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RESEARCH PAPERS

Maimed, Disabled, Enslaved as Commodity: Child-Maiming in the Lens of Critical Consciousness

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Abstract

This essay seeks to acknowledge the unsettling reality of children being intentionally maimed towards disability and disfigurement as economic commodity. The issue is easily invisibilized in modern education, and understandably so: the trauma triggered by these bloody realities can automatically disqualify the content for formal in-school education as a form of "unwelcome truth". Freire and Fanon, however, did not shy away from the horrific state of life for the oppressed and the wretched in their consideration of pedagogy. The lived experience of maimed children is tragic, but it is lived experience nonetheless – acknowledged by hooks as "a way of knowing that coexists in a non-hierarchical way with other ways of knowing" (2014). In other words, this knowledge exists but is arguably not mobilized by society towards action. Critical consciousness, upheld by Freire as the key to seeing inequality to act upon it, is a goal beyond reach for the maimed children themselves. Here, we consider the extension proposed by Nicholls (2011), who discusses pedagogy of the privileged as an equally-important parallel towards collaborative action against long-standing inequalities. In the context of these children having minimal access to education, we contend that privileged students must be the ones to carry forth the knowledge towards their own critical consciousness. Specifically, we explore what acknowledging children who are maimed could offer towards pedagogy, in relation to helping students to 1) minimize the act of "othering" in a global community; 2) reconsider the role of mass-media and media literacy in their critical consciousness; and 3) move away from surface-level, performative charity against societal inequalities.

Keywords: *inequality; digital media; social justice; education; colonialism.*

Context

What can critical consciousness look like for a child living in extreme oppression? As a severely under-researched violation against the wellbeing of children, intentional maiming of a child to produce lifelong disfigurement or disability is nonetheless reported to occur beyond individual cases (Helal & Kabir, 2013; Kaushik, 2014; Iqbal, 2013). Common methods include forced amputation of limbs or removal of the eyes, with the intent of forcing children into the street-economy of begging. These children spend their entire lives as a vulnerable presence on the streets, and completely depend upon their maimers for everyday survival. Profits earned are maximized towards the share of the maimers. There is no economic gain in the upkeep of the child's basic health or wellbeing; contrarily, deliberately creating additional conditions that visually convey disease or lack of wellbeing can generate increased daily profit. Due to the fact that many of these children were abducted from caregivers, disfigurement is a practice which minimizes chances of parents or law enforcement in successfully recovering the child. Additional disabilities such as removal of vocal cords also prevent children from being able to provide identifying information about their maimers if the child has an opportunity to be recovered.

Limited research exists on the fates of the children once they age out of childhood, and can no longer attract the same level of sympathy and profit for their maimers.

Critical Consciousness in the Classroom

The level of research dedicated to the investigation or prevention of this phenomenon does not match its graveness. In fact, intentional maiming of children for economic oppression is rarely acknowledged in academic nor society as an "unwelcome truth" (Kemmis, 2006).

If critical consciousness seeks to acknowledge and address inequalities in our world, child-maiming – as one of the most serious violations against human equality – should be included amongst the inequalities pedagogy seeks to tackle. Freire openly names the process of dehumanization and discusses populations "whose humanity has been stolen" towards emancipation. If the educator is concerned with humanizing students, the concern must lead "to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as a historical reality" (Freire, 2000). Access to education and any form of pedagogy is beyond reach for children living through these unjust realities. To carry forth their legacy and embrace both the validity and value of their lived experiences, formal education

should consider how children who have been maimed contribute to student's understanding of critical consciousness in settings of privilege (Nicholls, 2011).

Currently, exposing students to maiming of children is often performed with the intent of increasing awareness for self-protection in areas where there are high-profile cases of abduction. In other words, this pedagogy is a preventative intervention that relies on the knowledge of students to reduce potential cases of maiming. In itself, if this pedagogy is capable of preventing a single victim, its value cannot be overstated. At the same time, in order to truly apply a lens of critical consciousness, students should not be exposed to child-maiming as an issue affecting an "other" which they must both avoid and separate the "self" from (Fanon, 2004). The subconscious division of the other versus the self, when the pedagogy is centered around and only around self-protection, may have more serious implications on how the student engages with inequalities in the future. The idea of self-protection and preservation to not be a victim of inequality is worthwhile, but is not directly related to the concept of critical consciousness. Ideally, pedagogy can empower students beyond removing themselves from inequalities. "What matters is not to know the world but to change it" (Fanon, 2004); this change can be much more powerful and meaningful compared to pure self-isolation from parts of the world which pose risks to the student.

The classroom can be a challenging space to house emotions. Separating emotion from education, inherited from positivist paradigms which prioritize scientific neutrality, can help to create a classroom that is easy to control (Nicholls, 2011). This however, ultimately does not aid in the development of empathy, courage, nor solidarity towards addressing inequalities in the world. An additional layer of nuance adds to the conundrum when educators are charged with the task of protecting the mental health of students. What if a student is exposed to the reality of children being maimed as economic commodity, and cannot emotionally recover before class ends? We argue students perhaps should not *recover* from emotional trauma in the traditional sense of simply feeling nothing any more – developing a strong, even vehement response to extreme inequality is part of what makes us human. One can bear trauma, in order to learn to mobilize trauma and all the emotions associated with it towards action in changing the conditions which espouse trauma. The complete removal of negative emotions does not indicate true recovery, but rather could signify that something more worrying exists which runs contrary to critical consciousness. If a student not only longs to feel nothing about inequalities – but is also actively encouraged by their instructors to no longer feel as a sign of possessing positive mental health, this new form of critical consciousness becomes challenging to differentiate from indifference. Clinically,

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guided exposure to trauma in order to resist negative emotions in the future can lead to a stabilized state (Siehl et al., 2021) so that the individual can possess greater potential in taking action. To emphasize the goal of not feeling trauma could also lead to students no longer feeling any need to take action against injustices. Here, a superficial definition of mental health runs contrary to the outcome desired by Freire. The priority of having a positive mood in the classroom setting in itself can become an obsession, and a privilege accessible only to students of a higher class.

Students who cannot recover emotionally from being exposed to traumatic injustices can indeed pose a challenge to the classroom. They may be assumed to be emotionally fragile, or coming from backgrounds that make them unsuited for learning about the world and all its inequalities. The reality may veer from these assumptions: for a student who has truly understood the gravity of child-maiming, and for a student who can sympathize with an authenticity that allows them to feel what the victimized children feel, they may likewise exhibit an inability to switch off negative emotions at the behest of their instructors or peers. These students exhibit mental strength because they do not feel the need to construct a "compartmentalized world… divided in two" to separate themselves as "superior" to an "inferior" (Fanon, 2004), and are capable of blurring the lines between the self and the other – no matter what kind of injustices the other is facing. These facts could lead one to conclude that these students indeed have advanced further in their development of critical consciousness with less fear than their emotionally-balanced peers. What these students need is not an artificial removal from this mental state, but rather, as Freire would emphasize, empowerment.

For a student who is taught to protect themselves against child-maiming by being mindful of its reality, they may indeed exhibit fear. If this fear is about their own personal safety, it is a fear that can be assuaged by reinforcing the reality that they are currently safe and free from these injustices. Contrarily, for the perceptive student, they may exhibit inconsolable fear, because their fear does not concern themselves. The question they ask internally is not "what should I do to protect myself", but rather "what about all the children who are already victimized" – a question that students, their educators, and in truth, all of society does not have an answer to.

This lack of a leverage point towards action can be a deep powerlessness that is the root of uncontrollable emotions. Being comforted is always helpful, but being empowered means much more in the lens of critical consciousness. One should be prepared for the possibility that in a classroom full of students, some are ready, willing, and actually desperately seeking actions that they can take against

injustice even in their present state of being a young student. What is traumatizing might not be the fact that they are exposed to an unjust reality happening in their world, but rather that they are stripped of an opportunity to act upon the injustice no matter how desperately they wish to. These students are not seeking more shallow forms of learning when it comes to injustice. They do not need to be protected, but rather, they are seeking to be taught in a way in which there is opportunity to directly and deeply engage with said injustices. In a worst case scenario, protection is prioritized for the sake of convenience. Students are being taught to protect themselves against any negative emotions, and embrace their disempowered state as a chronic condition which they must conform to and hold constant to appear mentally healthy. And in this mode of pedagogy towards critical consciousness, any form of societal injustices which lead to negative emotions must be removed, silenced, invalidated, as the wellbeing of the privileged student is paramount. The journey towards critical consciousness becomes one of intentional censorship of any issue that could remind the student of disempowerment. Power, or the illusion of power, is achieved via engaging with whichever issue that is most easily within reach. Within the context of this unique form of critical consciousness development, children who are maimed must remain invisibilized.

A society concerned with the wellbeing of all children should naturally be concerned with the wellbeing and existence of maimed children. We must teach their lived experience with utmost sensitivity, dignity, and respect to them, fully acknowledging that this is a valid legacy that they leave the world with. Erasing this legacy or acknowledging their lived experience as anything less is a form of further injustice; we may fall trap to our own language that is "used to make social inequality invisible" (Freire, 2000). The legacy of these children is worth passing on to the next generations beyond teaching self-protection. There will be trauma and there will be emotions, but with commitment, educators can co-learn with students that there is much more to be learned beyond the statement that "something horrible exists."

The Paradox of Silence

Here it is worthwhile to consider another historical injustice, related specifically to Freire's consideration of colonialism. The residential school system of Canada (Wilk et al., 2017) stole generations of indigenous children from all different First Nations, and placed them not under assimilation but rather in isolated school grounds for daily emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Sexual

abuse of students was so rampant that repeated forced abortions were documented (*The Bridgehead*, 2022). Graves of students lay testimony to the severity and frequency of crimes committed.

Residential schools are inseparable from these horrendous details of violations against the human being. Here, the details must be censored as the graphic nature would have many agree that they are not suited for audiences under the age of majority. This results in widespread censorship or complete removal of residential school history from textbooks and discourse in formal education settings. The immediate implication of this censorship is that survivors can find themself in a society that has no understanding of, nor any interest in understanding their lived experience. Beyond this general phenomena of marginalization, skepticism exists to this day regarding the actual severity of the abuse that was carried out under the guise of education in residential schools. An entire generation of indigenous children, growing in the secluded dictatorship of white oppressors, can easily find themselves in more trauma and isolation after they survive and leave the residential system. A society that consistently casts doubt over their claims of abuse is a barrier, and so is the fact that this same society can request the survivors to repeat their stories as "evidence". Even after finally gaining society's approval to be a survivor of real abuse, the individual then moves on to the next phase of living with potential stigma the general public can have towards survivors of abuse.

