos* from the political fields, which they treat as their own *res privata*. In contrast, political Prometheanism associates the *politeia* with the *dēmion*, with the "public matter."[126] Prometheanism endorses this principle of shared responsibility (*aidōs*).

To further corroborate this view, Hammer argued that in the Homeric world, abuse of power and despotism arise when the *basileus* is unable to separate his private desires from public claims, considering *themis* an issue

[120] K.A. Raaflaub, Homer to Solon: The Rise of the Polis, The Written Sources. *The Ancient Greek City-State, edited by Mogens Herman Hansen*. Copenhagen, 1993, pp.41-105.

[121] L. Morgan, *Ancient Society,* p.147, p.225.

[122] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1111a.

[123] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* pp.24-6; cf. Homer *Iliad,* Book 20, 4-5; Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 2, 28-32.

[124] A. Feldman, *Homer and Democracy,* p.341.

[125] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 4, 689-692.

[126] D. Hammer, *Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy,* pp.338-9.

of his own will.[127] This is the basis of Agamemnon's leadership, as portrayed in his quarrel with Achilles. For Agamemnon, "power appears as a possession … like strength or might, that he can use to compel others to obey."[128] In Book I, the king blames Achilles as a man of serious standing "above us all," that is, for desiring absolute "power to rule everyone."[129] Conversely, Achilles accuses the *basileus* of ruling through "personal prerogative,"[130] thereby indulging his lust for power that overrides the common good. He highlights the profound disconnect between the stated purpose of the war, the rescue of Helen, and Agamemnon's self-centred motivations. As we read Book 9: "What reason is there to fight Trojans? / Why did [Agamemnon] gather and bring this army here? / Was it not on account of fair-haired Helen?"[131] While Achilles "laid waste a dozen cities / near Troy, another eleven on foot" and "seized fabulous treasure from each city / and brought it all back … to Agamemnon," the latter seized the wife he "slept by and cherished."[132] Agamemnon is, therefore, "vindictive …, and devouring";[133] he profits greatly from the war, claiming the lion's share, while Achilles and the Achaians for almost nine years, "in a noble spirit of generosity," were fighting "to gratify Agamemnon and to win honor [*kleos*] for him."[134] However, Agamemnon "has no feelings of shame [or *aidōs*] in the face of such generosity, no reverence for such nobility, and no gratitude for such sacrifice."[135] Homer depicts Achilles shouting against Agamemnon using the following words: "*anaidès am' espometh' ophra sy chairēis*" ("ἀναιδὲς ἄμ' ἐσπόμεθ' ὄφρα σὺ χαίρῃς"); "[w]e all came here for your sake, shameless king."[136] Agamemnon is "without" *aidōs*; not only does he lack the moral awareness to recognise the wrongness of his disgraceful deeds before carrying them out, but also he expresses no regret or active *aischynē*. He only cares about "his own profit, his own prizes, and his own wealth."[137] As we know, in the *Iliad*, Achilles led the assault on Lyrnessus

[127] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* 24-5.Thus, within a lawful *politeia* the responsibility of upholding justice is shared by its own members, young and old; it does not exclusively rest in the *basileus* himself (cf. Homer *Iliad,* Book 20, 4-5; Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 2, 28-32).

[128] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.90.

[129] Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 287-8.

[130] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* pp.24-5; cf. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 150.

[131] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 9, 336-9; cf. P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue: Creating the Foundations of Classical Civilization.* Cambridge*,* 2014*,* p.121.

[132] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 9, 328-337.

[133] D. Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought,* 24; cf. Homer, *Iliad*, Book 1, 150.

[134] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.138.

[135] Loc.cit.

[136] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, 158.

[137] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.138.

during the Trojan War, and "bereft of the young woman, fair-haired Briseis" as a war prize.[138] When the aristocrats go to war together, they divide the spoils accordingly, "giving each his due portion."[139] However, in Book 1 (of *The Iliad*), Agamemnon is forced by Apollo to return his captive, Chryseis;[140] and as compensation, he captures Achilles' Briseis.[141] In this moment, Agamemnon violates the aristocratic code, revealing his egotism and readiness to exploit power for personal gain.[142] Thus, Achilles wonders: why should he and the Achaians risk their lives to "to wage [a] fruitless war"[143] that only benefits Agamemnon and Menelaus, who do "not think or care about us"?[144] Notice that in Book 1, Achilles accuses the king by using the following words: "*anaideiēn epimeinē kerdaleóphron*" ("ἀναιδείην ἐπιειμένε κερδαλεόφρον"), denouncing him for his "shamelessness and greed."[145] By calling him *kerdaleóphron*, the warrior highlights how the *basileus* exploits public matters (*dēmion*) for personal advantage; this is because his *phrēn* (mind or spirit) is not concerned with *themis*; rather, it is absorbed by a selfish *kerdos* (gain or profit). Homer uses the word *anaideiēn* ("lack of shame") once again to link *aidōs* with the *dēmion*. To make this point more precise, we should note that Achilles's critique does not address Agamemnon's lack of *aidōs* exclusively; he also "criticizes the Achaians for acquiescing in the foolish and unjust rule of Agamemnon."[146] As Ahrensdorf notes, the king was so unrighteous that Achilles finds "unreasonable for any of the Achaians to obey him";[147] to use my terms, Agamemnon's power is so unjust that submission to it demonstrates blatant lack of *aidōs*. While lack of active *aischynē* primarily characterises the king's personality, as he has already committed a *hubris*, the loss of *aidōs* concerns both him (as observed earlier) and the Achaians, who do

[138] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 2, 688.
[139] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.176.
[140] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, 430-447.
[141] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, 184-7.
[142] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.176.
[143] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 9, 322.
[144] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, 160.
[145] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, 149. In Ahrensdorf's mind, Achilles suggests that he and all the Achaians "have been fighting the Trojans for nine years, not out of self-interest, but in a noble spirit of generosity, to gratify Agamemnon and to win honor for him" by rescuing Helen (*Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.138). However, "Agamemnon has no feelings of shame in the face of such generosity, no reverence for such nobility, and no gratitude for such sacrifice." (ibid.).
[146] Ibid, p.139.
[147] Ibid, p.138.

not express *nemesis* (the rightful anger)[148] against his transgressive and self-centred rule.

In the same way, the people in *The Odyssey* are portrayed as fully responsible, potent and active political agents; they are indebted to uphold the ethical principles of mutual respect. In short, the *demos* must take matters into their own hands, denouncing structures that perpetuate injustices and forbidding the few powerful and privileged from exercising arbitrary force upon others. More to the point: In Book 2, Telemachus (the son of Odysseus), nineteen years after Odysseus' departure, is urged by goddess Athena to call for a public meeting. Aigyptos reminds the assembled Ithacans that "[w]e have not met in council since the day / Odysseus departed with his ships."[149] Telemachus, in a bid to ignite the community's conscience and sense of justice, condemns the suitors with the following words: "You … all should feel ashamed! Consider / what others in the neighborhood will think!"[150] This passage offers one of the clearest descriptions of active *aischynē* in Homer's *Odyssey*: a powerful sense of guilt brought before the audience – the Ithacan public. Moreover, this guilt highlights the need for a shift in attitude, moving towards *aidōs*. This is particularly clear in the depiction of the suitors as *anaideis* (without *aidōs*),[151] who commit *aischea* instead of limiting their desires, acting according to the *timē* (honour and dignity) of others.[152]

This nascent form of public deliberation and emphasis on the duty of each member of the community to uphold the principles of justice in order to safeguard an environment of mutual friendship are among the key elements of democracy that we later identify with the democratic *politeia* of Athens. The same meaning is conveyed in another passage of Book 2, where we find Penelope (Odysseus' wife) urging Dolius (the house slave) "to hurry off and sit beside Laertes, / and tell him everything; he may decide / to go in tears to ["*exelthōn laoisin* - ἐξελθὼν λαοῖσιν"] plead with those who want / to kill godlike Odysseus' son, his grandson."[153] The word "plead" does not accurately describe the Greek *exelthōn laoisin*, literally translated as *exiting the private sphere to meet the people in the public square* (in the political field). In short, there is hope that Laertes will decide to join the *synaxis*, informing the Ithacans about Penelope's suffering at the hands of the suitors, who have usurped the household and forced her

[148] *Nemesis* usually refers to the rightful anger of the audience, of the public, of the *demos,* when a person becomes *anaidhs* (lack of *aidōs*) and behaves against *themis*; cf. N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality,* pp.156-7.

[149] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 26-7.

[150] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 64-5.

[151] See Section One.

[152] L.D. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology of Ethics*, p.103.

[153] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 4, 736-41.

way into her private sphere, expecting her to cease hoping on Odysseus' return so that she can marry one of them. The household is taken over by cynical men, who take advantage of their might to gratify their lust for domination. But the suffering inflicted by these unjust forms of rule must be publicly condemned by everyone; the *demos* must never remain silent when *hubris* is committed. This emphasis on public responsibility is also confirmed from another angle: since in the Promethean mindset *themis* is a public duty, we understand that the responsibility to actively oppose cruel practices of oppression rests not exclusively with leaders, but also with the *laos*. This is also illustrated in Mentor's arguments (who was in charge of the household during Odysseus' absence): "But I do blame" the δήμῳ [demos], who remains passive and never speaks against the suitors, though the *demos* itself far outnumbers them ("πολλοὶ ἐόντες").[154] Thus, the *demos* must uphold the demands of *themis*. Upon adhering to these, the *laos* condemns and rejects *hubris*. But as we can clearly see, this stance requires the internalisation of *aidōs*. By doing so, the people cultivate high moral standards and become capable of practising self-restraint.

Furthermore, Aegyptius addresses the suitors using the following words: *aidesthēte periktíonas anthrōpous* ("αἰδέσθητε περικτίονας ἀνθρώπους"). They translate as follows: "feel shame before your fellow men".[155] This phrase carries a double meaning: *prima facie,* it denotes that the suitors must feel *aischynē* for their disgraceful deeds; "[c]onsider / what others in the neighborhood will think," Aegyptius shouts.[156] Let us be reminded again of Aristotle's assertion that "people blush" out of *aischynē* and "feel disgrace"; for moral persons have no need to feel *aischynē*, since they have adopted the virtue of *aidōs*.[157] Thus, the suitors must blush out of shame (in front of the *laos*) for their choices. However, we can see that in this passage, Homer uses the word *aidesthēte* (from which the term *aidōs* is derived). We might interpret this to mean that the suitors are called not merely to feel *aischynē* in response to their wrongdoing. Rather, this feeling must trigger a shift in their mindset, driving them toward actions aligned with *aidōs*. We see here again that this active *aischynē* – that leads to *aidōs* – is linked to the *dēmion* (δήμιον). Let me further clarify this point: when one is active he/she is concerned with the public affairs; as the previous section clarified by reflecting on Arendt, *action* is synonymous with "publicness," and more precisely, with the participatory politics of the *synaxes*. Hence, (active) *aischynē* becomes a political force and plays a significant role within the fabric of the communal sphere.

[154] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, *Odyssey,* 238-40.
[155] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 64; translation mine.
[156] Homer, *The Odyssey,* Book 2, 64-5.
[157] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1128b; cf. Section One.

To summarise, active *aischynē* fosters *aidōs* not simply to the mind of the wrongdoer but to the public as a whole. It reminds the wider community that decisions must be carefully considered before they are collectively made, so that *hubris* will be avoided. As Hammer also argued, participatory politics, where the *demos* and a leader cooperate, inherit the threat of tyranny; charismatic authority figures often exploit popular desires in order to consolidate their self-serving rule. "In such circumstances," Stuurman explains, the ruling aristocracy faces two dangers: abuse of power by the *basileus* and popular revolt.[158] The *Iliad* turns on the first danger: Agamemnon exemplifies best "the risk that the chief king can endanger the entire community" as we have already seen.[159] However, the second danger is also present; when Agamemnon abuses his power, he almost provokes a rebellion among the soldiers. This, according to the same author, is best exemplified by the role of Thersites in the poem.[160] It is time to move on, discussing how *aidōs* and *aischynē* appear in the poems to show the flaws in human judgment, which connects to the second principle of political Prometheanism: scepticism concerning the limits of the moral capacities of humans. To clarify this dynamic in the context of Thersites' episode, we must consider the dominance of *kleos* in the Homeric social value structure.

4. The Scepter and the Shame: the *Hubris* of the *Demos*

We get the best hint of how *aidōs* and active *aischynē* are absent when they are most needed in the mistreatment of Thersites. In brief, the Achaian makes a similar critique with Achilles: Agamemnon is greedy, selfish and unjust; he is "never satisfied with his part of the spoils."[161] More importantly, he is (as previously stated) a *kerdaleóphron* commander, who exploits the pursuit of *kleos* (a public demand) for his personal gain. Thersites urges the Achaians to "go home in our ships, leaving the man / and his prizes here at Troy, so he may see / that none of us cares the least whit for him."[162] Like Achilles, Thersites voices his contempt for the lack of *aidōs* and active *aischynē* on behalf of his fellow soldiers, who – out of cowardice (Stuurman argued) – submit to the king.[163] He urges them to abandon Agamemnon in Troy; without the ordinary Achaians, the king would be helpless. In this way, Thersites highlights "the indispensable role of the common soldiers in the fighting,"[164] "implying that there should be

[158] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.186.
[159] Loc.cit.
[160] Loc.cit.
[161] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.175.
[162] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 236-8.
[163] S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.175.
[164] Ibid, p.177,

something in it for them too; otherwise, they might as well go home, leaving Agamemnon to his own devices."[165] But instead of receiving support from his peers, even from Achilles himself, he is humiliated and suppressed; Odysseus hits him "until he bent double and wept pain's tears."[166] For Hammer, Thersites is punished because "his lower status does not allow him to speak in this way against the king."[167] He lacks the heroic stature of Achilles and, for this reason, he is quickly silenced. Vico pictures Thersites as "a character of the plebeians who served the heroes in the Trojan war" but was "beaten by Ulysses … with the scepter of Agamemnon, just as the ancient Roman plebeians were beaten by the nobles."[168] For others, Thersites' violent silencing reinforces the dominance of Homer's aristocratic ethos – one that is nearly impossible to challenge or transcend.[169] John Ferguson regards Thersites as a proto-liberal martyr; this "caricatured and ruthlessly manhandled" cruelty "is the beginning of a democratic to aristocratic and misuse of power."[170] This stark contrast in how similar criticisms are received underscores a deeper issue within the Homeric value system. In a nutshell, the disparity between Achilles and Thersites could be also explained through the *kleos*-centered value system of the Homeric world: Achilles has proven his excellence and virtue (*arete*) as a warrior. Thus, he earned him renown. On the other hand, Thersites, neither mighty nor accomplished, lacks such recognition. Thus, he is not punished for being low-born; the Achaian lacks the military prestige of Achilles. And he is described as a "[b]owlegged," "lame," and "disgrace among the Greeks at Troy."[171] More importantly, Thersites is *aischistos* ("αἴσχιστος").[172] The poet's application of the adjective *aischistos* (or *aischros*), although closely related to *aischynē*, on this occasion is not synonymous with lack moral shame *after-the-act*; the *aischistos* is "ugly";[173] that is, he commits deeds that are not well received by the public,

[165] Ibid, p.176,

[166] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 266.

[167] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.61.

[168] G. Vico, *The New Science*, New York, 1948, p.123.

[169] A. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, p.34, p.173; W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, Vol. I*. New York, 1945, p.19. This reading is shared by both conservatives and contemporary Marxist scholars; the former endorse Odysseus's suppression of Thersites, who is not a hero but a deranged personality; the Marxists view Thersites as an oppressed rebel to whom the audience must sympathise. Such readings are also offered by Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Moses Finley, F. A. Paley and so on (S. Stuurman, *The Voice of Thersites*, p.180).

[170] J. Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World*, Cambridge, 1991, p.11.

[171] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 216-9.

[172] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 216.

[173] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame*, p.11, p.13; D. L. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology of Ethics*, p.4, p.54, p.57.

since they lack elegance and eloquence. We could, therefore, agree with Lowly[174] that Thersites' physical deformities do not define his role as an anti-hero; rather, his rhetorical "ugliness" causes anger and indignation as it stands in opposition to the aristocratic Homeric decorum. In Homer's words, Thersites "spoke shameful words," or "improper for the audience" –"*épea phresin hēisin acosma"* ("ἔπεα φρεσὶν ἧσιν ἄκοσμά");[175] the word *a-cosma* is formed by the prefix "a," implying "without," and *cosmos,* translated as the "crowd," or the "people." Furthermore, the verb *cosmo* denotes the application of beauty or adornment. This suggests that Thersites lacked not only a noble physique but, more importantly, rhetorical eloquence. His "ugliness" mainly derives from his words, deemed utterly inappropriate for the crowd of the Achaians; they caused *lōbē* (λώβη), that is, "outrage," and *oneidos* (ὄνειδος) ("insult").[176]

From a different angle, in Book 2 Odysseus claimed that "[a]ll the Achaeans here cannot be kings / That would bring chaos. There must be one chief, / one king, who must be the man Cronus' son put / in charge of scepter and laws so he could rule."[177] Additionally, in the midst of a dangerous disorder, Odysseus resorts to physical coercion[178] by striking commoners with the sceptre, rebuking them with words.[179] Hence, does the Ithacan king affirm Agamemnon's authority, as Ahrensdorf claimed?[180] For Hammer, Odysseus' coercive tactics do not restore Agamemnon's power; "what holds the political field together now is not people acting together, but force."[181] In simple terms, the Ithacan king stops the soldiers by relying on compulsion, replacing mutual cooperation and trust with fear and force. For Hammer, the use of force by Agamemnon "only to weaken his power" and when the Ahcaians are imperilled, he is unable to do anything to help them."[182] This is because "Agamemnon is powerless", says the same author;[183] true power is not coercion used arbitrarily in the pursuit of obedience; coercion and violence "prevent the development of power" by fostering "the conditions for isolation."[184] Thus, violence denies the very condition of power: namely, the capacity of the people to act and speak

[174] Ibid, pp.40-1.
[175] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 213.
[176] E. Lowry, *Thersites: A Study in Comic Shame*, p.19, p.29, pp.39-40.
[177] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 203-5.
[178] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 199.
[179] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 2, 198.
[180] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.45.
[181] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.88.
[182] Ibid.*,* p.90.
[183] Loc.cit.
[184] Ibid., p.91.

together.[185] More importantly, power "is located not in a person but in the political field. Power originates when people speak and act with each other and enables groups to act together to pursue particular goals."[186] As Arendt argued, power is never the property (*res privata*) of an individual; it belongs to groups, unions and peoples and "remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together."[187] Power "arises from the constituting of a political space."[188] But if arbitrary coercion undermines both power and loyalty toward a leader, as Agamemnon's case explains, how is it that Odysseus, who also employed brutal physical coercion, succeeded in inspiring obedience, uniting the Achaian camp? Could the reason behind Odysseus' success be his ability to tap into deeper collective aspirations embedded in the Homeric value system, most notably, the pursuit of *kleos*? Ahrensdorf offers further insight into this dynamic.

As the author argued, *kleos* "cannot be shared" or distributed;[189] it is not a collective reward. Rather, it is doled out to individuals who demonstrate exceptional military excellence. To avoid misunderstandings, *kleos* is also attributed to those who "fight bravely" and defend their community, which provides them "with material honors, such as the "choice meats and the filled wine cups," as well as good farmland, Hammer claimed.[190] Simply put, glory is bestowed upon those who abandon the security of their private walls and sacrifice their personal well-being to safeguard the common good. Here, the attribution of *kleos* arises from the expression of an "ethical self," which prioritises the duty to defend collective well-being and security over selfish enjoyments. But even when framed as service to the collective, the pursuit of glory remains fundamentally self-serving; military excellence on behalf of the community can serve less as an expression of civic duty than as a strategic path to individual renown. For example, Hector is commonly perceived as a humble figure, devoted to the common good of the Trojans and his family. He ostensibly emerges as a prudent and exemplary leader,[191] who embodies the virtue of loyalty to one's people and one's loved ones;[192] he "fights on, apparently in order to fulfil his duty to protect his city, his family, and his soldiers."[193] When he is confronted by Helen, he responds with the

[185] Loc.cit.

[186] Ibid., p.90.

[187] H. Arendt, *On Violence,* New York, 1970, p.44; cf. D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.91.

[188] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.92.

[189] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.170.

[190] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Ethical Thinking*, p.208.

[191] I. Tripoula, *The ethics of war leadership,* p.125.

[192] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* pp.94-6.

[193] Ibid, p.86.

following words: ""Do not encourage me to sit … My heart urges me to rush back and aid / the Trojan men who badly need their leader."[194] Unlike Achilles, Hector never expresses anger towards the Trojans and never attacks Priam as bitterly as Achilles attacks Agamemnon.[195] But if Hector is just, why does he not save his city from utter destruction "by opposing the pro-war policy of his father and brother?"[196] Why does he insist with such a frenzied passion on fighting an 'ill-fated' (in the words of Andromache) and unjust war? "Your fury will be your death. You do not care / for your son or hapless wife, all but widowed / because the Argives soon will end your days."[197] Andromache suggests that Hector's insistence to fight the Achaians overpowers "both his reason and his pity … sacrificing his own life and thoughtlessly ruining the happiness of his wife and also of his child,"[198] who will find "no solace" but "only grief."[199] "Stay here on the wall," she insists, "rather than widow me and orphan your son. / Station your men at the wild fig where Ilium / is most vulnerable, its wall least high."[200] However, Hector considers retreat an act of cowardice and prioritises his public honour over his family's future. And he responds with the following words: it would be "my shame among / the Trojan people would be far too heavy / were I to avoid the war as would a coward," since he "was raised to be brave / and always to fight among the forward Trojans."[201] He knows that the fate of Troy is sealed, but he keeps "fighting on for the sake of his own glory."[202] His main concern is not the common good or his family, the Trojan women and children, or the war's outcome; for he fears shame and abasement (passive *aischynē*): he dreads the thought of being killed "like a helpless woman."[203] Thus, "his defeatism gives him license to pursue his self-interest."[204] With this in mind, we could assume that since *kleos* plays a central role in Homeric society and so long as it encourages self-serving ambitions, Agamemnon's prolongation of the war aligns with the Achaeans' demands. In other words, Odysseus and Nestor's rhetorical defences of Agamemnon's autocratic rule serve to

[194] Homer, *Iliad*, Book 6, 360-363.
[195] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.99.
[196] Ibid, p.96.
[197] Homer, *Iliad*, Book 6, 407-9.
[198] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.100-1.
[199] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 6, 412-3.
[200] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 6, 431-4.
[201] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 6, 441-5.
[202] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.108.
[203] Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 22, 125; cf. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* 99. In this way, Hector denounces Paris for choosing to retreat, shaming himself while delighting their foes (Homer, *Iliad*, Book 3, 39-55; Book 6, 521-526; cf. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.104, p.108).
[204] Ibid, p.111.

reinforce a hierarchical structure that channels the individual aspirations of each soldier for *kleos* into sanctioned expressions.[205] Perhaps, this explains the reasons Odysseus's violent enforcement of despotism is not shamed and despised.

Beyond their superior rhetorical skills, there is another reason that Odysseus and Nestor win the debate and Achilles and Thersites do not: Odysseus and Nestor act in accordance with fate, which has already preordained Troy's ultimate destruction. This accord with destiny grants them a significant advantage. Given the dictates of fate and the predetermined outcome of the war, can we conclude that the Achaians lack *aidōs*? Do they lack the agency and will to uphold *themis*? As it has already been claimed, divine will and fate act "outside of, and upon, the human will."[206] While there is no "free-floating" human agency operating in absolute autonomy, people can still debate, make decisions, seek reconciliation and respond to others; their choices and actions carry significance.[207] Hence, even if Troy's fate is sealed, the Achaians could reflect on Thersites' speech; they, perhaps, had no power to influence the final cause of the war, but they could reconsider their strategy, moving beyond Agamemnon's policies. Yet, this did not occur, as Thersites was brutally suppressed.

Much like Achilles, Thersites draws attention to the *anaideia* of the Achaians, demonstrated not simply as obedience to an unjust authority but (in Yamagata's definition) through a refusal to aid the helpless or a display of contempt for the vulnerable[208] (as his case denotes). However, we have seen that the pursuit of *kleos* either leads them to disregard their *aidōs* in favour of self-serving ambitions or to reinforce hierarchical double standards, silencing those lacking renown. Though Odysseus' violent tactics certainly play an important role in uniting the political field (as Hammer notes), the pursuit of *kleos* and its tendency to incite selfish ambitions, ultimately encourages devotion to the cause of war. We understand then that those who possess the Promethean (*thnatous āgan*) flame, bear a formidable responsibility: they must cultivate self-limitation to confront and temper the deeply rooted vices inherent in the human condition. They must, in other words, be guided by *aidōs*, active *aischynē*, and *themis*, the very ethical virtues that balance ambition with humility.

[205] P. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* p.45.
[206] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.51.
[207] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.77.
[208] N. Yamagata, *Homeric Morality,* pp.170-1.

Conclusion

This study explored the participatory aspects of Homer's epics; while lacking formal institutions, Homeric society in institutional terms, evoke a distinctly "Promethean" vision of human agency, one marked by the capacity to use *logos*, that is, to deliberate and judge in "political fields," where communal ethics, public speech, and shared norms of justice begin to take root. Far from portraying a world governed exclusively by aristocratic decree or divine will, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* highlight the importance of popular involvement in collective decision-making. The presence of *synaxes*, the invocation of *aidōs*, and the recurring concern for *themis* reveal a world where politics is already in formation, although not formalised as, for example, was the case in the Athenian *polis*. In line with the second principle of political Prometheanism, Homer's epics dramatise the fragility of the human capacity for judgment, highlighting the problem of *hubris*. In this regard, the fire Prometheus offered to humanity (according to Aeschylus and Protagoras), which burns in the speeches of Achilles and Thersites, in the restraint urged by Telemachus, and even in the *synaxes* of Ithaca and the Achaian camp, requires modesty and civic conscience; this fire is excessive for mortals.

Ultimately, Homer's epics are not merely mythic tales of divine wrath or heroic glory; as Hammer claimed, Homer was also "a political thinker"; his poems are "work[s] of political thought," and they are "engaged in [a] critical reflection," which "is political in nature."[209] Such a reflection sheds light on the limits of power and the perils of charismatic leadership. It also reveals that the legitimacy of authority does not lie in divine providence, faith or noble birth alone; honour and respect are also earned through dialogue, fairness and the capacity for *aidōs*. This is the essence of the Promethean burden in politics: not merely to act, but to act with a view to common responsibility; not merely to speak, but to speak with *dēmos*, in the shared pursuit of *themis*.

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[209] D. Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics,* p.5.

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OLDER PEOPLE AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: AN EXPLORATORY PERSPECTIVE

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***Abstract**: "In the context of demographic ageing and ongoing economic transformations in the Republic of Moldova, financial inclusion of the elderly is becoming a priority for social cohesion policies and for reducing economic vulnerabilities. Equitable access to financial services is considered essential for active economic participation and protection against financial shocks. Despite the acknowledged importance of financial inclusion, the population segment aged over 60 remains poorly integrated into the financial system due to barriers such as low income, lack of financial literacy, digital obstacles, and distrust in banking institutions. This phenomenon generates additional social and economic risks. This study aims to assess the current level of financial inclusion among the elderly in the Republic of Moldova, identify the key factors contributing to exclusion, and formulate recommendations for improving access to formal financial services. The research is based on a survey conducted among a sample of 215 individuals over the age of 60, from both urban and rural areas. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and logistic regression to evaluate the relationship between socio-economic variables and the level of financial inclusion. The findings reveal a low level of access to and use of financial services among older adults, mainly due to limited income, lack of trust in the banking system, and unawareness of existing financial products. Financial inclusion in this demographic group is limited: only 20% of respondents have savings or have taken out loans, less than 4% hold investments or private insurance, and 62% own bank cards. However, there is notable openness to using digital services, provided adequate educational support is available. Reducing financial exclusion among the elderly requires a coordinated intervention from public authorities, financial institutions, and civil society. Recommended measures include the development*

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of products tailored to unstable income, targeted financial literacy programs, and the expansion of digital access in formats that are senior-friendly."

***Keywords**: elderly, financial inclusion, low income*

Introduction

The economic transition and the accelerated demographic aging process place the Republic of Moldova in front of major challenges regarding ensuring the financial inclusion of the elderly. Although access to financial services is considered a fundamental right and a necessary condition for active participation in the economy, the segment of the population 60+ years old remains largely outside the formal financial system. This exclusion has direct consequences on personal well-being, economic security and the ability to manage financial shocks.

Financial inclusion has become a strategic priority for policymakers, financial institutions and international organizations, being recognized as an essential factor for sustainable economic growth and reducing social inequalities[1, 2].

In a context marked by widespread poverty and economic exclusion, such as the case of the Republic of Moldova, where over 30% of the population lives below the absolute poverty line[3], equitable access to financial services becomes a pressing necessity.

The elderly are one of the most affected social categories in terms of accessing financial services, and the aging of the population increases the pressures on the financial and social system. The absolute poverty rate of people aged 60 and over in the Republic of Moldova is 43.4 in 2024[4]. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that, currently, 17.4% of the population of the Republic of Moldova is over 65 years old, and by 2040, this proportion will increase to 25%, i.e. one in four people in the country[5]. In this context,

[1] Marta de la Cuesta-González et al. The relationship between vulnerable financial consumers and banking institutions. A qualitative study in Spain. *Geoforum*, 119, 2021, pp. 163-176. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.01.006.

[2] A.L. Prete, Economic literacy, inequality, and financial development. *Economics Letters*, 118(1), 2013, pp. 74-76. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2012.09.029.

[3] National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Social Statistic. 2024. https://statbank.statistica.md/PxWeb/pxweb/ro/

[4] National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Databank: Disposable income of the population by source of income, age group of the head of household and average, 2019-2024. https://statistica.gov.md/ro

[5] O. Gagauz, M. Buciuceanu-Vrabie, I. Pahomii, V. Ştîrba, T. Tabac, & E. Grigoraş, *The population of the Republic of Moldova at 30 years of independence: main challenges and necessary policies*. Chişinău: INCE, 2021.
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our research interest focuses on identifying solutions that will favor the increase in financial inclusion of the elderly, which will contribute to the economic development of the country and the increase in individual well-being. To identify these solutions, we started from the analysis of the financial behavior of the elderly, with the objective of delimiting the factors that contribute to increasing the level of access to financial services, as well as highlighting the barriers that may hinder their inclusion in the financial system.

Specialized literature and international policy documents issued by World Bank[6] and European Commission[7] emphasize the importance of developing an open, fair and adapted financial system to the real needs of the population. Financial inclusion involves both access and efficient use of financial products and services, in conditions of transparency, safety and accessibility. This involves the elimination of structural, behavioral and digital barriers, as well as the promotion of financial literacy and consumer protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitalization of financial systems, revealing the huge potential of digital technologies in expanding inclusion, but also new risks, especially for vulnerable groups. Digital technologies offer a powerful solution to expand access to financial services for the estimated 1.4 billion adults globally who are still excluded from the formal financial system[8]. In this context, promoting digital financial services, supported by proportionate regulatory frameworks and adequate infrastructure, becomes imperative.

However, despite the rapid pace of financial system development and the process of financial digitalization, a large part of the world's population is financially excluded. According to the Global Findex database[9], there are significant disparities in the use of basic financial services across country groups. Some of the excluded have access to affordable financial services but choose not to use them; at the same time, there are people who need services but do not have access to them for various reasons.

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[6] World Bank. The Global Findex Database 2024: Financial inclusion, digital payments, and resilience. https://globalfindex.worldbank.org/

[7] European Commission. *Financial services provision and prevention of financial exclusion*. 2008. Retrieved from https://www.fi-compass.eu/library/other/financial-services-provision-and-prevention-financial-exclusion

[8] G20 GPFI. *Implementation Guide for the G20 High-Level Principles for Digital Financial Inclusion*. 2022, September.

https://www.gpfi.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPFI%20Outcome%201%20%28Final%20-%20updated%29.pdf

[9] World Bank. *Global Financial Inclusion (Global Findex) Database*, 2022. doi:https://doi.org/10.48529/jq97-aj70

The key issue is to assess the factors that influence financial inclusion and take action to remove existing barriers. Only in this context can policies be initiated by both the financial sector and public authorities to increase financial inclusion.

The main purpose of this research is to analyze the level of financial integration of older people in the Republic of Moldova and to identify the demographic, socio-economic and perceptual factors that influence this process. The main objectives of the research are: to assess the level of financial integration of the elderly population by conducting a pilot study; to identify barriers and opportunities in accessing financial services by people over 60 years of age and to determine the influence of factors on the probability of financial integration by building and validating a multivariate logistic regression model. As a final objective, the research aims to formulate practical recommendations for public authorities and other relevant institutions, in order to increase the degree of financial inclusion of older people.

Literature review

Financial inclusion, like any economic phenomenon, depends on a complex set of factors. The literature classifies these factors into three major categories: (i) supply factors, which reflect the structural conditions of the financial system, (ii) demand factors, which relate to the individual capabilities of users, and (iii) societal factors, which include demographic, institutional and public policy dimensions[10,11].

Supply factors refer to the accessibility, availability and adaptability of financial services offered by the banking system and new financial technologies. In this direction, recent research has highlighted the importance of financial technologies (FinTech) as vectors of financial inclusion, especially in developed economies[12]. FinTech contributes to reducing structural barriers and extends the coverage of financial services to previously excluded groups.

[10] D. Clichici, Financial inclusion issues and its role in economic development. *Journal of World Economy*, 2(12), 2020, pp. 49-61.

[11] European Commission. *Financial services provision and prevention of financial exclusion*. 2008. https://www.fi-compass.eu/library/other/financial-services-provision-and-prevention-financial-exclusion

[12] A. Demir, Pesqué-Cela, V., Altunbas, Y., & Murinde, V. Fintech, financial inclusion and income inequality: A quantile regression approach. *European Journal of Finance*, 1(28), 2022, pp. 86-107. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1351847X.2020.1772335

In emerging economies, Del Sarto, N., & Ozili, P.K.[13] show that integrating FinTech into traditional financial intermediation models can accelerate inclusive economic growth. However, the authors highlight the persistence of gaps in understanding the long-term impact of these technologies on financial stability and the ability to adequately serve vulnerable populations.