All of these scenarios manifest from the censorship of graphic abuse in formal school textbooks. Essentially, the educator's goal of not causing excessive trauma to students erects multiple systemic barriers to the successful recovery or rehabilitation of abused children who were able to leave the system alive.

The greatest injustice resulting from the censorship is that the perpetrators and abusers collectively are given the chance to walk away from the situation bearing no responsibility. If one creates a system that leads to abuse, one may have to admit this historical abuse in future textbooks. Yet if one creates a system that completely abuses and dehumanizes individuals to a horrific degree, one ironically gains public support to remove this history from future mentions. Via intensified abuse, history is set up to be repeated as it is deleted. This deletion, notably, is a deletion sanctioned by the public.

Developing the ability to confront severe injustices is no longer made an option for students in the classroom, because severe injustices are silenced or presented in less-severe forms. This creates an unrealistic version of reality, one that potentially even encourages students to emulate the behavior of trivializing injustices to acceptable levels before engaging with them. For the more perceptive

students, critical consciousness loses its appeal because all the injustices they are presented with in the classroom are not worth acting upon.

Specific Contribution to Critical Consciousness

Acknowledging the lived experience of children who are maimed is not valid simply because it represents severe injustice. Its validity in the critical consciousness discourse can be much greater; here, we propose three specific contributions to pedagogy which are directly linked to the nature of the issue.

Firstly, an in-depth understanding of the issue of child-maiming creates a fair and realistic conceptualization of a global community (Luke & Carpenter, 2003). The most high-profile cases of child-maiming, specifically in academia, are in India and Bangladesh. For a student who is exposed to this fact without dedicated guidance from the critical educator, the issue can easily be viewed as evidence of inferiority of other cultures. This view of inferiority may in fact be applied to the entire developing world by the student.

The most fundamental error is the student's association of lack of research with absence of the problem. The conceptualization of this paper was first prompted when the co-authors reflected on our own research experiences and realized identical practices of child-maiming are present in different countries. For one of these countries, a literature search cannot produce any scholarly sources on child-maiming. The fact that academia in India has begun to acknowledge and investigate the issue suggests not inferiority, but significant advances and openness in addressing inequalities. Countries which appear to be free from child-maiming cases may prove to possess this public image only due to severe censorship – or worse, due to severe social inequalities that localize these issues in marginalized communities. Having never heard of such an incident is not scholarly evidence for absence of a form of abuse, and students will benefit from understanding what constitutes scholarly evidence.

The analysis above is not included in order to accuse more countries of housing environments for child-maiming. In fact, the educator can guide students to consider more critical questions: why are we accusing? Why are we delineating an us-versus-them conceptualization of countries in the world? If indeed, our home country is free from cases of child-maiming, what difference does it make to the children who have been maimed miles away?

The nature of the issue can lead students to immediately delineate. It is tempting, or even instinctive to accuse, and cast other communities as inferior, almost as if the moral high ground can mentally protect ourselves from these risks

of abuse. The important distinction that students may not directly grasp is the distinction between the individual versus the community. In fact, it is indeed a tremendously nuanced distinction, as the community here in question also deserves to be inspected. As a basic level of understanding, students aspiring to gain critical consciousness should understand that the individual abusers should be condemned and not accepted as part of our community. Yet, to condemn the entire community would also mean condemning many more who are victimized by the issue of child-maiming: parents spending everything they own trying to locate their child; grandparents; siblings, and other children who are also at risk of this abuse are all condemned when we condemn a community. Students should be encouraged to think critically about the community which allows this form of abuse to happen – as well as the community members who have been directly impacted and struggling to fight the issue. These inquiries clearly indicate that there is important nuance beyond a binary that separates the developed world from the developing world. Without engaging in these inquiries, a common outcome for young minds to gravitate to is more discrimination and stereotyping of developing countries whenever they are exposed to global inequalities, whether it be on the news, through their friends, or on social media. To these young minds, what happens in the developing world seems too barbaric, too severe, too out-of-the-ordinary, and too unacceptable – if only even to mention – and is entirely not related to their business in the developed world, even if their own communities have identical cases of inequality that the student does not know about. In this mindset, the global community becomes fractured. This destruction of the global community becomes more likely to happen if a topic related to injustice is the student's first introduction to a specific country, or their first introduction to the concept of developing countries in general. The issue of child-maiming, when included in pedagogy in a critical way, helps to introduce important concepts on both global inequalities and our shared global commonalities.

For the advanced learner, the absence of child-maiming in academic research creates opportunity to develop critical consciousness in relation to global differences in conceptualizing research. Like how the young learner can discriminate against developing countries, the advanced learner who claims to be non-racist can discriminate against research from developing countries. In-depth consideration of validity of research on child-maiming is beyond the scope of this paper, but preliminary contemplations can show that the issue requires a radical shift in perspectives of even the methodology itself. The value of quantitative research beyond providing a very rough estimation of the prevalence is questionable, as it is difficult to imagine how statistics alone can change the on-

the-ground realities that the children experience. With regards to qualitative research, in considering ethnographic observations, engagement via interviews or focus groups, one can clearly see that the current accepted paradigms of valid research are insufficient to addressing this social injustice. How can a researcher simply observe and interview, and not act? Furthermore are considerations of ethics in researching vulnerable populations; the complex ethics process does not necessarily aid in viewing our human responsibility to terminate child-maiming as an ethical act, but rather encourages diversion of attention and research-funding to less ethically-complex research matters. In a situation as such, research can seem futile in addressing the issue towards benefiting children who are maimed. Yet, this should not be used to justify the disqualification of child-maiming as a worthy research issue. Cultural and postcolonial research paradigms (Ryder et al., 2020) which do not fit the norm may need to be drawn upon to fill the void in this context of unavailable methodology. After the research is indeed performed using a cultural research practice, how we as researchers in settings of privilege view the validity of the research outputs also calls into question how we contribute to fragmentation of a global community.

Understanding Mass (Digital) Media Critically

This lack of research outputs essentially positions child-maiming as a sidelined and nearly-censored topic in academia. The responsibility of acknowledging the reality of child-maiming in our world is ironically taken up by digital media, which is not only often conceptualized as mere entertainment but is also open about the fictional nature of its content. Still, the value that research brings to advocacy and raising awareness of child-maiming has been minimal, especially in comparison to the tremendous impact associated with mass media. For example, *Slumdog Millionaire* (Koehler, 2009), as pop culture, as an unacademic source, has delivered the possibility of child-maiming to millions of viewers around the world.

Here we are reminded about the necessity of educators in incorporating child-maiming in pedagogy. Without educators, youth are still being exposed to difficult realities through mass media. The heightened accessibility of information with growing digitization exposes youth to new concepts regardless of whether they have received formal approval from their parents or teachers. It becomes apparent that in some cases, the formal education system is not truly concerned with youth being emotionally triggered by inequalities. Emotional triggers abound in society and in mass media, but what matters to us more is that we rid ourselves

of the responsibility of bringing that trigger. If a child sees triggering content, we can conveniently blame it on the state of the internet.

For youth who first learn about child-maiming as an inequality through *Slumdog Millionaire*, they may draw fictional conclusions about this real inequality. They may consider the issue to be limited, once again, to the sphere of India. They may consider the issue to be a thing of the past, reinforced by the film's narrative format. Or, they may consider the issue to be fictional, just like how the rest of the story presents itself as fiction. Even educators who are not ready to fully explore the issue of child-maiming in pedagogy can provide essential information to these youth. More importantly, if educators are not ready to fill in the role of guiding youth in exploring digital media, other entities in society will. A social media influencer may discuss inequalities as an entertaining sample from the horror genre. Or, they may provide discussions of child-maiming accompanied by their own racist propaganda. In these cases, we may lament about how the education system has failed to move students away from racism. In reality, the education system did not fail because it did not teach anti-racism, but rather, it conceded territory to other sources of information in a student's life.

Of particular note, digital media not only has the potential to raise awareness at a population-level, but is also increasingly used in formal education. Paradoxically, one may find literature on digital media education – via films, animations, games – only in the highest levels of formal education (Darbyshire & Baker, 2012). The fact that digital media is being used for formal education in graduate school and professional medical training suggests that digital media is not simply entertainment. Valid learning can happen via digital media, as supported by multiple studies performed in higher education institutes (Baniasadi et al., 2020; Bracq et al., 2019; Law et al., 2015; Olszewski & Wolbrink, 2017). The existing state of research suggests there is limited rationale in invalidating digital media as a learning tool. As digital media has both the potential to engage audiences at the population-level and provide learning opportunities suitable for postgraduate degrees, how might educators apply digital media towards developing critical consciousness?

While academia has more or less sidelined child-maiming as an inequality in scholarly work, it is possible to identify academic sources on *Slumdog Millionaire*. Some of these papers directly discuss the film in the context of allowing audiences to be able to see inequality (Freire). The film, as a form of "multimediated communications", is noted as a "response to the international inequalities laid bare and exposed to a growing critique" (Magala, 2010). Seeing the invisibilized is a common theme, as the film is also described as "inviting viewers to see the

impoverished and therefore vulnerable child at its centre" (Snell, 2016). Acknowledging children who have been maimed in a lens of critical consciousness illustrates another important trend: digital media can allow invisibilized social inequalities to resurface, not just in public discourse but also in peer-reviewed research.

This calls upon educators to be reflexive about conceptualizations of valid learning. Youth who access *Slumdog Millionaire* and other films out of their own interest may learn about social inequalities, yet this learning can be dismissed by society due to the medium of film. At the same time, academia approves systematic reviews on medical students learning from the medium of film. In short, learning through digital media can be automatically invalidated unless the learner is privileged with access to formal educational settings. This in itself is a form of inequality that critical consciousness invites individuals to see and act upon.

Mass media can bring silenced perspectives to the masses – and just as easily, it can shape social constructs which lead to stereotyping and discrimination. As an example, Hooks writes that "Contemporary popular culture… rarely represents the poor in ways that display integrity and dignity" but rather portrayed as "consumed with longing to be rich, a longing so intense that it renders them dysfunctional" (Hooks, 1994). In conjunction with the fact that youth are exposed to a wide array of content including paid-advertisement content, helping youth to engage with digital media critically becomes an important task for educators. Critical consciousness can be developed and dismantled by digital media. In a landscape of capitalist influence in media as an industry, inequalities and representation of inequalities naturally become innate to public discourse on media pieces. In resistance to this capitalism, how youth can be guided to consume media in a way that leads to critical consciousness, or create youth-led media to share marginalized voices in society are worthwhile pedagogical inquiries. Considering the children who are maimed and their impact on *Slumdog Millionaire* leads students and educators to inquire about the emerging role of digital media in highlighting and addressing invisibilized inequalities.

Highlighting Our Own Tendencies

At first glance child-maiming may seem too horrific an act that is far away from our own realities. At the core of the issue, child-maiming is about dehumanizing and commodifying an individual – perhaps resulting in irreparable damage – for attention and subsequent profit. Digital media also brings an

important lesson here: individuals in so-called first world countries also perform the exact same act, and perhaps even to their own children. Netflix's *Gypsy* (Banjara, 2021) brought mass attention to a case of *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* (Abdurrachid & Marques, 2022), in which a specific individual not only fabricated medical conditions for her daughter, but also forced her daughter to undergo unnecessary surgery. The parent is assumed to have generated enough donations not just to cover living expenses but also multiple costly health care procedures which are not covered by a public health care system. Dehumanizing the daughter became a full-time job, and proved to be as lucrative as one.

This case would only appear before public scrutiny when the child murdered the parent and left the murder scene, causing many to search for a potentially abducted victim with multiple reported serious health conditions. The incident became widely known after the release of an entire television series dedicated to the multi-year abuse. Through a media comparison between *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Gypsy*, youth can begin to see that child-maiming is not a problem of the "other". The much-needed representation of invisiblized victims raises self-awareness, and calls into question our assumed moral superiority over other global communities. Including child-maiming in pedagogy allows youth to think about the parallel evils in our own communities, and how much effort it takes for certain tragedies to be seen by the public. Youth should be encouraged to prevent and condemn these tragedies no matter how invisibilized they may be; one cannot prevent nor condemn if one does not first acknowledge.

Understanding child-maiming in light of how our own communities participate in equivalent acts of cruelty can bring further insight into what it means to be critically conscious. The perceived differences between *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* and child-maiming creates an opportunity for youth to understand the impacts of colonialism and the longstanding inequalities it introduces to a society. If child-maiming or child-beggars is related in part due to poverty, the privileged youth should acknowledge our direct role in causing this poverty. Fanon writes that our "opulence is… built on the backs of slaves, it fed on the blood of slaves". For all youth in developed cities, Fanon's (2004) message to them is clear:

> *You know full well we are exploiters. You know full well we have taken the gold and minerals and then oil from the "new continents," and shipped them back to the old metropolises. Not without excellent results in the shape of palaces, cathedrals, and centers of industry.* (p. lviii)

These are not simply generalizations. Specifically with regards to India and precious metals, Pomeranz and Topik discuss colonialism as strategic economic

warfare. Their book *The World that Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy, 1400 to the Present* details a distressing narrative: centuries of trade through the Silk Road in combination with European tastes for the oriental resulted in more than "one-third" of Europe's gold and silver – directly taken from the Americas – flowing to Asia due to European consumption alone. To recuperate these spendings from Asia, imperialist powers were not interested in increasing the competitiveness of European products among Asia consumers to balance trade, but rather, war and colonialism would be the preferred response. India was strategically taken first for its suitability for growing opium, which then could be used to take down a second major oriental vendor: China. India was a stepping stone in order to grow and use drugs for systematically redirecting oriental wealth back to the west. In relation to child-maiming, the widespread poverty which provides fundamental context for these phenomena is inseparable from centuries of western activities in the region. As members of the developed world, youth should understand that we all continue to benefit from this global plunder.

Whereas severe poverty can be seen as the driver for child-maiming in colonized countries, the rationale for Munchausen syndrome by proxy is more difficult to comprehend in comparison. Certainly, individuals in the west have greater access to economic opportunities that could replace commodification of one's own children as a means of living. Diving deeper into the issue of child-maiming using a critical lens helps privileged youth understand that we have contributed to the poverty of colonized countries; we continue to benefit from this poverty of colonized countries; and still, members of our own community perform the same act in this situation of massive privilege. Without active participation in restorative justice to remove the economic damage performed by colonialism, we cannot claim any superiority over communities with higher-profile cases of child-maiming. In fact, we should perhaps shift to consider viewing ourselves in the developed world as members who contributed to child-maiming.

Addressing economic inequality which has persisted for centuries is a challenging task. There can be a tendency to link an on-the-ground tragedy to a systemic cause simply too grand for one individual to tackle – such as capitalism – and then settle on inaction. In honesty, addressing child-maiming is not difficult at the ground-level: if every individual who walked by a child beggar did not spend money, but rather spent time to guide the child to an orphanage, a school, or any institution that naturally is created to be concerned with welfare of children, there would be no profit for the maimers. Similarly, if all individuals who walked by a child-beggar were simply not bothered enough to spare any coins, there would also be no profit for the maimers. In other words, the behind-the-scenes abusers and

perpetrators take advantage of not societal indifference, but rather, convenient charity.

Here, the community must be inspected for this culture of convenient charity to persist. In any community, there can exist individuals who are interested in helping, but oftentimes, only on their own terms. The ultimate safety and welfare of the child-beggars are not their concern. When the child is in sight, putting down some cash makes it easier to walk past the child. Once the child is behind them, life carries on. This in itself is not reprehensible behavior, but it nonetheless is what contributes to sustained income for those who abuse children. Convenient charity at a population level – which we all participate in – encourages continued abuse because it presents to abusers a reliable source of income. Here, youth may see once again how we contribute to child-maiming as a reality. Those who choose to transgress and be radical in their charitable acts towards child-beggars are few and far between. This is inherently linked to the state of critical consciousness of our society.

Similarly, abusers who profit from *Munchausen syndrome by proxy* also understand how to perfectly exploit convenient charity. Individuals are concerned enough to share a social media post and make a donation if a payment link is conveniently located; few are truly interested in helping the child-victim reach long-term wellbeing. Not only so, every single health professional who has interacted with the child-victim, despite their medical expertise, has also exhibited this same prioritization of convenience. Making a difference in the lives of their patients is desirable, but only if it is convenient or perhaps extremely lucrative. Some of these health professionals in the Gypsy-Rose Blanchard case are so concerned with their own terms of patient-engagement that some have been fooled or talked into performing unnecessary surgeries on the child-victim. As a society, we continue to place faith in the same health professionals, their regulating bodies, as well as the medical education system which grants them the platform to practice. Likewise, individuals in the general public are not fully invested in the wellbeing of child-victims, but rather lean towards using blind faith to remove the issue from their sight – as some trustworthy health professionals should be paid somewhere to help the victim. Even when we do commit financial resources, our fundamental motivation for convenient charity might not be significantly different from an impulse buy.

All of these individuals discussed are among the more laudable cases who participate in charity. Others who lack critical consciousness to truly grasp the severity of inequality may choose to participate in not just convenient charity, but rather performative charity for attention. Whether it is to generate evidence for

self-assumed moral superiority, or to exert upon power structures within their social circle, charity can be employed as a tool for personal gain. Individuals who engage in performative charity use victims as their vehicle; attention and personal gain are their desired outcomes. Here, the act of charity shares similarities with the horrendous deeds of the abuser.

Without critical consciousness, convenient charity and performative charity can become the norm. The psychological framework behind society's lesser acts of charity might not be complex: convenient charity and performative charity can easily stem from a common human motive to invest less but gain more – in everything in life, even in charity.

Balancing existing perspectives

If actual elimination of severe abuse and commodification of children is a goal of educators concerned with critical consciousness, we contend that critical pedagogy should be inclusive of lived experiences of all victims. Not all youth should be taught to prioritize their own mental health over the actual life-and-death of thousands of victims around the world; we believe there is a segment of the student population who are ready to be guided towards acknowledgment and action. The tendency to silence what is deemed inappropriate for young minds here may prove to be futile, as the digital world presents massive, uncontrolled information that youth can access at their fingertips. What is necessary is not trigger warnings, but rather pedagogy that arms youth with the emotional capacity to accept severe inequalities as actionable reality in our world. When educators and youth collectively set boundaries on what should be excluded from critical pedagogy based on our emotions, censorship becomes justified. Critical consciousness may be trivialized to whatever we are already willing to accept. Whatever inequality that is actually critical for us to accept is stripped of its relevance and removed entirely under a population-level movement towards a superficial model of mental health. We are left with a host of issues that we are comfortable to confront, and that make us feel powerful because anything beyond our power has already been censored.

It is our hope that one day, youth can tackle issues like child-maiming with a pure intent of removing inequality just as Freire had imagined. Youth will be able to look upon any form of injustice in any community around the world, and declare: "your problem is my problem, I am not coming in to help as a member of a superior community, but rather from a community that exhibits the exact same motives and tendencies in all our privilege."

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Worsening Inhospitability in Inherited Dystopias: Kenya and Somalia as Epitomes

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Abstract

Farah and Ngugi paint Somalia and Kenya as spaces where the incompetence of the new leaders, with the collusion of the colonial masters, has produced unpleasant effects on the lives of the masses. The two writers implicitly project that both civilian and military regimes are despicable Siamese twins in their political intercourse with the people. Using mimicry as a theoretical anchor, this paper aims to foreground the colonial strategies rehashed by the postcolonial leaders of Somalia and Kenya to sustain their political and economic supremacy over the governed. This paper concludes that the reviewed spaces remain inhospitable for those at the periphery of the power structure, particularly those who aspire to become economically independent. The paper equally concludes that for the indigent masses, the said spaces have become even worse dystopias of uncertainty – uncertain as to who will be the right autochthones to rekindle hope in them for a dignified existence.

Keywords: *necropolitics, liberticidal politics, economic violence, mimicry, inhospitable spaces, torture chamber.*

Introduction

Ngugi and Farah seek to demonstrate that where political vision spins around the sole interests of members of an inner circle bent on promoting inequalities, the tools of coercion privileged by the colonial master will remain fashionable. The texts chosen for this article (*Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* by Ngugi and *Sweet and Sour Milk*, *Sardines* and *Close Sesame* by Farah)[1] unveil a diabolic trinity used by the colonial replacements within the power structure to sustain their hegemony over the masses: torture of challenging dissenters, encouragement of intellectual sycophancy and complicity and thirdly, promotion of philistinism. This satanic creed re-historicises the strategies used by the erstwhile imperial administrators to sustain their political and economic supremacy over their colonised miserables.