On the demand side, the level of financial literacy, trust in institutions, and income are key determinants of access to and use of financial services[14,15]. Sharif, S.P. et al.[16] investigate, in a comparative framework, the influence of gender on financial inclusion and the role of education in reducing this gap. The results indicate that men are more likely to have bank accounts, and education contributes significantly to reducing the gender gap in basic access, but has no significant impact on the use of advanced financial services (savings or credit). In the same vein, World Bank data highlights a direct correlation between household income and the level of financial inclusion, highlighting that economic vulnerability limits the ability to access and effectively use available financial instruments[17].

A third category of relevant factors is represented by societal and demographic conditions. These include variables such as age, gender, geographical location (urban/rural), fiscal and social policies, and structural changes in the labor market. Studies by the European Institute for Gender Equality[18] highlight that older women, especially those in rural areas, are more exposed to the risk of financial exclusion, in the context of inequitable pension systems and low incomes during working life.

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[13] N. Del Sarto, & P.K. Ozili, FinTech and financial inclusion in emerging markets: A bibliometric analysis and future research agenda. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 13(20), 2024, pp. 270–290. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOEM-08-2024-1428

[14] World Bank, *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis*. Overview booklet, 2024.

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[15] P.M. Vik, D. Kamerāde, & K.T. Dayson, The Link Between Digital Skills and Financial Inclusion—Evidence from Consumers Survey Data from Low-Income Areas. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 47, 2024, pp.373-393. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-024-09567-w

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[17] World Bank. *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out of the Polycrisis*. Overview booklet, 2024.

https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f75dd18d-4e3f-44f9-b455-7f0d8e189609/content

[18] European Institute for Gender Equality. Gender gap in pensions in the European Union. 2015. doi:doi:10.2839/2584

Recent literature highlights that older people are among the most affected by multiple financial exclusion, due to the accumulated barriers: modest incomes, cognitive and physical limitations, low digital literacy and the lack of financial products adapted to the needs of older age[19, 20, 21]. In response to the challenges outlined, at the international level, the G20 Fukuoka Policy Priorities[22] promote policies oriented towards equity, digital literacy and the development of personalized financial products for seniors. In the Republic of Moldova, the National Program for Active and Healthy Ageing 2023–2027[23] provides for measures to reduce the social and financial exclusion of older persons. These efforts are supported by projects implemented by UNFPA Moldova, focused on digital literacy and creating an equitable framework for access to financial and public services[24].

Therefore, existing research converges on the idea that financial inclusion is the result of the interaction between structural, individual and societal factors. For the elderly population, this interaction takes on increased complexity, requiring an integrated approach that takes into account both demographic specifics and digital, economic and social barriers. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, the analysis of these dimensions is all the more relevant as applied research in this field is limited, and the results can substantially contribute to the foundation of coherent public policies and interventions adapted to the real needs of vulnerable groups.

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[21] Finance Watch, *A wrinkle in the process: Financial inclusion barriers in an ageing Europe*. 2021. Retrieved from https://www.finance-watch.org/publication/a-wrinkle-in-the-process/

[22] OECD G20 Fukuoka Policy Priorities on Aging and Financial Inclusion. 2019. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/g20-fukuoka-policy-priorities-on-aging-and-financial-inclusion_08a2a48d-en.html

[23] Government of the Republic of Moldova. National Program for Active and Healthy Ageing 2023–2027. 2023. Retrieved from
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[24] UNFPA Moldova, Programmes and initiatives on digital and financial literacy for older persons. United Nations Population Fund Moldova, 2025.
https://moldova.unfpa.org/

Methodology and Data

The present analysis is based on data collected through a questionnaire applied to a sample of elderly people, aged 60 and over. The research instrument was developed with the aim of assessing the level of financial integration and identifying demographic, socio-economic and perceptual factors that may influence this process. The questionnaire structure included both objective variables (such as gender, age, residential area, level of education, economic status and estimated monthly income) and subjective variables, which reflect the respondents' opinions on the financial system, the use of banking services and the perception of access barriers.

The research is exploratory in nature and was designed as a pilot study, given the absence of previous empirical investigations specifically dedicated to the financial integration of the elderly in the Republic of Moldova. The sample consisted of 215 respondents and was built based on pre-established quotas, having as main benchmarks the distribution of the elderly population according to gender, age group and area of residence. Although the sample size is relatively small, this structuring allowed the capture of a diversity of relevant opinions and experiences, thus ensuring an exploratory representativeness appropriate to the purpose of the study. The distribution of respondents according to the socio-demographic characteristics obtained in the final stage of the research can be seen in Table 1.

The data collection process was carried out using the Google Forms platform, with direct assistance from trained interviewers. This approach allowed both the logistical optimization and digitalization of the collection process, as well as providing the necessary support to respondents to complete the questionnaire, especially in cases where digital skills were limited. The use of the online platform also had an ecological advantage, reducing the consumption of printed resources.

This research constitutes a first systematic initiative in the investigation of the financial integration of the elderly in the Republic of Moldova, in a context marked by demographic aging and economic vulnerability. The results obtained can contribute both to the substantiation of subsequent more extensive quantitative analyses and to the orientation of public policies regarding the financial inclusion of this population category.

Table 1. Socio-demographic data of respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Sex	Males	35.8
	Females	64.2
Age group	60–64 years	28.8
	65–69 years	26.5

	70–74 years	18.6
	75–79 years	13.5
	80–84 years	7.9
	85+ years	4.7
Area of residence	Urban	49.3
	Rural	50.7
Study level	No studies / Primary	7
	Gymnasium level	11.2
	Secondary specialised studies	29.3
	Secondary level	12.6
	Higher level	40
Socioeconomic status	Employee	22.7
	Pensioner	70
	Self-employed in agriculture	3.5
	Other	3.8

Source: Data from empirical research.

The analysis carried out in this research can be represented by two modules – descriptive analysis of the situation of the elderly and their level of financial integration and regression analysis to highlight the factors of major importance in increasing the risk of financial exclusion of the elderly.

To identify the factors associated with the probability of the elderly being financially integrated, we estimated a binary logistic regression model, in which the dependent variable was the respondents' familiarity with the financial system in the Republic of Moldova (value 1 for affirmative answers, value 0 for negative answers). The model was built to estimate the log-odds of the probability of financial integration according to several socio-demographic characteristics, using the following general formulation:

$$log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \beta^0 + \beta^1 * Education + \beta^2 * Income + \beta^3 * Age + \beta^4 * Sex + \beta^5 * Residence + \Sigma\beta_j * Stat_eco + \varepsilon$$

Where,

p - represents the probability that a person is financially integrated;

β^n - are the estimated coefficients associated with the explanatory variables;

ε - is the random error term.

All independent variables were recoded to be introduced as categorical factors. Education level was classified into three groups: low education (no education or primary education), medium education (middle school and high school), and higher education. Personal monthly income was recoded into three ranges: under 4,000 lei, between 4,000 and 8,000 lei, and over 8,000 lei, respectively. Age group was structured into five categories: 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, and 80+ years. Economic status was reduced to two categories: retired (no economic activity) and active (employed or performing paid activities). Gender (male/female) and residence environment (urban vs. rural) were also included in the model.

The model estimation was performed in Python, using the statsmodels package and the *Logit()* functionality applied to the design matrices built with *patsy*, which allowed the correct generation of coefficients for all categorical variables introduced. The coefficients were interpreted both in logit (log-odds) form and transformed into odds ratio for better readability.

For the analysis of objective data on income, the statistical databases of the responsible national authorities were used: the National Bureau of Statistics, the National Social Insurance House, and the National Bank of Moldova. The reference year used in the analysis is 2024, this being the most recent for which data were available at the time of the research.

National Socio-Economic Background

The situation of the elderly in the Republic of Moldova is marked by heightened economic vulnerability, especially in periods characterized by macroeconomic instability and significant increases in the cost of living. The analysis of the responses obtained in the research shows that the majority of respondents over 60 years of age have very modest incomes (Fig. 1). Approximately 45% of them declare monthly incomes below 4,000 lei (the equivalent of approximately 207 euros, according to the official average exchange rate published by the National Bank of Moldova[25]).

Official statistical data confirm this situation. The average disposable income of people aged 60 to 64 is 5,576.9 lei per month, and for the 65+ category it is approximately 18% lower, standing at 4,594.5 lei [26]. At the same time, the average old-age pension is 3,965 lei per month [27], a value

[25] National Bank of Moldova. Official exchange rate 2024. Retrieved from https://bnm.md/bdi/pages/reports/dovre/DOVRE7.xhtml?id=0&lang=ro

[26] National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Databank: Disposable income of the population by source of income, age group of the head of household and average, 2019-2024. Retrieved from https://statistica.gov.md/ro

[27] National Social Insurance House Information on beneficiaries of state pensions and social allowances (in territorial aspect), registered with the National Social Insurance House. 2024. https://cnas.gov.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=244&id=6970&t=/Statistica/NFO

that is close to the absolute poverty threshold established for the same period, of 3,493.3 lei.

These objective data highlight the low level of income of the elderly and support the hypothesis of a pronounced trend of income-based financial exclusion among this category of population.

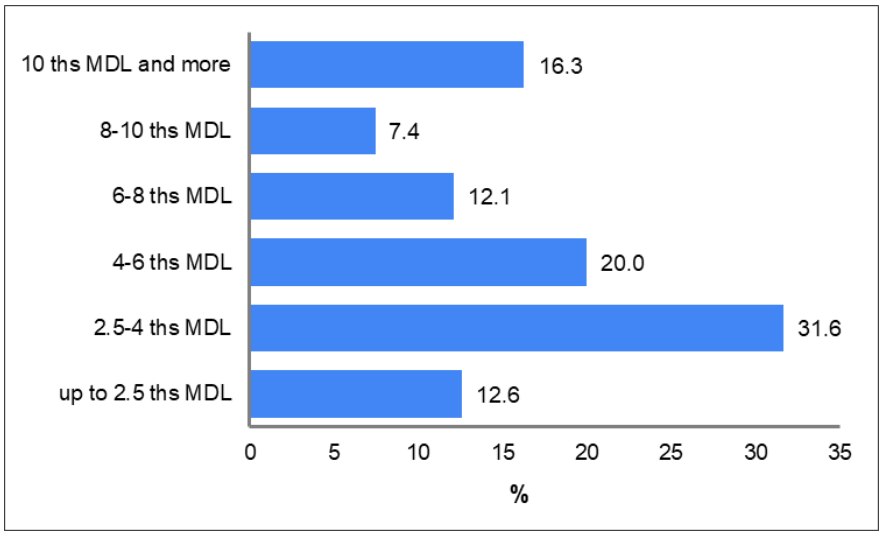

Fig. 1. Income level of respondents.

Source: Empirical research data

Such low incomes for respondents are primarily associated with the fact that most of them are already retired, with pension being one of the main sources of income (Fig. 2). It is important to note that respondents were able to indicate multiple sources of income, with the data indicating that 69.8% of respondents have 2 or 3 sources of income.

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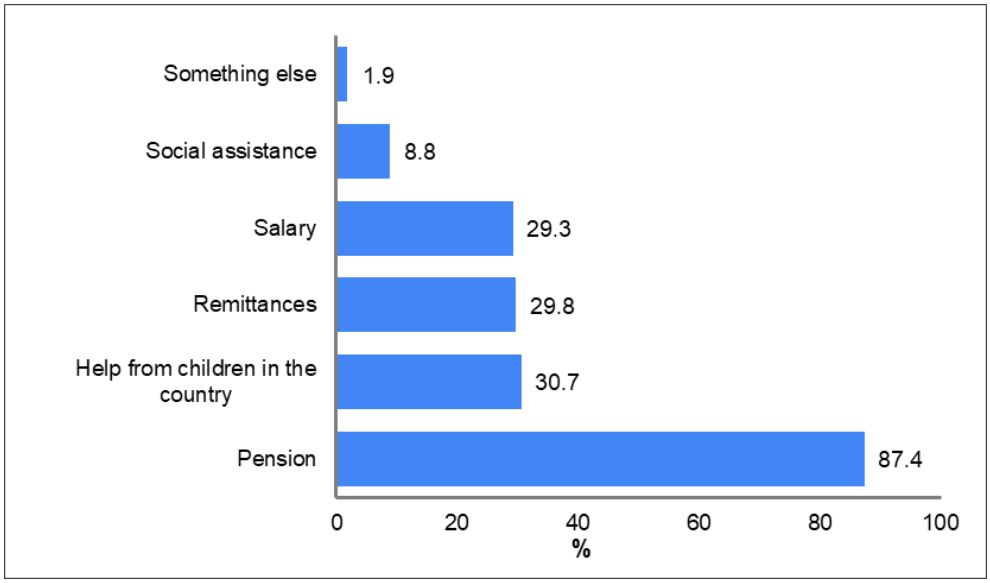

Fig. 2. Main sources of income.
Source: Empirical research data.

Although approximately 90% of the elderly indicated the pension as their main source of income, a significant number of them also reported the existence of additional sources. Thus, approximately 30% of the respondents benefit from financial support from children in the country or relatives abroad (Fig. 2). Also, a third of the respondents continue to be economically active, this choice being determined, in most cases, by the lack of financial resources [28].

In this context, it is worth mentioning that only 16% of the respondents stated that they had not encountered financial difficulties in the last 12 months (Fig. 3). These are, in general, respondents who reported monthly incomes of over 10,000 lei.

[28] HelpAge Moldova. Violence against the elderly in Moldova 2024 [PDF report], 2025. https://helpage.md/files/2025-01-29/help_age__studiu__violența_asupra_persoanelorîn_vârstă_2024-_-1738176975.pdf

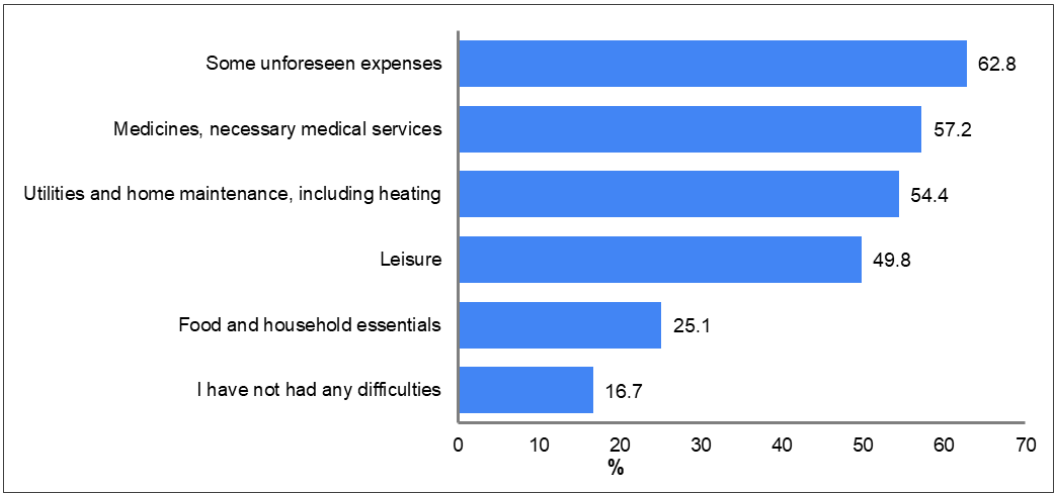

Fig. 3. Types of financial problems encountered in the last 12 months.
Source: Empirical research data.

It is worrying that one in four respondents cannot afford the bare necessities, i.e. basic food and household products, and for 62.8% of respondents, some unforeseen expenses constitute important barriers and factors of financial insecurity and instability. At the same time, more than half of the respondents have encountered financial difficulties in covering expenses related to other basic needs such as medicines and medical services, but also communal services. Official statistical data also indicate a deficient consumption structure in which almost 70% of the expenses of the elderly are for food and home maintenance[29]. The situation becomes even more alarming in the context in which the average pension exceeds the subsistence minimum for pensioners by only 1490 lei (equivalent to 77 euros). This indicates a precarious standard of living of the elderly in the Republic of Moldova and an increased risk of social and financial exclusion among this segment of the population. Therefore, the rather complicated and uncertain economic situation of older people may be a major factor in reluctance to adopt modern financial integration behaviors and models.

The level of access to financial services

The survey data shows that over half of the respondents are familiar with or have some level of knowledge about the financial system. At the same time, over 60% of them have a bank card (Fig. 4). Having a bank account or a payment card are universal indicators used to assess the degree

[29] National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. Databank: Consumption expenditures of the population by destination of expenditures, age group of the household head and average. 2024. https://statbank.statistica.md/

of financial inclusion. In the Republic of Moldova, out of the total of approximately 3.7 million bank cards in circulation, only 15% are social cards, including those for pension payments. This situation highlights both a relative reluctance of older people to the services offered by commercial banks, as well as the existence of financial infrastructure limitations, especially in rural areas, which restrict the efficient use of bank cards.

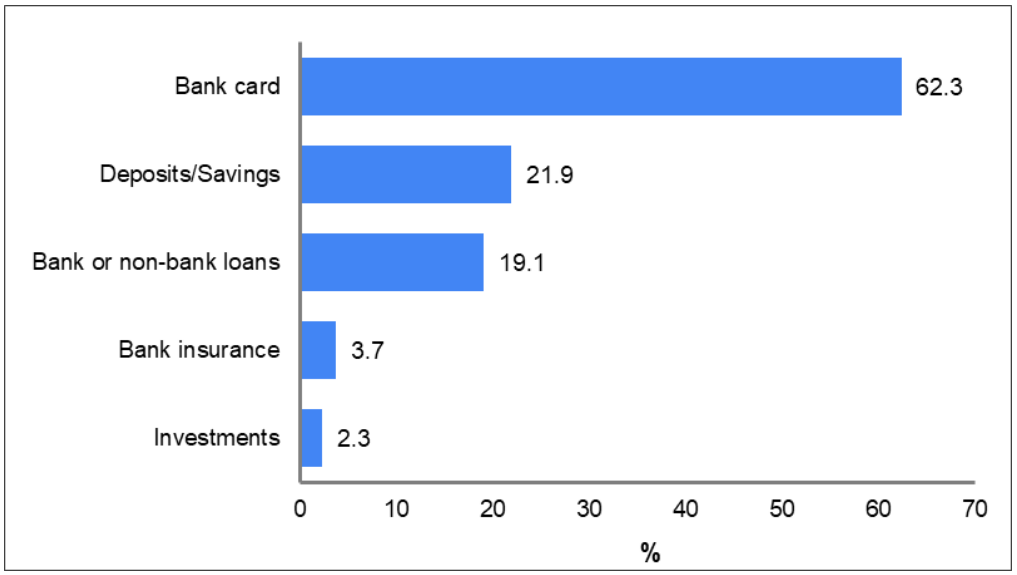

Fig. 4. Types of financial products held.
Source: Empirical research data.

Only 2 out of 10 respondents declared that they have savings, bank deposits or have taken out loans, which reflects a low degree of active financial participation among the elderly population. This phenomenon can be explained mainly by the low level of income recorded by this category of population, income that limits the ability to save and considerably reduces the chances of eligibility for accessing credit products offered by financial institutions.

In the research, special attention was paid to respondents who hold bank cards, an analysis that allows us to assess the real degree of use of this financial instrument. Although a significant proportion of them declare that they hold at least one bank card, their use is predominantly limited to cash withdrawals (Fig. 5). Over half of respondents say they use their card to pay for purchases on a regular basis, but its use for digital operations such as online shopping or bank transfers is significantly lower.

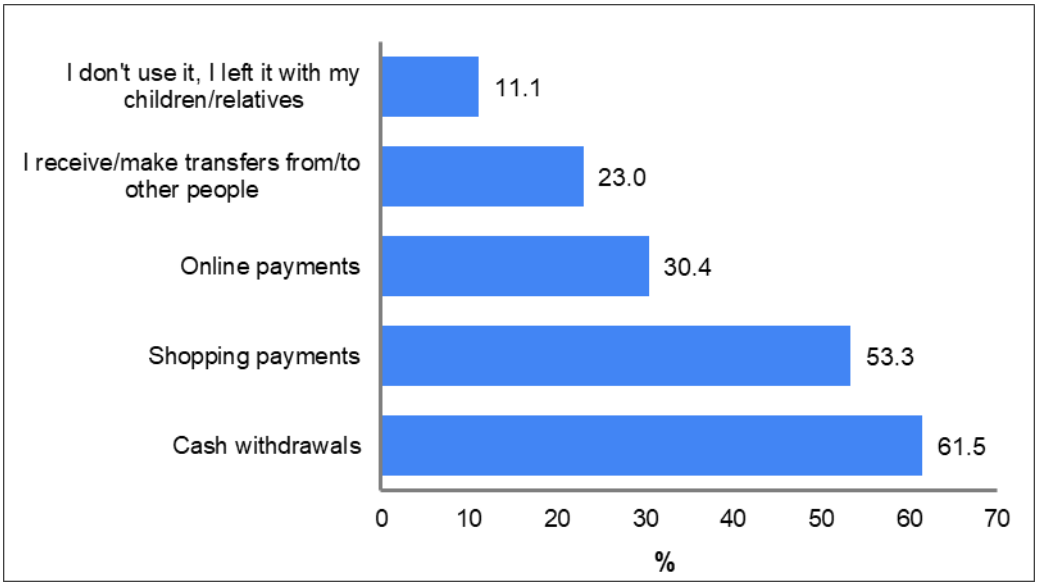

Fig. 5. Types of card transactions.

Source: Empirical research data.

Worryingly, approximately 10% of respondents who own a card do not use it at all, preferring to leave it in the care of relatives or children, which reflects an indirect management of financial resources and an increased dependence on cash. This behavior can generate risky situations, including potential financial violence against the elderly [30]. Thus, generalizing, we could mention the existence of two categories of respondents: those who completely avoid using the card, leaving it in the care of children or other relatives, and those who, although independently managing their personal budget, prefer traditional methods, making cash withdrawals. Both behaviors indicate a low level of financial inclusion.

Barriers to accessing financial services

Identifying the barriers that prevent active card use is essential for formulating appropriate policies. The reasons cited by respondents vary, but fall into three broad categories: infrastructural limitations, lack of trust in the financial system, and insufficient technical or digital skills (Fig. 6).

In terms of infrastructure, over 30% of respondents who do not use cards mentioned the lack of an ATM in their locality or the lack of payment terminals in markets and shops. Another 20% expressed their distrust of the banking system, fearing that they might be scammed. A similar percentage

[30] HelpAge Moldova. Violence against the elderly in Moldova 2024 [PDF report], 2025. https://helpage.md/files/2025-01-29/help_age__studiu__violența_asupra_persoanelorîn_vârstă_2024-_-1738176975.pdf

indicated a lack of knowledge necessary to use the card, and 16.7% mentioned the fear of making errors during use. This technological insecurity is often associated with a lack of financial literacy and low confidence in one's own capabilities.

Although in a small proportion, some respondents cited additional difficulties, such as the impossibility of remembering the PIN code or severe physical limitations (immobilized people), which prevent the use of the card. These situations are classified under the category of "other causes" and represent approximately 3.5% of the total.

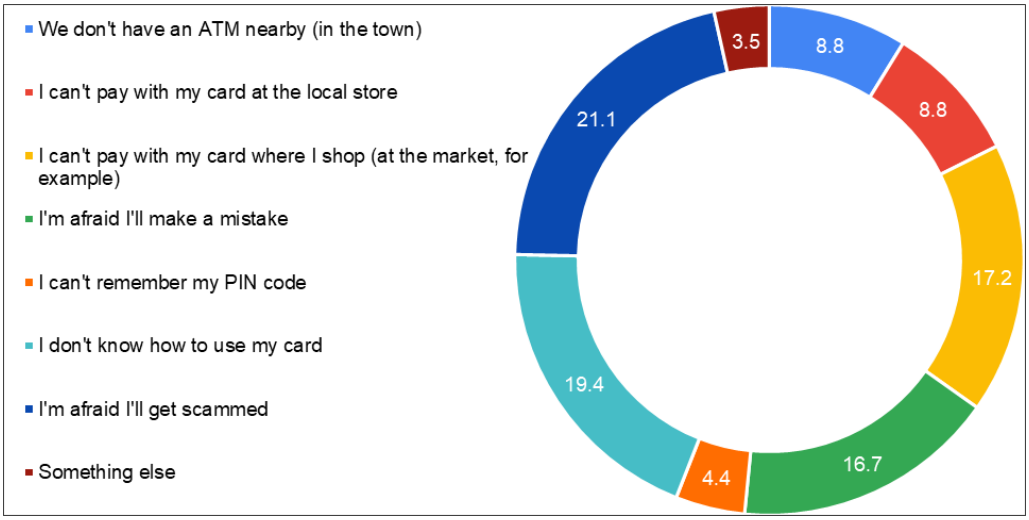

Fig. 6. Reasons for not using the card.
Source: Empirical research data.

Regression analysis highlighted a series of sociodemographic characteristics that act as inhibiting factors for the financial integration of respondents. In order to identify variables with a significant impact, a logistic regression model was developed (Table 2), which simultaneously included factors such as gender, age, level of education, economic status, residential environment and monthly income. This analytical framework allowed for an in-depth insight into the relationship between individual characteristics and the probability of financial integration.

Tabelul. 2. Regression model indicators

Variabilă	Coef.	Std.Err.	z	p>|z|	**Confid. interval** [0.025	0.975]	OR
Intercept	-1.1786	1.2886	-0.9146	0.3604	-3.7041	1.3470	0.3077
Education (medium)	0.6338	0.5507	1.1509	0.2498	-0.4456	1.7131	1.8847
Education (high)	2.3028	0.6106	3.7711	0.0002	1.1059	3.4996	10.0018
Income (medium)	0.2706	0.4376	0.6185	0.5363	-0.5870	1.1283	1.3108

Income (high)	1.4686	0.7238	2.0290	0.0425	0.0500	2.8873	4.3433
Age group (65-69)	-0.4967	0.4725	-1.0512	0.2932	-1.4229	0.4294	0.6085
Age group (70-74)	0.0758	0.5139	0.1474	0.8828	-0.9315	1.0830	1.0787
Age group (75-79)	-0.8300	0.6055	-1.3708	0.1704	-2.0167	0.3567	0.4360
Age group (80+)	-0.8011	0.6350	-1.2617	0.2071	-2.0456	0.4434	0.4488
Economic status (active)	0.6108	0.5254	1.1626	0.2450	-0.4189	1.6405	1.8419
Sex (female)	-0.1542	0.3675	-0.4197	0.6747	-0.8745	0.5660	0.8571
Residence (rural)	-0.1596	0.3833	-0.4165	0.6771	-0.9109	0.5916	0.8525

Source: Author estimation.

The estimated logistic model had as dependent variable financial integration, defined binary (1 = respondent is familiar with the financial system; 0 = not familiar). The independent variables included in the model had the following reference groups: low education for education, income below 4,000 lei for income and age group 60-64 years for age, men for sex and urban area for residence.

The results indicate that the level of education has a significant impact on financial integration. Compared to people with low education, those with medium education have a positive coefficient of 0.634 ($p = 0.250$), but the effect is not statistically significant. In contrast, people with higher education have a significant and high coefficient of 2.303 ($p < 0.001$), which indicates a substantial influence of educational capital on the probability of integration.

Income shows an interesting relationship with financial integration. Those with average incomes (4,000-8,000 lei) have a coefficient of 0.271 ($p = 0.536$), statistically insignificant, indicating a weak and uncertain association. In contrast, for the category of those with high incomes (over 8,000 lei), the coefficient is 1.469 ($p = 0.043$), confirming a significant positive effect and suggesting a relevant increase in the probability of integration into this group.

Regarding age, more advanced groups tend to have negative coefficients compared to the reference category (60-64 years). Thus, the 65-69 year old group has a coefficient of -0.497 ($p = 0.293$), the 75-79 year old group of -0.830 ($p = 0.170$) and the 80+ year old group of -0.801 ($p = 0.207$). None of these are statistically significant, but negative values may indicate a trend of decreasing integration probability with age. Exceptionally, the 70–74 year old group has a slightly positive coefficient of 0.076 ($p = 0.883$), but this result is insignificant and lacking substantial relevance.

Economic status (working vs. retired) did not produce a significant effect, the coefficient being 0.611 ($p = 0.245$), but the positive sign indicates a possible association between carrying out economic activities and a higher probability of integration. Neither gender (coef. = -0.154, $p = 0.675$) nor rural residence (coef. = -0.160, $p = 0.677$) significantly influence financial

integration. This suggests that, in the presence of the other predictors, gender and residence differences do not make a significant independent contribution to explaining the variation in the probability of integration. Overall, the regression model reveals that the financial integration of the elderly is significantly influenced by the educational level and by belonging to the highest income category. Other dimensions – such as age, gender, economic status or residential environment – do not retain their statistical significance in a multivariable model, suggesting that their influences are partially absorbed by stronger structural variables, such as education and income.

Conclusions

The results obtained in this research confirm that the main barriers to financial inclusion of the elderly derive from demand factors – in particular low incomes and low levels of financial education. At the same time, supply factors also contribute to exclusion, as few financial products are adapted to the needs of this segment. This result is consistent with the international literature, which highlights educational capital as a critical determinant of financial skills and trust in financial institutions. In this regard, a coordinated intervention by the state, the banking sector and non-governmental organizations is required, aiming at: (i) the development of simple financial products adapted to low incomes; (ii) the expansion of digital services accompanied by educational support; (iii) the organization of financial literacy campaigns for people 60+; and (iv) the strengthening of protection measures against financial fraud.

The limited use of bank cards among the elderly is manifested by a preference for cash withdrawals and the avoidance of digital transactions. This trend reflects both a preference for traditional forms of financial interaction and concerns about security, technical errors or lack of digital skills. The identified barriers – insufficient infrastructure, distrust in the banking system and cognitive or technical deficiencies – are aligned with trends reported in the literature.

The existence of a relevant proportion of respondents who leave their bank card in the care of relatives or children denotes an area of increased risk regarding financial autonomy and potential financial abuse – a dimension rarely explored in national studies, but highlighted in international documents on the financial protection of the elderly.

It is also worth noting that, despite the relatively high level of card ownership, familiarity with the functioning of the financial system is not universal. This supports the idea that financial inclusion is not equivalent to simply accessing a formal service, but involves a more complex process of literacy, trust and autonomy in use.

At the institutional level, initiatives such as the National Program for Active Aging for 2023-2027 and UNFPA Moldova projects represent important steps, but they need to be consolidated and expanded through intersectoral collaborations and structural investments. The active involvement of the banking sector in the development of age-friendly products and channels – such as senior-friendly cards, simplified digital applications or personalized assistance services – is essential for a sustainable transformation of financial practices. In parallel, public policies must be based on solid empirical data, obtained through longitudinal research and interdisciplinary collaborations. The development of a national strategy dedicated to financial inclusion, which explicitly includes the elderly segment, is a necessary condition for ensuring financial equity in a demographic context marked by accelerated aging.

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FROM HERITAGE TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP: EMPOWERING NIGERIAN WOMEN THROUGH CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

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Abstract: *This paper investigates how Nigeria's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) empower women entrepreneurs. Grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, it explores the historical contributions of women to Creative Cultural Industries from the pre-colonial period to the present and evaluates the profiles of successful women entrepreneurs and the challenges they encounter in Nigeria. It considered the role of digital platforms and technology on Cultural Creative Industries, as well as the policy frameworks and institutional support available to women entrepreneurs at local and international levels. The paper utilizes a qualitative research methodology to examine literature, case studies and policies from Nigeria, Africa, and the European Union (EU) regarding women's entrepreneurship in the Cultural and Creative Industries. Findings indicate that African women have traditionally been guardians of culture and Heritage, passing their entrepreneurial legacy from one generation to the next. Case studies of notable female entrepreneurs shows that Cultural Creative Industries can be a tool for women's empowerment, global recognition and promotion of cultural Heritage. Women entrepreneurs face limited access to finance, piracy and copyright issues, unreliable electricity supply, inadequate quality education, and networking difficulties. While digital platforms and technology have significantly helped overcome some barriers to business growth, issues like digital illiteracy and cultural constraints persist. Policies and initiatives such as Nigeria's Copyright Act (2022), the AU's AfCFTA, the ACP-EU Culture programme by the EU and the UNESCO Creative Cities Network all exist to promote cultural Heritage and entrepreneurship. The*

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findings further revealed that women's entrepreneurship in the Cultural Creative Industries helps to achieve several Sustainable Development Goals, such as SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 5 (Gender Equality), and 8 (Decent Work). The paper concludes that Cultural and Creative Industries is a significant platform for female entrepreneurs to transform their Heritage into success and recommends expanding access to finance for women in Cultural Creative Industries, investing in digital skills and infrastructure, strengthening intellectual property protection and encouraging regional and international engagement and collaboration in line with best practices.

Keywords: *Cultural and Creative Industries, Women Entrepreneurs, Empowerment, Heritage and Creative Economy*

1. Introduction

Culture encompasses the entire way of life of a people. Cultural industries, also synonymous with creative industries are conceptualised to imply any industry combining the creation, production and marketing of cultural and intangible content.[1] The contents can be goods and services protected by intellectual property rights. Cultural and Creative sectors (CCS) encompass a diverse range of fields which span literature and journalism, to audio-visual and digital media, visual and performing arts, fashion, architecture, design, artistic education, and handcrafted works.[2] O'Connor,[3] narrates that the industry includes all activities eligible for public funding as art, and covers both the classical cultural sectors and the traditional arts.

Globally, the CCS is a source of employment and value addition with an estimated annual revenue generation of USD 2.25 trillion and employing almost 30 million people.[4] In Africa, a continent rich in diverse heritage and culture, the continent's cultural and creative industry (CCI) is emerging as a powerful catalyst for economic growth, social transformation and cultural

[1] T.L. Ngo, Tran, T.V.H., Tran, M.D., Nguyen, Q.H., & Hoang, V.H. 'A study on the relationship between cultural industry and economic growth in Vietnam' Management Science Letters, (2019) 9(6), pp.787–794.

[2] OECD, *Economic and Social Impact of Cultural and Creative Sectors: Note for Italy G20 Presidency Culture* Working Group. OECD Publishing (2021); Afreximbank. 'Estimating potential economic contributions of cultural and creative industries in Africa', African Export-Import Bank (2024). https://media.afreximbank.com/afrexim/Estimating-Potential-Economic-Contributions-of-Cultural-and-Creative-Industries-in-Africa.pdf.