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[1] Henceforward, we shall use *Petals, Matigari, Sweet, Sardines and Sesame* instead of full titles.

The two writers seem to ask the following questions in the reviewed works: Are the dystopias inherited bequeathed to the Central and East African people any worse than the new ones created by the colonial replacements? Have the indigenous leaders who have replaced the colonial masters been able to make life comfortable for the victims of colonial abuse? Are the immediate leaders of post-independence Africa intellectually equipped for real independence? Are the post-independence leaders merely the final executors of the ruthless and exploitative policies of the replaced colonial regimes (Henning, 2008)? The answer is "no" to all these questions. And since the post-independence dystopias reviewed in this study are a mere iteration of pre-independence ones, one can adopt mimicry as the theoretical underpinning to foreground two major governance strategies employed the new-but-not-too-new stewards of the studied spaces in two slates: necropolitics and liberticidal politics.

Slate One: Necropolitics in Somalia

Somalia, under the political stewardship of Siad Barre, evidently Farah's Generalissimo in *Sweet, Sardines* and *Sesame*, is considered as one of Africa's worst dystopias. It can be argued that this trilogy intends to point an accusing finger at Siad Barre and the erstwhile colonial masters of the Somali space for the deepening and worsening of the dystopia left behind by the latter. Directly affected by the dictatorial behaviour of Siad Barre, Nuruddin Farah assumes the responsibility of presenting to the reading community this postcolonial dystopia, with all the inhuman manifestations of its leader (the Generalissimo) and his regime, as well as the active complicity of various western powers. With his pen, he succinctly depicts scenarios of crude terror and necropolitics which seem to justify his labelling of Somalia not just as a prison with an effective Dionysius Ear, but also as an unparalleled torture chamber for the express purpose of maintaining and sustaining a status quo where the political and economic hegemony of the oppressor is consolidated whilst the indigence of the oppressed sinks into a bottomless abyss.

In this component, we shall analyse the instances of necropolitics resorted to by the Generalissimo to muzzle dissent. We shall equally discuss the Generalissimo's lack of respect for status in his practice of necropolitics: religious and intellectual dignitaries are, in fact, his main targets. He has no sacred cows in his dispensation of bad behaviour anchored on the credo that "destabilizers do so to their own sorrow". This component shall equally discuss the Generalissimo's reliance on Western powers, particularly Russia, to consolidate and sustain his

torture chamber, since his (the Generalissimo) unbridled megalomania seems to have rendered him oblivious and blind to the need to work with the religious and intellectual dignitaries to alleviate or even eradicate poverty in Somalia.

It can be posited that in the mimicking or re-historicising necropolitics and liberticidal politics in the East African hemisphere, Farah's Generalissimo (Siad Barre) is unarguably the most ruthless leader in the space under review. His way of dealing with people branded as dissenters or challengers of his regime knows no boundaries. He succeeds, with the aid of both local and international hirelings to stifle the liberty to challenge his regime. In conformity with the old colonial order where challengers of the word of the colonial master would be considered as destabilizers or subversives, and be dealt with accordingly, challengers of the Generalissimo's word are crushed like cats, to give a literal interpretation of Ionesco's "chats écrasés" in *Rhinocéros* (p. 94). Literally, no one is free to speak and act in a manner that corrodes the interests of the regime.

What the reader observes, and of course Farah makes no attempt to dissimulate this reality, is that, the entire Somalia space is a torture chamber and at the same time an incaceral dystopia where the Generalissimo is the General Warder. By instituting an all-hearing system through the metaphoric construction of Dionysius Ear, a trope that further confirms the Somalia space as a terrible penitentiary, the General succeeds in rendering himself omniscient, omnipresent and ultimately, omnipotent. In the Mogadiscio under review, it is practically impossible to do or utter, or attempt to do or utter anything subversive to the General's regime without his knowing about it, and on very good authority.

In trying to quell down the tense political atmosphere engendered by the *Dionysius Ear* (the name given by Soyaan and the nine others to their memoranda), the excessive ruthlessness of the Generalissimo and his henchmen is extended even to those who are mere privy to the existence of these memoranda. Such is the fate of Mulki, Soyaan's secretary/typist who typed the memoranda. She is not just arrested and tortured, but she is also completely withdrawn from circulation, as Farah paints the situation. In addition to this, the entire tribesmen and women of Mulki are imprisoned too. What is detected in this form of generalized torture is that, the Generalissimo and his hirelings are not seen to demonstrate any sense of moderation in their administration of the bitter pills of coercion to their primary, secondary and even tertiary victims. And once in the custody of these torturing rhinos, there is hardly anyway the victim will be able to brave their methods of torture and remain reticent. In Loyaan the reader detects a Farah who informs the general readership how the Generalissimo's victims are tortured. Loyaan makes this torture obvious, albeit metaphorically, by borrowing

from the regime's sadism to attempt to extract confession from the Minister to the Presidency. In so doing, Loyaan sees himself as "the powerful pervert who puts the needle between the flesh of the thumb and the nail, screws it in harder, deeper, further and further, until it draws blood, not innocent blood, but just blood, red blood." (*Sweet*, pp. 197-8)

The General and his henchmen are not just able to trace and disgrace their destabilizers, they are also able, through his infallible network of detectives, to lay hands on the Memoranda which Margaritta puts in her jewellery box at the bank for safe keeping. In respect thereof, Loyaan comments: "[t]he sky is too high to reach and hide [Soyaan's documents] in [and] the earth too earthly and too exposed and the boxes are not sufficiently secretive." (p. 248) What the breaking into Margaritta's jewellery box at the bank reveals is that, the right to one's privacy can only remain sacrosanct if it is not likely to threaten the Generalissimo's peace of mind. The incident further reveals the ambivalent nature of the Generalissimo's regime and probably of all post-colonial dictatorial regimes: Margaritta, the keeper of the memoranda, is not subjected to physical torture because she is of Italian extraction while Mulki, the machine writer of the document, is subjected to both physical and psychological tortures. Through the treatment of these two ladies, it can be deduced that the two-faced Somalian Janus god has the ugly face turned towards the native and the beautiful one towards the alien.

It is also observed that when the Janus Generalissimo wears an aura of clemency, the victim, whom he considers as a real nuisance and embarrassment to his regime, is made to suffer some psychological torture that would make the physical one a better option were he to be given the opportunity to choose. Loyaan is made to suffer the pangs of exile when he obstinately questions the people-in-power in order to know who and what killed his twin brother, Soyaan. He is "deported" to communist Belgrade, far away from all sources of family and other vectors of social comfort. The use of the word "deport" brings to memory a string of cruel punishments in history meted out on the subversives by people-in-power. The word does remind the reader about the treatment meted out on the Jews by the Nazi when they were deported to Serbia or other inhospitable places to perish. The word also brings to memory the multitude of traditional potentates – Samoury Touré, Cheikh Amadou Bamba, Bai Bureh, etc. – who were exiled by the colonial regimes to faraway lands so that they would divide, rule, ruin and exploit conquered territories unperturbed. But above all, the word "deported" becomes an implicit proof that the Soviet Union and those countries which accepted their political tutelage are one and the same polity. But unlike the exile of some of these

traditional leaders, who were made to return home when they were already old, weak and depleted of organic ardour, Loyaan is abandoned to his moral resources and left to degenerate into a complete human waste in Belgrade.

In view of the above, it is probably helpful to argue that the politically asphyxiating atmosphere in Somalia is not just a mimicry or re-historicisation of the antics and inhumane conduct of the former colonial master, but, in fact, also the sum total of a perfectly negative hybrid of necropolitical practices demonstrated by communist regimes all over the world, as fictionalized in Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon,* and even as documented in Jang Jing-Sung's *Dear Leader*, to mention just a few of such works.

Therefore, when the Generalissimo orders the elimination of the ten imams and all the ten intellectuals (Jibriil, Koschin, Mahad, Medina, Mukhtarr, Mursal, Samater, Ibrahim Siciliano and Soyaan) save Ahmed-Wellie, what surges forth from one's memory is not just the Tiananmen Square killings in China, Napoleon's purges in *Animal Farm*, but rather the brutal methods used by the colonial master to stymie dissent and consolidate exploitation of the natural resources of the colonized. Or, perhaps, the absurd sadomasochism of Caligula who would have loved to cut off all the necks of the Romans in one drop of the guillotine.

Again, it should also be borne in mind that the practice of necropolitics in the terms proposed by Mbembe, where bodies are territorialised into those who should die and those who should live so that the dictatorial regime will grow strong and prosperous, the dictators seem to believe that "bad behaviour is more often than not good politics" (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2012, p. xi). The Generalissimo and his henchmen seem to be guided by this paradox evoked by Bueno et al in almost all his different engagements with his othered masses. One may also acknowledge that the Generalissimo's behaviour, emblematic of postcolonial military dictators, finds expression in Josaphat B. Kubayanda's evaluation of postcolonial dictatorship in Africa as a system that "concerns itself with repression which, in effect, means the arrest, exile, execution, or consistent harassment of dissident voices" (p. 5) and can therefore produce "an atmosphere of fear, hate and humiliation" (p. 5).

This atmosphere of fear born out of necropolitics is buttressed by Ebla in her caution to her daughter, Sagal, to pin her conscience to her underthings and not to wear it on her forehead (*Sardines*, p. 35) when she discovers that she is playing with the fire of politics:

> *The land is mined, and this General is out to kill. Duck at the buzz of the coming bullet; duck, my dearest, before a stray one gets you, duck and dodge. Do you argue that the city is full of walking corpses?* (p. 35)

Ebla's piece of advice resonates with the wisdom contained in Duncan's ironic comment in *Macbeth:* "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face" (Act 1, Scene 4). What this means is that, Sagal should dissimulate her participation in destabilising the Generalissimo if she wants to remain alive. It is important to note, however, that the two political situations are starkly different. While Duncan is not aware that he is being hunted, the Generalissimo is aware that he is living in a society of hunters and has therefore taken every precaution in order not to fall prey by not just transforming Somalia into an ordinary prison, but into a prison where everybody seems to be in death row. Ebla's fear can therefore be considered founded.

Given the hunting atmosphere depicted in Farah's trilogy, it seems reasonable to posit, as suggests Gene Sharp (1973), that it is ill-advised to use violence to undo the work of the Generalissimo. It has been impossible for the challengers to execute their Sharpian agenda of non-violent action and destroy the atmosphere of fear, hate and humiliation the Generalissimo has established in Somalia. While the nine Somali intellectuals can only be praised for their organic behaviour, it is observed that it is foolhardiness or suicidal to attempt to terminate the regime of a Generalissimo through the gun which some of them eventually resort to after the assassination of Soyaan. As the texts reveal, he is a frontline man for the Soviets and because of this position, he is given maximum security, but not without a price tag as Nasser narrates in his letter to Medina:

> *Politics in Africa and the third World (…) is but an insipid goulash of western and eastern ideologies. The Soviets mastermind the acculturation of the African and the Asian as much as the other foreign powers did before them. (…). As for the Soviets, they got what they deserved. They led their little boy by the hand and introduced him to their friends. They used him; they cleaned his coast of its fish; they had their base, etcetera, etcetera. He used them too. He made them train his clansmen; he used them to build himself a system of security, watertight as the KGB. (Sardines, p. 25)*

The above seems to validate the argument that without the backing of some great powers, dictators in Africa will hardly succeed in establishing themselves as such. Nasser's excogitations point to the fact that the Generalissimo assumes the airs of another Louis XIV who also believes that "l'état c'est lui" because of the failsafe clanified security system the Russians have helped him entrench. The Generalissimo even arrogantly asserts this when Soyaan declares his decision to kill the ten imams as unconstitutional:

... have I ever introduced myself to you, young man? I am *the constitution. Now you know who I am, and I want you out of here before I set those dogs of mine on you and you are torn to pieces. Out!* (*Sweet*, p. 251).

One queer form of necropolitics practiced by the Generalissimo's regime and deemed vital to add to the smorgasbord of necropolitical practices discussed above is the one related to the sly elimination of the poor by subjecting them to hunger. Antecedents in history tempt one to argue that the Generalissimo mimics the starve-and-rule strategy used in the past by regimes that want to put the oppressed masses under perfect control. Medina, in fact, believes that the Russians are not unaware of the imminent drought, but choose to wait for it to result to famine (*Sardines*, p. 117). Thus, she is comforted by the foregoing to see the strategy "as a continuation of the same barbaric methods as were used by the Americans when they caused famine in Southeast Asia" (p. 117). Farah continues to report that the famine in Somalia provides the Generalissimo with the opportunity to employ this strategy in a sustainable manner because of two important benefits he derives from it. First, the financial help rendered by international charity organisations for the famine helps him to pay his security forces (p. 116). Second, the famine helps him quieten down the rebellious populations of the north as is buttressed by Medina with the support of another antecedent:

[i]t is easier to negotiate from a position of power with a hungry country; it's easier to rule a starving family. Haile Selassie used hunger as a controlling force in the Ogaden, Wallo, Sidamo and other provinces. The strategy has remained the same: starve and rule. (p. 117)

Having presented the Somali political situation under the Generalissimo (Siad Barre) this way, it can be asserted that through necropolitics, the Generalissimo succeeds in reducing his people to walking corpses. He has astutely territorialized the Somali people into who should die so that he can sustain his dominance over them. Thus, Somalia is not just a politically asphyxiated space, but a torture chamber and prison where every Somali seems to be serving a death sentence. It has also been established that with the complicity and collusion of the Soviets in creating a Somali society of the living-dead, the resources of Somalia are made to benefit mainly the few in power and their external political godfathers.

Slate Two (a): Liberticidal Politics in Kenya

The East-African dystopia painted by Ngugi in *Petals* and *Matigari* may not be too inundated with incidents of serial killing and torture, or as despicable and inhospitable as Farah presents Mogadishu, but all the same, Ngugi presents it as an unbearable space for the victims of capitalism. It may not be Farah's open society

of hunters where the oppressed are in constant quest for the oppressor's life (hunting the hunter) and vice versa but it is all the same a physical and economic torture chamber that offers no hope and scope to the downtrodden. In much clearer terms, the Kenyan power apparatus will not just use raw arms and physical aggression to silence the people while they lead them to the slaughter house, they will also use powerful economic arms to ensure that the dreams entertained by enterprising Kenyans to attain a certain level of economic independence remain a nightmare.[2] Thus, this segment shall analyse the physical and economic forms of violence used by Kenyans in authority to tame the exploited masses.

In *Petals* and *Matigari* Ngugi lucidly demonstrates that the Kenyan space is both and economic and physical torture chamber for the poor, but particularly for those agents who grant themselves the audacity to overturn this state of affairs. In *Petals*, Nderi, Chui, Kimeria, Mzigo and Reverend Ezekiel Waweru have their own thugs whom they rely upon to muzzle dissent so that they can continue to steal the wealth of the poor people, in fulfilment of the Gospel according to Tijan Sallah, The Gambian poet:

> *To those who have shall more be given.*
> *But from those who have not, even what they have*
> *Shall be taken away.* (1988, p. 13)

What appears to be the greatest evil, one can argue, is not so much the act of taking as the means employed to take (steal) and continue taking without hindrance. We contend that Nderi, Chui, Kimeria, Mzigo and Reverend Ezekiel Waweru, occupants of the first locus of extreme opulence, abuse or misinterpret the Gospel. And it is not impossible for the reader to brand these first locus occupants as antitheses of humankind for they (Nderi, Chui, Kimeria, Mzigo and Reverend Ezekiel Waweru) do not only stop at dispossessing the people of their lands hiding behind the bank, they go to the extremity of swindling the people by asking them to take from their very meagre resources and contribute twelve shillings and fifty cents per individual to the Kiama-kamwene Cultural Organization (KCO) which they believe, in an argument they do not expect any hard-thinking individual to patronize, will foster "unity between the rich and the poor and bring cultural harmony to all the regions" (*Petals*, p. 85). One should add that they are able to succeed in this robbery mission because they are protected by armed thugs.

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[2] It can be assumed that Ngugi decided not to go deep into the theme of arbitrary killings by dictators in *Petals* because this has been sufficiently addressed in *Crow of the Wizard*.

The tea-drinking meeting organized by the KCO at Gatundu turns out chaotic and ends up widening the moat between rich and poor on account of a very disturbing display of ruthless behaviour by KCO thugs who hit a teacher with a flat panga (heavy cutlass) for having the temerity to ask loudly if the tea party was to have them fall into queues: one for men and the other for women (p. 92); and mercilessly beat up a scraggy wretched old man – belonging to the second locus of the used, misused and abused – for protesting against the taking of a new oath "until the promises of the first one have been fulfilled" (p. 93). According to Munira, the thugs "stepped on his neck and pressed it with their boots against the floor and only when he made animal noises did they stop. He took the oath all right. But not with his heart" (p. 93).

What seems even more disturbing is Reverend Ezekiel's inability to commiserate with the poor old man on his maltreatment; what he rather does is to take sides with the KCO and defend it further as a useful organization. Ezekiel thus reminds the critic of Richard Congreve, Bishop of Oxford, who is believed to have said that "God has entrusted India to us to hold it for Him, and we have no right to give it up" (Bhaskar, 1967, p. 26). It is tempting to assume that Ezekiel too believes that Kenya has been entrusted to them by some divine power not only for them to feed on the downtrodden poor, but to also coerce them into subservience.

So, reminiscent of the house tax[3] and various other forms of economic exploitations to which the indigenous people were subjected by the colonial administration without seeing any significant development, the Ilmorogans are made to go through a similar experience in terms, but starkly different in intent. That is to say, both experiences (colonial and post-independence) can be subsumed under the rubric of exploitation. But unlike the house tax, which only entailed milking dry cows, the Ilmorog development programme does not stop at milking the dry cows; it goes as far as working towards rendering the future of these dry cows uncertain. Like the colonial establishment, the post-independence Kenyan power structure continues the work of the empire builders commenced and supervised directly by them: dispossessing the people of their lands through the faceless African Economic Bank and the KCC.

The African Economic Bank entices people into accepting loans from it with "small interests" and of course with their lands as collateral security. It is tempting to assume that the African Economic Bank does not expect the indigent indigenes of Ilmorog to be able to pay back their loans particularly when the development of

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[3] The British derogatorily called it the Hut Tax in Sierra Leone. This led to the war that saw Bai Bureh exiled to Gold Coast, present day Ghana.

the land for which the loans are taken goes with other charges. It is therefore little surprising for the reader to see the Kanua Kanene & CO (Valuers and Surveyors, Auctioneers, Land, Estate & Management Agents), acting on the instructions given to it by the Wilson, Shah, Muragi Advocates on behalf of their client, African Economic Bank, sell by public auction Mrs Nyakinyua's land situated in New Ilmorog because she is not able to pay back her loan. This has also been the fate of many other Ilmorogans as confirms what follows:

> *She was not alone: a whole lot of peasants and herdsmen of Old Ilmorog who had been lured into loans and into fencing off their land and buying imported fertilisers and were unable to pay back were similarly affected. Without much labour, without much machinery, without breaking with old habits and outlook, and without much advice they had not been able to make the land yield enough to meet their food needs and pay back the loans. Some used the money to pay school fees. Now the inexorable law of the metal power was driving them from the land.* (*Petals*, p. 275)

It is obvious that the loans constitute a real poison and that the rationale behind the social and infrastructural revolution in Ilmorog is to throw the indigenes out of their land without knowing who to point an accusing finger at. But it can be deduced that the African Economic Bank only functions as a visor to mask the real faces of the greedy local authorities who collude with foreign companies to buy the forfeited lands. It is in this regard that Melber Henning intimates that these authorities are the final executors of the policies of the ruthless exploitative and greedy colonial regimes; and that the new "liberators" only tend to reproduce the past rather than offer genuine poverty alleviating alternatives (2008) may be considered valid.