[3] J. O'Connor, 'The definition of the 'cultural industries' *The European Journal of Arts Education*, (2000) 2(3), pp.15–27.

[4] OECD *op. cit.* (n 2).

exchange.[5] The creative industry in Africa is ranked globally as the fifth-largest creative market.[6]

In Nigeria, Ayakoroma[7] enumerated the diverse creative enterprises Nigerian youths are engaged in the cultural industry, which include photography, digital/screen printing, filmmaking, painting, carving/sculpting, carpentry, music and dance, stand-up comedy, bead making and local beverages. Nollywood is ranked as the second-largest movie industry globally after Bollywood. The industry employs around 300,000 people directly and contributes about USD 7.3 billion to the country's GDP.[8] However, beyond job creation, the CCI in Nigeria is a source of women's emancipation and empowerment. It gives them the tools and platform to express themselves while contributing their quota to society.[9] By leveraging their skills, talents and knowledge, many women have turned traditional crafts from storytelling, music, arts and fashion into viable entrepreneurial ventures, especially with insufficient or male-dominated formal employment.[10] These not only enhance the income and social standing of the women innovators and entrepreneurs but also celebrate the African heritage and tradition and increase their influence within the society.

Against this backdrop, this paper utilised the qualitative research methodology relying on literature and case studies to examine women's evolving role in CCIs in Nigeria. It explores their historical contributions from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, both as custodians of culture and as innovators. It also highlights the profile of select successful women cultural entrepreneurs and explores some challenges women entrepreneurs encounter in Nigeria. It investigates the role of technology and digital platforms in enhancing or influencing the craft of these entrepreneurs. In addition, the paper reviews relevant policy frameworks at both local and global levels and discusses the contribution of women cultural entrepreneurs to sustainable development. This paper also supports the attainment of several sustainable development goals (SDG), specifically SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and

[5] Tony Elumelu Foundation, 'Harnessing Africa's creative industry: Community, collaboration, and cultural exchange, 2023.

[6] Afreximbank, (n 2).

[7] B.F. Ayakoroma, 'Culture, creativity and the Nigerian youth', *Nigeria Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists*, (2019) 19(3), 138–147.

[8] Afreximbank, *op. cit.* (n 2).

[9] S.N. Bako, D.K. Dzarama & B. Majam, 'Women emancipation drive in Nigeria: An overview of cultural cum political trajectories and prejudices', *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies*, (2023) 5(1), pp.21–31.

[10] R.A. Oluwakemi, D.K. Györke, & F. Gubacsi, 'Entrepreneurship as a tool for women empowerment in Nigeria', *Studia Mundi – Economica*, (2023) 10(1), pp.3–13.

Economic Growth), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), thereby making it an important tool for policy and international cooperation.[11]

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Heritage

Heritage refers to the inherited traditions, cultural expressions, knowledge, and skills passed down through generations. In the African context, this includes crafts, oral traditions, music, dance, visual arts, and other forms of cultural production that reflect community identity and values.[12] Heritage can also be seen as a source of pride passed down from generation to generation.

2.2. Cultural Industries or Sectors

Cultural industries, also known as creative industries, are sectors that originate from individual creativity, skill, and talent. They include activities such as art, crafts, music, film, fashion, design, and cultural tourism, and are recognised for their capacity to generate income, create jobs, and promote cultural diversity.[13] This is a blend or mixture of traditional and modern practices to produce goods and services for the people.

2.3. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the process by which individuals identify opportunities, mobilise resources, and establish enterprises to create economic, social, or cultural value. Female entrepreneurship in Africa is notable for its high rate, driven by necessity and opportunity, especially in contexts where formal employment is limited.[14] In cultural industries, entrepreneurship involves turning heritage-based skills and creativity into sustainable businesses.

2.4. Empowerment

Empowerment in this context means increasing African women's agency, economic independence, and social status through active

[11] United Nations Development Programme, Sustainable development goals. Retrieved May 10, 2025, available at: https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals; I.K. Muo, M.S. Oladimeji, & Agboola, O.O. 'Women entrepreneurship and sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Nigeria', *Fuoye Journal of Management, Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, (2024) 2(2), pp.189–204.

[12] M.F. Motsamayi, P. Dlamini & Matlala, M.E. 'Gendered art entrepreneurship in South Africa: Emerging artistic trends creating empowerment opportunities in Limpopo Province', *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, (2024) 13(1), pp.161–180.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] International Finance Corporation, 'Women and e-commerce in Africa', (2021). https://www.ifc.org/en/insights-reports/2021/women-and-ecommerce-africa

participation in cultural industries. This includes gaining control over resources, decision-making, and the ability to influence their communities and broader society.[15] Empowerment is achieved through income generation and enhancing women's visibility, leadership, and cultural influence.

2.5. From Heritage to Entrepreneurship

This phrase captures transforming traditional cultural practices and heritage assets into viable entrepreneurial ventures. African women use their inherited skills—such as weaving, pottery, beadwork, and storytelling—to create products and services that meet market demands, thus bridging the gap between tradition and modern economic participation.[16] This process fosters both cultural preservation and economic development.

3. Harnessing Cultural Capital: A Theoretical Lens on Women's Entrepreneurship in Nigeria's Creative Industries

This paper adopts the Cultural Capital Theory to anchor women entrepreneurship in the Nigerian CCIs. The concept of Cultural capital was first introduced in 1970 by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron.[17] According to Bourdieu,[18] there are three subtypes of cultural capital: embodied, objectified, and institutionalised cultural capital. The embodied cultural capital includes skills and knowledge acquired intentionally through personal investment of time and effort, or picked up passively by socialising with friends or family. They refer to all one's life experiences, knowledge and mental skills.[19] Examples include knowing how to weave Yoruba textiles (Aso Oke), Igbo storytelling or traditional bead-making. Objectified cultural capital includes tangible cultural products, like handcrafted fabrics, which can be converted to economic capital through buying or selling. Institutionalised cultural capital involves formal recognition, such as awards or certifications that enhance credibility. According to Pret et al.,[20] lack of cultural capital limits the ability to fit in

[15] Motsamayi, *op. cit.* (n 12).

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] A. Klimczuk, 'Cultural capital', in D.T. Cook & J.M. Ryan (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell encyclopedia of consumption and consumer studies,* (Wiley-Blackwell 2015), pp.209–214.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid*. See also Klimczuk, (n 17); G. Ramsey, 'Cultural capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu', *Simply Psychology* (2024).

[20] T. Pret, E. Shaw & Dodd, S. Drakopoulou, 'Painting the full picture: The conversion of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital', *International Small Business Journal*, (2016) 34(8), pp.1004–1027.

and can impede social access and status enhancements. In Nigeria, some women entrepreneurs who lack formal training (institutionalised capital) face exclusion from the global markets even though they possess the embodied cultural capital required to excel in their craft.[21]

In Nigeria's creative and cultural industries, which encompass writing and publishing, fashion, and crafts, women leverage these forms of capital to build enterprises.[22] For instance, a Yoruba woman skilled in indigo dyeing (Adire) (embodied capital) in Southwest Nigeria may produce fabrics for sale (objectified capital), thus gaining recognition at cultural festivals (institutionalised capital). Such endeavours generate income, preserve heritage, and challenge gender norms, contributing to economic empowerment and global appreciation of Nigerian culture. By applying the Cultural Capital Theory, this paper elucidates how Nigerian women's cultural heritage promotes entrepreneurship and provides insights into their role in sustainable development.

4. Historical Contributions of African Women to CCIs, From Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial Eras

Throughout history, African women have significantly contributed to the growth of CCIs from the pre-colonial era to the present day. From leadership to homemaking, their roles have laid a strong foundation for modern cultural entrepreneurship, especially in Nigeria, by preserving traditions and fostering innovation. In pre-colonial Africa, women were central to cultural production. They excelled in diverse arts and crafts ranging from textiles, pottery, and beads, with notable examples from Nigeria, such as artefacts found in Nok (Kaduna State) and Igbo-ukwu (Anambra State).[23] In the 16th century, Queen Amina of Zazzau was not just a female warrior and military leader but was also renowned as a patron of arts and crafts, cementing women's influence in cultural heritage.[24] Women also led industries like pottery in places like Ekwe Igboland and cotton cloth production called Akwete in Igboland. They also pass their skills to female children as soon as they come of age, as exemplified in southwestern

[21] T.A. Adekunle, 'Challenges associated with entrepreneurship, vocational education, and self-employment in Nigeria', *Iconic Research and Engineering Journal*, (2024) 7(9), pp.91–105.

[22] S. Maiwada, S.A. Dutsenwai, & Waziri, M. Y. 'Cultural industries and wealth creation: The case of traditional textile industry in Nigeria', *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, (2012) 2(5).

[23] N.J. Gimba, 'The Economic Role of Women in Pre-colonial or Traditional African Societies', *Journal of Arts and Contemporary Society* (2012) 4: pp.3-8.

[24] The Guardian Nigeria. (2023, October 22). Women trailblazers in Nigerian arts, culture. Guardian Life. https://guardian.ng/life/women-trailblazers-in-nigerian-arts-culture/

Nigeria, where girls learn weaving from their mothers.[25] During the colonial period, despite disruptions, such as trade restrictions and the influx of ceramics, textile and leather products from Europe which led to a decline of traditional crafts, women were able to sustain their crafts through resilience and adaptations.[26]

In the post-colonial era, Nigerian women have emerged as leaders in CCIs. Examples include entrepreneurs like Nike Okundaye with her Adire textiles and art galleries, empowering local women by blending traditional textile making with the modern.[27] The Nigerian movie industry (Nollywood) also thrives with women like Joke Silva MFR, Patience Ozokwor, Chioma Chukwuka Akpotha, Mo Abudu, Funke Akindele and Uche Jombo blazing the trail. In terms of music, women like the late Onyeka Onwenu MFR and late Christy Essien Igbokwe MFR in the 1980s, Tiwa Savage, Simi in the 2000s, Tems and Ayra Starr in recent times, who are all award winners, have all contributed to the Nigerian CCI and put Nigeria on the global map for their craft.[28] As for storytelling and literature, women like Flora Nwapa and Chimamanda Adichie have also contributed their quota. This legacy of successful women entrepreneurs extends beyond Nigeria to Ga women in Ghana, known for coral bead making, and Senegalese women, celebrated for fashion,[29] highlighting African women's enduring role in cultural and economic vitality. The historical contributions of African women have shaped modern cultural entrepreneurship by providing a foundation of skills, traditions, and resilience. Africa has the highest rate of female entrepreneurship globally (24%).[30] The preservation and innovation of traditional crafts, such as Adire, Afrobeats, and movies, have been transformed into successful businesses, empowering women economically and culturally.

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[25] E. Aduke, 'Women in pre-colonial economic development in North East Yoruba Land of Nigeria', *Specialty Journal of Humanities and Cultural Science*, (2019) 4(3), pp.60–64.

[26] O.F. Fadipe, 'Indigenous technology and its contribution to the socio-economic development of contemporary Africa', *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, (2023) 10(4), pp.33–42.

[27] ColorsxStudios, 'Mama Nike'. (2022) Retrieved May 10, 2025, https://colorsxstudios.com/editorials/mama-nike.

[28] A. Ugwu, 'The rise of Nigerian female artists and what that means for music royalties', (2025) Royalti.io. https://royalti.io/2025/02/the-rise-of-nigerian-female-artists-and-what-that-means-for-music-royalties/

[29] Gimba, op. cit. (n 23).

[30] B. Ukoha, 'The secret behind Africa's thriving women entrepreneurs', African Leadership Magazine, (2025, February 20).

https://www.africanleadershipmagazine.co.uk/the-secret-behind-africas-thriving-women-entrepreneurs/

5. Women of Influence: Case Studies in Empowerment and Innovation in Nigeria's Cultural and Creative Industries

5.1. Mo Abudu (Television)

Mosunmola Abudu, popularly known as Mo Abudu, is one of Nigeria's most influential women entrepreneurs in the CCI, transforming African storytelling through television and film. She is the founder and CEO of EbonyLife Group. She launched her media career with Inspire Africa in 2006 through her syndicated talk show Moments with Mo, where she gained recognition for her ability to engage with her audience across Africa. She launched EbonyLife TV in 2013, Africa's first global black entertainment and lifestyle network. Her vision was to connect all of Africa by producing authentic African content that celebrates the continent's diversity and creativity.[31]

Mo has produced several blockbuster movies like Fifty, The Wedding Party, and Òlòtūré, which have garnered international acclaim and distribution through platforms like Netflix, Sony Pictures Television and AMC Networks (USA).[32] Abudu's innovations extend beyond content creation. Her efforts have earned her global recognition, including listings among Forbes' 100 Most Powerful Women globally for several consecutive years (No. 98 in 2021, 2022, and 2023), recognition by The Hollywood Reporter as one of the most powerful women in global television, and honorary doctorates from Babcock University and the University of Westminster.[33] She is also the first woman from sub-Saharan Africa to join the Oscars in the producer membership category.[34] Beyond business success, Mo Abudu partners with the Lagos State government through initiatives like the EbonyLife Creative Academy, which offers free practical classes promoting excellence across Nigeria's creative sectors, including film, music, fashion, and arts.[35] Her leadership exemplifies how women entrepreneurs in cultural industries can drive economic growth, cultural preservation, and global cultural diplomacy.

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[31] IMDb. (n.d.). Mo Abudu - Biography. Retrieved May 11, 2025, https://www.imdb.com/name/nm5801801/bio/?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm; The Guardian Nigeria. (2024, December 30). Mo Abudu: Crafting African stories for the world. https://guardian.ng/life/mo-abudu-crafting-african-stories-for-the-world/; THISDAY Style. (2024, September 8). The 60 years metamorphosis of Mo Abudu. THISDAY Style. https://www.thisdaystyle.ng/the-60-years-metamorphosis-of-mo-abudu/.

[32] LinkedIn. 'Mo Abudu - Founder & Visionary', https://ng.linkedin.com/in/mo-abudu; IMDb, *ibid*.

[33] Wikipedia contributors. (2024, November 10). Nike Art Gallery. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nike_Art_Gallery; The Guardian Nigeria, *ibid*.

[34] Mo Abudu. (n.d.). About Mo Abudu. http://themoabudu.com/

[35] *Ibid*.

5.2. Nike Davies-Okundaye (Textiles and Arts)

Chief (Mrs.) Oyenike Monica Okundaye, known by her pen name Nike or affectionately referred to as 'Mama Nike', is a professional textile artist and painter celebrated for her work in batik and Adire textiles.[36] Born in 1951 in Ogidi-Ijumu, Kogi State, Nigeria, she learned traditional weaving and dyeing techniques from her great-grandmother, a talented weaver and Adire textile maker. Although she left formal education after Primary 6, Nike Davies-Okundaye taught herself English at home and never pursued formal art studies. Instead, she developed her expertise based on what she learned from her great-grandmother.[37] Over time, she was able to perfect her skills and create her unique style and techniques in dyeing, weaving, painting, and embroidery. Her early experiences laid the foundation for her lifelong commitment to preserving and innovating Nigeria's rich textile Heritage.[38]

Nike is the owner/curator of the Nike Centre for Art and Culture, Osogbo, which she established in 1983 with 20 young girls rescued from the street. She provided them with free training, accommodation, and materials, teaching them skills in textile dyeing, weaving, painting, beadwork, and other traditional arts.[39] The Nike Art Gallery is the largest in West Africa.[40] Her centre has trained over 3000 young Nigerians, and some countries send students to learn the arts from her, many of whom have established their businesses.[41] Mama Nike's artistic style honours traditional Adire patterns while incorporating Yoruba history, mythology, and personal narratives. She blends batik, embroidery, and painting to create "wearable art".[42] Her artworks have been exhibited internationally in prestigious places such as the Smithsonian Museum and the British Library. She has also conducted workshops across the United States and Europe, sharing her expertise and promoting African textile arts globally.[43]

She confronted the challenge of empowering rural women in a male-dominated society. Her establishment of a weaving centre in her hometown of Ogidi-Ijumu employs over 200 women, providing sustainable livelihoods

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[36] BellaNaijaStyle. (2023, June 15). Take a look at the new Nike Art Gallery in Abuja, Nigeria. https://www.bellanaijastyle.com/nike-art-gallery-abuja/

[37] AfricanCraft. (n.d.). A brief profile (curriculum vitae) of Chief (Mrs.) Oyenike Monica Okundaye: A Nigerian woman artist.
https://www.africancraft.com/niketours/profile.htm.

[38] AfricanCraft, *ibid*.

[39] AfricanCraft, *op. cit*. (n 37).

[40] BellaNaijaStyle, *op. cit*. (n 36).

[41] Nike Art Foundation. (2023). Nike Monica Okundaye. Retrieved May 11, 2025, https://nikeartfoundation.com/nike-monica-okundaye/

[42] AfricanCraft, *op. cit*. (n 37).

[43] NikeArtFoundation, *op. cit*. (n 41).

and preserving cultural Heritage.[44] Beyond her artistic contributions, Nike Davies-Okundaye is a dedicated philanthropist and social entrepreneur. Through her Nike Art Foundation, which operates galleries and art centres in Lagos, Osogbo, Abuja, and Ogidi-Ijumu, offering free entry to individuals, she continues to nurture emerging artists and promote Nigerian arts and culture on the global stage.[45] Her efforts have significantly contributed to the creative economy, enhancing economic opportunities for rural women and elevating the status of Nigerian cultural Heritage.

5.3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Literature)

Chief Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on 15th September 1977 in Enugu State Nigeria. She is a globally acclaimed Nigerian Novelist, public speaker and feminist. She grew up in the university town of Nsukka, where her father was a professor and her mother was the first female registrar of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Her Igbo Heritage strongly influenced her career path, especially the folktales and stories told by her grandmother, which shaped her narratives on the role of women.[46] Adichie left the shores of Nigeria at 19 for the United States, where she graduated with a Communication and Political Science degree from Eastern Connecticut State University. She holds a master's degree in African history from Yale University and another in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. She published her first play in Nigeria in 1998, Love of Biafra. Her first novel, Purple Hibiscus (2003), received the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, while her second novel, Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), won the Orange Prize. She received the US National Book Critics Circle Award and was designated one of The New York Times' Top Ten Best Books of 2013 for her novel Americanah (2013).[47] Beyond her novels, she is an influential public speaker and has given two TED talks: The Danger of a Single Story in 2009 and We Should All Be Feminists in 2012, which sparked a global debate on feminism and was later published as a book.[48] She spends her time between the United States and Nigeria writing, speaking and teaching on issues she is passionate about.[49]

Her community recognised her literary and cultural contributions to society and honoured her by conferring her with the title of "Odeluwa Abba",

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[44] NikeArtFoundation.com, *op. cit.* (n 41).

[45] *ibid*; BellaNaijaStyle, *op. cit.* (n 36).

[46] Susan VanZanten, 'Interview: A Conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie', *Image Journal* 65, available at: https://imagejournal.org/article/conversation-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/

[47] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. (n.d.). About Chimamanda. Ifemelu's Blog. https://www.chimamanda.com/about/

[48] *Ibid*; Britannica. (2025, April 24). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Chimamanda-Ngozi-Adichi

[49] VanZanten, *op. cit.* (n 46).

meaning writer of the world from Abba.[50] In 2015, she was named one of TIME Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World, and one of the World's 50 Greatest Leaders by Fortune Magazine in 2017. She belongs to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts and Letters.[51] Chimamanda Adichie's work has been translated into over thirty languages and adapted as movies. She spends her time between the United States and Nigeria continuing to inspire writers through workshops, public speaking and teaching on issues she is passionate about.[52] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has profoundly impacted African literature and global discourse on culture, gender issues, and identity, positioning her as a transformative figure whose work bridges local narratives and universal themes.

5.4. Lisa Folawiyo (Fashion)

Lisa Folawiyo is a veteran fashion designer from Nigeria. She was born in 1976 in Lagos, Nigeria. Inspired by generations of African women, her fashion style blends traditional West African attire (Ankara) with modern contemporary beadworks, all hand-produced in local shops in Nigeria. She trained as a lawyer before pursuing her passion for fashion by starting her line with no formal training. In 2005, she founded her label, "Jewel by Lisa", which later changed to "Lisa Folawiyo", which quickly gained recognition for its vibrant colours, hand embellishments, and modern silhouettes rooted in African Heritage.[53]

Folawiyo has achieved considerable international recognition for her work in the fashion industry. Celebrities worldwide, including Lupita Nyong'o, Issa Rae, Solange Knowles, and Thandie Newton, have worn her designs on red carpets and in prestigious fashion magazines.[54] She appeared in Vogue Italia in 2012, which helped boost her global visibility. Additionally, Folawiyo collaborated with L'Oréal and performed a trunk show on Moda Operandi.[55] By showcasing her collections at esteemed occasions like Lagos Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week, Folawiyo

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[50] C.U. Okoye, 'Chimamanda Adichie's chieftaincy title: A remaking of our culture', Business Day, January 27th 2023, available at:
https://businessday.ng/uncategorized/article/chimamanda-adichies-chieftaincy-title-a-remaking-of-our-culture/

[51] Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *op. cit.* (n 47).

[52] VanZanten, *op. cit.* (n 46).

[53] The Business of Fashion. (2025). Lisa Folawiyo. The Business of Fashion. https://www.businessoffashion.com/people/lisa-folawiyo/

[54] Industrie Africa. (2023). Lisa Folawiyo. Industrie Africa.
https://connect.industrieafrica.com/designers/lisa-folawiyo

[55] The Business of Fashion. (2025). Lisa Folawiyo. *The Business of Fashion*. https://www.businessoffashion.com/people/lisa-folawiyo/

has further broadened her global reach.[56] Her collections are available in the US, UK, South Africa, and Nigeria, and she has showrooms in Nigeria and New York.[57] Folawiyo recounted one of the challenges she faced in her career, which centred on gender and cultural biases within the global fashion industry. She cited an incident where an international publication intended to cover Nigerian fashion but limited its focus to male designers within a specific age bracket, excluding female designers like herself.[58]

Beyond fashion, Folawiyo is also a mentor and is actively involved in mentoring emerging talent. She also provides training and support to aspiring designers and entrepreneurs through collaboration with institutions such as ESMOD Paris and Wazobia Academy in Nigeria.[59] She is a vital cultural ambassador who elevates African textiles and traditions on the global stage. Her unwavering dedication to authenticity, craftsmanship, and innovation continues to inspire a new generation of designers, celebrating the richness and beauty of African culture through fashion.

6. Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship: Access to Finance, Intellectual Property, Power Supply, Education, and Networking Challenges

Despite their significant contributions, many women entrepreneurs worldwide continue to face unequal opportunities compared to men. The financing gap for women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises is estimated at approximately $1.7 trillion; despite this, female entrepreneurs own 22% of micro-enterprises and 32% of SMEs, while an estimated 740 million women remain unbanked.[60] A World Bank report[61] also indicated that 3.9 billion women globally lack the same legal access to economic participation as their male counterparts and just one in five women (20%) hold corporate board positions. Some challenges restricting women entrepreneurs include limited access to finance, piracy and copyright

[56] Industrie Africa. (2023). Lisa Folawiyo. Industrie Africa. https://connect.industrieafrica.com/designers/lisa-folawiyo

[57] The Business of Fashion. (2025). Lisa Folawiyo. *The Business of Fashion*. https://www.businessoffashion.com/people/lisa-folawiyo/

[58] Adepo, O. (2020, August 1). Interview with Lisa Folawiyo of Lisa Folawiyo. Vogue CS. https://www.vogue.cz/clanek/vogue-cs-in-english/ooooota-adepo/interview-with-lisa-folawiyo-of-lisa-folawiyo

[59] The Business of Fashion. (2025). Lisa Folawiyo. *The Business of Fashion*. https://www.businessoffashion.com/people/lisa-folawiyo/

[60] M. Muckerheide, (2023, October 26). The finance gap for women entrepreneurs is $1.7 trillion. Here's how to close it. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/10/women-entrepreneurs-finance-banking/

[61] World Bank, 'Women, Business and the Law 2024', (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024).

infringement, unreliable power, lack of networking opportunities, and societal pressures related to gender roles.[62]

6.1. Access to Finance

Access to finance is a significant hurdle for women entrepreneurs. Research indicates that women-led startups receive a disproportionately small share of venture capital investments compared to their male counterparts. For instance, a report by PitchBook Data found that in 2023, women-led startups received just 2% of venture capital dollars in the United States, while those in Europe were even lower at 1.8%.[63] In Africa, access to funding, especially for women-run businesses, is even harder.[64] This funding gap can limit the growth potential of women-owned businesses and hinder their ability to compete effectively in the market. Uddoh[65] further highlights that only about 10% of commercial loans are targeted toward women-owned businesses in Nigeria, despite women managing approximately 41% of businesses in the country.

Furthermore, according to Enhancing Financial Innovation and Access report,[66] due to factors such as cultural norms, illiteracy, and limited access to information and resources, women in Nigeria are less likely to own a bank account or access credit, with just 47% of Nigerian women having access to formal financial services. Such financial disparities not only stifle innovation but also perpetuate economic inequalities. Simba et al.,[67] stated that the lack of personal assets to acquire financing, as the family assets are often in the husband's or family name, is also a significant issue. Many women rely on personal savings or informal sources due to difficulties securing loans or raising capital. This financial constraint stifles growth in cultural industries where upfront equipment, materials, or production costs can be high. For instance, a Cairo-based photojournalist and visual artist "Heba Khalifa", narrated how difficult it is for some female artists to survive

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[62] E. Carranza, C. Dhakal & I. Love, 'Female entrepreneurs: How and why are they different?' (World Bank. 2018).

[63] K. Knickerbocker, (2024, March 18). 102 female founders and investors to know in 2024. PitchBook blog. https://pitchbook.com/blog/female-founders-and-investors-to-know

[64] Moniepoint. (2024). Moniepoint women-owned businesses case study.

[65] I. Uddoh, 'Elevating women's entrepreneurship in Nigeria: Policy strategies for the future', BusinessDay. (2023, December 10). https://businessday.ng/life/article/elevating-womens-entrepreneurship-in-nigeria-policy-strategies-for-the-future/

[66] Women's World Banking. (2025). Case study: NGX Regulation Limited Nigeria. https://www.womensworldbanking.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Case-Study-NGX-Regulation-Limited-Nigeria.pdf

[67] A. Simba, E. Ume Kalu, V. Onodugo, C.R. Okoyeuzu, & O.M. Ogundana, 'Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria', In M. Dabić et al. (Eds.), Women Entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa (Springer Nature Switzerland AG.2022) pp.137–9.

without grants or gallery representation in Africa.[68] In the same vein, Nollywood actress Temidayo Babatunde also voiced the challenge of poor funding for movies, making the industry churn out bad movies from good stories, and she believes that more substantial financial support could significantly enhance the industry's growth and the quality of productions.[69]

6.2. Piracy and Copyright Infringement

This is another critical challenge undermining the growth of the CCIs in Nigeria. The challenge persists globally in creative sectors like music, film, fashion and literature. The original owners suffer significant economic and emotional losses when their intellectual property is stolen. In the United States, piracy and copyright violations have been shown to discourage investment, reduce the motive to create and affect the quality of creative outputs.[70] In Nigeria, prior to the enactment of the Copyright Act 2022, the Nigerian Copyright Commission reported an annual loss of up to ₦918 trillion due to piracy and copyright infringements, impacting both individuals and the government's revenue base, while also deterring foreign investment and stifling local innovation.[71]

Misconception about piracy is also another challenge facing female creative entrepreneurs. For instance, a Nollywood movie titled "Love in Every Word" produced by a popular Nigerian producer “Omoni Oboli”, was removed from YouTube after a claim of copyright infringement by the film. While it was eventually restored, the movie has lost momentum and revenue and also illustrates how even established creators are vulnerable to digital piracy.[72] In the fashion sector, designers like Desiree Iyama and Stella Atuboyedia have all publicly decried the copying of their original designs

[68] I. Abba, ‘How African women are navigating the roadblocks in the global art industry’, AMAKA Studio (2023). https://amaka.studio/u/@immaculata/how-african-women-are-navigating-the-roadblocks-in-the-global-art-industry-BY5Y2RsrbWnbk5Co_P3Tv

[69] The Guardian Nigeria, ‘Mo Abudu: Crafting African stories for the world’, (2024, December 30). https://guardian.ng/life/mo-abudu-crafting-african-stories-for-the-world/

[70] J. Easton, ‘How copyright infringement affects the creative industries’, Leppard Law (2024).

[71] European Commission Intellectual Property Helpdesk. (2025, February 19). Nigeria’s media industry: Growth, challenges, and the fight for copyright protection. https://intellectual-property-helpdesk.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/nigerias-media-industry-growth-challenges-and-fight-copyright-protection-2025-02-19_en

[72] Kabbiz Legal, ‘Copyright Infringement Challenges in Nollywood’, (2025, March 13). https://kabbizlegal.com/copyright-infringement-challenges-in-nollywood-film-industry/

and resold without consent, and have had to put up forewarnings to take legal actions and have felt undervalued when their works are copied.[73]

6.3. Unreliable Power Supply

The challenge of unreliable power supply remains a barrier to entrepreneurship. Globally, the World Bank (2019) estimates that businesses in low- and middle-income income countries lose up to $82 billion in sales annually due to power outages.[74] Nigeria stands out as an example in Africa. The country is called the "power generator capital of the world" due to the high number of backup generators used in homes and businesses. Businesses, including those owned by women, are estimated to lose up to $29 billion annually due to unreliable electricity.[75] For entrepreneurs in Nigeria's creative and cultural industries-such as filmmakers, musicians, designers, and digital artists, the impact of erratic power supply is particularly acute. These sectors rely heavily on power for production, editing, digital marketing, and distribution, making stable electricity both a convenience and a necessity.[76] For women entrepreneurs facing financial and societal barriers, the additional costs of generating their power through generators can be prohibitive. They may limit their ability to scale their ventures or compete.[77] Foluorunshi Alakija described the power supply issue as the major challenge affecting entrepreneurial growth in Nigeria due to its indispensability.[78] Despite these obstacles, Nigerian women in the creative sector continue demonstrating resilience and innovation. Some have adopted solar energy solutions, which are often expensive or unavailable.

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[73] J. Onyemauche, 'Design theft: Preservation of creativity in the Nigerian fashion industry. Culture Custodian', (2025). https://culturecustodian.com/design-theft-preservation-of-creativity-in-the-nigerian-fashion-industry/

[74] J. Rentschler, M. Kornejew, S. Hallegatte, J. Braese, & M. Obolensky, 'Underutilised potential: The business costs of unreliable infrastructure in developing countries. World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery', (2019). https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/336371560797230631/pdf/Underutilized-Potential-The-Business-Costs-of-Unreliable-Infrastructure-in-Developing-Countries.pdf

[75] O. Udegbunam, 'Nigeria businesses lose $29 billion annually to poor electricity', Premium Times (2021, April 22).

[76] K. O. Alakwe, 'Towards a prosperous creative industry in Nigeria: Perspective and policy imperatives', *Journal of Creative Industries and Cultural Studies*, (2023) 10(1), pp.52–82.

[77] A. A. Akanbi, 'How poor power supply hurts women-owned businesses in Kwara', TheCable. (2022, September 19). https://www.thecable.ng/how-poor-power-supply-hurts-women-owned-businesses-in-kwara/

[78] F. Adekoya, 'Inadequate power supply, biggest challenge to entrepreneurship', The Guardian Nigeria. (2019, September 18). https://guardian.ng/business-services/inadequate-power-supply-biggest-challenge-to-entrepreneurship/

6.4. Education

Limited access to quality education remains a global barrier for women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing regions. UNESCO reports[79] that women and girls are disproportionately affected by educational disparities due to factors like poverty, early marriage or gender-based violence, which can affect their ability to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for business success. In Africa, especially in Nigeria, these gaps are evident in formal education and vocational training. Many women in the creative sector lack access to specialised training in areas such as digital literacy, financial management, and creative technology.[80] The educational gap affects the level of some women's competitiveness, limiting their innovation and adaptability to the rapid changes that take place in markets.

6.5. Networking Opportunities

Networking opportunities are another critical factor that can impact the success of women entrepreneurs. The "boys club" mentality often excludes women from important conversations and opportunities.[81] Women may struggle to form professional connections and access mentorship and support networks crucial for business growth. A lack of networking opportunities can create additional barriers for women trying to establish and expand their businesses, as relationships often play a key role in securing resources and information necessary for entrepreneurial success.[82] In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by infrastructural issues, ineffective technology usage, and perception and gender bias issues.[83] Women in the creative and cultural industries may struggle to showcase their work to broader audiences, secure distribution channels, or participate in export markets. The lack of networking also restricts their growth potential and the ability to generate sustainable income from their craft.[84]

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[79] UNESCO (2023, January 13). Key data on girls and women's right to education. UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/key-data-girls-and-womens-right-education

[80] UNESCO (2025). Empowering creative women. UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/activities/empowering-creative-women

[81] Harvard Business Review. (n.d.). Gender bias in venture capital. https://hbr.org

[82] GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor). (2023). Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2022/23 Women's Entrepreneurship Report. 2023.

[83] A. S. Olanrewaju, 'Challenges of the Creative Industries in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Performing Arts Industry', *British Journal of Mass Communication and Media Research*, (2024) 4(2), pp.1–17.

[84] Moniepoint, (n 64).

7. The Impact of Digital Platforms and Technology in Nigeria's Creative Industries

Digital platforms and technology, social media, artificial intelligence, mobile money, and e-commerce have become transformative tools for women entrepreneurs in low- and middle-income countries, notably within Nigeria's CCIs. These technologies open doors to global markets and foster innovation, enabling women to overcome traditional barriers to business growth.[85] In Nigeria, a 2024 survey by the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women revealed that 74% of women-led creative businesses use Facebook for marketing, while 88% leverage WhatsApp for client engagement and sales, making these platforms critical for visibility and revenue generation.[86] Social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) have liberalised and improved access to audiences, allowing women in CCI to showcase their work to millions without requiring large budgets or established networks. Nollywood producers like Funke Akindele, Omoni Oboli, and Ruth Kadiri utilise YouTube to share content directly with fans, expanding their reach beyond traditional distribution channels. In the music sector, platforms such as Youtube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and streaming services like Spotify, Apple Music, Boomplay, NotJustOk.com, and Tidal serve both established and emerging female artists as well as local cultural musicians, enabling broader distribution, assisting them top charts globally and engage better with a wider audience.[87] These digital platforms enhance female musicians' opportunities to monetise their work and build sustainable careers.