The use of violent action as a means of sustaining the exploitative hegemony of the Nderis, the Chuis, the Kimerias, the Mzigos and the Reverend Ezekiel Wawerus is not just limited to the lumpen proletariat, it is also extended to people in the upper class who militate in favour of the downtrodden. This has been the fate of Mr Hawkins, the lawyer who defends Munira, Karega and Abdulla (under police custody at the Central Police Station for having indirectly initiated the molestation of MP Nderi wa Riera at the Jeevanjee Gardens) and succeeds in getting them acquitted and discharged. This he does by painting the deplorable condition of Ilmorog and pointing out that the need for the march to the capital could have been obviated if the authorities had taken their assignment seriously:

> *He described Ilmorog with such phrases as a "deserted homestead", a "forgotten village" an island of underdevelopment which after being sucked thin and dry was itself left standing, static, a grotesque distorted image of what peasant life was and could be. He castigated the negligence of those entrusted with the task of representing the people. If the people's representatives did their duty, would such a journey have*

been necessary? He summed up by describing their epic journey in such detail that the people in court, even the magistrates, were visibly moved. (*Petals*, p. 184)

Knowing the tragic fate the pre and early post-colonial predators reserve for the people's organic intellectuals who attempt to build a buffer or no-contact zone between them and their prey, the critic receives the news about Mr Hawkins assassination without much surprise. It can be argued that if Patrice Lumumba was killed and immersed into mining acid (Bolivar, 2008, p. 23) and Waiyaki wa Hinga was buried alive at Kibwezi "head facing the bowels of the earth" (Ngugi, 2009, p. 3), the murder and abandonment of Mr Hawkins' corpse in the bush for hyenas to regale on may not be regarded as gruesome as the first two. However, the message behind the show of extreme ruthlessness by the predators and hegemony builders remains the same: defenders of the exploited do so to their own sorrow! The show of inhumanity by both pre- and post-colonial political magnates may also serve both as a warning and a piece of advice to potential destabilizers.

This is the same warning that permeates *Matigari.* And like the oppressor-oppressed situation developed in Farah's trilogy, Ngugi's *Matigari* examines an identical situation where the loyalists-to-the-law succeed to a large extent in forcing the masses into their shells of submission with the help of the national security forces and to a lesser extent, with the assistance of foreign forces, particularly the British. It is observed that whoever dares raise a voice or finger to act in contravention of the dictates of people-in-power is dealt with ruthlessly.

Matigari catalogues the dastardly acts orchestrated by the security forces against those organic individuals who dare protest against the two-world Kenya of exploiter-exploited, or of those who frequently visit the toilet and those who do not (p. 55), or of those who consume all the fruits of others' labour and those who labour without consuming the fruits of their labour. In *Matigari,* the reader witnesses a boundless show of police ruthlessness in the business of taming dissenters in order to protect the exploiters. Arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions and summary executions are rife, thus rendering Kenya inhospitable for the various shades of the marginalized community. Students and teachers are perhaps the most targeted given their open inclination to Matigari's Marxist project. In fact, convinced that a "thieving spirit cannot be appeased by sacrifice," (p. 121), a student victim exhorts people to listen to Matigari and "sing with those who were detained yesterday, those gaoled the day before yesterday and the fifty who were killed this morning by the security forces" (p. 121). This wastage of lives, reminiscent of the Tiananmen Square killings, is manifestative of leadership callousness: dictators do not seem to care about the number of human lives wasted by their security forces as long as such waste guarantees them security in their

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political positions, and also helps them guarantee the security of the John Boys and the Robert Williams, physical agents of the colonial continuum.

Efforts to consolidate the colonial continuum are seen in the Minister of Truth and Justice's parody of justice in which Ngaruro wa Kiriro and Matigari ma Njiruungi are sent to a psychiatric hospital by the judges for mental examination – Ngaruro wa Kiriro for spearheading a strike action against the Anglo-American Leather factory to demand wage increase as does Ibrahima Bakayoko in *Les Bouts du bois de Dieu or* Etienne in *Germinal* by Sembène Ousmane and Emile Zola; and Matigari for berating John Boy and Robert Williams for their predatory tendencies and for talking at the Minister of Truth and Justice and opposing a presidential decree (*Matigari*, pp. 122-125).[4] But while Bakayoko and Etienne's actions produce the desired results, Ngaruro and Matigari's actions do not. More crucially, what seems sad in the case of Ngaruro and Matigari is that, the public, in spite of the burning desire to come to their rescue, is incapacitated from doing so because of the fiery posture of the regime's armed dogs, to employ an Orwellian nomenclature. The disgruntled public is practically paralyzed or becomes just another zombified community like Ebla's walking dead in *Sardines*.

This justice delivery system captured above is probably the apogee of self-debasement by the people-in-power. Observing the situation with patriotic lenses, it seems indefensible to embark on a colossal campaign of hunting and exterminating dissenters for the good of the few-in-power particularly when these few include people abhorred for their proclivity to predatory practices. What seems paradoxical is that, the insane consider the sane insane. Should there be any group of people who need mental attention, it can be argued that it is the Minister of Truth and Justice, his acolytes and the security forces, for, as is depicted in *Matigari,* they are the ones who have abandoned all pretensions to sanity and humanity. Thus, by using the services of the Minister of Truth and Justice and the security forces, the government of His Excellency Ole Excellence repeats the warning given to those who fight on the camp of the oppressed in *Petals*: defenders of the exploited do so to their own sorrow!

Slate Two (b): Economic Violence

It is noted that apart from the use of guns to tame dissenters in order to sustain the status quo in the East African states under review, Ngugi also captures

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[4] Ngaruro and Matigari are helped by Guthera (the prostitute) to escape from this mental hospital. However, Ngaruro is later killed but Matigari succeeds in wreaking large-scale havoc on the property of John Boy by setting the entire estate on fire.

other forms of arms employed by economic predators to create a worldly hell for people who want to enfranchise themselves economically. It is a dystopia akin to Ulrich Beck's "Municipal Darwinism" (Beck et al., 2004, p. 65) where the Metropolitan superstructure devours smaller cities, and small-scale businesses in conquered territories; or perhaps as a superstructure that promotes the vampire ideology of consumer capitalism or the law of the jungle where the fittest survive (Bullen & Parsons, 2007). What this suggests is that, the disembedded others (the oppressed masses) are made to suffer both physical and fiscal violence so that a few greedy individuals will perpetrate their hegemony. In short, the old binary configuration of opulent colonizing minority and indigent colonized majority is seen mimicked and re-historicized in the Kenyan space.

The bitter experience tasted by the people of Ilmorog lends validity to Ast's argument in Armah's *Osiris Rising*, that "[t]here is plenty of evidence that the independence game only stabilized European and American control" (p. 36). Ilmorog (*Petals)* and Nairobi *(Matigari)* are consumed mainly by the capitalist flames of the British and American multinationals; and even the small-scale businesses are made to squirm under the heavy wheels of capitalism and forced to go bankrupt. It can be posited that since capitalism must not wear a human face, it is understandable why Kenyan capitalists have to hide behind institutions like banks, insurance and foreign companies, particularly the African Economic Bank and the Kanua Kanene & Co.

It is made clear in *Petals* that Ilmorog has not only been consumed by multinationals, but even small-scale businesses are forced to fold by people with larger capital and greedy dispositions. Wanja and Abdulla are thrown out of their bar and Theng'eta (locally brewed alcohol) business by Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo. Old Abdulla, an erstwhile freedom fighter, is left with no other alternative but to lead a life of frustration while Wanja resumes her former trade, prostitution, and even establishes a whore house. It should be noted that Abdulla and Wanja's Theng'eta business in their bar was already doing very well and even had an edge over bigger bar investments owned by Chui, Nderi and Kimeria. It can even be assumed that there was already hope for them to be among the next set of Kenyan Rockefellers. But with the withdrawal of their license to sell local wine (*Petals,* p. 279), their hope for real independence is seen shattered. Chui, Nderi and Kimeria do not only hijack the Theng'eta business from them, they also hijack the wonderful advert originally made by Munira for Abdulla and Wanja. It can be asserted that here again mimicry of capitalist colonial conduct is seen to be at its grimmest: stopping someone from doing something only for them to do the same thing later and in a much amplified manner.

It is observed that through Abdulla and Wanja's Theng'eta business, Ngugi, just like Sembène, demonstrates that with enterprising individuals, riches can be created from within. Oumar Faye's pro-poor policies in *Ô Pays mon beau people* demonstrate that one only needs to be enterprising to attain economic independence, a sine qua non for real independence. Oumar Faye believes in the transformative might of his Casamance soil and toils in it assiduously in order to produce positive results. And indeed, he does produce positive results. Faye, just like Mr Hawkins, the pro-poor lawyer in *Petals*, is therefore perceived by the colonial administration as a subversive element whose actions will not fail to culminate in throwing them out of business and sending them packing back to native France. To prevent this, Oumar Faye is assassinated by the field workers of the empire, thus transforming his Casamance renaissance project into a nightmare. It should be noted that Oumar Faye has been featured in this article in order to shore up our argument that Chui, Nderi and Kimeria are only aping or mimicking a practice that has worked for the different brands of colonial masters in Africa under the stewardship of the Frederick Lugards or the Faidherbes.

Thus, when Farah portrays Somalia as a space filled with land mines which require the politically conscious to tread with caution, Ngugi presents Kenya as a space replete with economic traps set by the upholders of the economic hegemony bequeathed to them by the British colonial administration. The Minister of Truth and Justice labels these sustainers – he is one of them of course – as the loyalists-to-the law and even goes to uncalled-for lengths to preen himself on such inheritance:

> *My father was the first person in this country to advocate loyalism to the Crown at the beginning of the century. Some might wonder: Loyalty to whose law? The colonial law? Let me tell you: Law is law. Those who realised this from the beginning are the only people in power today. Long live loyalism!* (*Matigari*, p. 102)

If it is Ngugi's intention to mock early political scientists for their predilection for "isms", or the Minister of Truth and Justice for his seemingly deliberate corruption of the word "loyalty" to probably demonstrate the fact that he is able to corrupt everything, our intention is different. It is of some interest to us because it creates for us the possibility to rename the subaltern collaborators of the empire builders as loyalists-to-the-law (of exploitation of the masses) who use the same aggressive economic and governance policies used by their colonial predecessors to worsen the living conditions of the subaltern people of the spaces under review. And like Farah's political dictators, Ngugi's loyalists-to-the-law will use every wile to ensure that the masses are entrapped in permanent poverty. The KKC and the African Economic Bank are not known to be of any positive life-

changing vectors in Kenya, but rather, as vectors that accelerate the economic disenfranchisement of the masses.