E-commerce platforms are also revolutionising the CCI landscape in Nigeria and across Africa. Marketplaces like Jumia, Jiji, and Konga allow women entrepreneurs to sell products ranging from handmade textiles to digital art directly to consumers, bypassing intermediaries and increasing profit margins. Similar platforms in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire have successfully boosted women-led craft businesses, illustrating the regional impact of digital commerce.[88] Beyond sales, these tools help female entrepreneurs build their brands and establish customer trust. Despite

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[85] B.C. Ugwu, 'Advancing women's trade opportunities in Africa through digital trade platforms: Challenges and opportunities', The Young African Policy Research Hub (2024, July 20); L. Alhorr, A.A. Malik, A. Javed, N. Naz, & N. Un Nisa, (2024). Empowered or undermined? Women entrepreneurs & the digital economy: 2024 survey of women entrepreneurs in low & middle-income countries. Cherie Blair Foundation for Women.

[86] *Ibid*.

[87] World Bank, 'Unlocking opportunities for youth in the orange economy: Music in Africa', Knowledge Brief Series Issue 15, 2021.

https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099904103162338068/pdf/IDU01d7ec1da0df7404f3a08d4909fc0c7495244.pdf.

[88] International Finance Corporation, *op. cit*. (n 14).

these advances, challenges remain. Despite its numerous benefits, many businesswomen in Nigeria still struggle to fully leverage digital opportunities due to digital illiteracy, high costs of digital tools, and cultural barriers.[89]

8. Overview of Policy Frameworks and Institutional Support in Nigeria's Cultural Industries

Policy frameworks and institutional support at the national, regional, and international levels play an important role in enhancing the development and sustainability of CCIs. This section discusses some of these policies and initiatives.

8.1. National Policies and Initiatives on CCIs in Nigeria

The Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy is the key government ministry saddled with the responsibility of upholding Nigeria's cultural Heritage through policy guides to stimulate growth in the creative industry.[90] Other agencies for the regulation and policy implementation for the industry in Nigeria include the Nigerian Copyright Commission, the Nigerian Film and Videos Censors Board, the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission, the National Council for Arts and Culture, the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria, and the Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria. Some key initiatives aimed towards protecting and improving the industry include:

8.2. Copyright Act (2022)

The Copyright Act 2022, signed into law in 2023, aimed to strengthen intellectual property protection in Nigeria. It recognises innovation as one of the nation's greatest assets. The Act recognises digital works which were not part of the repealed Copyright Act of 2004, and it also introduced the term "Audio-visual works", which has a broader reach of creative works.[91] Also covered by the Act are literary, musical, artistic, sound recordings, and broadcasts. Copyright is automatic under the law once a created work is eligible. A work must exhibit originality and exist in a fixed, tangible form that enables perception, reproduction, or communication to be eligible under the Act. The act also enforces anti-piracy measures and introduces

[89] B.C. Ugwu, 'Advancing women's trade opportunities in Africa through digital trade platforms: Challenges and opportunities', The Young African Policy Research Hub (2024, July 20).

[90] Federal Ministry of Art, Culture and the Creative Economy. (2024). About FMACCE. https://www.fmacce.gov.ng/about-fmacce.

[91] O.M. Ufuoma, & B.O. Alloh, 'The prospects/shortcomings of the Nigerian Copyright Act 2022 with regards to criminal liability for copyright infringement', *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research*, (2024) 12(6), pp.20–43.

streamlined takedown procedures for online infringement. In addition, it grants the Nigerian Copyright Commission the authority to impose fines of up to 1 million to deter copyright violations.[92]

8.3. The Creative Leap Acceleration Programme (CLAP)

CLAP is an initiative by the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism, and the Creative Economy designed to transform Nigeria's creative and cultural industries into a $100 billion economy by 2030, creating 2 million jobs. It prioritises empowering youth-led ventures in animation, fashion, gaming, film, and music by providing digital access, skills training, and commercialisation of intellectual property (IP). The mission of CLAP is to spur a creative revitalisation in Nigeria by equipping creators with the necessary tools, education, and networks to successfully compete on a global scale.[93]

Other initiatives of the Federal Government of Nigeria for the Creative and cultural sector include the Renewed Hope Creative Economy Development Fund, which is designed to provide Nigerian youths in the creative industry with funding and leverage intellectual property (IP) assets to drive their growth. Creative Renaissance Project (Heritage Preservation) focuses on archiving and restoring cultural assets and fostering artistic expressions. CultuRise (Infrastructure) is an initiative that builds creative infrastructure hubs to boost the cultural economy.[94]

8.3. The African Union's Role in Advancing Creative and Cultural Industries

The African Union (AU) has recognised and prioritised the creative and cultural industries as a significant economic and social development driver. Key initiatives and policies it has undertaken include:

a) **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA):** With headquarters in Accra, Ghana, this agreement seeks to remove trade barriers and encourage the free flow of goods and services within the 55 countries on the African continent.[95] While the agreement is not explicitly

[92] Aluko & Oyebode, 'Key Highlights of the Copyrights Act 2022', May, 2023, available at: https://www.aluko-oyebode.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Aluko-Oyebode-Nigeria-Copyright-Act-2022.pdf

[93] Creative Leap Accelerated Programme. (2025). About CLAP. https://clapnigeria.ng/; Federal Ministry of Art, Culture and the Creative Economy. (2024). About FMACCE. https://www.fmacce.gov.ng/about-fmacce.

[94] Federal Ministry of Art, Culture and the Creative Economy. (2024). About FMACCE. https://www.fmacce.gov.ng/about-fmacce.

[95] World Bank, 'Unlocking opportunities for youth in the orange economy: Music in Africa', Knowledge Brief Series Issue 15, 2021.

focused on CCIs, it covers certain aspects related to it, such as intellectual property, digital trade, investment and trade in goods and services.[96] The single market is expected to boost trade, create employment and provide more entrepreneurial opportunities for young people in the creative industry.[97]

b) **Declaration of 2021 as "The AU Year of the Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want":** The AU theme for 2021 was Arts, Culture, and Heritage, in recognition of the creative and cultural industries' instrumental role in the continent's growth and development. The initiative aimed to make the Member states invest more resources in promoting African culture and heritage to attain Africa's Agenda 2063.[98]

Other policies and initiatives include the revised 2018 plan of action on cultural and creative industries in Africa, which recognises the CCI's role in job creation, poverty alleviation and economic empowerment,[99] and the Great Museum of Africa, which is also another flagship project of the AU Agenda 2063. The museum is hosted in Algeria on behalf of the continent and is designed to attract tourists and showcase the rich cultural Heritage of the African continent.[100]

8.4. International Policy Support: The Role of the EU and UNESCO in Advancing Creative Industries

The European Union (EU) and UNESCO have also launched laudable policies and initiatives to promote CCIs globally. These include:

a) **The Creative Europe 2021-2027 programme:** The Creative Europe programme consists of three strands to support Europe's creative

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https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099904103162338068/pdf/IDU01d7ec1da0df7404f3a08d4909fc0c7495244.pdf.

[96] J. Kouzmine-Karavaïeff, 'AfCFTA & cultural and creative industries (CCIs): A catalyst for investment and growth – Key insights from a diverse webinar', Africa Creatives Alliance, (2025, January 20). https://aca.africa/afcfta-cultural-and-creative-industries-ccis-a-catalyst-for-investment-and-growth-key-insights-from-a-diverse-webinar/

[97] AllAfrica, 'How Africa's free trade area will boost the creative arts', AllAfrica. 2021. https://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00080717.html.

[98] African Union, 'About the theme of the year 2021: Arts, culture, and heritage', (2021). https://au.int/en/theme/2021/arts-culture-and-heritage.

[99] African Union, 'Revised African Union Plan of Action on Cultural and Creative Industries' (2021).

https://ocpa.irmo.hr/resources/docs/AU_Plan_of_Action_Cultural_and_Creative_Industries-en.pdf.

[100] African Union, 'Launch of the temporary site of the Great Museum of Africa', (GMA) (2023, June 14). https://au.int/en/newsevents/20230614/launch-temporary-site-great-museum-africa-gma-flagship-project-african-union.

and cultural sectors and beyond. The Creative Europe Culture strand covers Architecture, cultural heritage, design, and performing Arts, among others. The programme encourages cooperation and exchanges among cultural organisations and artists within and outside Europe.[101] The Creative Europe MEDIA strand supports and promotes the European film and audio-visual industry.[102] The cross-sectoral strand reinforces collaboration across diverse CCSs to address the challenges they face, such as digital transformation and sustainability. The program has a budget of €2.44 billion and invests in actions reinforcing cultural diversity and the needs and challenges of the creative and cultural sector. The programme is open to EU and non-EU states and subject to certain conditions.[103]

b) **The ACP-EU Culture programme:** The ACP-EU Culture Programme is an EU-funded programme implemented in 79 countries from the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific to a budget of €40 million from 2019 to 2026.[104] The program was launched in 2019 to create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, and increase the income of artists and cultural professionals in the CCS within the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.[105]

c) **UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals:** This programme, redesigned in 2021, aims to promote and protect artistic freedom and the status of artists in the Global South, Africa, and Small Island Developing States countries (UNESCO). The programme supports research, advocacy and monitoring, capacity building, and financial assistance to promote artistic freedom.[106]

d) **Women Entrepreneurship for Africa (WE4A) Programme:** WE4A is one of the EU partnership programmes that supports women entrepreneurs in Africa. The program is facilitated by the Tony Elumelu Foundation and the German Development agency GIZ. The initiative is implemented in 8 African countries. The programme's primary objective is to foster the sustainable and inclusive growth of youth across the African continent. It empowers women SMEs with entrepreneurship

[101] European Commission, 'Creative Europe CULTURE strand: Supporting and promoting Europe's culture sector', (2022, September 1).
https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-culture-strand

[102] *Ibid*.

[103] European Commission, 'Creative Europe MEDIA strand: Supporting and promoting Europe's film and audiovisual sector', (2023, January 19).
https://culture.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/creative-europe-media-strand.

[104] ACP-EU Culture, 'The ACP-EU Culture Programme, Towards a Viable Cultural Industry in the ACP Countries', available at: http://www.acp-ue-culture.org/en/about/

[105] *Ibid*.

[106] UNESCO, *op. cit*. (n 80).

skills and seed funding capital ($5000). It covers agriculture, blue economy, renewable energy and ecotourism and has so far.[107]

e) UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN): This UNESCO initiative was created in 2004 to bring cities across the globe together to work towards making cities safer, more resilient, and inclusive by placing culture and creativity at the centre of their urban development plans.[108] UCCN covers seven areas in the creative sector, including Architecture, Crafts and Folk Art, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music.[109] According to Borrell,[110] the EU has played and is continuing to play an important role in supporting the Cultural and creative industries in Africa and has also recognised the considerable contribution by Africa and its diaspora to the promotion of culture globally through music (pop, RnB, jazz, blues, rock, funk, disco, salsa, reggae and rap). The EU is also working with UNESCO to preserve cultural manuscripts in Mali from Jihadist threats, supporting The Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (Fespaco) in Burkina Faso and has also trained over 10,000 artisans who supply fashion houses with their traditional designs.[111]

9. Creative Industries for Sustainable Futures: Economic, Cultural, Environmental, and Gender Perspectives

Cultural and creative industries such as fashion, film, music, literature and crafts are significant promoters of sustainable development while contributing to economic growth and preservation of cultural heritage. Sustainable development can be defined as meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.[112] Some of the roles played by CCI in sustainability include:

9.1 Job Creation and Revenue Generation (SDG 8)

The creative and cultural industries create over 50 million jobs and are the highest employer of young people between the ages of 15 and 29 years,

[107] Tony Elumelu Foundation. (2024, March 8). WE4A II: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). https://www.tonyelumelufoundation.org/news/we4a-ii-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.

[108] UNESCO, *op. cit*. (n 80).

[109] UNESCO. (2025, April 18). Mission statement of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/mission?hub=80094.

[110] J. Borrell, (2021, January 3). Placing culture at the heart of our dialogue with Africa. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/placing-culture-heart-our-dialogue-africa_en

[111] *Ibid*.

[112] United Nations, 'The Sustainable Development Agenda', (2025). https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/

more than any other sector worldwide.[113] Africa generates about 2 million jobs from the CCIs, with Nigeria leading the way. The Nollywood movie industry in the country is the second largest employer of labour and generates an estimated $800 million annually. Furthermore, Nigeria's music industry is the biggest African export after oil and Gas, generating an annual estimated revenue of $150 million.[114]

The rapid digital transformation in Africa has increased the potential of CCIs to create more youth and women entrepreneurs in various fields within the creative industry; however, some challenges need to be overcome to attain this. There is a need for proper training on the use of these emerging technologies, increased awareness on how entrepreneurs can take advantage of the financial aspect of business provision, social protection and provision of safeguards for intellectual property rights, which are currently lacking.[115]

9.2 Cultural preservation (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities)

Entrepreneurs in the CCIs, while generating revenue, also serve as preservers of cultural heritage. UNESCO defines cultural heritage as "the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations".[116] Examples of women in Africa preserving Heritage include the Adinkra symbolism printed on fabrics in Ghana, Adire textile dyeing in Nigeria, and the intricate Maasai beadwork in Kenya. These are ways Indigenous knowledge systems are safeguarded through the cultural industries and are handed down intergenerationally. By embedding Heritage in their creative work, the entrepreneurs can sustain cultural diversity while showcasing their talents locally and globally.

9.3 Environmental Sustainability

Most of the materials used by the creatives and cultural industries, like the textile or pottery industry, are locally sourced and often from recycled or upcycled materials, reducing the need for synthetic materials that harm

[113] N. Datta, M. Melchor, & J. Laclé, 'Five ways creative and cultural industries respond to youth job challenges', (2023, October 5). https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/jobs/five-ways-creative-and-cultural-industries-respond-youth-job-challenges

[114] N.A. M'Hammdi & L. Jaïdi, 'The Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa and Latin America: A Driver for Transatlantic Cooperation', Policy Center For The New South (2023).

[115] *Ibid*; United Nations Development Programme. (2021). Creative Industries Advisor – Kampala, Uganda. https://jobs.undp.org/cj_view_job.cfm?cur_job_id=100018.

[116] T. Nilson & K. Thorell, (Eds.). Cultural heritage preservation: The past, the present and the future, (Halmstad University Press 2018).

the environment. Using local materials also supports the local economies and reduces the need for long transportation, reducing carbon. Also, cultural events such as the Osun-Oshogbo Festivals, held annually to honour the goddess of fertility and portray the sacredness of River Osun, promote the preservation and sustainability of culture and forest resources.[117] The digitalisation of the creative industries has also enabled most of the goods and services to be transferred online, such as music and film streaming, which has reduced the need for physical media, hence reducing or cutting down on packaging and distribution waste as a result.[118] Some challenges CCIs face in improving environmental sustainability include the high cost of transitioning to green energies and the limited knowledge among SMEs about adopting circular economy practices.

9.4. Gender Equality

Cultural and Creative Industries are not merely economic tools but also crucial agents of gender equality and transformation for African and Nigerian women. Gender equality is essential to unlocking the full potential of CCIs for sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic empowerment. Throughout history, African women have been fundamental in sustaining and preserving cultural heritage and local languages. This they do through the art of storytelling, cuisines, music, trade, and religious ceremonies.[119] Despite the remarkable, unique perspectives and creativity women bring to the sector, they still face several barriers affecting their opportunities to excel, including gender biases, unequal pay, restricted finance access, and limited training and leadership positions.[120] Despite these hurdles, Nigerian female cultural and creative entrepreneurs like Lisa Folawiyo, Chimamanda Adichie, and Mo Abudu, among others, have adapted and thrived in their diverse creative sectors. This highlights how blending tradition with innovation in the CCI can break exclusive barriers, therefore making gender equality essential for both diversity and cultural development. Empowering women as innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders will not only enrich positive outcomes like expanding market reach but also help achieve sustainable development goals.

[117] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 'Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove Nomination Document', (2005). https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/1118.pdf

[118] E. Barteková & P. Börkey, 'Digitalisation for the transition to a resource efficient and circular economy', *OECD Environment Working Papers*, No. 192, (2022).

[119] D. Rita & J. Kumar, 'The Role of Women in Preserving and Promoting Cultural Heritage', *Universal Research Reports*, (2024) 11(5).

[120] Pret, Shaw & Drakopoulou, *op. cit.* (n 20).

10. Conclusion

This paper concludes that the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) serve as a significant platform for African women, particularly Nigerian women, to transform their heritage into entrepreneurial success. Case studies of entrepreneurs like Nike Davies-Okundaye, Mo Abudu, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Lisa Folawiyo illustrate how women can blend tradition with innovation within the CCI to navigate systemic challenges that limit women entrepreneurs, such as restricted access to finance, piracy, copyright infringement, unreliable power supply, digital illiteracy, and gender bias, thereby achieving success both locally and globally. The paper highlights the crucial role that digital platforms, technology, and local and global policies and initiatives play in showcasing and preserving Heritage while promoting entrepreneurship. Beyond business, CCIs are also a means for gender equality, women's empowerment, and sustainable development, necessitating coordinated actions from all governments, the EU, and industry practitioners to overcome existing challenges and ensure that women entrepreneurs in Nigeria's CCIs become a sustainable transformation model for African women and beyond.

11. Recommendations

From the findings of the paper, the following recommendations are made:

a) **Expand Access to Finance for Women in CCIs**: Nigerian government, AU and development partners need to prioritise access to financing including loans and grants for women in the cultural and creative sector of the economy

b) **Invest in Digital Skills and Infrastructure**: To enable women to benefit from globalisation, stakeholders must prioritise digital literacy training and improve internet access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

c) **Strengthen Intellectual Property Protection:** The Nigerian Copyright Commission should fully enforce the 2022 Copyright Act and conduct awareness campaigns to protect the rights of creators, especially women in film, fashion, and literature.

d) **Encourage Regional and International Engagement Collaboration**: The African Union, the EU, and UNESCO should promote knowledge exchange, co-productions, and mobility programmes for women in the cultural and creative sectors to enhance African cultural heritage.

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https://amaka.studio/u/@immaculata/how-african-women-are-navigating-the-roadblocks-in-the-global-art-industry-BY5Y2RsrbWnbk5Co_P3Tv

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https://www.thecable.ng/how-poor-power-supply-hurts-women-owned-businesses-in-kwara/

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE BANKING SECTOR IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

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Abstract: *The banking sector in the Republic of Moldova has undergone significant transformation since the country's independence in 1991. This evolution is closely tied to the nation's broader economic trajectory and its ability to withstand various internal and external shocks. From the collapse of the Soviet economic system to the implementation of market-based reforms, the Moldovan banking sector has had to navigate a series of financial crises, regulatory changes, and geopolitical challenges. This paper examines the evolution of Moldova's banking sector from the perspective of economic resilience, focusing on its capacity to absorb shocks and adapt to changing economic conditions. The study highlights key phases in the development of the banking system, including the post-Soviet transition period, the consolidation of the banking sector, and the 2008 global financial crisis, which exposed vulnerabilities in Moldova's financial system. It further explores the effects of the 2014 "billion-dollar theft" on public trust in banks and the subsequent reforms implemented by the National Bank of Moldova to restore stability and strengthen financial supervision. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with banking professionals and quantitative analysis of key financial indicators, this research assesses how regulatory frameworks, institutional reforms, and macroeconomic factors have influenced the resilience of the banking sector. It concludes by*

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discussing the ongoing challenges and opportunities for the sector in the face of economic volatility, political instability, and the evolving role of remittances in Moldova's economy. The findings suggest that while significant progress has been made in enhancing the banking system's resilience, the sector must continue to adapt to both domestic and global economic pressures to ensure long-term stability and growth. The article was developed within the framework of Subprogram 030101 „Strengthening the resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability of the economy of the Republic of Moldova in the context of the accession process to the European Union", institutional funding.

Keywords: *Banking sector, economic resilience, financial crises, financial stability.*

JEL Classification*: G21, Q21.*

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Introduction

The evolution of the banking sector in the Republic of Moldova is closely linked to the process of strengthening the national economy and its integration into international economic systems. In terms of economic resilience, the banking sector plays a crucial role, as it represents one of the fundamental pillars in supporting financial and economic stability. In the context of the Republic of Moldova, the economic resilience of the banking sector can be analyzed from several perspectives, including its adaptability to economic crises, financial stability, regulations in the field and external challenges.

The National Bank of Moldova (NBM) plays a pivotal role in enhancing the resilience of the national banking system through its regulatory and supervisory mandate. The institutional framework established by the NBM is designed to promote financial stability and mitigate systemic risks. Key regulatory measures[1] include capital adequacy requirements, liquidity risk standards, and risk management regulations, aligned with international prudential norms. In addition, the NBM[2] applies a comprehensive risk-based supervision model to evaluate and monitor both internal (e.g., political and institutional instability) and external risks (e.g., global financial volatility).

[1] National Bank of Moldova (NBM). (2022). Annual Report 2022. https://bnm.md/en/content/annual-reports

[2] National Bank of Moldova (NBM). (2023a). Financial Stability Report 2023. https://bnm.md/en/content/financial-stability

Banking sector resilience also relies on the diversification of financial activities, which enhances banks' capacity to absorb and respond to unexpected economic shocks. In the Moldovan context, the sector faces the challenge of servicing a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that require tailored and accessible financial instruments. Strategic diversification of loan and deposit portfolios[3], coupled with the integration of innovative services, such as digital payments and green finance products can significantly contribute to long-term sectoral stability.

Over the past decades, the Moldovan banking sector has been exposed to multiple systemic crises. During the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, the sector experienced reduced liquidity and capital pressures, which affected financial intermediation and economic confidence. The 2014–2015 banking crisis[4], triggered by the embezzlement of approximately USD 1 billion from three major banks, severely eroded public trust. In response, Moldovan authorities introduced structural reforms, tightened prudential standards, and engaged international financial institutions to rebuild systemic credibility.

The sector's resilience is fundamentally linked to effective risk management[5], particularly with regard to:

- ✓ Credit risk: due to borrower defaults;
- ✓ Liquidity risk: associated with withdrawal pressures and cash flow mismatches;
- ✓ Macroeconomic risk: stemming from inflation, currency depreciation, or external trade shocks;
- ✓ Political and regulatory risk: related to institutional instability or abrupt legal changes.

Commercial banks[6] are required to implement internal strategies for risk identification and mitigation and to maintain adequate capital buffers to absorb potential shocks. Furthermore, macroeconomic stability remains essential to banking resilience. The NBM and the government must coordinate monetary and fiscal policy to ensure a predictable and supportive economic environment. Stability in inflation, interest rates, and public debt is particularly important to sustain confidence in the financial system.

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[3] National Bank of Moldova (NBM). (2023b). Regulation on Risk Management in Banks, Decision No. 109/2019. https://bnm.md

[4] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2016). Republic of Moldova: Financial System Stability Assessment. IMF Country Report No. 16/109.

[5] International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2021). Moldova: Staff Report for the 2021 Article IV Consultation. https://www.imf.org

[6] World Bank. (2017). Financial Sector Assessment Program: Moldova. https://www.worldbank.org

Although the Moldovan banking sector has made notable progress in improving financial performance and supervisory compliance, it remains vulnerable to both domestic and external risks. Sustainable resilience depends on continuing structural reforms, expanding financial inclusion, investing in digital infrastructure, and strengthening public trust through transparency and governance.

The introduction of the study highlights the importance of the banking sector in strengthening the economy's capacity to respond to internal and external shocks, as well as the research intention of analyzing the evolution and stability of the banking system in recent decades. However, in order to provide more scientific rigor, the research objectives are explicitly formulated in the form of questions or hypotheses. In this regard, the authors outline several essential directions of analysis within the work, including: (i) to what extent institutional transformations and prudential regulations have contributed to increasing banking resilience; (ii) how the banking system's capacity to manage risks and maintain financial stability in times of crisis has evolved; and (iii) what is the impact of interconnection with the European market on strengthening the sector's resilience. Integrating these questions into a clear methodological framework will allow for a better development of the role of the banking sector in the sustainable economic development of the Republic of Moldova and will support the formulation of public policies oriented towards stability and adaptability.

Research methods

When conducting research on a topic like the evolution of the banking sector in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of economic resilience, several research methods can be applied. These methods help to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data to draw valid conclusions. The choice of methods depends on the research question, objectives, and available resources. Below are some of the most commonly used research methods. The research methods selected for studying the evolution of the banking sector in Moldova and its economic resilience will depend on the specific research question, the scope of the study, and the available resources. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can provide a comprehensive understanding of how the sector has adapted to changes and crises, while comparative and historical analysis can provide context for these changes. Regardless of the method used, ensuring rigorous data collection, ethical considerations, and valid interpretations is key to producing reliable and meaningful results.

To achieve the objectives proposed in the work, the following scientific research methods and tools were used: the documentary method, based on accessing and studying the general and specialized bibliography; the

synthesis method, applied to establish the connections between the researched phenomena; the systemic analysis method, the method of quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Results and discussion

The study of the concept of resilience can be substantiated by a dual approach, structuralist and systemic, as these two methodological perspectives are complementary and allow a coherent analysis of complex systems. The structuralist approach facilitates the investigation of the internal components of a system (such as banking institutions, regulations, financial instruments), while the systemic approach allows understanding the overall functioning of the financial system in its interaction with the economic, political and social environment.

Therefore, the authors elucidate the resilience approach at the level of subsystems, i.e. the structural components of the financial sector, in our case the banking sector, as well as at the level of the entire system, in order to assess the capacity to react, adapt and transform in the face of shocks or uncertainty.

Next, the authors propose to analyze the main crises that have marked the evolution of the economy of the Republic of Moldova since 1991 and until now, highlighting how they have influenced the resilience of economic sectors and the quality of the financial sector. The study also aims to identify key lessons that can be learned from these episodes, with a view to strengthening the financial system's capacity to react and adapt. The analysis focuses both on the triggering factors of these shocks and on the mechanisms through which the national economy responded and adapted to the disruptions, providing an integrated perspective on its capacity for recovery and structural transformation.

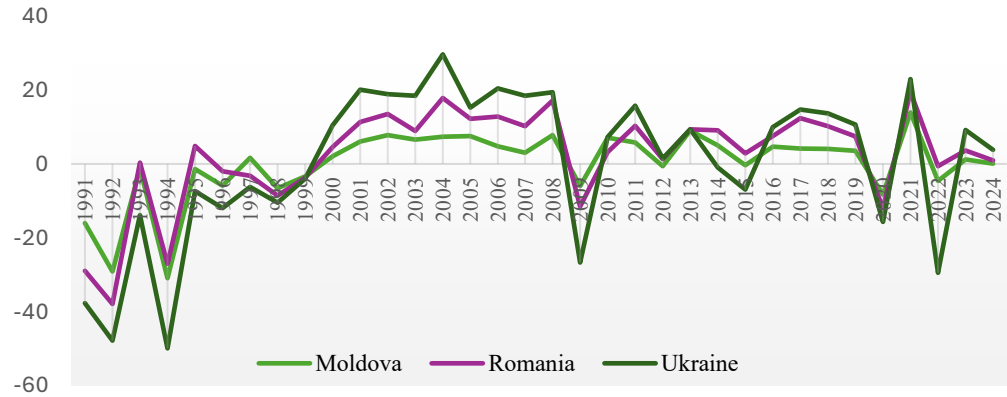

Figure 1. Annual Economic Growth Rate (GDP, %)

*Source:*https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2024&locations=MD&start=1991&view=chart

The period 1991–2025 was marked, for the Republic of Moldova, by a succession of economic shocks and crises of both internal and external origins, which profoundly influenced the dynamics of economic development and the stability of the financial sector. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy, the regional financial crisis of 1998, the global recession of 2008–2009, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy and inflationary crisis of 2022–2023, as well as recent geopolitical uncertainties constituted moments of inflection that tested the limits of the national economy's capacity to react and adapt.

From the perspective of economic resilience[7], maintaining inflation within moderate limits is a key factor for supporting aggregate demand, protecting purchasing power and preventing macroeconomic imbalances, thus ensuring a more robust framework for responding to possible external or domestic shocks.

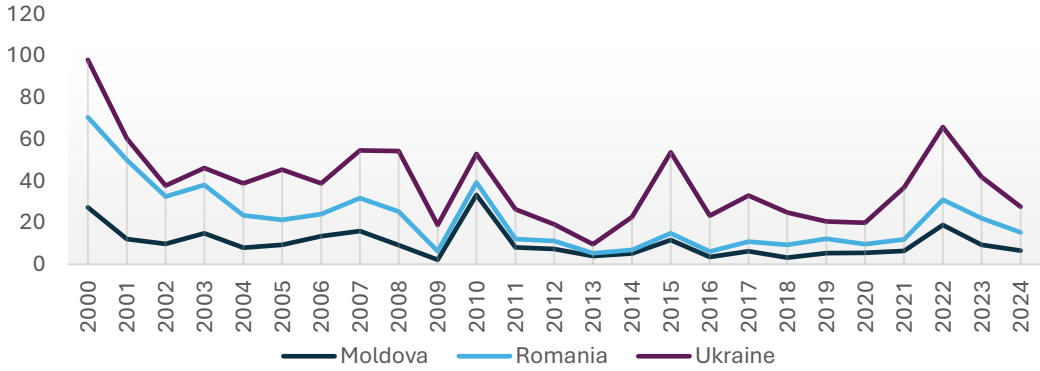

Figure 2. Dynamics of the GDP Deflator as a Measure of Inflation: Republic of Moldova, Romania, Ukraine

*Source:*https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.DEFL.KD.ZG.AD?end=2024&locations=MD&start=2000&view=chart

The Republic of Moldova remains highly exposed to external and internal economic shocks, such as increases in energy prices or adverse weather conditions, which negatively affect the agricultural sector. At the same time, the persistence of structural imbalances means that inflation remains a major challenge for the national economy.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, factors such as low labor productivity and structural weaknesses of the economy, including inefficient management of public enterprises and the lack of a genuine competitive environment, exert significant influences on price dynamics.

[7] World Bank, Digital financial services and financial inclusion in Moldova: Diagnostic and policy recommendations, 2023. https://www.worldbank.org

However, multifactorial regressions performed on the basis of annual data fail to highlight solid correlations between inflation and structural variables. One of the reasons for this limitation is the lack of relevant indicators, such as unit labor costs, the calculation of which would allow a clearer understanding of the relationship between wage developments, labor productivity and inflation.

Since 1991, the national banking system has undergone a continuous process of reform and modernization, recording notable progress on multiple dimensions. The current banking legal framework fully regulates the activity of commercial banks and the central bank, establishing the accountability relationships between financial institutions and clients, as well as the mechanisms for organizing and monitoring the banking process. In addition, the internationalization of financial operations and the penetration of foreign capital into the domestic banking system have contributed to the standardization of banking regulations in accordance with international requirements, through the implementation of financial market stabilization programs in collaboration with the IMF and through gradual alignment with the principles of the Basel Accord.

The capacity of the domestic banking system has experienced significant expansion, with the volume of active and passive operations constantly increasing. In parallel, the range of banking products and services has diversified, oriented both towards meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele and towards increasing accessibility and efficiency in their provision. The structure of the banking market has evolved, expanding the categories of eligible clients – from individuals with modest incomes or young entrepreneurs, to companies with growth potential – and diversifying, at the same time, the profile of the shareholders. The entry into the national market of international strategic investors, such as Groupe Société Générale, Gruppo Veneto Banca or Raiffeisen Group, has brought not only capital contributions, but also the transfer of know-how, modern management strategies, pricing policies and technological innovations.

All these processes have contributed[8] to the consolidation of a competitive and dynamic domestic banking system. However, its development has also determined a diversification of banking risks, the management of which has become increasingly complex. The consequences of the manifestation of these risks are reflected in the reduction of banks' profitability and, in extreme cases, can generate major blockages in their activity.

[8] R. Flage, & T. Aven, *Emerging risk – Conceptual definition and a relation to black swan type of events. Reliability Engineering & System Safety,* 144, 61–67, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ress.2015.07.008

One of the determining factors of the amplification of the global economic and financial crisis triggered in 2007[9] was the extensive involvement of the banking sector in off-balance sheet activities and the excessive use of leverage. This behavior was accompanied by a gradual erosion of the level and quality of equity. At the same time, many banking institutions had insufficient liquidity reserves to cover their current obligations. As a result, the banking system proved unable to absorb losses generated by trading and lending activities, as well as exposures resulting from off-balance sheet re-intermediation, accumulated in the so-called "shadow banking system".

In recent years, the banking sector of the Republic of Moldova has recorded a generally favorable evolution from the perspective of macroprudential indicators, reflecting trends of consolidation and stability. Among the main advances, the increase in total assets, the consolidation of own funds and the increase in the volume of attracted deposits are noteworthy, in parallel with the reduction of both non-performing and overdue loans, which led to a visible improvement in the quality of the portfolio.

However, the profitability of the banking system recorded a decline in 2024 compared to the previous year, mainly caused by the decrease in interest income, especially from investments in government securities (GS), NBM certificates and mandatory reserves. The increase in income from lending activity was only partially able to compensate for this decrease.

At the same time, commercial banks accelerated their digital transformation process, with a focus on the digitalization of internal processes and services offered to customers, thus contributing to operational efficiency and expanding the degree of financial inclusion. Concentration and liquidity levels remained high, supported by the monetary policy framework of the National Bank of Moldova, and the decrease in risk-weighted assets reflected a more prudent management of credit risks and a higher quality of banking portfolios.

From the perspective of institutional performance, three banks – BC „MOLDOVA-AGROINDBANK" S.A., BC „Moldindconbank" S.A. and BC „Victoriabank" S.A. – distinguished themselves as leaders in risk-weighted asset management and market activity, and as primary dealers on the VMS market, BC „FinComBank" S.A. also stood out.

Overall, developments in the last 3 years confirm the strengthening of the stability of the banking system, but also the need for policies aimed at supporting profitability and fully capitalizing on the opportunities offered by digitalization and gradual integration into European financial markets.

[9] R. Perciun, et al., *Stabilitatea financiară a economiei în tranziție,* 2015. INCE. ISBN 978-9975-3032-4-8

Table 1. Measures of Concentration in the Banking Sector (%)

NO.	Name of Banks	Market share by asset value (%)			Market share by loan value (%)			Market share by deposit value (%)		
		2022	***2023***	***2024***	***2022***	***2023***	***2024***	***2022***	***2023***	***2024***
1	BC "MOLDOVA - AGROINDBANK" S.A.	32,8	33,9	**34,9**	37,2	37,4	**37,9**	33	33,9	**35,7**
2	BC „Moldindconbank" S.A.	19,7	20,2	**21,2**	20,4	21,9	**23,7**	20,3	21,1	**22,2**
3	B.C. "VICTORIABANK" S.A.	14,0	14,1	**14,4**	9,3	10,3	**11,5**	14,4	13,9	**13,8**
4	OTP Bank S.A.	14,1	13,9	**12,6**	14,1	11,7	**10,4**	14,6	14,7	**13,1**
5	B.C. "ProCredit Bank" S.A.	4,7	4,2	**4,4**	5,8	5,3	**5,1**	3,5	3,3	**3,8**
6	B.C. "EXIMBANK" S.A.	3,6	3,3	**3,4**	3,5	3,4	**3,1**	3,5	3,2	**3,2**
7	"FinComBank" S.A.	3,8	3,8	**3,7**	3,3	3,5	**3,2**	3,8	3,8	**3,6**
8	BCR Chişinau S.A.	2,4	1,9	**1,2**	2,0	1,9	**0,5**	2,3	1,9	**1,0**
9	B.C. "ENERGBANK" S.A.	2,2	2,1	**1,9**	1,7	2,0	**2,3**	1,8	1,8	**1,7**
10	B.C. "COMERTBANK" S.A.	1,6	1,4	**1,3**	1,6	1,6	**1,3**	1,5	1,3	**1,2**
11	BC "EuroCreditBank" S.A.	1,2	1,1	**1,0**	1,0	1,1	**1,1**	1,2	1,0	**0,9**
Indicatorul HHI (puncte)		*1918*	*2006,2*	***2089,2***	*2153,8*	*2184,6*	***2289,0***	*1974,7*	*2051*	***2169,7***
Indicatorul CR-4 (%)		80,5	82,2	**83,2**	81	81,3	**83,5**	82,3	83,6	**84,8**

Source: Authors' calculations according to data from the National Bank of Moldova.

The degree of concentration of the domestic banking sector[10] remains at a high level in 2024. The asset market concentration index (AMIC) rose from 1918 points in 2022 to 2089.2 points at the end of 2024, a level from which the banking sector is considered to fall within the limits of a banking market with a high degree of concentration. And the value of loans (2289 points) compared to that of deposits (2169.7 points), indicates a higher concentration (excessively concentrated market) of the banking market of the Republic of Moldova. The ranking of the first four commercial banks, which hold 83.5% of total loans, increased by 3% in 2024, compared to 2022 (see table 1). The banking sector presents a higher level of concentration, reflected by the market share by loans held by the top four banks in the system, as well as by the Herfindahl-Hirschman index (HHI) calculated by

[10] INCE, Tendinţe în Economia Moldovei. Publicaţiei semestriale de analiză economică "Tendinţe în Economia Moldovei" (Semestrul II, 2024, nr.52), https://ince.md/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/MET_50.pdf, 2024, 115 p.

loans. The upward evolution of this indicator shows a continuous increase in the degree of concentration of the domestic banking sector and increased competition between banks.

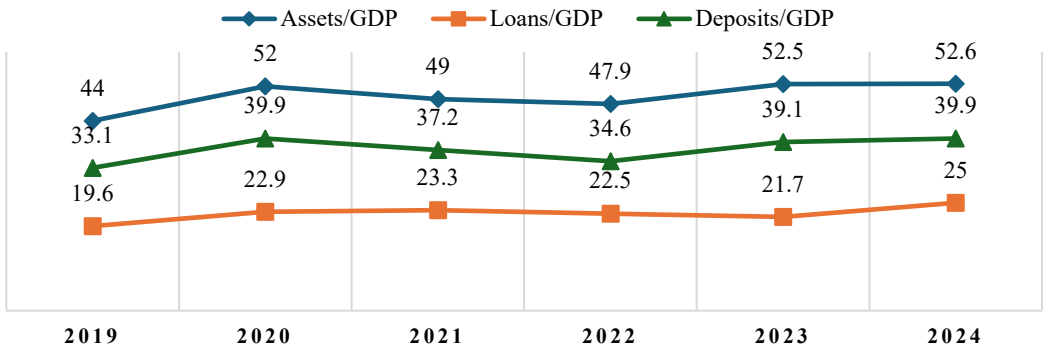

Figure 3. Degree of financial intermediation of the banking sector, %

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the National Bank of Moldova and the National Bureau of Statistics.

The evolution of banking assets from 44% of GDP in 2019 to 52.6% in 2024 indicates a gradual strengthening of the position of banks in the national economy. This process reflects not only the increase in the volume of financial resources intermediated by the banking system, but also a deeper integration of the sector into macroeconomic dynamics. From a resilience perspective, this marks a strengthening of the shock absorption capacity, as banks become main actors in the mobilization of domestic and external resources.

The improvement in non-performing loan indicators and the decrease in the volume of outstanding loans signal an increase in the structural robustness of the sector. At the same time, the increase in risk-weighted assets (50.1% of total assets in 2024, +4.6 pp compared to 2023) shows a greater exposure to lending and investment activities. From a resilience perspective, this suggests a delicate balance between strengthening the intermediation role and the need for prudent risk management to avoid overexposure to external shocks (e.g. macroeconomic volatility, geopolitical instability).

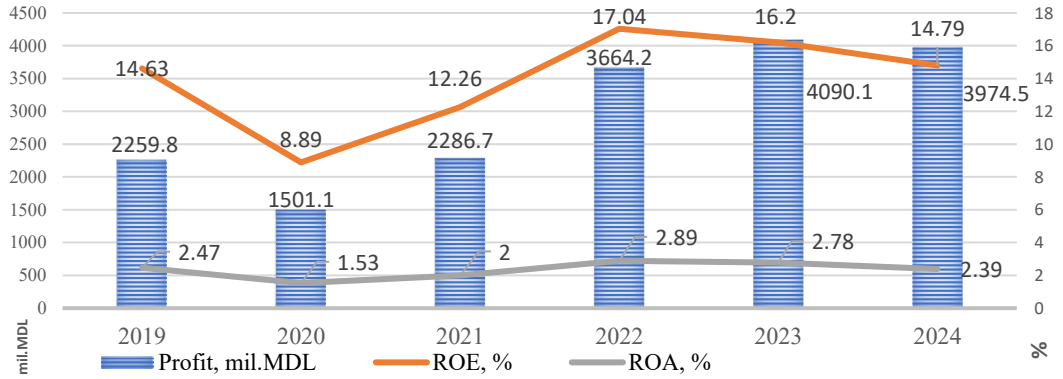

Figure 4. Evolution of Banking Sector Profitability in the Republic of Moldova

Source: Authors' calculations according to data from the National Bank of Moldova.

The decline in profitability in 2024, amid a reduction in interest income from safe investments (VMS, CBN, reserves at the NBM), raises questions about medium-term sustainability. This trend highlights the sector's vulnerability to changes in monetary policy and market conditions. From a resilience perspective, reduced profitability may limit banks' ability to invest in innovation, digitalization, and service expansion, which are essential factors for adaptability.

Progress in digitalization and the expansion of services to a broader spectrum of clients marks an important dimension of adaptive resilience. Digitalization enhances operational efficiency and increases accessibility, reducing the system's vulnerability to structural factors such as financial exclusion and excessive risk concentration.

The data confirm the predominance of the three systemic banks – MAIB, Moldindconbank and Victoriabank – which concentrate the majority of assets and liabilities. This concentration is comparable to trends in neighboring countries, but remains higher than the EU average. From a resilience perspective, this creates a dual perspective: on the one hand, the consolidation of large institutions increases the stability of the system; on the other hand, excessive dependence on a few actors increases systemic risk, if one of them were to experience major difficulties.

- In the short term, the banking sector is in a position of consolidated stability, with growing assets and deposits and improved portfolio quality indicators.
- In the medium term, the main risk lies in low profitability and excessive dependence on income from safe investments, which limits the capacity for structural transformation.

- In the long term, digitalization, product diversification and gradual integration into the European financial market become essential for transforming banking resilience from passive stability to active adaptability.

In the operational dimension, the ongoing digital transformation of the banking sector is evidenced by an estimated 85% share of transactions executed electronically, supported by IT investments totaling approximately MDL 200 million. These developments highlight growing technological resilience and efficiency in service delivery.

Governance and regulatory resilience is illustrated by the 12 compliance audits carried out by the National Bank of Moldova (NBM) in 2024, underscoring a proactive supervisory approach consistent with international prudential standards.

In the context of external resilience, the sector's foreign exchange (FX) exposure was reported at 21.7%, indicating a moderate level of vulnerability to currency risk and external financial shocks. This underlines the need for continuous strengthening of risk management systems and macroprudential buffers.

The social and reputational resilience of the sector was evaluated through a trust index of 7.2 (on a scale from 1 to 10) and a low complaints rate of 0.5%, suggesting relatively high levels of consumer confidence and institutional credibility.

Together, these descriptive statistics provide not only a baseline for understanding the structural dynamics of the Moldovan banking sector, but also a foundation for the application of the resilience model in comparative, cross-sectional, and time-series analyses. Although limitations exist regarding the availability of uniform data across all institutions, the proposed framework demonstrates strong potential for integration into macroprudential supervisory strategies.

Table 2. Composite Banking Resilience Index (CBRI)

Bank	Financial	Operational	Governance & Regulation	External	Social& Reputational	CBRI
MAIB	**0.82**	**0.85**	**0.9**	**0.7**	**0.78**	**0.809999999999**
Moldindconbank	**0.76**	**0.79**	**0.8**	**0.65**	**0.74**	**0.748**
Victoriabank	**0.68**	**0.72**	**0.75**	**0.6**	**0.71**	**0.692**

Source: elaborated by authors

The table above presents an applied example of the Composite Banking Resilience Index (CBRI) for three systemic banks in the Republic of

Moldova – MAIB, Moldindconbank, and Victoriabank – based on a set of fictitious normalized data. Results and Interpretation:

1. MAIB has the highest resilience score (CBRI = 0.810), being classified as "High Resilience."
2. Moldindconbank records a solid score (CBRI = 0.748), also classified as "High Resilience."
3. Victoriabank is at the lower threshold of the upper category (CBRI = 0.692), being classified as "Moderate Resilience."

To support a quantitative and integrative evaluation of sectoral resilience, this study introduces a Composite Banking Resilience Index (CBRI). The CBRI is structured around the five dimensions of resilience and follows established guidelines for composite index construction provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development[11] and the European Commission's Joint Research Centre[12]. These methodological foundations ensure transparency in indicator selection, normalization, aggregation, and interpretation, facilitating the model's scalability and replicability for policy application.

Conclusions

In the context of the Republic of Moldova, where the economy faces various challenges, including political and economic instability, corruption, and an underdeveloped financial infrastructure, the banking sector plays a crucial role in maintaining financial stability and promoting sustainable economic development. The authorities of the Republic of Moldova, in particular the National Bank of Moldova (NBM), have implemented a set of regulations aimed at guaranteeing the stability of the banking sector. These include capitalization requirements, risk monitoring, and consumer protection regulations. However, challenges remain in the consistent application of these regulations, especially in the context of periods of economic instability.

The banking sector of the Republic of Moldova benefits from international cooperation, through programs and initiatives supported by international financial organizations, such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. These institutions can provide technical

[11] OECD., *Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators: Methodology and User Guide*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264043466-en

[12] M. Saisana, A. Saltelli, & S. Tarantola, *Uncertainty and Sensitivity Analysis Techniques as Tools for the Quality Assessment of Composite Indicators*. Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society), 2005, 168(2), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-985X.2005.00350.x

assistance, advice, and financing for projects that support the development of a sustainable banking sector.

The interconnection of the banking sector of the Republic of Moldova with the European market contributes decisively to strengthening financial resilience by diversifying funding sources, expanding investment opportunities and integrating into European supervisory and regulatory mechanisms. Access to the single market provides banking institutions with the opportunity to benefit from additional liquidity and modern risk management tools, thus reducing vulnerability to internal and external shocks. At the same time, alignment with European standards of governance, prudence and transparency increases investor and depositor confidence, strengthening the stability of the financial system. Interconnection also facilitates the transfer of good practices in the field of digitalization, sustainability and financial innovation, supporting long-term competitiveness. Therefore, progressive integration with the European market not only strengthens the resilience of the banking sector, but also contributes to creating a favorable framework for the sustainable development of the national economy.

Overall, the developments of recent years highlight a steady process of consolidation of the banking sector in the Republic of Moldova, marked by improvements in corporate governance, increased transparency, and gradual alignment with European standards. Following the major vulnerabilities caused by the 2014–2015 banking crisis, the financial system has made significant progress in terms of capitalization, risk management, and diversification of credit and deposit portfolios. In 2024, the banking sector is characterized by a relatively stable situation, supported by prudent policies, yet it remains exposed to external risks of geopolitical, currency, and macroeconomic nature. Therefore, the long-term strengthening of resilience depends on maintaining prudent banking policies, reinforcing supervisory mechanisms, and capitalizing on the European integration process as the main driver of modernization and sustainability.

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CORPORATES AND CRYPTOCURRENCY: NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract: *Cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology are becoming increasingly popular in the world of private and corporate business. These innovations speed up money transfers and protect sensitive materials. Cryptocurrencies are difficult to regulate, exchange rates can be very volatile, and the technology itself is still new to many companies. The purpose of this article is to understand how large corporations are using cryptocurrencies, what their advantages and disadvantages are, and what the future holds for them. To achieve this, the latest research articles, reports, and expert opinions were studied. Therefore, we found that some companies are already actively using cryptocurrencies and that blockchain helps increase transparency and trust in business. However, there are also problems, many countries do not yet know how cryptocurrencies should be regulated, and there is a risk of cyberattacks. Since we are authors from Moldova, in this article we also researched and compared the attitude of corporations towards cryptocurrencies in our country. We analyzed the existing regulatory framework, the level of adoption of digital assets among Moldovan companies, and the possible prospects for their integration into the economy. The main conclusion is that, despite the existing problems,*

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cryptocurrencies and blockchain have the potential to change the way large companies operate. However, for their successful implementation, safety and regulatory aspects must be taken into account.

***Keywords**: Cryptocurrencies, Blockchain, Corporations, Corporate Affairs, Money Transfers, Future Technologies, Data Security.*
***JEL Classification:** G15, G28, O33, E42, D81*

Introduction

Every year, interest in cryptocurrencies grows not only among individuals but also among large corporations. Whereas previously Bitcoin and other digital currencies were primarily used by private entrepreneurs, they are now becoming an important tool in the operations of entire companies. Organizations view cryptocurrencies and blockchain technology as an opportunity to streamline large remittances, reduce regulatory costs, and increase transparency in their operations. However, certain challenges remain: governments in many countries have yet to adopt clear regulations governing the use of cryptocurrencies, and sudden fluctuations in exchange rates can lead to financial losses. This article examines how companies utilize digital assets, the associated benefits and risks, and also considers potential future market prospects.

Theoretical Background: Review of Scientific Sources

What Are Cryptocurrency *and Blockchain?*

Cryptocurrency is a digital form of money that exists exclusively in the digital space and is not subject to traditional banking regulations.

Blockchain is a decentralized ledger that enables secure and transparent exchange of cryptocurrencies among transaction participants without intermediaries, such as banks or payment systems. Blockchain is the primary technology that underpins the operational activities of cryptocurrencies.[1]

Bitcoin* is currently regarded as the most globally recognized digital currency. However, there are many other cryptocurrencies, such as USDT** and ETHERE***. By 2025, thousands of different virtual currencies are already in existence.

Cryptocurrencies are used to achieve various objectives: online payments for goods (on platforms that accept digital currencies), investments (to generate profit due to exchange rate volatility), and cross-border money transfers (with fees significantly lower than those of standard systems).

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However, the widespread adoption of this technology does not provide only convenience and autonomy. There is a specific set of risks associated with various factors: high volatility (degree of exchange rate fluctuation), insufficient or entirely absent regulation in some countries (risk of falling victim to fraud and being unable to protect consumer rights).

Cryptocurrencies require thorough analysis and careful awareness of the associated risks.[2]

Why Do Corporations Use Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain?

In recent years, large corporations have actively started using cryptocurrencies and blockchain to optimize their processes. The security guarantees provided by blockchain ensure that data cannot be edited or deleted. As a result, corporations can avoid contact with fraudsters and reduce auditing costs. For example, the reconciliation process (financial data reconciliation) in the banking sector is significantly accelerated and becomes more accurate due to blockchain. A study by Juniper Research suggests that implementing blockchain for international transactions allows banks "to reduce costs from $301 million in 2021 to $10 billion by 2030".[3]

Cryptocurrencies are also convenient for international payments: they enable rapid fund transfers, with low fees, and are not bound by banking schedules. However, their high volatility remains a serious risk. By accepting cryptocurrency payments, a corporation may generate additional profits but may also incur losses due to sudden increases in the value of digital assets.

Cryptocurrency offers companies new opportunities, but its volatility exposes them to potential financial losses.[4]

How Do Corporations Implement Cryptocurrencies and Blockchain in Their Activities?

Introducing cryptocurrency in the corporate sector is a complex, multi-stage process that requires an integrated approach.

The first step for a company is to make a decision based on a clear understanding of the objectives for implementing cryptocurrency payments. These objectives may include optimizing international

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[3] [2]. TAdviser. *Why companies choose cryptocurrencies*. Available at: https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F:%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BC%D1%83_%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%81_%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B5%D1%82_%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BF%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%82%D1%8B. Accessed: 11.03.2025.

[4] [2]. Ibid.

settlements, diversifying assets, or increasing transparency in financial transactions.

Next, a legal analysis is conducted, as cryptocurrency regulations vary significantly across countries. To mitigate legal risks, corporations consult with lawyers and examine taxation and reporting issues.[5]

In the following stage, the company determines the most appropriate method for accepting cryptocurrencies. Options may include integrating with existing payment services such as BitPay[6] or Coinbase Commerce[7], or developing proprietary infrastructure.

After selecting a platform, the integration process with the financial system begins: crypto wallets are created, communication with accounting systems is ensured, and mechanisms are developed for exchanging digital assets for fiat currency.[8]

One of the key steps is security. To protect funds, companies use cold wallets, multi-factor authentication, and transaction monitoring systems to prevent fraud.[9]

Before full-scale cryptocurrency adoption, testing is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of payment processes, consider exchange rate fluctuations, and identify potential operational risks.

After a successful testing period, cryptocurrency becomes an integral part of business processes. Companies start using it for settlements with clients and partners, paying employee salaries, and making long-term investments.[10]

The introduction of digital assets provides corporations with several benefits, including reduced transaction costs, accelerated international payments, and increased financial transparency. However, in the absence of competent regulation and reliable protection mechanisms, cryptocurrency transactions may present significant risks.

To better understand the implementation process of cryptocurrency transactions in companies, Figure 1 provides a demonstrative overview, summarizing the key steps described above.

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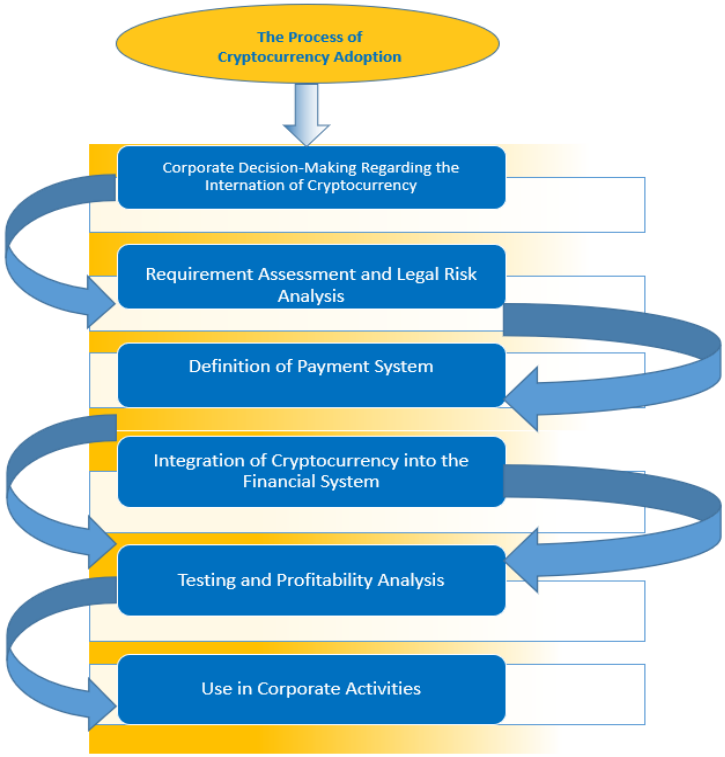

Figure 1. The Process of Implementing Cryptocurrencies in Corporate Activities

Source: Developed by the authors based on the studied sources.

Thus, this process helps corporations reduce transaction costs, accelerate international settlements, and increase transparency in financial transactions. However, without competent regulation and reliable security, the risks remain significant.

Benefits for Companies

Advantages and Challenges of Using Cryptocurrencies in Business

The use of cryptocurrencies in the corporate sector provides companies with a range of significant benefits that can substantially change the way they conduct business. Firstly, cryptocurrencies help reduce transaction costs. Cryptocurrency transfers are cheaper because they exclude intermediaries, such as banks, which is particularly beneficial for international settlements.[11]

[11] [4]. BitPay. Available at: https://www.bitpay.com/. Accessed: 12.03.2025.

Another major advantage is the acceleration of payments, as cryptocurrency transactions typically occur within minutes, regardless of the time of day or the location of the sender and recipient.[12]

In addition, the use of blockchain technology increases the transparency of business processes, as all transactions are recorded in an open ledger, contributing to greater trust between partners and clients.[13]

Alongside these benefits, there are also significant challenges. Regulation remains one of the main issues. The legal status of cryptocurrencies varies across countries, creating uncertainty for companies and investors.[14]

The high volatility of cryptocurrencies also makes them an unstable means of payment, as their value can change dramatically in a short period.[15]

Security is another major concern, as cryptocurrency wallets and exchanges are vulnerable to cyberattacks, requiring enhanced protective measures.[16]

Furthermore, the lack of clear taxation and financial reporting regulations in some jurisdictions increases the legal risks for companies using cryptocurrencies.[17]

Table 1 summarizes the main advantages and disadvantages of using cryptocurrencies in business, provides real-life examples, and evaluates the importance of certain aspects. This will help offer a more objective view of the risks and opportunities that cryptocurrencies present for companies (Table 1).

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Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Cryptocurrencies in Business

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	EXAMPLES	EVALUATION
Cryptocurrencies eliminate intermediaries, reducing the cost of international transfers.[18]	Different legal standards across countries create uncertainty.[19]	Tesla suspended the use of Bitcoin due to regulatory uncertainty.[20]	Essential for global companies.[21]
Payments are processed within minutes, without time or location restrictions.[22]	Sudden value fluctuations make cryptocurrencies risky for settlements.[23].	Microsoft accepts Bitcoin, but volatility creates risks.[24]	Medium importance for small payments.[25]
Blockchain records transactions, enhancing trust between parties.[26]	Cryptocurrency wallets are susceptible to attacks, requiring high security.[27]	Coinbase develops protective systems, but threats remain.[28]	Important for company reputation.[29]
Reduces personnel expenses for employees handling international	Lack of clear taxation and reporting regulations increases legal risks.[31]	Meta abandoned the Diem project due to legal issues.[32]	Critical for startups and large corporations.[33]

[18] [4]. BitPay. Available at: https://www.bitpay.com/. Accessed: 12.03.2025.

[19] [7]. CoinDesk. Available at: https://www.coindesk.com/ru/markets/2025/03/14/russia-turns-to-crypto-to-bypass-western-sanctions-in-oil-trade-reuters; https://www.coindesk.com/policy/2025/02/19/u-s-sanctioned-countries-such-as-iran-leaning-heavily-into-crypto-chainalysis. Accessed: 12.03.2025.

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[33] [11]. Ibid.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	EXAMPLES	EVALUATION
transactions manually.[30]			

Source: Developed by the authors based on the studied sources.

At present, cryptocurrencies continue to be an ambiguous yet promising tool for conducting business. Despite the clear benefits in terms of speed, transparency, and cost savings, corporations face certain factors that complicate their use, such as legal uncertainty, volatility, and cyber threats.

We believe that the successful implementation of cryptocurrency solutions requires a comprehensive approach: regulation must be considered, security levels improved, and risk hedging strategies developed.

In the future, we can expect companies to use cryptocurrencies more actively as clearer legislation and technological solutions emerge, enhancing reliability and stability. However, much remains to be done before full adoption of digital technologies in corporate business.

Regulation of Cryptocurrencies in the Corporate Sector Across Different Countries

The development of cryptocurrencies has resulted in different countries adopting varied approaches to their corporate use. In some countries, companies actively use digital assets for settlements, investments, and financial transactions, while in others, corporate cryptocurrency usage is severely restricted. The lack of uniform international standards creates challenges for multinational corporations and increases legal uncertainty.

Differences in Corporate Cryptocurrency Regulation

- **United States:** Cryptocurrencies are treated as assets, and their use is regulated by multiple agencies simultaneously: the SEC[34] (if the cryptocurrency is considered a security), the CFTC[35] (if regarded as a commodity), and the IRS[36] (for tax accounting). Companies must report

[30] [2]. TAdviser. *Why companies choose cryptocurrencies*. Available at: https://www.tadviser.ru/index.php/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%8C%D1%8F:%D0%9F%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D0%BC%D1%83_%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%81_%D0%B2%D1%8B%D0%B1%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B5%D1%82_%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BF%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BB%D1%8E%D1%82%D1%8B. Accessed: 11.03.2025.

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crypto assets, and transactions are subject to taxation. Giants like Tesla and MicroStrategy[37] hold Bitcoin in corporate reserves, but operations are governed by strict regulations.

- **European Union:** The adopted MiCA regulation[38] introduces strict requirements for corporate cryptocurrency use. Cryptocurrency exchanges and stablecoins ***** are subject to licensing, and companies working with digital assets must comply with KYC/AML regulations.[39] For example, PayPal[40] introduced cryptocurrency payments adapted to MiCA requirements.[41,42]
- **China:** Since 2021, cryptocurrency transactions have been banned, and mining ****** has been completely halted. Chinese companies cannot apply digital funds in business operations but actively implement CBDC[43] (digital yuan), which operates in a controlled environment. International corporations such as Alibaba[44] and Tencent[45] are testing a central bank digital currency for internal settlements.[46]
- **Japan:** Cryptocurrency exchanges and corporations using digital assets must obtain a license from the Financial Services Agency (FSA)[47]. For example, Rakuten[48] and SBI Holdings[49] provide cryptocurrency services that meet clear investor protection standards.[50].

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[50] [24]. Financial Services Agency (FSA), Japan. Available at:

- **Switzerland:** One of the most favorable countries for corporate cryptocurrency use. In the well-known "Crypto Valley" in the canton of Zug[51], corporations use cryptocurrencies for tax payments, and banks offer crypto accounts for companies. Crypto companies, such as the Ethereum Foundation[52], successfully implement operations in Switzerland thanks to flexible regulations.[53].
- **Moldova:** As authors from Moldova, we consider it important to account for the specific regulation of cryptocurrencies in our country, as it undoubtedly affects the prospects of local corporations.

Currently, Moldova lacks clear legislation controlling the use of digital assets by large companies. The National Bank of Moldova (NBM) does not recognize cryptocurrencies as legal tender, but their possession and exchange are not prohibited. For corporations, this creates legal uncertainty: tax and accounting regulations are not adapted to digital assets.[54]. To avoid legal risks, some Moldovan corporations register crypto businesses in other countries (e.g., Estonia or Switzerland). The lack of regulatory initiatives hinders the mass adoption of the crypto industry in the country.

Below, we present an illustrative chart demonstrating how far different countries have advanced in regulating cryptocurrencies in the corporate sector. While the United States, the EU, Japan, and Switzerland create favorable conditions for business, Moldova remains in a zone of uncertainty, which impedes industry development (Figure 2).

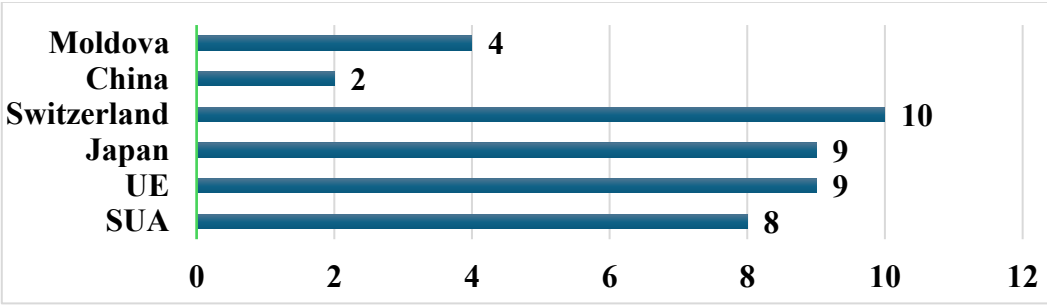

Figure 2. Level of Cryptocurrency Regulation in the Corporate Sector
Source: Developed by the authors based on the studied sources.

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Countries with clear regulations (USA, EU, Japan, Switzerland) provide companies with predictability and legal protection, contributing to the development of corporate crypto assets. In China, cryptocurrencies are banned, but an alternative state-backed digital currency is being developed.

Potential for Cryptocurrency Development in Moldova

Despite existing restrictions and the ban on cryptocurrency use in Moldova, the country still presents significant potential for the development of cryptocurrency technologies, particularly in the corporate sector. By 2025, Moldova has 54,377 digital asset users, representing 1.35% of the total population, ranking 87th globally.[55] This figure could be an important factor for future growth, as private cryptocurrency users significantly influence the adoption of digital assets in the corporate sector. If cryptocurrencies are actively used by individuals, the likelihood of their adoption by large corporations increases automatically. Private users already gain experience with digital assets and integrate them into daily life, providing practical opportunities for transferring these technologies to the corporate sector and adapting crypto solutions in company operations.

Corporations are generally cautious regarding the use of new technologies, but private user experience can significantly accelerate the adaptation of digital assets and blockchain technologies in business. Some companies in Moldova have already begun accepting payments via platforms such as BitPay[56], indicating growing interest in digital assets among Moldovan enterprises. With increasing technological literacy and a growing number of experienced cryptocurrency users, corporations are likely to begin integrating these technologies into their operations.

Furthermore, Moldova has a real chance of becoming a significant player in the Eastern European cryptocurrency market, even amid legal uncertainty. While this uncertainty has discouraged many corporations from widespread adoption, the growing number of private users offers hope that the technology will eventually be integrated into the corporate sector. The experience of independent cryptocurrency users, despite the absence of comprehensive legislation, can form the foundation for innovative business solutions, providing companies with new ways to optimize international settlements and enhance financial transaction transparency.

Active cryptocurrency usage among private users in Moldova can also positively impact the adoption of digital assets in other sectors of the

[55] [31]. Business Pages. *Moldova ranks 87th worldwide in digital asset users.* Available at: https://ybp.md/ru/article/moldova-zanimaet-87-mesto-v-mire-po-dole-polzovateley-kriptovalyut-k-ostalnomu-naseleniyu. Accessed: 14.03.2025.

[56] [4]. BitPay. Available at: https://www.bitpay.com/. Accessed: 12.03.2025.

economy. In the long term, once laws and regulations are adapted to new realities, corporations that leverage the experience of employees and partners already familiar with cryptocurrencies will be able to adopt new financial instruments more rapidly and fully exploit digital assets.[57]

Conclusion

For corporations, cryptocurrencies and blockchain represent not only technological challenges but also strategic opportunities. Large companies are beginning to recognize the importance of these technologies as key to future competitiveness. Cryptocurrency usage allows for reduced costs of international transfers, faster settlements, and decreased reliance on traditional financial systems, which is particularly important for global corporations operating across multiple jurisdictions.

However, corporations face a number of specific risks. First is the volatility of cryptocurrencies. For large companies with billion-dollar turnovers, unpredictable exchange rate fluctuations can significantly affect profitability and business stability. Even when cryptocurrencies are used for intercorporate settlements or asset storage, they may remain an unreliable tool for long-term stability.

Second, regulation remains a major concern for most corporations considering cryptocurrency adoption in their operations. Taxes, legal issues, and changes in legislation can greatly affect the ability of corporations to integrate cryptocurrencies into their financial systems. In countries with strict regulations or total bans on cryptocurrencies, it becomes difficult for corporations to work with such assets. Conversely, in countries with progressive legal frameworks, corporations can adapt quickly and capitalize on new opportunities.

Additionally, corporate security regarding cryptocurrency use requires special attention. Blockchain protocols may provide a high level of security, but corporate systems and platforms interacting with cryptocurrencies can be vulnerable. Hacker attacks, errors in smart contracts, or even unauthorized access to wallets can cause significant damage.

Reputational risk is also an important factor. For major brands, maintaining consumer and partner trust is crucial. Insufficient transparency or unpredictability in cryptocurrency transactions can lead to negative consequences for corporate image.

Thus, it is important for corporations to strike a balance between innovation and control, actively monitoring legislative changes and developing internal security systems. Blockchain and cryptocurrencies offer

[57] [31]. Business Pages. *Moldova ranks 87th worldwide in digital asset users*. Available at: https://ybp.md/ru/article/moldova-zanimaet-87-mesto-v-mire-po-dole-polzovateley-kriptovalyut-k-ostalnomu-naseleniyu. Accessed: 14.03.2025.

incredible potential to improve business processes, but to use them effectively, corporations must not only invest in technology but also develop an agile strategy capable of adapting to the rapidly changing regulatory environment surrounding these technologies.

List of Terms

- Bitcoin* – a payment system that uses a unit of the same name to record transactions.
- USDT – a cryptocurrency asset created on the Bitcoin blockchain.
- ETHERE* – a blockchain platform.
- Hedging** – opening transactions in one market to offset the impact of price risks of an equal but opposite position in another market.
- Stablecoin*** – a general term for cryptocurrencies whose exchange rate is intended to be stabilized, for example, by pegging their value to conventional currencies.
- Mining**** – the process of obtaining cryptocurrencies by performing complex calculations using a computer.