The binary configuration of indigent followership and opulent leadership left behind and still supervised by the colonial master continues to hold sway and the creator of the wealth in the Kenyan economy continues to survive on the leftovers of the few but potent exploiters. The enormity of this calamity is made vivid in Matigari's chained metaphors where the capitalist predator moves into the house built by the exploited while the indigenous owner sleeps in the open air; where the predator who does not even know how to thread a needle wears the clothes while the indigenous tailor walks in rags; where the predator who reaps-where-he-never-sowed yawns for having eaten too much while the tiller yawns for not having eaten at all; and where the foreign predators dispose of the goods produced by the exploited indigene while the said indigene is left empty handed (p. 113).

The above jeremiads seem to demonstrate that the third space negotiated for by the freedom fighters is indeed a dystopia worse than the old one, in that the old moral problems inherent in the colonial regimes (injustice, exploitation, torture and assassination of forward-looking, pro-poor individuals) are seen resurfacing or being re-historicized by people who are supposed to fight for their eradication.

Conclusion

As has been demonstrated in the analysis of the two different East African spaces reviewed in this study, one under a military regime (Somalia) and the other under civilian regime (Kenya), mimicry of the colonial leaders by their replacements is palpable. It is observed that the two post-colonial regimes are new, but not quite. Not quite, because, they are seen rehashing the same tools of domination and exploitation used by the colonial field workers to sustain economic and political hegemony over the subaltern masses. And like the colonial master, the cult of violence is presented as an irresistible attraction for the post-colonial imitators. In consequence thereof, the reviewed spaces remain inhospitable for those at the periphery of the power structure, particularly those who want liberty of expression and economic independence. It has also been made evident that for the indigent masses, the said spaces remain dystopias of uncertainty; uncertain as to who will be the true autochthones to rekindle hope in them for a truly dignified existence.

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Cerebrospinal meningitis in the Colonial History of the Asante of Ghana

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Abstract

The incidence of diseases in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) shaped encounters between colonial officials and indigenous people, yet this subject has merited minimum attention in the Ghanaian historiography. This paper examines the colonial healthcare interventions to combat the outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) in Asante and how the presence of the disease transformed the relationship between the people of Asante and Europeans. The outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) in Asante was sporadic especially in the early 1900s. The incidence of the disease in Asante was socially constructed and attributed to spiritual cause at its initial stages. The impact of the disease on economic and social activities prompted the colonial administration to take swift actions against its spread. The study provides detailed account on: the history of CSM in Asante during the colonial period; the nature of its spread; the colonial administration's strategies to combat the disease; and the effect of the disease on the socio-economic activities among the Asante people of Ghana. This paper argues that the fight against diseases in Asante; CSM in particular, required a synergy between local and institutional actions.

Keywords: *Disease, Cerebro Spinal Meningitis (CSM), Policy, Ghana, Asante.*

Introduction

The incidence of diseases in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) shaped encounters between colonial officials and indigenous people, yet this subject has merited minimum attention in the Ghanaian historiography. The outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM) in colonial Asante of the Gold Coast from the 1900s represents an important historical event that shaped European encounters with indigenous people. The incidence of CSM called for the implementation of colonial healthcare interventions such as the territorial survey / inspection and quarantine, erection of caravansaries, the use of the police and other security agencies, public education,

culture restrictions, and disinfection programmes to combat the disease. These measures, though of the past, have contemporary implications in the twenty-first century.

Cerebrospinal Meningitis (CSM), also known as menicogal meningitis is a respiratory and a contagious disease caused by a bacterium called *N. meningitides.* The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the disease has twelve Serogroups in which six of them constituting A, B, C, W, X and Y have been identified to cause epidemics (World Health Organization, 2014). Infections ranging from viral, fungal and bacterial sources have been the main cause of the disease (Haddar et al., 2020). African countries have been noted for the incidence of such disease on the African continent, the WHO has referred to the "African belt" as the region with high incidence of CSM. The African belt comprises of twenty-five countries with extremely high incidence of cerebrospinal meningitis (Jafri et al., 2013, p. 17). This area stretches from Ethiopia in East Africa to Senegal in West Africa, and it is within the range of 300-1100mm annual rainfall (WHO, 2014, p. 6.s). Countries within the meningitis belt include Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Northern Nigeria, Northern Cameroon, Senegal, and Sudan among others (WHO, 2014, p. 6).

Like other respiratory infections, the mode of transmission of CSM is from person to person through droplet of respiratory or throat secretions from carriers. Scholars have indicated that unlike gonorrhea, CSM is associated with colonising the lining of the throat and spreading rapidly through respiratory infection (Owusu et al., 2012). Therefore, activities including smoking, close and prolonged contact such as kissing, sneezing or coughing with infected person or living in close quarters with a carrier facilitate the spread of the disease (WHO, 2014, p. 6). According to Moore and Broome (1994), *Neisseria Meningitides*, the bacterium that facilitates the spread of cerebrospinal meningitis thrives in the lining of the throat. When the said organism enters the bloodstream and gains access to the meninges, the illness begins. The pathogen grows rapidly in this environment "inflaming the meninges[1] and causing fever, neck stiffness, headache, and often coma." (Moore & Broome, 1994, p. 41).

Symptoms of the disease vary from person to person but the most common ones are stiff neck, high fever, sensitivity to light, convulsion, headache, and vomiting (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014). However, there are exceptional instances where a person can exhibit symptom of shock (loss of blood pressure) (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014). Almost 5-10% of patients die typically within 48 hours of the onset of the

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[1] Meninges are the membrane that covers the brain and the spinal cord.

symptoms (WHO, 2014, p. 7). Studies have recounted that, early intervention and treatment with antibiotics reduce the mortality rate to about 10 percent (Moore & Broome, 1994, p. 39). On the contrary, early detection of the causative organism leads to better treatment and effective management (Owusu et al., 2012, p. 4). This notwithstanding, Codjoe and Nabie (2014, p. 6926) argue that in some instances, the recovery from the disease comes along with different health implications ranging from brain damage, hearing loss, or hearing disability in 10 to 20 percent of survivors.

Although observed worldwide, the highest burden of CSM is in sub-Saharan Africa due to the hot climatic conditions in the region. The disease is highly contagious and spreads at a rapid pace during the dry season, relative to the cold season and causes great deal of fatalities during the dry season (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014, p. 6923). In 1996, Africa experienced a major outbreak of the meningitis epidemic in history with over 250,000 cases and 25,000 deaths (WHO, 2014, p. 7). The WHO in 2018 indicated that nearly 30,000 cases were reported annually in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, there were over 800,000 reported cases in sub-Saharan Africa between 1972 and 2000 (WHO, 2014, p. 6).

CSM has been recorded across almost all parts of Ghana. The Northern zone of the country has the highest recorded cases (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014, p. 6926). The mortality rate of infections in Ghana has been estimated to range from 36 to 50 percent. The historical antecedent of the disease can be traced to the beginning of the 19th century when the disease was first discovered by Viesseux in 1805. Later, the causative agent, *Nuessena Meningitides*, was identified by Weichel Baum in 1887 (WHO, 2014, p. 7). The earliest incidence of CSM in Africa was documented in the 1840s (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014, p. 6926). Since then, the disease has become well known throughout the continent. The historical development of CSM in the Gold Coast has been traced to 1900 when the disease was detected at Cape Coast (Forgor, 2007, p. 15). Codjoe and Nabie (2014) report that earlier studies on CSM concentrated on the rate of mortality. The outbreak died out rapidly without causing an epidemic among the indigenous population. The next epidemic was in 1906 which occurred in the Northern territory during the dry season and was responsible for about 20000 deaths between 1906 and 1908 (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014, p. 6926).

CSM is not new in the discourses concerning Ghana's health care system. There are several studies on CSM in Africa and Ghana in particular. For exemple, Codjoe and Nabia (2014, p. 6926) focused on CSM among the people of Nayaginis and Vunania but captured briefly, the history of the disease in Ghana. Leimkugel et al. (2007) also did an general study of cerebrospinal meningitis in

Kassena Nankana District in the Northern Region of Ghana but paid attention to how levels of menningocal colonisation with different bacterial serogroups change over time, and how the pattern of the disease relates to such changes. Adu-Gyamfi's (2010) study on Asante pays attention to broader diseases in colonial Asante which touched less on the subject of cerebrospinal meningitis. Kwarteng et al. (2017) studied the current meningitis outbreak in Ghana and captured briefly a historical study of the disease. Considering the existing historiography on CSM in Ghana, little is known about the historical role of the disease in shaping the colonial history of Asante. The current research aims at building on same.

This paper examines the colonial healthcare interventions toward the prevention and control of CSM in Asante; the nature of responses and spread of CSM in Asante; and the impact of the disease on the socio-economic development of Asante during the era under review. The current study has the potential of informing policy makers on the need to tap into these relevant past policies for contemporary social and healthcare policies in Ghana and Asante in particular.

The research is based on a qualitative research approach. Information from both primary and secondary sources were used to generate relevant historical analysis. Data from primary sources were gathered from the Public Records and Archive Administration Department (PRAAD) and the Manhyia Archives of Ghana in Kumase. The data gathered supported the discussion concerning cerebrospinal meningitis in Asante and its associated policies in combating its spread. Data from books and journal articles provided useful information to augment fragmentary data from the archives. Also, data was gleaned from internet sources. The data from the primary and secondary sources have been analysed and presented thematically to construct a history of cerebrospinal meningitis in Asante within the colonial period and how the account is relevant in the twenty-first century amid the outbreak of epidemic diseases.

Cerebrospinal Meningitis in Asante during the Colonial Period

Asante in this context refers to the old Asante territory that included the present-day Bono-Ahafo, Central, Eastern and Western Regions of Ghana as well as some parts of Ivory Coast and Togo (Collins & Burns, 2007, p. 8). Apart from metropolitan Asante, our work basically focuses on territories in the Northern Province of Asante which included Bono Ahafo.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the people of Asante were faced with cerebrospinal meningitis (CSM). The earliest recorded incidence of CSM in Asante was in 1906, at Kintampo (PRAAD, Kumase, 1950, ARG1/14/2/27).

Evidence suggests that the incidence of CSM in Asante differs across time and space. Its symptoms included fever, stiffness of neck, pains in the head, ears and the spinal column which were severe during the night. Traces of cases of CSM were found in some villages and towns in Asante including metropolitan Kumase (PRAAD, Kumase, 1950a, ADM 3/2/5). The disease was sporadic in the region. This was as a result of limited transport services at the time which limited mobility (PRAAD, Kumase, 1950, ARG1/14/2/27).