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ESSENTIAL MEASURES FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA TOWARDS FISCAL CONSOLIDATION AND BUDGET SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: *Adopting policies that guarantee stability and sustainability is critically needed in the challenging economic and geopolitical environment we are currently experiencing, both domestically and globally. The urgency with which these measures must be implemented in Romania, a country characterized by inflation, pressure on the public budget, an excessive deficit, and accelerated indebtedness, no longer allows for temporary or populist solutions. Delays in assuming and implementing them would only result in significant costs for the country's citizens as well as for its reputation and credibility abroad.*

The entire budgeting system must be rethought through structural changes, fiscal restraint, and a genuine collaboration with the populace and corporate sector. According to this viewpoint, financial sustainability and fiscal consolidation are essential elements of economic growth and boosting public trust in state programs.

Keywords: *fiscal consolidation, sustainability, stability, fiscal adjustment*

1. Increasing budget revenues by broadening the tax base: a fiscal necessity for Romania

In the context of a persistent budget deficit and the constraints imposed by its membership within the European Union, Romania needs to address the issue of fiscal sustainability through measures aimed at both increasing

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revenues and making expenditures more efficient. One of the essential directions for action is to broaden the tax base, with the aim of increasing tax revenue collection without excessively increasing the burden on active taxpayers.

Romania's tax revenues, expressed as a percentage of GDP, are below the European Union average (around 27-28%, compared to an EU average of over 40%)[1]. This reality reflects not only a low level of collection, but also a narrow tax base, affected by numerous exemptions, facilities and areas of tax privileges. In a fair and efficient system, the tax base must be broad, and taxes distributed in proportion to contributory capacity.

In Romania, the flat tax rate (10%) is applied uniformly to all income, regardless of source or amount[2]. There are also gaps in the taxation of property and non-productive assets, such as individuals who own multiple properties but pay insignificant local taxes and special, non-contributory pensions that are partially exempt from taxation[3].

The government should consider a coherent tax reform, which would include progressive taxation of very high incomes (over 25,000 lei/month), a revision of the property tax by differentiating between the main and additional residences, a periodic revaluation of real estate assets, as well as taxation of special pensions exceeding the 7,000 lei threshold, in the name of contributory equity[4].

These measures could lead to a sustainable increase in tax revenues without impacting the vulnerable classes, would strengthen the perception of fiscal justice in society and would discourage the accumulation of non-productive assets. Broadening the tax base must be carried out with social responsibility, so as not to amplify poverty or hasten the exodus of qualified labor, and it is essential that tax reforms be accompanied by real dialogue with the business environment and unions, compensatory measures for those with low incomes, and tax education campaigns that explain the purpose and benefits of fair taxation.

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[1] Eurostat, EU and euro area tax-to-GDP ratio down in 2023, OpenStats, 2024. Available at: https://openstats.eu/en/news/eu-and-euro-area-tax-to-gdp-ratio-down-in-2023-025aec.

[2] Global Property Guide (2024) Taxes and Costs in Romania. Available at: https://www.globalpropertyguide.com/europe/romania/taxes-and-costs (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

[3] PwC (2024) Romania – Individual Tax Summary. Available at: https://taxsummaries.pwc.com/romania/individual/income-determination (Accessed: 9 July 2025).

[4] Mediafax (2024) IMF asks Romania to abandon flat rate: 25% tax for the rich, VAT at 21%. Available at: https://www.mediafax.ro/english/imf-asks-romania-to-abandon-flat-rate-25-tax-for-the-rich-vat-at-21-23563472 (Accessed: 29 August 2025).

a) Fighting tax evasion: incentives for accurate and expeditious tax payment, targeted controls, and digitalization

Tax evasion is one of the most important sources of budgetary losses in Romania. International and national reports consistently estimate annual losses of over 6–8% of GDP, which means a minus of tens of billions of lei for the public budget. In a context in which Romania is facing an excessive deficit and has European commitments to fiscal adjustment, combating tax evasion is no longer an option, but a strategic necessity. This objective can be achieved through a balanced combination of fiscal, budgetary and institutional reforms[5].

The digitalization of ANAF/NAFA (National Agency of Fiscal Administration) represents the central pillar of fiscal modernization in Romania, as by implementing systems such as e-Invoice, SAF-T and e-TVA, the tax administration acquires the capacity to collect data in real time, reduce fraud and increase collection efficiency, thus correcting historical deficiencies caused by underfinancing, bureaucracy and lack of transparency.

For Romania to increase its tax revenues without tax increases, a coherent strategy is essential that combines the digitalization of ANAF/NAFA (National Agency of Fiscal Administration), tax controls targeted at high-risk sectors, the professionalization of inspectors, and incentives for the correct payment of taxes, all supported by an interoperable IT infrastructure, specialized personnel, and public trust in data protection, within a new tax approach based on efficiency, transparency, and partnership with the taxpayer.

b) Review of the flat rate: between fiscal sustainability and social equity

Romania has been applying, since 2005, a flat tax rate of 16% (later reduced to 10%), for both labour and capital income[6]. This measure, initially conceived as a tool to attract investment and stimulate tax compliance, has been maintained for almost two decades[7]. However, current budgetary

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[5] Taxation and Customs Union, 2025. VAT gap in the EU - Country Report Romania. [pdf] Available at: https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/6a38fb0c-4a3d-4326-a249-8bebcb5b60af_en?filename=ROMANIA+Country+specific+VAT+gap+report+2023.pdf [Accessed 9 July 2025].

[6] Spengel, C., Lazar, S., Evers, L. and Zinn, B., 2012, *Romania's Development to a Low-Tax Country*. ZEW Discussion Paper No. 12003. Available at: https://ftp.zew.de/pub/zew-docs/dp/dp12003.pdf [Accessed 21 June 2025].

[7] A. Gheorghiță, 2023, Understanding Public Support for the Flat-Rate Personal Income Tax in Romania. Sustainability, 15(9), p. 7576, Available at: https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/9/7576 [Accessed 21 June 2025].

realities - the increase in the public deficit, the pressure on social spending and the low level of tax revenues (below 28% of GDP) - require a reanalysis of the sustainability of this tax regime[8].

The revision of the flat rate is justified both for reasons of equity, as the current system disproportionately favours high incomes and undermines real tax progressivity, and for efficiency reasons, given that, despite the flat rate, Romania records a low level of collection, persistent evasion and a sharp polarization of income, without clear benefits for vulnerable categories or the middle class.

In this context, it is necessary to analyse alternatives to the flat rate, such as the introduction of progressive taxation or temporary surcharges for high incomes. Progressive taxation, a common practice in most EU countries, involves increasing tax rates along with the level of income, being considered a fairer and more efficient mechanism for mobilizing budgetary resources, and as an interim solution, the introduction of temporary surcharges on very high incomes, substantial dividends or special pensions has been adopted in various post-pandemic states to support fiscal balancing and consolidation without affecting the broad masses of taxpayers.

The revision of the flat rate, although it may generate economic risks such as discouraging skilled work or a negative impact on entrepreneurship, as well as political and administrative obstacles related to the opposition of the business environment and the need for ANAF/NAFA (National Agency of Fiscal Administration) reform, must be approached as a fair and sustainable recalibration, accompanied by protectionist thresholds, limited periods for surcharges, public consultation, transparency and compensatory measures for the vulnerable, in order to increase budget revenues without affecting social cohesion or economic competitiveness.

1. Cutting budget spending

In the context of a structural budget deficit and increasing pressures on public finances, reducing state spending is becoming an essential objective for Romania's fiscal sustainability. The public administration, due to its size and limited efficiency, represents one of the main areas for reform. According to Eurostat, Romania allocates over 10% of budget spending to public sector wages, a percentage comparable to the EU average, but without achieving commensurate results in terms of the quality and efficiency of public services[9].

[8] D. Dăianu, *The Twin Deficits Syndrome – The Case of Romania*. Romanian Journal of Economic Forecasting, 28(1), pp. 23-39. Available at: https://ideas.repec.org/a/rjr/romjef/vy2025i1p23-39.html [Accessed 21 June 2025].

[9] Eurostat, 2025. *Government expenditure on general public services*. [online] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-

In Romania, public administration presents significant imbalances, with bureaucratic overload at the central level and redundant government agencies, while essential sectors such as health and education are undersized, reflected in overlapping competences, positions without clear attributions and local organizational charts disproportionate to the real needs of communities.

The proposed solutions include conducting a detailed functional audit in each institution to identify redundant positions, their gradual reduction through natural retirements and restructuring, as well as the merger of agencies with similar responsibilities, measures that must be applied with caution so as not to affect critical sectors such as health, education and public order.

a) Temporary hiring restrictions within the public sectorc

In times of budget crisis, temporary freeze of public sector hiring is a common practice in European economies. In Romania, although this measure was applied after the 2009 crisis, the lack of a coherent strategy for prioritizing essential functions has reduced its effectiveness, which is why a freeze of 12–24 months is recommended, except for strategic positions such as those in health, education and public order, the implementation of a ratio of "1 hiring for 2 vacant positions" and the periodic reassessment of staffing needs based on administrative performance indicators, thus generating immediate savings and subsequently facilitating the professionalization of the public apparatus through targeted hiring[10].

Romania ranks among the last in the EU in terms of digitalization of public services, according to the DESI index, where excessive bureaucracy, lack of interoperability of IT systems and dependence on paper documents affect the efficiency and trust of citizens[11]. However, by implementing electronic signature, creating a national interoperability hub and prioritizing electronic forms, the government can reduce operational costs, increase transparency and accessibility of services, learning from examples such as Estonia and Lithuania, and thus modernize public administration to create a more efficient, leaner and closer to the needs of society.

explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_on_general_public_services [Accessed 17 August 2025].

[10] European Commission, *Economic Forecast: Romania*. [online] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-romania-2025_en [Accessed 17 August 2025].

[11] European Commission, *Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2024: Romania*. [online] Available at: https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-romania [Accessed 17 August 2025].

b) Regulation of special wages and retirement benefits

One of the important factors contributing to the fiscal imbalance in Romania is the unbalanced remuneration and pension system, especially pensions and special salaries, which create deep inequities and generate unjustified budgetary expenditures in relation to contribution or performance[12].

In a context where the budget deficit exceeds the 5% threshold of GDP, and the share of social spending in the total budget is continuously increasing, the revision of these systems becomes a fiscal and moral urgency.

Special pensions are derogatory retirement regimes that do not respect the contributory principle. They apply in Romania to a relatively small number of beneficiaries (approximately 200,000 in 2024), but the budgetary impact is significant. According to the Fiscal Council, spending on special pensions exceeds 12 billion lei annually and is growing at an accelerated pace.

Special pensions, uncorrelated with the real contributions of the beneficiaries, generate inequities towards pensioners in the public system and are often combined with active income, through the premature return to public functions of some pensioners aged between 45 and 55[13].

A balanced solution to the problem of special pensions could include their gradual integration into the public pension system or progressive taxation of non-contributory components, the establishment of a maximum ceiling (for example, 3–4 average net salaries) and the reform of the award criteria for special categories, in accordance with the decisions of the Constitutional Court, but within the limits of fiscal sustainability, following the example of European states such as France, Poland or Portugal, which have unified or eliminated privileged regimes[14].

c) Correlating productivity and inflation to raises in wages and pensions

Wage and pension increases decided on electoral criteria, without a solid economic or budgetary foundation, generate fiscal imbalances and unpredictability, which is why it is essential to establish automatic indexation mechanisms, correlated with inflation and productivity, in

[12] Fiscal Council, 2024. *Annual Report on Romania's Fiscal Policies*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.consiliulfiscal.ro/rapoarte/2024.pdf [Accessed 9 July 2025].

[13] OECD, *Pensions at a Glance: Europe 2021*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.oecd.org/els/public-pensions-europe-2021.pdf [Accessed 11 July 2025].

[14] European Commission, *Economic and Fiscal Assessment: Romania*. [pdf] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/economic-fiscal-assessment-romania-2024.pdf [Accessed 11 July 2025].

accordance with the principles of fiscal responsibility promoted by the European Commission and the IMF[15].

Examples from Germany, Sweden, Estonia and Latvia show that automatic indexation formulas, fiscal responsibility legislation and transparency in pension adjustment can strengthen the equity and sustainability of public systems, providing a viable model for the ethical and efficient reconstruction of the social contract in Romania[16].

d) Audit of major expenditures

An efficient public budget requires not only obtaining sustainable revenues, but also a rational and efficient spending of existing resources. In Romania, the ex-post evaluation of major budget programs is fragmented, and performance auditing remains underdeveloped. This contributes to budgetary waste, the perpetuation of useless programs and an inefficient use of public funds, including European funds[17].

Romania spends significant amounts annually on recurrent budget programs, but in the absence of clear result indicators and a systematic performance audit, a considerable part of public funds is allocated inefficiently, perpetuating costly policies with modest impact and weak economic justification[18].

Expenditures that need to be audited with priority include major subsidies, multi-annual public investment programs, publicly funded IT systems and business support schemes, and for efficient management it is essential to institutionalize an independent budget evaluation mechanism, introduce mandatory cost-benefit analyses and ensure transparency through the involvement of civil society and real-time digital monitoring of project execution[19].

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[15] European Commission, *Fiscal Sustainability Report: Romania*. [pdf] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fiscal_sustainability_report_2025.pdf [Accessed 11 July 2025].

[16] OECD, *Pensions at a Glance: Europe 2021*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.oecd.org/els/public-pensions-europe-2021.pdf [Accessed 11 July 2025].

[17] European Court of Auditors, 2021. *Annual Report on EU Funds in Romania*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=60177 [Accessed 3 July 2025].

[18] OECD, 2021. *Government at a Glance: Romania*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.oecd.org/governance/government-at-a-glance-romania.pdf [Accessed 17 August 2025].

[19] European Commission, *Economic Forecast: Romania*. [online] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-romania-2025_en [Accessed 17 August 2025].

2. Boosting the total amount of European funds absorbed

In the context of increasing pressure on public finances and limited internal fiscal space, European funds represent the main countercyclical instrument available to Romania. They provide non-reimbursable sources of financing that can support public investments without deepening the budget deficit[20].

However, for this potential to be harnessed, it is essential to increase the administrative absorption capacity and prioritize projects with a high economic multiplier. Romania benefits from over 45 billion euros from cohesion policy in the period 2021–2027, approximately 28 billion euros through the PNRR and additional funds from the REPowerEU program, but the absorption rate remains low, with only ~60% of PNRR projects contracted and effective payments below 25% by June 2025, while cohesion funds are just starting to be implemented, being affected by persistent problems such as bureaucracy, lack of technical expertise and bottlenecks in procurement[21].

To increase the absorption of funds, it is necessary to review the PNRR planning to respect milestones, provide technical support to local beneficiaries through regional units, prioritize projects ready for execution, and establish a special government team dedicated to unblocking problematic projects, such as regional hospitals or the digitalization of ANAF[22].

Eliminating bureaucratic bottlenecks in public procurement in Romania requires simplifying legislation (amending Law 98/2016) with thresholds adapted to EU-funded projects, fully digitizing the process (integrating SEAP, SICAP, and MySMIS), and accelerating the resolution of appeals at CNSC and courts, to reduce delays and increase efficiency.

Prioritizing projects with immediate economic impact is crucial in a context of budget deficit, so that European funds are directed towards investments with a high multiplier effect, stimulating the growth of tax revenues and job creation, with an emphasis on road and rail infrastructure, energy transition, administrative digitalization and modernization of education and health.

The intensive use of European funds to finance investments instead of domestic sources contributes to reducing the pressure on the budget deficit,

[20] Idem.

[21] European Court of Auditors, 2021. *Annual Report on EU Funds in Romania*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=60177 [Accessed 3 July 2025].

[22] European Commission, *Romania: Progress in PNRR Implementation*. [pdf] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/romania-pnrr-progress-2024.pdf [Accessed 29 August 2025].

increasing GDP potential by improving infrastructure and human capital, increasing indirect tax revenues by stimulating economic activity and decreasing interest costs, making the rapid absorption of these funds an essential tool for macroeconomic balancing and supporting sustainable development under conditions of fiscal stability.

3. Transparency and trust in tax policies

A sustainable tax system does not only depend on technical measures, but also on the trust of the public, investors and international partners in the financial governance of the state. Transparency and predictability are the foundations of trust in tax policies. In Romania, legislative instability, lack of transparency and weak budgetary planning have often undermined these foundations.

Adopting a realistic multiannual budgetary framework, linked to the national economic strategy and based on prudent estimates of revenues and expenditures, is essential for increasing the credibility of fiscal policy, prioritizing investments and ensuring sustainable planning in a context dominated by rigid expenditures and constant budgetary pressures.

To correct the current dysfunctions and avoid the risks associated with the excessive deficit procedure, Romania must develop a realistic and transparent multiannual budgetary framework, linked to the objectives of the PNRR, with the active involvement of the Fiscal Council in validating projections and anchoring annual budgets within clear expenditure limits and performance indicators, so as to respect the commitments assumed towards the European Commission and avoid possible conditionality of European funds[23].

Respecting Romania's fiscal commitments implies adopting a credibility framework based on structural reforms, avoiding slippages in election years and maintaining a transparent dialogue with European institutions, as EU trust directly influences the state's financing costs and the perception of Romania as a stable economic partner in the region.

Real transparency of public spending requires the clear, complete and accessible publication of all budgetary data including salaries, contracts and executions in a format that is easy for citizens to understand and monitor, an essential condition for democratic accountability and the prevention of waste, especially in the case of state-owned companies.

To increase accountability and efficiency in the use of public money, it is essential to implement measures such as the monthly publication of detailed expenditures, an open electronic contract register interconnected with SEAP, full transparency regarding personnel paid from public funds,

[23] Fiscal Council, *Annual Report on Romania's Fiscal Policies*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.consiliulfiscal.ro/rapoarte/2024.pdf [Accessed 9 July 2025].

and encouraging civic control over the budget, all of which contribute to strengthening public trust and preventing abuses.

Fiscal transparency and predictability are not just abstract principles of governance, but concrete factors that reduce financing costs, increase taxpayer confidence, limit waste and corruption, and create the premises for sustainable economic stability, essential for relaunching trust in the state and for the success of any fiscal reform.

4. Avoidable steps in the process of fiscal adjustment

In the contexts of fiscal adjustment and budgetary constraints, the pressure to adopt rapid measures is significant. However, both domestic and international experiences indicate that untimely interventions can have significant negative consequences in the medium and long term, affecting economic performance, social cohesion and the institutional credibility of the government[24].

Sudden and unexpected tax increases undermine business confidence, reduce investment levels and can stimulate the informal economy, suggesting that any fiscal adjustment should be planned according to a clear, consultative and predictable timetable. This avoids the recessionary effects and job losses that could result from untimely fiscal measures[25].

Similarly, abrupt cuts in social spending, made without a rigorous impact analysis, can increase inequalities, generate social instability and hamper economic recovery. Fiscal reforms need to include measures that protect vulnerable populations and be accompanied by initiatives to improve the efficiency and targeting of social support[26].

Also, fiscal promises without budgetary coverage undermine government credibility, fuel public deficits and may lead to harsh financial corrections later[27]. Consequently, any measure with a major budgetary impact must be based on rigorous economic analysis, public consultation and clear sources of financing, as part of a balanced fiscal consolidation strategy[28].

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[24] OECD, *Economic Outlook for Eastern Europe and Central Asia*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.oecd.org/eea/economic-outlook-2020.pdf [Accessed 21 August 2025].

[25] European Commission, *Economic Forecast: Romania*. [online] Available at: https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-romania-2025_en [Accessed 21 August 2025].

[26] OECD, 2021. *Social Expenditure Database – Romania*. [online] Available at: https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/expenditure.htm [Accessed 30 August 2025].

[27] IMF, 2022. *Fiscal Monitor: Strengthening the Credibility of Public Finances*. [pdf] Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/FM/Issues/2022/10/10/fiscal-monitor-october-2022 [Accessed 11 August 2025].

[28] European Commission, 2024. *Fiscal Sustainability Report*. [pdf] Available at: https://economy-

5. Example of a realistic package of fiscal measures to reduce the budget deficit

In the context of excessive budget deficit and financing constraints, Romania needs a balanced mix of measures that generate additional revenues, increase the efficiency of public spending and avoid measures with a regressive impact. Such a package can be built based on tax reform, expenditure optimization and maximization of European resources.

Introducing a progressive system of taxation of high wage incomes (for example: 10% for incomes up to 15,000 lei/month, 20% for the part exceeding 15,000 lei and 25% for the amount exceeding 25,000 lei) could generate additional revenues of over 6 billion lei, without affecting the middle class. This measure, adopted in most EU Member States (Romania and Bulgaria being notable exceptions), contributes to increasing tax equity and reducing the burden on vulnerable groups. However, to prevent income migration to alternative forms of remuneration, effective mechanisms to prevent abuse are needed.

Imposing a differentiated tax on luxury properties and vehicles (e.g., real estate valued at over 500,000 euros and cars priced at over 100,000 euros) could generate additional revenues estimated at over 2 billion lei, without affecting most taxpayers. This measure is justified by the proportional but insufficiently adapted nature of the current property tax system, which does not correctly reflect the real value of assets. Many European countries have already implemented similar taxes, such as taxation of second homes, high-emission vehicles or non-productive assets.

Reducing administrative costs by 10%, through digitalization, reorganization and merging oversized structures, could generate savings of approximately 5 billion lei annually. It is essential that these measures avoid reducing critical positions in essential sectors such as education and health, focusing on reducing bureaucracy and eliminating redundant entities.

Increasing the absorption of European funds by 10%, by simplifying procedures and digitizing administrative processes, could generate an additional approximately 3 billion lei annually in investments, contributing to development without increasing public debt, in the current context of a low execution rate under the PNRR and cohesion funds caused by bureaucracy, lack of administrative capacity and delays in public procurement.

The proposed package generates a net positive budgetary impact of approximately 10 billion lei annually, without significantly affecting consumption or vulnerable categories. The measures are based on concrete data and international experiences, ensure a balance between revenues and

finance.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fiscal_sustainability_report_2024.pdf [Accessed 11 July 2025].

expenditures and promote fiscal equity by directing taxes to taxpayers with greater financial capacity. The implementation of this set of measures can play a key role in reducing the budget deficit, in respecting European commitments and in restoring confidence in Romania's fiscal policies.

For sustainable fiscal consolidation in a crisis context, the government must adopt smart and fair policies that stimulate revenues and streamline spending, without compromising the pace of economic growth. Political will, deep structural reforms and transparent communication with citizens and international partners are needed.

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REVIEWING WOMEN'S LITERARY CONTRIBUTION IN PRE-MODERN TIMES IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES

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Abstract: *This article is a review of recent scholarship on digital humanities and an essay concerned with rethinking the way in which women authors were treated by literary history from the middle of the 20th century onwards. The official literary canon is still predominantly male, if we consider literary histories and academic courses in English literature written until recently. Women's works, though acknowledged sometimes, got discarded as minor and sub-literary. If the feminist critics of the 1980-ies rediscovered the female authors, since then we can assert that women's literature is a field of research par excellence most definitely enriched by digital technology. The 'cultural studies' perspective which places literature in its larger historical and cultural contexts has been giving women their well-deserved place as readers, editors, journalists and writers of novels, essays, poetry, in short, as agents of cultural change. In short, we argue that a synthesis of all these data will necessarily trigger a reconsideration of the canon – which has already become more inclusive.*

Keywords: *digital humanities, literary canon, feminist criticism, literary history.*

Introduction

Literary histories are usually concerned with the formation of a national canon or organized along literary genres. They inevitably come to reductionist outcomes even while placing the literary works in their due historical, social and economic context, as Ian Watt did in the *Rise of the Novel* (1957). Although it is correct to argue, as Watt did, that the rise of the new novel form is connected to the rise of economic individualism, the spread of Protestantism and a new middle-class readership[1], books like his and many other subsequent ones[2], ignore the complexities of women's participation in the development of eighteenth- century British literature. Feminist literary historians and critics have, since the 1980-ies, filled the

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[1] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1957, pp. 60-61.

[2] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (1954).

gaps and recovered the forgotten female authors[3], rejecting the issues of literary value that had relegated women authors to a sub-literary status, and evaluating their fiction for its cultural resonance, for what it reveals about readership and their eighteenth-century world.

Jane Spencer duly noticed that the eighteenth century witnessed both the emergence of the novel as a genre and that of women as professional writers, but, while the first event was well documented and debated the second one was largely ignored[4]. Dale Spender identified more than 100 women authors of novels in the 18-th century (and around 600 novels written by them)[5], a number bigger than that of male authors. However, their work was all but suppressed by modern literary critics and historians, in favor of five great male authors: Defoe, Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Sterne.

For a period, at the beginnings of feminist literary history, women's fiction was overemphasized at the expense of other genres, due to evolutionary as well as professionalized and print-centric accounts, producing "yet another kind of historical reduction".[6] Until the emergence of cultural studies, literary scholarship has been more concerned with the major, genre-defining authors of fiction or poetry, rather than with authors of more period specific forms like dramas, letters, periodical essays, or operas librettos[7].

While the canon is composed of authors validated by criticism, culture and time, the digital archive offers a complete image of an age, that can be very different from the canon, and it is important for the public to gain awareness of a very different literary landscape than that offered by the classic textbooks. The new digital methods can foreground women's participation in the intellectual and cultural movements of their age by unearthing previously hidden women writers. Four digital projects that deserve attention are:

Orlando Project - Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present - launched in 2006, includes entries on the lives

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[3] For example, Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983), Jane Spencer's *The Rise of the Woman Novelist. From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (1986), Dale Spender's, *Mothers of the Novel – 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* (1986), or Susan Staves' *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (2006) to cite only a few.

[4] Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist. From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p.viii

[5] D. Spender, *Mothers of the Novel – 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen*, London: Pandora Press, 1986.

[6] D. Mazella; C. Willan; D. Bishop; Elizabeth Stravoski; W. Barta; M. James, "'All the modes of story': Genre and the Gendering of Authorship in the Year 1771", *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts*, 1640-1830: Vol.12: Iss.1 (2022), p. 1

[7] Ibidem, p. 2

and writing careers of more than 1300 writers, linked together with a great deal of contextual historical material (collaborative research of more than 100 scholars, co-edited by Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy)[8].

Perdita Project – launched in 1997, is a digital collection of manuscripts written and compiled by the early women writers of the British Isles throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Launched by the University of Nottingham Trent and taken over by the University of Warwick, it has benefitted from the contributions of editors Dr Elizabeth Clarke, Dr Jill S. Millman, Dr Victoria E. Burke and Dr Jonathan Gibson[9].

Women Writers Project - working since 1988 on building an electronic collection of rare and less familiar texts. Its flagship publication is *Women Writers Online*, a TEI-encoded collection of more than 470 texts written or translated by women and first published in print between 1526 and 1850[10].

New approaches to European Women's Writing Project (NEWW Women Writers) - developed between 2014 and 2023 under the direction of Suzan van Dijk (Huygens Institute, The Netherlands). A new database, named SHEWROTE (Studying Historical Early Women's Reception: Oeuvres, Texts, Engagements) is currently under construction at Radboud University (The Netherlands), under the direction of Alicia C. Montoya[11].

Facts and Fiction when rediscovering women's literature

Feminism is a recent development, and women had little agency in the past – these are the tenets of our age. However, within the feminist critical project of rediscovery and counter-representation the presence of women in literature appeared to be more extensive than was imagined possible.

A few facts about women and writing in early modern England: from the late Middle Ages, women of the aristocracy were educated, sometimes achieving a solid Greek and Latin erudition. While few works are known to have been published by women in England before 1500, over one hundred works were composed or translated by English women between 1500 and 1640[12]. In that period women translated, from Greek and Latin, and we can mention Margaret Roper, daughter of Sir Thomas More (1478 – 1535), who corresponded with another humanist and friend of the family, Erasmus of Rotterdam. She published a translation of a Latin work by Erasmus, and also wrote poems, now lost.

[8] The Orlando Project | CWRC/CSEC

[9] Home - Perdita Manuscripts

[10] Women Writers Project - The NULab for Digital Humanities and Computational Social Science

[11] Women Writers in History | DARIAH

[12] Women writers: Life and Times: Internet Shakespeare Editions

During the Elizabethan period, when theatre was considered to be a strictly male affair, five women involved in the English theatre. Lady Jane Lumley (1537 – 1578) did the first translation of a Greek play into English, namely Euripides' *Iphigenia,* while Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639) was the first woman to write a play in English, namely *Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry* (1613) in iambic pentameter, about Mary, wife of King Herodes the Great. And she published it under her own name. Mary Wroth (1587-1652) wrote a pastoral, *Love's Victory* (1619-20). However, she is much more famous for her romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), which is a tribute to her uncle's *Arcadia*. However, Wroth's romance is a real *roman a clef*, whose characters, while being kings and queens, have the recognizable faults and vices of some contemporaries.

In 1642 theatres closed under the Puritan rule of the English Parliament, but two sisters, Lady Jane Cavendish (1621–1669) and Lady Elizabeth Brackley (1626–1663) wrote a play, *The Concealed Fancies* (1645), which was probably performed in one of the family estates and revolves around the courtship and marriage of the sisters Luceny and Tattiney. The heroines "hold out for and get 'equall marryage,' having trained the gallants, Courtley and Praesumption, who were intending to train them."[13].

As the patriarchal system in 17th-century Britain made the idea of a female author publishing original literature unacceptable, Katherine Philips (1632–1664) translated two of Corneille's plays, *Pompey* and *Horace*, which were very successful on the London stage, but her translations were published anonymously. On the publication of *Pompey*'s translation in her own name she wrote to her friend Sir Charles Coterel (whose pastoral pseudonym was 'Poliarchus'): "*But should I once own it publickly, I think I should never be able to show my face again"*[14]. Philips' poems and translations were published posthumously under her own name in 1667.

Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673) – incidentally, she was the stepmother to Lady Jane Cavendish, wrote several plays and published two Folio collections of her plays—*Playes* (1662) and *Plays, Never before Printed* (1668). Her plays were met with negative criticism not only because of her gender but also because she would not adhere to neoclassical rules of drama[15].

Margaret Cavendish studied and wrote poetry, philosophy, science and novels; she wanted to be a serious writer, and a recognised writer, and her

[13] Virginia Blain, et al., eds., *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, pp. 190-191.

[14] D. Spender, *Mothers of the Novel*, London, Pandora Press, 1986, p. 34

[15] Playwrights | History Matters: Celebrating Women's Plays of the Past

most popular publications are her biography of her husband *The Life of William Cavendish* (1667) and *The Blazing World* (1668), which is often credited as one of the first science fiction novels. Because she did not shrink from public view, and sought publication, she was publicly mocked and ridiculed[16]. She can be considered as one of the first literary celebrities, although she was held up as a figure of fun: so great was her fame in the 1660s that wherever she went in London she was greeted by people desperate for a glimpse of her.

Cavendish was a feminist who reflected at length on the position of women and the power of men. She argued that it was women's lack of education that gave them the appearance of inferiority: '*Whereas in nature we have as clear an understanding as men*', *'if we were bred in schools to mature our brains and to manure our understandings, that we might bring forth the fruits of knowledge*' (from *The World's Olio,* 1655)[17]. Men, she said '*will not let us divide the world equally with them, as to govern and command, to direct and dispose as they do.*' And thus, she added, our '*slavery has so dejected our spirits, as we are become as stupid as beasts are but a degree below us, and men use us as but a degree above beasts' (The World's Olio,* 'Preface to the Reader' 1655)[18].

But what prepared the field for the explosion of women writers, editors, journalists, as the 18-th century witnessed? What we know now about women's literary activity at the beginning of the eighteenth century is that more women were involved in writing the emerging genre of the novel than men. In the view of traditional literary scholars, it was however a male activity – Walter Allen writes in his 1954 *The English Novel: A Short Critical History*: "The comparatively sudden appearance at the turn of the seventeenth century of the novel as we know it was a manifestation of a marked change in men's interests".[19]

At the turn of the century, Mary Astell and Catharine Trotter Cockburn were articulating philosophical views that proved that women could conceive a moral philosophy of their own. In 1702 Catharine Trotter published a defense of John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and in 1705 Mary Astell published her major philosophical work, *The Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church*[20].

Mary Astell (1666–1731) was an advocate of universal education for women, publishing the widely read manifesto *A Serious Proposal to the*

[16] D. Spender, *op. cit.,* p. 44

[17] Ibidem, p. 47

[18] Ibid., p. 48

[19] Walter Allen, *The English Novel: A Short Critical History*, London, Phoenix House, 1954, p. 21

[20] Karen Green, "A Moral Philosophy of Their Own? The Moral and Political Thought of Eighteenth-Century British Women", *The Monist*, 2015, 98 (89-101), p. 89

Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of Her Sex, Parts I and II (1694, 1697), which detailed a plan to set up an academy (university) for women, funded by their dowries. Astell's most revolutionary work was the proto-feminist treatise *Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700) which exposed the inequalities of contemporary marriage practices. By 1706 it had a 3rd edition. In her treatise Astell pointed to the inequality between men and women - when a woman married she put '*herself entirely into her husband's power, and if the matrimonial yoke be grievous, neither law nor custom affords her that redress which a man obtains*'[21].

On the other hand, Catharine Cockburn published a pamphlet – *A Discourse Concerning a Guide in Controversies* (1707) which argued for the individual's right to follow their own conscience. The belief of these authors that there is a natural law, that it is natural to desire happiness, which depends on our acting in accordance with our God-given human nature, the way in which they advocated independence of thought and freedom for women (within the frame of religion) must have helped in the emancipation of many women[22].

Thus, we could say that the intellectual atmosphere at the beginning of the century allowed and encouraged women to take their lives seriously and attempt to make a living by their own intelligence and work. The fact that during the Restoration of Charles II (1660-1685) women could attend theatres and also to play on stage as professional actresses was also an important step in their emancipation.

Why is it, that some authors – mostly women – who were hugely popular in their time did not make it in the literary canon? The criticism against women writers was the poor literary quality of their works.

One of the feminist critics from the 1980-ies identified the techniques used by the establishment to suppress women's writing – Joanna Russ pointed that the prohibitions against women's writing were first and foremost societal expectations. The women who had the courage to write in the 17-th century were ridiculed as presumptuous. Anne Finch (1661-1720), a poet, complained in verse:

„Alas! A woman that attempts the pen
Such a presumptuous creature is esteemed
That fault can by no virtue be redeemed"[23]

[21] The data about Mary Astell is sourced from The British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-astells-reflections-upon-marriage, accessed 23rd of april 2023

[22] In Mary Astell's words, If "I do what is fit I answer the end of my being", The British Library, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/mary-astells-reflections-upon-marriage, accessed 23rd of april 2023

[23] Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983, p. 11

Another method to suppress women's writing was to deny their authorship, if they did write. Margaret Cavendish was accused of hiring a male scholar to write her works, because she used learned terms and „wrote of many matters outside her ken."[24] Even Mary Shelley was accused of not writing *Frankenstein* and Branwell Bronte was considered by some to be the real author of his sisters' works[25]. Therefore, anonymity or a masculine pseudonym became the means to counteract these reproaches.

Another measure against women, which acounts for the exclusion of so many women writers from the canon is what Russ called the 'pollution of agency'. Women who were recognized as writers were criticized for coarseness, unlady like attitudes, or lacking refinement, by their contemporaries. Even 20-th century criticism of eighteenth-century women novelists shows a double standard - half or even two thirds of the fiction printed in the eighteenth-century is condemned as minor, or mediocre and salacious, and that is the fiction written by women.

Moreover, the female tradition in literature has been ignored or even taken over by men. Although we can say that it starts with Aphra Behn, Mary Delariviere Manley and Eliza Haywood (the so-called fair triumvirate of wit), as well as with Jane Barker (1652–1732), or Penelope Aubin (1679-1731), these novelists were either dismissed as writers of low-brow amatory fiction, or forgotten as boring moralist writers.

Delarivière Manley - author of a *roman à clef* for which she was imprisoned for a week in 1709 - "Secret Memoirs and manners of several Persons of Quality of Both sexes. From the New A*TALANTIS*, an Island in the *Mediterranean*", was a true political journalist, and shared the editorship of the *Examiner* with Jonathan Swift. However, while Jonathan Swift is seen first and foremost as a political satirist, Delarivière Manley, who was interested in the same issues, and wrote on the same topics, has been consigned to the category of *scandalmonger*.

Eliza Haywood's writing career spanned for 40 years from 1719 and coincided with the time that the novel assumed its basic form we know today. And Eliza Haywood was successful and experimented with many forms – epistolary novels, sentimental novels, 'thrillers', moralising novels and realistic novels. She was also a publisher, started newspapers for women (*The Female Spectator*), wrote 'agony columns'. Her output was astonishing, with 67, or even 93 works attributed to her. Yet, she is not mentioned in two standard studies of the novel (Walter Allen's *The English Novel* and Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel)*. These exceptional fore-runners were followed throughout the 18-th century by other women, from different backgrounds, regions, and with different concerns, who all published well-

[24] Ibidem, p. 22
[25] Ibidem.

acclaimed novels. The realistic narrative was supported by female novelists like Penelope Aubin, who dealt with problems of slavery, inheritance and women's problems in managing their finances, as well as being treated fairly by their guardians.

How was this large number of women authors treated by their contemporaries ? As early 18-th century editors of the popular magazines like the *Spectator* despised the novelistic genre, they wrote a lot criticising the many female authors. Delariviere Manley was sharply criticised by Addison and Steele, and Alexander Pope made a vicious personal attack on Eliza Haywood in *The Dunciad* (1728), considering it a high moral purpose to expose the low moral standards of the scribblers of the literary industry.

Scholars of literature of the following century like Madame de Stael observed with benevolence the connection between the rise of the novel and the entrance of large numbers of women in the literary world – in the arena of literary production as well as consumption. The association of women with the novel was so strong as to prompt terming the novel „a feminine thing"[26]. As Jane Spencer showed in her pioneering work, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986), women were the main force, both as consumers and producers in the literary market of the novel. They initiated new genres and styles – from the science fiction (Margaret Cavendish), to the sentimental (Sarah Fielding) or quixotic, moralistic tale (Charlotte Lennox), to tales of travel and exotic adventures in far-away lands (Penelope Aubin), or they expanded the gothic genre started by Horace Walpole (Ann Radcliffe).

Maria Edgeworth, noted in 1795 that: "Women of literature are much more numerous of late than they were a few years ago. They make a class in society, they fill the public eye, and have acquired a degree of consequence and appropriate character."[27]

What arguments could we bring for the importance and quality of women's fiction, so that they deserve a place in the canon? Although they were dismissed as either low-brow amatory, or formulaic, sentimental fiction, the novels written by women throughout the eighteenth century were very diverse. A special mention deserve the quixotic novels, which have the moralistic intention of saving young women from falling prey to romance reading, and becoming disconnected to the real world of reason. The Scottish Charlotte Lennox (c. 1729-1804) – with her famous *The Female Quixote*

[26] Michael Danahy, « Le roman est-il chose femelle? » in *Poetique*, 1976, vol. 25 (pp. 85-106) and Madame de Stael, *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800), cited by Josephine Donovan, "Women and the Rise of the Novel: A Marxist-Feminist Theory", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1991, vol 16, no. 3 (pp. 441-462), p. 441

[27] Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O'Gallchoir and Penny Warburton (eds.), *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere (1700-1830)*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 1

(1752) and the American Tabitha Tenney (1762-1837), author of a conduct book for young women and wife of a senator, with her novel *Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon* (1801), profess to emulate Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. They considered Cervantes' novel was written so that the readers, by looking into the mirror of fiction could avoid the fate of the deluded character Quixote. Both Arabella in *The Female Quixote*, and Dorcas Sheldon in *Female Quixotism* are completely immersed in a romantic world. For them, the world of romance *is* the real world and this leads them to make many mistakes. A strange man seen in church, or a new servant in the house are taken to be princes or nobles in disguise, in love with them, and with intention to carry them off. If Arabella almost loses the good suitor who loves her and is agreed by her father, Dorcasina rejects the serious suitor and will never marry, finally gaining the wisdom of living in the real world, and advising her best friend to educate her daughters without romances.

Some women explored a range of political issues through the medium of fiction. Elizabeth Inchbald used *A Simple Story* (1791) to develop an understanding about Catholicism in a hostile Protestant England. Lady Morgan justified her fiction writing with the purpose of exposing the plight of Ireland. Charlotte Smith raised questions about authority and democracy – her later novels such as *Desmond* (1792) and *The Old Manor House* (1793) praised the ideals of the French Revolution.

Sarah Robinson Scott (1723-1795), sister of the popular blue-stocking critic Elizabeth Robinson Montagu, created in *Millenium Hall* a female utopia, a world where women take up masculine roles by being capable leaders, surveying and managing an estate. Not really recognized as a proto-feminist, Scott manages to redefine the role of women. *Millenium Hall*'s sequel, *The History of Sir George Ellison* further explores the themes of charitable activism and social reform as the hero tries to emulate the community's example in a series of projects of his own.

Another writer with a strong feminist bent was Jane Barker – a Jacobite who went into self-imposed exile when James II fled England during the Glorious Revolution in 1688. Her novels were written after she returned to London in 1704. Receiving a good education from her brother, Barker established herself as an author within mostly male coteries during the second half of the seventeenth century. A celibate woman, Barker tried to make it an acceptable alternative to marriage. Her works offered her readers information regarding single womanhood, female education and politics.

Such writers were not frivolous, or sensational, and it is the *diversity* of women's writing which has been overlooked and deserves to be reconsidered.

Actually, commenting on the contributions of Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne in the period 1740-1771,

another proto-feminist critic – Clara Helen Whitmore, challenges their position with the statement that "The plot of most of their fifteen realistic novels is practically the same: The hero falls in love with a beautiful young lady, not over seventeen, and there is a conflict between lust and chastity. The hero travels up and down the world where he meets with a series of adventures, all very much alike, and all bearing very little on the main plot. At last fate leads the dashing hero to the church door, where he confers a ring on the fair heroine, a paltry piece of gold, the only reward for her fidelity, with the hero thrown in, much the worse for wear, and the curtain falls with the sound of wedding bells in the distance"[28].

An important issue about the women writers is how or why they came about to write. Historians have argued that women's choice to become writers was primarily an economic one. "Of the few professions open to women, acting was the most lucrative, but it was self-promoting and flamboyant - and hence morally suspect. Writing alone offered the promise of decent wages without demanding a lengthy apprenticeship or even a remarkable genius - and a writer's gentility might survive relatively undamaged."[29] Eliza Haywood, Hannah More, Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Wollstonecraft and many other women writers relied on their literary earnings. The case of Sarah Fielding, Henry Fielding's younger sister, is also a good example on this point. She published seven novels and lived with her brother following the death of his wife because, like her other two sisters she could not get married and gain the support of a husband due to the family's lack of money for a dowry.

The feminine novels of the early 18-th century could also boast a good dose of realism because they were grounded in the political discourses of the time as well as in the mercantile activities of the empire. One of the most interesting authors at the beginning of the century is Penelope Aubin (c.1679-1738) who published seven novels between 1721 and 1728. After her death, her works were published as *A Collection of Entertaining Histories and Novels, Designed to Promote the Cause of Virtue and Honor* – and this very much sums up the general perception of the age on her style and character. She considered herself a moralistic writer, presenting virtuous heroines caught up in fantastic adventures, in exotic, far-away places. However, she is much more interesting than this conventional view would have her. She married (against her family's wishes) Abraham Aubin, the son of a merchant family who left her in charge of the family affairs when he served in the army. Her novels were popular and apparently drew on her

[28] Clara H. Whitmore, *Woman's Work in English Fiction: From the Restoration to the Mid-Victorian Period,* New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, Knickerbocker Press, 1910, pp. 24-5, cited by Spender, *op. cit.,* p. 188

[29] E. Eger, C. Grant, C. O'Gallchoir and P. Warburton (eds.), *op. cit.,* p. 14

own experience; her heroes are shipwrecked, attacked by pirates and taken into slavery (*The Strange Adventures of the Count de Vinevil and His Family*, 1721, *The Noble Slaves, or The Lives and Adventures of Two Lords and Two Ladies Upon a Desolate Island,* 1722). They move across Europe – settle in Germany through marriage, or elope from France to settle in the Netherlands (*The Life and Adventures of Lady Lucy,* 1728). Parents are too authoritarian imposing marriage, which drives the children to elope, or run away. They are often deceived by false and interested friends, and lose their fortune, due to their ingenuity and loyalty.

The editor of her posthumous collected works praised her neutral and simple style as a virtue, putting it in contrast with the "unnatural Flights and hyperbolical Flourishes that catch the Fancies of some of her sex." (1739 *Preface* to Vol. 1 of Collected Works). One could say she was a woman very much in tune with the realities of her time. Born in a noble family and educated as such, she got well acquainted with business through her marriage, and well documented in the international affairs, probably from her husband's military career. Her novels are concerned with important issues of her time: merchants' travel and its perils, from pirates and sometimes the resulting slavery. In 1720 her brother-in-law David's ship, *The Prosperous*, was boarded and taken by French pirates in the Caribbean. By 1718, piracy was making trade in the West Indies and along the North American coast almost impossible. Capture by Muslim corsairs and subsequent enslavement in North Africa was a real risk for European sailors and other travelers in the Mediterranean. These were real issues of her time, not fanciful adventures, which should allow us to consider her a realistic author, describing the mercantile age in which she lived.

She also translated French novels, and her novels were published in America between 1777 and 1815, and translated into French, which gives her an international reputation in her time.

In the same line of diversity in themes and setting we can name Frances Brooke, née Moore (1724 – 1789), who was a novelist, essayist, playwright and translator. She married the Reverend Brooke and followed him on his mission work in Canada, where she stayed 5 years. There she wrote her second novel, *The History of Emily Montague*, published in 1769 in London, after her return. The novel incorporates much of her Canadian experience and was considered by some the first North American novel.

Mary Brunton (born Balfour, 1778 – 1818)[30], a Scottish novelist, produced another quixotic moralistic tale as her first novel, *Self-Discipline*.

[30] At 20 she fell in love with the Reverend Alexander Brunton, tutor to her younger brothers. The family did not approve of the attachment, and so Mary and Alexander eloped and married. Her husband encouraged her to study and to write. She published only two novels and left an unfinished one, as she died after childbirth.

In the preface she professes that the young people's disorderly appetite for reading needs to be provided with wholesome food, not with romances that delude. The heroine, Laura Mandeville, an exemplary woman and skilled painter, receives the attentions of a rather improper suitor, Hargrave, a voracious reader of romances and picaresque novels. Instead of proposing, he suggests making her his mistress. Horrified but still in love with him, Laura expects him to reform. Throughout the novel, Laura defends her honour from Hargrave's intrigues and after his death marries the anti-romantic and moral De Courcy, who has loved her from the beginning.

Another interesting and unconventional writer is Elizabeth Bonhôte (1744-1818). Born in Bungay, Suffolk, she married Daniel Bonhôte, solicitor and landowner. After writing five novels, she had a huge success with *Bungay Castle* (1796), a Gothic novel inspired by her husband's purchase of the ruins of the above-mentioned castle. Her second novel, *The Rambles of Mr. Frankly, Published by his Sister* is a moralistic tale of a character, Mr. Frankly, who learns from observing people during his walks in Hyde Park. The book was very popular and was translated into German.

Downturns of the feminist critical project

Despite a large number of studies that appeared in recent years about some of the one hundred plus women writers rediscovered by the feminist critics in the 1980-ies which view them through the lens of gender, colonialism and imperialism, queer desire, etc., many of them remain isolated from the canon. Their works are measured by the aesthetic and formal standards established by canonical male authors, and are marginalized for not fitting in.

Another problem with women writers is that their works are not read through a philosophical lens, as are major works of male authors (such as Shakespeare's plays considered to transcend the historical context and address the human condition in general). Though authors like Margaret Cavendish, Sarah Robinson Scott, or even Eliza Haywood in her later years produced novels that are representative of and illuminate the human condition in general. As two scholars of women writers, Jaime Goodrich, and Paula McQuade have aptly put it, "we need a feminist philosophical approach to early modern women's writing in which scholars do not write *about* female authors but rather *think with* them about the great existential questions that have vexed generations of human beings".[31]

[31] Jaime Goodrich, Paula McQuade, "Beyond Canonicity: The Future(s) of Early Modern Women Writers", *Criticism*, Volume 63, Number 1-2, Winter/Spring 2021 (pp. 1-21), p. 19

Conclusion

From the many studies on women writers published in the past thirty or forty years, there emerges an image of extraordinary diversity, of an eighteenth-century society where women had much more agency and participation in cultural matters than the official narrative allowed it: the studies in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere* highlight women's participation in the public life as commentators, historians and reformers involved in the anti-slavery lobby (Anna Barbauld's anti-slavery poem, *Epistle to William Wilberforce Esq*.). Catharine Macaulay, an influential historian of her time, argued in a pamphlet, *A Modest Plea for the Property of Copyright* (1774), for the necessity of perpetual copyright on the grounds that otherwise "'independent men not born to estates will be prevented from using their talents for the benefit of mankind' and that none would write except 'men in opulence, and men in dependence'"[32], giving us proof of the professionalization of writers and of the growing demand for culture among the middle class, as well as of women's prominent position in this business.

All the women writers of the past mentioned here could be styled 'feminists' *avant la lettre*. They seem to us now exceptional personalities, but they were educated women who claimed their own rights, and such women existed for almost as long as men writers, in England and elsewhere, but were not always in the spotlight. I think we owe a great many thanks to the tens of women professors and writers who, in the 1970-ies and 1980-ies, delved into libraries to discover the forgotten women writers of the eighteenth century, and then prepared digital editions. High-quality teaching editions of these authors are needed for their work to be made known to a wider public. The research methods of textual criticism, historism should be encouraged to ensure a correct dissemination of their texts. It is our duty to ensure that the best of these women writers make it into the canon, that they enter the textbooks and the reading lists in English Departments, and that their works are accessible to a wide public online.

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CONUNDRUMS OF INTERPRETATION: PRACTICES FOR FICTIONAL LITERATURE

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Abstract: *Ambiguity is one of writers' most efficient strategies that opens spaces for multiple interpretations attached to a particular utterance, as a calculated gap between the linguistic expression and the potential referent. Semantic indeterminacies, which are at this stage resolved, at least in a preliminary operation, by association with the global meaning, may be further clarified in the next stages of interpretation. The personal commitment of the performer is precisely the involvement of his understanding in the creation of this world, which is also his. Involvement does not eliminate objectivity, because it can only be achieved successfully in the correlation between explanation and comprehension. The paradigm of textual interpretation thus represents the hermeneutic circle itself, which includes the open dialectic between explanation and comprehension. This paper – Conundrums of Interpretation: Practices for Fictional Literature - investigates possible techniques of interpreting literary texts by comparing and contrasting various approaches in modern hermeneutics in order to identify and propose a pattern in the process of going from reading to analysis.*

Keywords: *hermeneutics, fictional literature, literariness, interpretation, literary theory*

Introduction

The critic M. H. Abrams, in his book *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition,* identified four critical orientations, depending on the centre of interest of each literary research approach. Expressive theories define the work as an expression of artistic subjectivity; they emphasize the author and develop with romantic criticism. Objective theories, which identify the work with its immanent textual structure, emphasize the work itself as a product of language changes, as an activation of linguistic operations of selection and combination. This category includes the studies of poetics, stylistic analysis, and narrative theory. The mimetic theories determine the work according to the represented reality. They are preoccupied with the problem of reference, and these studies are concretized through the semiotic, semantic,

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and hermeneutic approaches. Pragmatic theories analyse the work according to the effects produced on the reader; the emphasis is on the receiving audience and is illustrated by research in rhetoric, theories of reception, and pragmatics.

> "A good critical theory, nevertheless, has its own kind of validity. The criterion is not scientific verifiability of its single propositions, but the scope, precision, and coherence of the insights that it yields into the properties of single works of art and the adequacy with which it accounts for diverse kinds of art. Such a criterion will, of course, justify not one, but a number of valid theories, all in their several ways self-consistent, applicable, and relatively adequate to the range of aesthetic phenomena; but this diversity is not to be deplored. One lesson we gain from a survey of the history of criticism, in fact, is the great debt we owe to the variety of criticism of the past."[1]

To elaborate, the integrity of the text, despite the pluralism of meanings, unification of interpretations, ability to admit the fact that there is a previous critical tradition that has not disappeared, and is diversified and extended to various critical models can open to all socio-human values in a broad framework of ideas and mentalities. Moreover, as Iser pointed out,

> "For a long time, interpretation was taken for an activity that did not seem to require analysis of its own procedures. There was a tacit assumption that it came naturally, not least because human beings live by constantly interpreting. We continually emit a welter of signs and signals in response to a bombardment of signs and signals that we receive from outside ourselves."[2]

Consequently, the critique involves not only the careful inventory of the components of the work or the formal analysis of the text (objective theory), but also the complex trajectory through which different approaches cooperate to reveal the essence of the work. The reflexive ability on concerted analysis from several perspectives ensures objectivity and multiplies the chances of fully understanding the text in a pluralistic approach in the ongoing critical endeavour, involving a certain degree of technicality. Free reflection adds value to any critical study since it interprets what the techniques have extracted from the structures of the work with the purpose of achieving a wider universality.

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[1] M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and Critical Tradition*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953, pp. 4-5

[2] Wolfgang Iser,*The Range of Interpretation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 1

Efforts of the Russian formalist school to define literariness through an analysis of the formal characteristics of the work of art rather than study it from a sociological, psychological or historical point of view, culminated with the metamorphosis of the practical language into a nonutilitarian language, a poetic, original language, a potential material for literature, as Victor Schlovskij proposed with his concept of defamiliarisation[3]. He started by defending Futurist poetic experimentation because he considered that only new forms of art could restore to man the sensation of the world and achieved his own rhetoric in which formalist concepts such as defamiliarization, roughened form, poetic language versus practical language could achieve that creation of perception, or awareness, by overcoming automatization, which he considered to be the function of art.[4]

Language of literature

The language of literature has been a pivotal aspect of any text analysis, since the philological study is fundamental for any type of interpretation. The real angle of analysis, which also considers the reader in its reality, will look at reading pragmatically, as a particular act of communication, on which it can only be concluded in a virtual regime, as it can only exhaust in theory all the possible readings, especially in the case of fiction texts. When they enter the historical circulation, their generic specificity can be modified in its essence, and then the complexity of the research from the angle of reality increases even more. However, the study of the virtual dimension can lead to the observation of some characteristics valid for the real reading plan if the premises from which it starts are correct and if it relies on analyses of concrete texts, leaving open the dimension of generalizations and objectifying the experience.

First, that language is figurative (metaphorical) and has a double meaning; there is therefore a need for an interpretation that distinguishes the plurality of layers of meaning. Secondly, concerning what has been said, the text is a whole with which each sentence enters into a relationship, as part of this whole. However, the textual totality is not the sum of the sentences that make it up; each sentence, by its meaning, is situated at a certain level of the text, so that the text as a whole is a hierarchy of primary and secondary themes, super- and sub-ordered to each other.

> 'When a critic looking at such pictures is at a loss and asks: "What in the world does this mean, I don't understand"—and what precisely does he want to understand?—he is like the metaphysician ofthe fable: they want to pull him out of the hole in the ground he's in and all he

[3] În his 1917 essay *Art as Device*.

[4] Lawrence Crawford, "Victor Schlovskij: Différence in Defamiliarization", *Comparative Literature*, 1984, no. 36 (3): 209-219, pp. 209-210

can do is ask: "What sort of thing is rope?" More briefly: for him, perception that is valuable in and of itself does not exist. He prefers paper currency to gold: currency, with its conventionally assigned value, seems to him more "literary."'[5]

Multivocality associated with texts is something other than the polysemy of individual words. The plurality or textual ambiguity is characteristic of the whole construction of the meanings released by the text. It is open to reading and as such, to a multiplicity of readings and interpretive reconstructions. Whether this reading or interpretation is valid or not is a matter of probability. Validation of an interpretation can be a scientific knowledge of the text only insofar as it presents itself as a serious hermeneutical alternative that confirms (or refutes) within the same methodology (or from different positions) the development of arguments. Conjecture (which is the actual interpretation) and validation (verification of the interpretation according to its value of truth) lead us to a different understanding of the notion of the hermeneutic circle.

Between interpretation and validation, we have a circular relationship, similar to that between the subjective approach and objective distance in approaching a text. Theoretically, a text (which is, however, a limited field of possible constructions, no matter how complex) can be approached from any point on a scale ranging from dogmatism to scepticism, from unconditional acceptance to fierce denial. Interpretation of the textual meanings or conjecture is synonymous with comprehension, while validation is equivalent to explanation. The meanings are reconstructed by this exploratory interpretation.

Comprehension is oriented towards these proposed worlds opened by the references of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from meaning to reference, from what it says to what it talks about. To understand, therefore, means to situate yourself in this dynamic or path of the text. Understanding is this very movement between meaning and its own reference; it starts from the explanation of meaning in semantics to its opening into a world. Ricoeur emphasizes the paradigmatic nature of this dialectical movement. First of all, the structural model is considered a paradigm of explanation that can be extended, beyond the textual phenomenon, to all social phenomena. Secondly, the place of deep semantics is between structural analysis and proximity. Preceded by an objective explanatory analysis, comprehension can no longer be psychological and subjective; deep semantics gives it an epistemological foundation. Then, interpretation is mediated by the epistemological

[5] Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 33

foundation of the explanation. It is therefore not a matter of any sense of what is to be explained, but of an understanding of the world that the referential meaning of the text unfolds.

The various ways and practices of reading have in common three essential approaches: the visual inspection of the text, the release of meaning, and the reaction of the subject to what he reads. They roughly correspond to a complex of interconnected activities called perception, comprehension, and affectivity. To study procedurally the reading means to follow systematically the functioning of these activities, in the successive order of the entry into the game, identifying the contribution of each one, including of their main subcomponents, in the integrated and finalized totality of the performance. Given the complexity of the processes that take place simultaneously, interfering and at different levels, it is not surprising that there are large differences in the relative importance attributed to the various operators or the explanation of various operations. In the following presentation, two models of reading influenced by Semiotics and Psycholinguistics are presented. A description of the relevant aspects of the reading process in the first model includes word perception, which includes pronunciation and meaning.

The next stage of comprehension, which corresponds to the clear perception of semantic content, involves literal comprehension, determination of implicit meanings or assumptions, and clarifying implications and meanings beyond what they immediately postulate.

Proposed techniques

Some possible techniques of approaching a text may include the following stages:

1. Reaction to the author's ideas and their evaluation (critical opinions, emotional responses, conclusions)
2. Assimilation (fusion of information and ideas obtained by reading with those in the reader's possession)

The second model brings innovations, as it is more finely articulated and has five subdivisions:

1. Visual perception
2. Semiotics (the elements of the artefact are invested with the quality of signs, thus becoming code units
3. Semiotic identification (association of a meaning of each recognized sign)
4. Cognitive processing of data resulting from the first three operations to produce "concretisation", the term used by Roman Ingarden as a specific mental configuration. Cognitive processes may include:

1. The development of hypothetical semantic structures that allow the satisfactory integration of units of meaning,
2. the establishment of connections between units of meaning at different levels of complexity, and
3. producing meaning complementary to operations of meaning.

Evaluation is a confrontation of the concretization in progress with various norms of coherence and plausibility. First of all, the role of the pre-reading, respectively of the information regarding the text to be read, entered, or in the possession of the reader, and transformed into expectations, must be emphasized. Although this information comes from heterogeneous sources (title, gender marks, instructor recommendations, press), it is of unequal relevance and has a pre-critical or non-critical character, but it still has an influence on the formation of meaning, which is not negligible and should not be neglected. Perception is more than eye contact with verbal stimuli, but a constructive mechanism, a set of selected and structured information. Recognition is a semiotic act and comprehension a semantic one, but recognition includes semantic indices, and meaning incorporates perceptive aspects so that, although analysable separately, perception and comprehension must be considered as deeply interrelated activities. The biggest problems are the comprehension, which is the essential moment of reading, as it totalizes the cognitive activities, thanks to which the graphematic units at the phrasal, textual level are transformed into corresponding units of meaning. Or, from the phase immediately after the recognition of the word (still being in a perceptual plan), to the formation of the textual meaning, through a process of negotiating codes, highlighting the context and paratext, using mnemonic mechanisms, solving indeterminacies the road is interwoven with inverse connections, with a great complication, so that its analytical detachment and its intelligible representation is constantly threatened by simplification and reductionism. The qualitative difference between understanding sentences and understanding text should be noted.

Texts and their meanings

Two of the essential operations of comprehension are the determination of meaning and imaginative investment. Another side that is inseparable from the act of reading that some researchers ignore is the evaluative reaction. Understanding interferes with emotional phenomena triggered by any process of meaning release. Thus invested, meaning becomes a magnetic field in the flow of which sensations, ideas, and representations are continuously attracted. The text becomes an event of the reader's experience, and comprehension tends to become receptive when

affectivity and emotional conditions favour understanding, a truth observed by Jauss. Therefore, evaluation is not a separate sequence.

Affective phenomena must be treated in connection with the cognitive ones that they influence and on which they depend at the same time. Due to the insufficient nature of specialized research, interpretation as a primary object of study still has shady sides. It is not a separate stage of reading, in the main purpose of elucidating obscure or ambiguous passages. Thus conceived, interpretation intervenes throughout the reading, being a necessary component of the negotiation of meaning. In a narrower and more specialized sense of the term, interpretation is the central activity of hermeneutics, situated between comprehension and application (largely equivalent to exegesis). Unlike comprehension, where meaning is formed gradually and cumulatively, with the advancement of reading on the beginning-end linear vector, interpretation determines meaning independent of the temporality of performance, by simultaneously examining the text as a whole.

The first is uncertain and approximate, largely dependent on the subjectivity of the reader and his emotional predispositions, the second is based on repeated and careful readings, tends to faithfully respect the particularities of the text to optimally identify what is said, takes place in a way explicitly adopted based on validity criteria, and is testable by others. Thus interpretation is a correlate of reading, while assimilation is a separate activity that goes beyond the actual model of reading and belongs to the matter of reception because it does not focus on the text, but on how to use it. Thus, the procedural study of reading appears better outlined.

The central issue will be how to negotiate the meaning, how to remove the difficulties along the way, and how to use the keys (author's instructions), how to select and recode the material to connect what is already read with what is to be read), how to invest imaginatively in the text, explaining the assumptions, and filling in the blanks. Furthermore, the recording Dynamics in its process will be explored, from the performance of the initial reading sequence to the increasing reorganization of the semantic field concerning the progress made.

> "A new set of questions may then be advanced: which meaning, therefore, are we to choose, owing to the various capacities of an artistic expression? Which is the way to reach Todorov's (1981) "literariness" (a term to be explicated in the last chapter of the present text) as an integral part of Eco's theory? All these questions, naturally, do have their responses."[6]

[6] B. Hoxha, *Umberto Eco's Semiotics - Theory, Methodology and Poetics*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, p. 7.

Considered from these perspectives, the theory of literature becomes a discipline that frees itself from the apparent claim of autotelic being, resizing its research object and methods, it will seek to acquire more concreteness, to work not so much ascertaining, evaluating and categorical, but involving in cultural dialogue, issues, and dynamics of the humanities and beyond. It provides a meta-language to the sciences of communication, art, and advertising, social sciences, and history of ideas, implementing even its fundamental practices, critical-ordering, and hermeneutic and creative operations. In the twentieth century, even writers will imprint this spirit of dialogue between literature, the arts, and theoretical speculation of the avant-garde, pedagogy of the reception and production of literary values. The theories of impersonation of the poetic instance owe to these poet-theorists of modernism fundamental models (the theory of the objective correlative, that of the personae, of the heteronyms).

Therefore, in the sequence dedicated to the literature theory of the work-biography relationship, artistic self (fictional, metaphysical), empirical self (real, biographical), Model Author (understood by Umberto Eco in the sense of a textual strategy imposed by writing), and biographical presence, aimed for the fragments dedicated to the seminar study to illustrate this process conceptually. The approach of these concepts was based on the method of problematising, on the comparative analysis of the subject's hypostases in romantic literature, in the poetry of modernism, and biography poets, on understanding the differences between the masks proposed by each poet, on the awareness that literature projects models of existence, building various mechanisms of selfrepresentation.

The selection of the texts that represent the seminar discussions, which implicitly prepare and lead the progress in the debate, are followed by the diversity of the way of enunciation, illustrating the fact that this preoccupation of self-definition through work or self-transformation / loss in the creative process does not depend organically on the poetic form, the structure and character of the text, or the tone that

the writer adopts. Poetry or poem in prose, letters or diary pages, a literary manifesto, or simple anecdotes can become didactic material for the operation of nuanced distinctions aimed at understanding the relations that literature activates between the writer and lyric, between the writer and his fictional-poetic projections, and between the writer and his audience.

Reading and Interpreting Texts

The success of reading and interpreting practices is based on the double orientation of readers, on the directed alternation or voluntarily assumed as a methodical exercise of two stages: participation and self-reflection. Starting from these premises, the students do tasks, whose effect is

generated progressively, together with the punctual and specific intervention of the teacher in their way of reading, of comprehension of the texts chosen for debate. If at first they are given freedom to read the text, in the following seminars the reading will be oriented by questions, stimulating interest and focusing attention on certain issues, requesting comparisons between texts, visions, categories, ideas, and theories.

> "These different modes point to the fact that each genre of interpretation focuses on a specific task regarding the translatability to be realised. In hermeneutics, the circle is employed to interrelate the explicit with the implicit, the hidden with the revealed, and the latent with the manifest. It basically sets out to recover what an author has not been aware of when writing, or what lies beyond the historical material to be observed in the present, or what went awry in the human subject on the way to itself. Penetrating behind what is given in order to recuperate what is lost—that is, the author's subconscious, a historical past, or the buried telos of the fractured self—is what structures this type of interpretation."[7]

The main focus from this perspective is the optimisation of the operations involved, to varying degrees, when considering all possible criteria of interpretation validity, out of which the best known are: relevance, coherence, historicity, and intertextuality. There is evidence that there is a need for recalibration since modern literary hermeneutics cannot be based on a methodology for universal interpretation, but on a circumstantial logic of validity. It is precisely validity through its criteria that admits the acceptable possibilities, called interpretive systems.

For instance, postmodernist theories contest any ontological essentialism, but use its presuppositions to expose incompetence in interpretation and the semiotic object it deals with. Thus, the community, even if texts are used as a playing field to materialize different approaches, will eventually reach an agreement of judgment at a global level after some transient stages: "The Contemporary world is intrinsically dependent on a holistic approach, despite it being informed by tiny specializations and hyper-specialized professionals."[8]

The literary objects, as self-referential or pseudo-referential texts, have a contextual, mental, and virtual space where the succession of approaches could therefore save the imaginary reserve. Thus, open interpretation could overcome the problem of one-directionality, without abolishing the

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[7] W. Iser, *The Act of Reading, Theory of the Aesthetic Effect* (transl. E. Sznycer), Brussels: Pierre de Mardaga, 1985, p. 8

[8] Felix-Narcis Nicolau, *Morpheus: from Text to Images. Intersemiotic Translation*, Romania: Tritonic Publishing House, 2016, p. 21

ontological ground. In addition, an interpretation would no longer be considered outdated, but would be maintained as a reserve that can be revisited at a later time. This means that no matter how modern and different theories and their respective systems of interpretation may emerge, the old ones will never really be erased. For one thing, comments may be bivalent and resist a clear and stable classification. The idea of fluidity in interpretation theories is more appealing from this perspective, instead of considering them either right or wrong, as long as readership and their mentality also have an undeniable dynamic diachronically.

> "We can undertake a first type of reading which formally records, as it were, the text's interception of all the relations to a world that can be pointed out and to subjectivities that can converse. This transference into the 'place' – a place which is a non-place – constitutes a special project with respect to the theory of interpretation text, that of prolonging the suspense concerning the referential relation to the world and to the speaking subject. By means of this special project, the reader decides to situate himself in the 'place of the text' and in the 'closure' of this place. On the basis of this choice, the text has no outside but only an inside; it has no transcendent aim, unlike a speech which is addressed to someone about something. This project is not only possible but legitimate. For the constitution of the text as text and of the body of texts as literature justifies the interception of the double transcendence of discourse, towards the world and towards someone. Thus arises the possibility of an explanatory attitude in regard to the text."[9]

According to Paul Ricoeur, there are two ways to base text theory on the phenomenon of understanding. In other words, the problem that arises is no longer the conditions of the possibility of understanding the text (of the epistemological foundation of textual comprehension), but that of the being that exists only in the act of understanding. How it is possible to understand a text (how it is possible to understand what the text is) becomes who understands a text (and it exists precisely to understand). A direct ontology evades any epistemological requirement and, as such, any scientific vocation. The ontology of textual comprehension abandons the method. The answer is simple because it is not considered a science of nature, not operating with the presuppositions of objective knowledge.

[9] P. Ricoeur, J.B. Thompson, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences. Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 114-115

> "For me, the distinction between semantics and semiotics is the key to the whole problem of language, and my four essays are based upon this initial methodological decision."[10]

Any objective (and objectifying) knowledge establishes a relationship from connoisseur to acquaintance, from subject to object, from interpreter to text. For the ontology of comprehension, there is no longer a subject who knows and an object to be known, but a being who wonders about his being, even if he does so through a text considered as a pretext. Instead of an illusory objectivity, as the text as object is always a purely rational data that closes meanings, a horizon opens with a real opening of existence in and towards proposed meanings. However, the privileged place of the subject, of that one who exists to know, is taken by the living being, by the very life of a significant being, that someone who understands existence. The problem of the truth of a text is no longer a problem of the method of its understanding, but that of the manifestation of the being, of its manifest manifestation in the very constitution of itself, that is, in the very existence of the text.

A rethinking of the theory of interpretation in English culture as a growing, more autonomous subfield of hermeneutics does not exclude the idea of cooperation with other areas of text investigation. On the contrary, it deals with an enormous diversity. This requires successive recalibrations of perspectives, by activating ones or others, according to the direction taken at a particular moment in time or in a certain cultural space. The theories are thus interrogated in order to articulate a new critical position by fertile deliberation for the most effective approach.

The meaning in turn, is distinct but bivalent as it contains one meaning of textual intentionality and another meaning of authorial intentionality. The first is verbal, the second mental. The verbal intent of the text not only survives the author's mental intent but is richer in meaning. Hence, meaning triggers meaning and signifies the place that is blank in the text. Interpretation can only understand this meaning, which

goes beyond both the event of speech as speech and the act of writing itself. The object of the interpretation of the texts is precisely this elevation from utterance to utterance, and from event to meaning.

The text has a reference (deictic words) because it is impossible for it not to refer to something, not to refer to something beyond it. It is not a world as a situation that can be shown, but a non-situational world, that is, fictional, but not necessarily fictitious, and this is because it is not completely broken by the real world. It is, as mentioned, the virtual

[10] P. Ricoeur, and Ted Klein, *Interpretation Theory. Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 8

(imaginary) world of literature to which the (literary) text refers as a possible way of being and which also involves the symbolic dimensions of our being in the world. It is no longer a question of the so-called surrounding world, the one that surrounds a dialogical situation, but of the intertextual world in which each text read refers to the others. Analysis and interpretation expand the readers' position in time and space of reading. Each additional reading adds a new province to the spirit empire. Therefore, reading a text reveals the intention and destination of projecting a world. There are several types of reader-response criticism, but most of them begin by asking questions about the reader's experience in the act of reading the text.[11]

Conclusion

The issue of the subjective dimension of understanding was addressed in the sequence devoted to reading literary texts, justified by the different profiles of readers specified in different cognitive structures, affective structures, and reading intentions. The personal character of reception is highlighted in the case of comprehension and interpretation of literary texts, whose structure creates spaces, manifestation of subjectivity, and a type of text that places readers with different profiles. The anonymity of the destination does not mean non-addressing, but precisely the destiny vocation of any text that opens and is offered to all without exception. The one who opens a book and is in front of the text does not do it like the one who is in front of an interlocutor, because the text aims only at an understanding presence, a look that reads one's self-offering, as a significant gift for anyone who wants it.

Being a world in the world, the work appears as its artistic expression. In such a way that the relationships we have discovered within the work multiply properly outside of it, in the wider world of which it is only an element. In this way, the reader will be convinced that the internal law of the work will be given to him in a symbolic summary of the collective law of the moment and of the cultural environment in which the work was produced. It is necessary and useful to study works as meaningful systems, as whole parts composed of concerted parts; but works and societies do not belong to the homogeneous texture of the same logos; the language of a literary work and that of the surrounding culture are not consubstantial and cannot be put together to pave the way for a unitary and coherent system of meanings. Most great modern works declare their connections with the world only in the form of refusal, and opposition. The task of criticism is precisely to find, within the texts, in their style, as well as in their explicit

[11] Raman Selden, *Practising theory and reading literature: An Introduction*. UK: Routledge, 2016, p. 10.

theses, variable indications that can be used as arguments, as everything in the contemporary world gives the work its character of exception, against the background of the culture that supports it.

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REVERSING THE MONSTER LENS: FRANKISH MONSTROSITY IN *LA CHANSON DE ROLAND*

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Abstract: *This article reexamines the twelfth-century Old French La Chanson de Roland (henceforth LCR) through the critical lens of monster theory. LCR constructs Saracens as grotesque, idolatrous, and demonic adversaries—monsters whose otherness justifies Frankish violence and religious supremacy. However, this paper proposes a reverse reading: if monstrosity is defined by traits such as excessive violence, moral absolutism, and symbolic otherness, then those criteria implicate the Frankish characters in monstrous behavior. Roland's prideful obstinacy and the imagery of Saracen deaths signal a sanctified form of Christian monstrosity embedded within the poem's ideological fabric. This article argues that monstrosity is not inherent but constructed, relational, and politically functional. Uebel's Foucauldian perspective complements this view, showing how the binary between Frank and Saracen is mutually constitutive and ideologically unstable. The article reveals how LCR projects cultural anxieties outward onto racialized enemies, thereby masking internal contradictions in Christian violence and identity. By reversing the monster gaze, this paper destabilizes the moral binaries of medieval epic literature and promotes a more balanced historiographical reading. It contends that monstrosity, far from being confined to the Saracen Other, is a narrative weapon wielded to maintain hegemony, offering critical insights into the ethics of representation in premodern literature.*

Keywords: *Middle English Romance, Chanson de geste, Saracen, Frank, Monster*

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I. Reimagining the Frankish and Saracen Other in *La Chanson de Roland*

In medieval literature, monsters do not merely exist on the outskirts of the narrative; they actively shape it. Cohen argues that monstrosity is a cultural category through which societies define, regulate, and reinforce ideological boundaries.[1] In medieval Christian romances, the Saracen often emerges as the quintessential monstrous Other: dark-skinned, idol-worshipping, and violent, imagined through a lens that conflates religious heresy with physical and moral deformity.[2] These figures are narrative antagonists and projections of the Christian West's anxieties about difference and moral order. *LCR* is prominent in shaping the medieval European conception of Islam and the East.[3] Its narrative constructs Saracens as morally corrupt, theologically aberrant, and frequently grotesque, reinforcing a rigid binary between Christian heroism and heathen monstrosity.[4] From depicting Saracen giants with supernatural strength to the dark lands they hail, monstrosity becomes a central tool for ideological storytelling.[5] However, this paper proposes a critical reversal of this interpretive lens. Instead of accepting the textual construction of Saracens as monsters at face value, it asks: what happens when we apply the same criteria of monstrosity—excessive violence, moral rigidity, symbolic otherness—to the Frankish characters themselves? By doing so, this article aims to destabilize the binary that separates Frankish virtue from Saracen vice, revealing the latent monstrosity at the heart of Christian heroism. Roland, the celebrated warrior, is not simply a martyr of faith but a figure whose brutal actions and inflexible pride echo the very traits used to define the Saracen as monstrous.

This reverse reading is informed by Cohen's notion that the monster stands at the threshold… of becoming, meaning that monstrosity is not an intrinsic state but a relational and contextual designation.[6] If Saracens are monsters because of their perceived savagery, then so must be the Frankish knights who exhibit equally violent, kish knights who exhibit equally violent,

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[1] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,* Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 4.

[2] John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 126.

[3] Phillipa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature,* Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017, p. 66.

[4] Margaret Sinex, 'Monsterized Saracens, Tolkien's Haradrim, and Other Medieval Fantasy Products', *Tolkien Studies*, 7, 2010, p. 182.

[5] Simon Gaunt and Karen Pratt, *The Song of Roland and Other Poems of Charlemagne*, Oxford World's Classics, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 66. 1933.

[6] Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,* p. 20.

often morally ambiguous, behavior. This interpretive approach challenges the ethical framework of the text and offers a more nuanced understanding of how monstrosity operates ideologically.

The concept of monstrosity is deeply entwined with cultural and ideological anxieties. Drawing on Cohen's theory, this paper considers the Saracen's monstrous image not merely as a reflection of physical otherness but as a projection of cultural fears and desires. This theoretical framework allows for a reverse reading of the texts, shifting the lens to examine the Franks' actions as potentially monstrous from an alternative perspective. In *LCR,* Charlemagne's order for mass executions demonstrates his unyielding authority: The king commands one of his officers, Basbrun: Go and hang them all from the gallows tree![7] While framed as an act of justice, this collective punishment highlights the Franks' ruthlessness. A reverse reading of all actions of Franks versus Franks and Franks versus Saracens could critique this act as monstrous, casting doubt on the morality and proportionality of such decisions, mainly when applied indiscriminately to both guilty and innocent individuals. This methodological approach challenges traditional narratives and seeks to promote historical balance by uncovering the biases embedded in medieval literature.

In *LCR*, scholars often focus on the Saracen descriptions in ways that blend the monstrous and the heretical, with exaggerated physical features and moral corruption. Tolan argues that the author of the chanson intentionally combined monstrous traits and moral depravity in depicting the bad guys, enabling the audience to take pleasure in the violence against them without feeling guilt or remorse.[8] Heng asserts this kind of portrayal intrinsically ties Saracens to an image that strips them of human dignity, making them easier to vilify and oppose without moral hesitation.[9] Cohen argues that Saracens are depicted as monstrous through grotesque physical and behavioural traits, such as barking like dogs, symbolizing their moral corruption and reinforcing their role as the absolute other.[10] Furrow argues that Saracens are safe objects to direct the hatred towards because poets needed to justify the violence of Christian chivalry, not only against Saracens but also to Christians who are seen as heretical.[11]Despite being

[7] Gaunt and Pratt, *The Song of Roland,* p. 132. 3952-3953.

[8] Tolan, *Saracens,* p. 126.

[9] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages,* United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 118.

[10] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, 1, 2001, pp. 119-120.

[11] Melissa Furrow, "Chanson de Geste as Romance in England," in *The Exploitations of Medieval Romance*, eds. Laura Ashe, Ivana Djordjević, and Judith Weiss, Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 2010, pp. 63-64.

presented as figures of cultural and religious otherness, Saracens are portrayed as noble adversaries. Heng argues that Saracens are depicted as virtuous only when converting or showing potential for conversion to Christianity, martially skilled, or linked to European ancestry, as seen with Saladin in *Le Roman de Saladin* and Ferumbras after conversion.[12] Strickland observes that artists depicted Saracens as highly skilled in warfare and formidable adversaries, primarily to highlight the accomplishments of Christian knights.[13] Calkin argues that the stereotypical portrayal of Saracens is rooted in their striking resemblance to the literary depiction of European Christian knights.[14] Saracens share the same practice of praying to God both before and after battle and exhibit similar conduct toward their enemies. Yet, it is unfortunate that they are not Christians in the eyes of Christians. Observing that many studies ignore a substantial range of sources that do not solely equate Saracens with evil and darkness, Ramey emphasizes that the same Saracen condemned for idolatry could also be celebrated as an ideal knight.[15]

Building on the sameness of Saracen and Frank warriors, it is essential to explore how the sameness of monstrosity is debated in scholarship, revealing a parallel framework of othering that aligns with the reverse reading methodology employed in this study. For instance, Uebel argues Christians are shockingly revealed to share many of the same monstrous characteristics attributed to Saracens.[16] This perspective is further illustrated in Usāmah's account of a Frankish knight who proposes taking Usāmah's son to Frankish lands to learn wisdom and chivalry. Usāmah criticizes the knight's proposal, highlighting his perception of the Franks as brave yet deficient in intellectual depth or moral refinement, comparing their qualities to the instinct-driven traits of animals.[17] This analogy underscores a shared sense of monstrosity, where Franks, like Saracens, are dehumanized or diminished in narratives based on cultural biases. Similarly, in their accounts of the First Crusade, Fulcher of Chartres and Raymond d'Aguilers describe the horrifying acts of crusaders, such as grave

[12] Heng, *The Invention of Race*, p. 56.

[13] Debra H. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 188.

[14] Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript,* New York & London: Routledge, 2005, p. 24.

[15] Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature*, 1st edition, vol. 3, Medieval History and Culture, London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p 4.

[16] Michael Uebel, "Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, First Edition, Minneapolis, Minn: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 282.

[17] Usāmah ibn Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usamah ibn-Munqidh*, trans. Philip K. Hitti, New York: Columbia University Press, 1929, p. 161.

robbing, burning, and disembowelling Saracen bodies out of greed, with the same intensity used to depict Saracen atrocities.[18] Together, these perspectives reveal how the discourse of monstrosity transcends cultural boundaries, destabilizing simplistic binaries of self and other.

Building on the insights of prior research, this article employs a monster lens to illuminate the complex interplay of cultural bias, identity construction, and the shared monstrous depictions of Saracen and Frankish warriors in medieval literature, challenging traditional narratives and fostering a more balanced historical understanding. This paper examines Saracens' monstrous portrayals, emphasizing instances where they are depicted as honourable opponents. It also explores how Frankish warriors share similar monstrous traits with Saracen warriors and highlights the grotesque behaviours of Franks and Christian fighters. The depiction of Saracens as monsters later became a habit of medieval English authors to strengthen Christian dominance, legitimize acts of violence against the Saracens, and create a national identity superior to the others. The chanson's alignment of physical deformity with spiritual deviance mirrors broader medieval perceptions, where physical abnormality was often seen as a sign of inner moral failing. Such representations served to affirm the moral righteousness of the Christian cause while simplifying the complex socio-political realities of the Crusades into a binary struggle of good versus evil.

Through close textual analysis of *LCR*, this article argues that Frankish monstrosity is not an aberration but an embedded feature of the epic's logic of glory and martyrdom. It repositions the Christian knight not as a symbol of divine justice but as a participant in a cultural narrative that sanctifies violence and othering. In doing so, the paper contributes to medieval literary scholarship by offering a method of reading that seeks balance, exposing how monstrosity is not the exclusive burden of the racialized Other but a mirror of the self.

Monstrosity is not merely a category of physical deformity or mythological invention, but a cultural construct that encodes societal anxieties, taboos, and ideological boundaries.[19] In this framework, the monster is a symbolic vessel through which communities define themselves by what they exclude. First, Cohen argues that monsters defy classification, embodying contradiction and hybridity.[20] They exist in a liminal space where stable identities—moral, cultural, and theological—break down.[21]

[18] Edward Peters, ed., *The First Crusade: "The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres" and Other Source Materials*, 2nd ed., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, pp. 249-261.

[19] Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,* p. *4*.

[20] Ibidem, p. 6.

[21] Ibidem, p. 7.

When applied to *LCR,* this lens reveals how Frankish knights, while ostensibly paragons of Christian virtue, often behave in ways that collapse the very binaries they uphold. Roland's refusal to blow his oliphant out of pride, his glorification of slaughter, and his complete lack of introspection blur the line between sanctity and savagery. Second, monsters are guardians of normative boundaries. They indicate the limits of what is acceptable—politically, theologically, morally—and thus uphold the center by marking the margins. In *LCR*, monstrosity reinforces the legitimacy of Frankish domination and Christian righteousness by contrast with the Saracen Other. But by reversing this gaze, we see that it is precisely through acts of monstrous violence that this legitimacy is maintained. Thus, the Christian hero becomes complicit in the very monstrosity he is supposed to oppose. Third, Cohen emphasizes the monster's function as a figure of potential transformation, a mirror of the culture's desires and fears. Monstrosity is thus relational rather than intrinsic—it reflects the cultural moment and the anxieties it produces. In this regard, the Saracen monster is not a historical reality but a projection of the Christian West's insecurities. But when the same traits are found in the Christian protagonists—unquestioning violence, divine zealotry, ethnic absolutism—they reveal the monstrous underside of their ideology.

Compared to Cohen's work, Uebel advances a Foucauldian view of alterity that emphasizes the interdependence of binary identities. Uebel contends that the construction of the Other is never absolute; rather, it is contingent, fluid, and produced through systems of thought that rely on their opposites for meaning.[22] The Saracen and the Frank are not wholly distinct entities in the poem but dialectically constituted. Their portrayals reinforce each other: the more monstrous the Saracen, the more justified the Frankish violence; yet that justification reveals its monstrosity.

These theoretical insights offer a framework for interrogating the text's ideological machinery. By applying the criteria used to define the Saracen as monstrous to the Frankish characters, this article uncovers the cultural logic of monstrosity. It critiques the ethics of representation in medieval epic. In this reading, Monstrosity becomes not a fixed identity but a rhetorical weapon, wielded by the text and exposed by the critic.

I. Traditional Monstrous Depictions fo Saracens

In *LCR,* the Saracens are not simply the religious or military opponents of the Franks—they are constructed as embodiments of monstrosity. Through physical exaggeration, moral vilification, and symbolic inversion, the text crafts the Saracen as a racialized and theological Other whose existence justifies Frankish violence and Christian supremacy. This section

[22] Uebel, "Unthinking the Monster," p. 264.

explores how these figures are depicted in traditionally monstrous terms, aligning them with medieval topoi of the grotesque and the demonic.

This idea finds further reinforcement in the specific characterization of Saracen figures like Chernuble de Muneigre. His exaggerated physicality and the supernatural desolation of his homeland highlight the stark contrast between the idealized Christian Frankish identity and the vilified Saracen other. This dynamic reflects the broader function of medieval literature in shaping and sustaining collective identity through excluding and vilifying the other. Chernuble of Muneigre is depicted with hair cascading to the ground, his physical prowess so extraordinary that he can effortlessly carry loads surpassing four fully laden mules. His homeland is characterized as a cursed and desolate place where no sunlight penetrates, wheat cannot thrive, and neither rain nor dew graces the land. Instead, it is strewn with black stones, rumoured to be inhabited by devils, further emphasizing its supernatural and sinister nature:

> *Next comes Chernuble of Muneigre:*
> *His flowing hair reaches down to the ground.*
> *For sport, to amuse himself, he can carry a heavier load*
> *Then four mules can carry when fully loaded.*
> *It is said that in the land from which he hails*
> *The sun never shines, and wheat cannot grow,*
> *Rain does not fall there, nor does dew gather.*
> *There is not one stone that is not entirely black.*
> *Some people say that devils live there.*[23]

Chernuble of Muneigre's monstrous description—his unnatural strength, demonic homeland, and blackened environment—conforms to standard techniques of Saracen monsterization. Yet when examined through a reversed application of monster theory, these distortions reveal more about the Frankish worldview than the figure described. According to Cohen, the monster is a projection of the fears and desires of the culture that constructs it.[24] Here, Chernuble becomes a symbolic container for everything the Christian Franks fear: darkness, disorder, demonic power, and cultural chaos. His blackened homeland, devoid of sun or wheat, functions not as a real place but as an imagined inversion of Christian harmony. The detailed fantasy of his origin suggests an obsessive need to imagine the Other as not just different, but unnaturally so—a need that arises from insecurity about Christendom's moral and spiritual foundations. By inventing such a world, the Frankish narrative deflects attention from its own violence and moral absolutism, casting monstrosity outward rather

[23] Gaunt and Pratt, *The Song of Roland,* p. *35*. 975-983.
[24] Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,* pp. *4-20*.

than confronting its internal sources. In this way, reverse monster theory exposes how Christian identity depends on exaggerated and mythic Others to mask its ideological extremism.

Chernuble is introduced as a Saracen lord from the distant land of Munigre, and his physical appearance—characterized by exaggerated size, grotesque strength, and non-European features—along with the exoticization of his homeland, reinforces his status as a monster within the narrative's ideological framework. His immense strength is depicted as dehumanizing, associating him with beasts of burden rather than the nobility expected of a warrior. For example, comparing his strength to that of mules emphasizes his physical power and implies an absence of reason, agency, and self-restraint. Such a depiction reflects the Christian authors' efforts to construct a dichotomy in which Saracens are defined by their excessive and undirected force, in stark contrast to the disciplined and purposeful strength exemplified by Christian knights such as Roland, whose martial feats are framed as rational, spiritually motivated, and aligned with divine order. In contrast, Christian knights are celebrated for balancing might and morality. As described in the text, Chernuble's pastime of carrying great weights for no functional purpose is portrayed not as a testament to skill or discipline but as an emblem of mindless and purposeless power. In this way, his strength becomes not a heroic attribute but a signifier of monstrosity—grotesque excess disconnected from intellect or ethical conduct.

This portrayal serves a broader ideological function: it positions the Saracen body as threatening and ridiculous, unworthy of admiration or emulation. Within the reverse reading of the monster theory, Chernuble exemplifies how monstrosity is manufactured through the lens of cultural bias and used to legitimize the Christian cause. His exaggerated physicality is not a flaw but becomes monstrous only when contrasted with the Christian hero's temperate, ideologically 'correct' body. As such, Chernuble's representation reinforces the text's identity construction through opposition, defining Frankish virtue not by inherent values but by its distance from the imagined Saracen other. His defeat, therefore, is not simply a martial conquest but an ideological purification, removing a figure of chaos to reestablish Christian moral and physical order.

The land of Munigre, from which Chernuble originates, is depicted as desolate and malevolent, reinforcing its role as the source of evil in the narrative. This barren land, devoid of sunlight and fertility, mirrors the medieval association between geography and moral corruption, where inhospitable and dark regions were seen as reflections of spiritual decay and divine abandonment. By portraying Munigre in this way, the narrative not only demonizes its inhabitants but also elevates the Christian homeland as

a space of divine favour and moral superiority. Chernuble, as a product of Munigre, becomes a symbol of destructive forces—mindless, relentless, and without a higher purpose. Within the medieval worldview, such a place—dark, barren, and devoid of divine grace—could only be associated with malevolent supernatural forces. The ease with which the narrator links Munigre to devils reflects a broader tendency in medieval literature to cast foreign or unknown lands as embodiments of moral corruption. Munigre, therefore, is not merely a distant, inhospitable land but a symbol of the existential threat posed by the forces of evil to the Christian world.

Moreover, the Saracens are frequently associated with **idolatry**, a form of theological monstrosity. Unlike the Christian Franks who pray to the Christian God, the Saracens are depicted worshipping false idols like Apollo, Tervagant, and Mahomet. This is not merely a religious error—it is presented as a spiritual perversion. The text declares: And his banner with Tervagant and Mohammed, / And a statue of Apollo, that most treacherous god.[25]

The emir of the Saracen army carries a banner that displays the names of Tervagant and Mohammed, as well as a figure of Apollo, who is labeled the most deceitful of gods. This brief yet revealing passage exemplifies how *LCR* constructs Saracen religious identity through distortion and demonization. The warrior's banner, marked with the names of Tervagant, Mohammed, and Apollo, functions as a symbolic amalgamation of fabricated idolatry and misrepresented faith. Tervagant, a fictitious deity born from medieval Christian imagination, is often used in chansons de geste to paint Muslims as idol-worshippers. Mohammed, the historical prophet of Islam, is here recast as a false god, undermining the monotheism of Islam and reducing it to paganism. The inclusion of Apollo, a classical Greco-Roman god, further blurs theological boundaries. Labeling him the most treacherous god not only demonizes the ancient world but also conflates Islamic belief with classical deceit and spiritual corruption.

These symbolic elements culminate in *LCR*, where the narrator consistently portrays the Saracens as heathens or devils, reinforcing a binary opposition between Christians and non-Christians. However, the historical reality of medieval France's conflicts was far more complex. While the narrative focuses on the battle against Saracens, France was also engaged in disputes with other groups, such as the Gnostics, Cathars, and various other heretical movements.[26] This poem is deeply anachronistic, projecting contemporary concerns onto a much earlier historical period and

[25] Gaunt and Pratt, *The Song of Roland,* p. *109*. 3266-3267.

[26] Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 22.

fostering a sense of hostility toward non-Christian groups.[27] For instance, the depiction of Saracens as idolaters, savages, and sometimes devils in *LCR* reflects the 12th-century Christian anxieties about Islam's growing influence and the existential threat it posed to Christendom. By the time the poem was widely circulating, the memory of the First Crusade and the ongoing presence of Islamic power in the Holy Land and Iberia had intensified Western fears of religious contamination, military defeat, and divine punishment. Casting Saracens as literal devil-worshippers—praying to fictional deities like Mahound, Tervagant, and Apollo—allowed Christian authors to frame Islam not as a rival Abrahamic faith, but as demonic heresy. This rhetorical move transformed the military conflict into a cosmic battle between good and evil, enabling the Christian warrior to kill without moral doubt. Thus, the devil imagery is not merely symbolic—it externalizes deeply rooted cultural anxieties and justifies violence as holy war. Monster theory helps reveal how these depictions functioned not just to vilify the enemy, but to stabilize Christian identity through the projection of fear onto a monstrous Other.

This kind of representation fulfills a crucial ideological function: it renders the enemy's religion not merely different, but inherently perverse and dangerous. It removes the possibility of religious equivalency or shared moral ground. In this case, the "monster" is a theological error, embodied in the Saracen's banner. The enemy's faith is marked as illegitimate, monstrous, and heretical, justifying the following violence.

Moreover, Michael Uebel asserts that these figures are not accurate representations of Islamic culture but rhetorical constructions designed to define Christian identity by contrast.[28] The Saracens, therefore, are not historical others but monsters of the Christian imaginary—fabricated to confirm Western religious and moral superiority. This passage, brief though it is, encapsulates the ideological machinery of the poem: it creates monsters not from deeds, but from faith, iconography, and association, turning banners into battlegrounds for spiritual legitimacy. By associating the enemy with deities that medieval Christians regarded as demonic or pagan, the poem strips them of human dignity and places them in the realm of the grotesque. Their beliefs are not just wrong; they are blasphemous, alien, and monstrous.

This portrayal is extended through bestial and violent imagery. Saracen warriors are described with animalistic or grotesque traits, often lacking individuality and personhood: And the next of Milceni with their enormous

[27] Fuat Boyacıoğlu, "The Historical Anachronism in *The Song of Roland,"* paper presented *at Das Erste Internationale Symposium zu den Deutsch-Türkischen Historischen und Kulturellen Beziehungen,* Selçuk University, October 8–10, 2009, p. 592.

[28] Uebel, "Unthinking the Monster," p. 267.

heads; / On their spines, which run the length of their backs, / These men sprout bristles just as pigs do.[29] They are a horde, an undifferentiated mass, whose primary function in the narrative is to die at the hands of righteous Franks. Their deaths are frequently described with gleeful savagery, as in:

The count goes to strike him as brutally as he can:
He shatters his shield and rips open his hauberk.
He cleaves his chest, shattering several bones.
From his back, he completely severs his spine.
He thus casts out his soul with the point of his lance[30]

LCR uses the full rhetorical arsenal of medieval monstrosity to construct its Saracen figures. They are dark, unnatural, idolatrous, and physically excessive—markers of both theological error and existential threat. Yet these traits, when viewed through the lens of monster theory, are not inherent to the Saracens but projected upon them by a narrative invested in Christian supremacy. The following section will show how these same markers—violence, extremity, and otherness—are equally present in the Frankish characters, inviting a reversal of the monstrous gaze.

II. Frankish Monstrosity through Reverse Reading

If monstrosity is defined by traits such as excessive violence, moral absolutism, symbolic otherness, and narrative extremity—as seen in the depiction of Saracens in *LCR*—then those same standards compel us to examine the Frankish heroes under similar scrutiny. Through a reverse reading, Roland and his fellow Christian knights often embody the characteristics the narrative condemns in their enemies. This section analyzes how Frankish monstrosity is embedded in the poem's valorization of brutal conduct, ideological rigidity, and glorified suffering. Roland is perhaps the most celebrated warrior in the chanson, yet his heroism is steeped in violence that borders on the grotesque. The poem frequently dwells on the physical destruction he causes, not simply to showcase his strength but to elevate a spectacle of death:

He slices through his head, his byrnie, and his body,
Splitting his fine saddle with its jewels set in gold,
Then slicing deep into the horse's back.
He kills them both, regardless of what anyone thinks.
The pagans say: 'This is a grievous loss for us!'
Roland replies: 'I regard your men as my eternal foes:
On your side, there is nothing but pride and injustice.'[31]

[29] Gaunt and Pratt, *The Song of Roland, p. 108*. 3221-3223.
[30] Ibidem, ll. 1198-1202.
[31] Ibidem, ll. 1586-1592.

Roland cuts through a Saracen warrior's head, armor, and body. He even splits the ornate saddle decorated with gold. He drives the blow so deep that it wounds the horse's back. He kills both the rider and the horse without hesitation. The Saracens exclaim: This is a terrible loss for us! Roland replies: Your warriors are forever my enemies—Your side stands only for arrogance and injustice. Such language, though valorizing Roland, dehumanizes the Saracen by turning his death into a spectacle of dismemberment. The enemy's body is not mourned or pitied—it is punished and displayed, reinforcing the monstrous nature assigned to him from the outset. It showcases both the extreme physical violence committed by Roland and the moral certainty with which he justifies it. The description of the attack is graphic and grandiose: Roland's sword strike does not merely kill a man, it annihilates him, slicing through not just his body but his armor, golden saddle, and even the horse beneath him. This hyperbolic destruction elevates Roland's blow to the level of spectacle, turning war into a performance of power.

Yet what follows the physical act is equally telling. The Saracens acknowledge the loss emotionally—a most grievous one — which humanizes them, if only briefly. But Roland's response is absolute: he offers no compassion, nuance, or condemnation. He deems the opposing side eternally wicked, defined by pride and injustice. This Manichaean moral worldview leaves no space for ambiguity: the enemy is inherently wrong and deserves death.

The passage is a vivid embodiment of what might be called heroic monstrosity. While the narrative frames Roland's violence as righteous, the scale and style of his destruction—cutting through man, armor, saddle, and horse in a single blow—borders on the supernatural. According to Cohen, such figures destabilize the binaries they are meant to uphold. Roland is both savior and destroyer, knight and executioner. Moreover, his cold moral judgment, Your side is only pride and injustice, reflects a radical dehumanization of the enemy. It denies the Saracens any moral complexity or individual worth. The fact that they express sorrow, a most grievous loss, is narratively dismissed by Roland's unwavering ideological stance. Here, monstrosity lies not only in Roland's physical violence but in his psychological rigidity: the absolute refusal to see the enemy as anything but evil.

This moment also resonates with Michael Uebel's analysis of alterity. Roland's need to define the Other (Saracens) as inherently unjust allows him to elevate himself as the just knight, even when his actions are callous. The enemy becomes a screen onto which the Christian hero projects all that he wishes to deny within himself. This article argues that *LCR*, while traditionally read as a celebration of Christian heroism and divine justice, simultaneously contains the seeds of monstrous contradiction within it. By

applying the same criteria of monstrosity—violence, moral rigidity, and symbolic otherness—that are used to depict Saracens to the Frankish characters, particularly Roland and Charlemagne, this paper has exposed the ideological asymmetry at the heart of the text. The Saracen Other is not inherently monstrous; rather, monstrosity is a narrative tool employed to justify Frankish supremacy and sanctify Christian violence.

Reverse reading, grounded in Cohen's *study* and supported by Michael Uebel's insights on alterity, has enabled a reassessment of the Frankish identity not as the antithesis of monstrosity, but as its mirror. Roland's prideful obstinacy, Charlemagne's genocidal vengeance, and the aestheticized brutality of the Frankish campaign reflect a form of sanctified monstrosity—one that resists recognition precisely because it is embedded in the dominant moral framework of the poem. This reading destabilizes the binary of Christian good versus Saracen evil and calls into question the ethical infrastructure of medieval heroic literature. It challenges us to consider how texts construct legitimacy through the dehumanization of the Other, and how cultural narratives elevate violence when the "right" side performs it.

III. Conclusion

This article has re-examined *LCR* through a reverse application of monster theory, challenging traditional readings that place monstrosity solely upon the Saracen Other. Drawing on Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's and Michael Uebel's theoretical insights, the paper has demonstrated that monstrosity in medieval literature is a cultural construction rather than an innate attribute. It is a flexible rhetorical device used to delineate the boundaries of Christian identity and justify violence under the guise of divine justice. Through close textual analysis, extreme violence, ideological absolutism, and symbolic otherness are used to vilify Saracens, and are equally, if not more, applicable to the Frankish protagonists, particularly Roland and Charlemagne. By reversing the monstrous lens, the article exposed how Christian characters themselves perform acts of sanctified savagery, framed not as moral failings but as divine imperatives. Roland's prideful refusal to call for aid and his ecstatic participation in carnage, as well as Charlemagne's orders for indiscriminate executions, reflect a narrative ethos that normalizes violence when aligned with Christian purpose. When viewed through Cohen's thesis of category crisis, the glorification of destruction, Cohen's thesis of category crisis, glorification of destruction, collapses the moral distinction between hero and monster. Uebel's Foucauldian perspective on alterity further supports the idea that the binary between Frank and Saracen is ideologically unstable and mutually constitutive: one exists to define and reinforce the other.

Moreover, by highlighting moments where Saracen characters exhibit chivalric virtue and dignity—such as Baligant and the amirafle—the article illustrated how monstrosity is contingent upon faith and ideology rather than character or conduct. Though praised for their noble attributes, these figures are denied complete narrative legitimacy due to their religious identity. This rhetorical contradiction underscores the article's core argument: that monstrosity is not about who the characters are but what the narrative needs them to be. Ultimately, this paper contributes to medieval literary criticism by repositioning monstrosity as a tool of ideological enforcement rather than moral clarity. It advocates for a critical methodology that interrogates the representation of the Other and the assumptions underpinning portrayals of the Self. It calls for a more balanced historiographical reading that acknowledges the complexities, contradictions, and cultural work embedded in medieval epic literature. When read through this reversed monster lens, *La Chanson de Roland* emerges not merely as a celebration of Christian heroism but as a revealing text of medieval Europe's deep anxieties about identity, power, and legitimacy.

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