From the first outbreak in 1906, it was until the 1920's that the second wave of the disease broke out in Asante including Kumase. The development of railways and road networks in the Gold Coast partly contributed to this outbreak. On 19th February 1920, Nkoranza, a town in the Northern Province of Asante recorded 40 deaths within a week. Medical report on Nkoranza shows that CSM impacted negatively on the lives of the people (PRAAD, Kumase, 1950, ARG1/14/2/27). A report from the Medical Officer of Sunyani to the Provincial Commissioner at Asante stated that:

> *Nkoranza Division, between Kintampo and Nkoranza, along with the Neighbouring part of the Western Province has been investigated by Medical Officers and their assistants. The number of cases more or less definitely accounted for in Nkoranza Division was 132 with 78 deaths and in the Western Province the numbers ascertained were 33 cases with 28 deaths. The total figures were therefore 165 cases with 104 deaths, a case mortality of 63 percent but countless others occurred which have not been accounted for.* (PRAAD, Kumase, 1950, ARG1/14/2/27)

This report shows that Nkoranza and its environs were deeply affected with CSM and this resulted in the colonial administration placing bans on social and economic activities in the area. The literature has emphasised the role of bans in controlling CSM across Ghana. It has been reported that in the past and in contemporary times, the outbreak of CSM in Northern Ghana has prompted community leaders to always place bans on the performance of funerals and other communal social-cultural activities (Codjoe & Nabie, 2014, p. 6932). In 2001, such bans were placed on the performance of funerals, naming ceremonies and weddings among other economic activities to prevent the spread of the disease.

In 1926, there was an outbreak of the disease in Ejura (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG 14/2/27). Notably, infected persons living within Ejura fled to safe havens within and around Asante. This behaviour contributed to the spread of the epidemic to other towns. To control the spread, the colonial administration located and arrested people who fled from communities with CSM outbreak. In February 1926 for instance, five infected persons namely Moshi and his son, Kwadwo Bio,

Adwoa Fodjuor, and Okyere fled to Akpa and Abosofo, which were villages near Mampong. On 19th February 1926, the police arrested these persons and sent them to isolation centres (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG 14/2/27). Series of reported cases of infected persons who fled, prompted the colonial administration to entrust powers in the hands of the traditional institution under the Native Jurisdiction Ordinance to sanction patients found culpable (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940a, ARG1/14/2/7).

On 13th January 1926, after a series of recorded cases and deaths, the district commissioner together with the Director of Health in Asante under the Infectious Disease Ordinance declared the town of Ejura and its environs as an infected area. Restrictions were placed on social and economic activities (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940a, ARG1/14/2/7). On 26th January 1926, there was an outbreak of CSM in Sunyani (PRAAD, Kumase, 1926, ARG 1/14/2/7). The 1926 medical report indicated that the prevalence of the disease in Sunyani was devastating. Several deaths were recorded within the first six months of the disease. This was as a result of the failure of the indigenous population to report CSM cases to the medical department at the initial stages of the disease in Sunyani (PRAAD, Kumase, 1926, ARG 1/14/2/7).

Report on July 1921 shows that the presence of CSM in Asante was closely linked to culture. The way of life by the indigenous population (villages) was a contributory factor for the spread of the disease. The report stated "when there is no Rest House, the Asante villages eked out a precarious livelihood by taking in the few wanderers who passed by the boarders for the night" (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940a, ARG1/14/2/7). Obviously, some of these traders might have contracted the disease and spread it along their journey. This hospitality can be attributed to the Asante concept of reciprocity.

Dankyi, Mazzucato and Manuh (2017) have argued that social solidarity which include the concept of reciprocity based on the notion of kin based mutual support are solidly anchored in traditional Ghanaian culture even in contemporary times. The traditional Asante man was of the view that, helping an unknown person attracted "blessing" from the gods and further lead to additional support from others (Dankyi, Mazzucato & Manuh, 2017). It was based on this background that the people of Asante at the time were more hospitable to strangers. This notwithstanding, providing shelter for these traders were sometimes detrimental to the health of the native population in the various villages.

Again, Asante funerary customs led to the spread of the infection. Evidence from the outbreak of Ebola Virus across Africa indicate that funerary and burial rituals contribute immensely to the spread of infectious diseases (Park, 2020). In

West African culture and among the Asante, proper burial and funerals mark the unity between the living and the ancestral world. In the past, such proper funeral rites included the washing and cleaning of the dead body and dressing for burial (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). Contact with dead bodies that were infected with CSM necessitated a further spread of the infection. Aside from this, people washed their hands in a single bowl. This led to the upsurge of CSM cases among the indigenes. Importantly, the mass assembling of people with exposure to infected corpse and social visiting between houses and villages contributed to the spread of the disease.

The first recorded case of the third wave of CSM in Kumase was on 31st April 1940.[2] The disease is believed to have been brought to Kumase by travellers from northern Ghana and by a man called *Zamebarrima* who according to the medical records had the symptoms of the disease at the start of his journey from Tamale (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940a, ARG1/14/2/7). The outbreak of the disease in Asante could be attributed to the 1940's CSM epidemic in Northern Ghana and subsequent movement of pathogens across borders. On 16th March 1940, there were over 55 recorded cases of CSM in Northern Ghana; Tamale, Yendi, Gambaga and Navorongo.

Table 1.0: *Number of CSM Cases in Major towns in Northern Ghana on 18th March 1940*

TOWNS	CASES	DEATH
YENDI	4	0
TAMALE	36	15
GAMBAGA	9	4
NAVORONGO	6	0

Source: PRAAD, Kumase, 1940b, ARG1/14/2/7.

From the above, it can be suggested that the spread of the disease in the Northern territories around March 1940 was responsible for the outbreak of the disease in Asante. This is because, during the era under review, Kumase continued to be the epicentre of Gold Coast where goods as well as traders from the north and the south passed. It is therefore obvious to state that, these traders might have contracted the disease from the north before reaching Asante, hence leading to the spread of the same.

On 9th May 1950, there was a reported case of CSM at Dompoase, a village in Adanse. Again, on 15th May 1950, according to the report of Dr. A Brack, a Medical Officer of Health at the Basel Mission Hospital, Agogo in Asante, there were cases of CSM in Dwaso. In the same year, there were several reports from

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[2] Kumase is the capital of Asante.

the General Hospital and South Wing Hospital in Kumase on cases of CSM (PRAAD, Kumasi, 1950b, ADM3/2/5). In addition, on 28th February 1952, the Medical Officer of Health in Kumase reported that Amadu Kanjaga, a prisoner at the Asantehene's prison had contracted CSM on 24th February, 1952. The reported case at the prison was something to be worried about because of the possibility that the disease could be communicated among prisoners in the same cell and the entire prison community including the prison officers (PRAAD, Kumasi, 1950a, ADM3/2/5). It was observed that CSM reported from out-stations was not shown in the Weekly Infectious Returns. These omissions could have had serious repercussions on the Consolidated Weekly Epidemiological Information (PRAAD, Kumase, 1952, 20th March).

Colonial Health Intervention in Combating Cerebrospinal Meningitis

Within the period under study, several measures were employed by the colonial administration to prevent, curtail and to cure people of CSM and its debilitating effects. This section discusses some of the important interventions employed by the colonial administration to fight CSM.

TERRITORIAL SURVEY/ INSPECTION AND QUARANTINE

The colonial office surveyed the whole Asante Province and the Gold Coast in general to control the spread of the CSM infection. This survey was organised in two-folds; preliminary surveys and full surveys. Preliminary surveys occurred when a medical officer together with sanitary inspectors organised a random inspection in a suspected area for a week and reported any case of symptoms among the indigenous people with the least possible delay (PRAAD, Kumase. (1952, ADM 3/2/5).

This was followed by the full survey. The full survey required the stationing of health professionals in an infected area for a long period of time after the area had been declared as an infected area. On 26th February 1952, as a result of a reported case of Yaa Afrɛ, a native of Twedeɛ in Asante, the Sanitary Overseer of the station was instructed to conduct daily inspection of the station for a week and report any case of fever among the population. The chief of Twedeɛ and the school teachers were advised to cooperate with the Sanitary Officer to duly discharge his duties.

At Twedeɛ, people who were infected with the disease were properly quarantined to avoid infecting other people in the community (PRAAD, Kumase, 1952, ADM 3/2/5). Also, on 11th February 1951, there were seventeen reported cases at Afrantwo near Kumase. The patients were isolated and discharged after

discovering that their temperatures had come to the normal level (PRAAD, Kumase, 1952, ADM 3/2/5).[3] In essence, it ensured that several people did not contract the disease through daily contacts with the infected.

Aside from quarantine, patients were given tablets by the colonial medical authorities to help cure the disease during the survey. The colonial administration introduced the use of sulphanilamide tablets. These tablets were given to infected persons to cure them. In addition, the temperatures of patients were checked at regular intervals to find out the progress they were making in their treatment. Mostly, the temperature of CSM patients were beyond one hundred degrees celsius (PRAAD, Kumase, 1952, ADM 3/2/5).

ERECTION OF CARAVANSARIES

Caravansaries have had rich history in Ghana.[4] Since pre-colonial era, caravansaries or zongos have been constructed across Ghana. In most instances, caravansaries have been historically linked with Muslim traders around market areas (Casentini, 2018). Aside serving as rest houses, it served other purposes during the outbreak of CSM in Asante. To prevent long distance traders from mixing with the Asante population and its environs, the colonial administration embarked on the expansion of caravansaries. These facilities provided accommodation for long distance traders trekking from either the north or southern Ghana (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7). Significantly, during the colonial era, most of the major trade routes linking Asante to the north lacked zongos. As a result, most traders ended up taking their rest in most of the villages along their way. A new solution that emerged thus involved the creation and expansion of these communities. The creation of these settlements along the main trade route from Asante helped to reduce contacts and reduced the spread of CSM (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7).

Also, most of the Caravansaries served as isolation centres for long distance travellers. These zongos were located at the outskirts of the various towns along the main trade routes from Kumase to the Northern Province. To ensure the success of this policy, the colonial administration used the police to patrol during the night to direct travellers to the established zongos. Among many others, Techiman and Kintampo zongos became the well renowned ones along the major trade routes from the North to Kumase that served as isolation centres (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7). Also, the Chiefs were advised to build Isolation

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[3] PRAAD, Measures adopted to Control CSM, 1952.

[4] Caravansaries in this context refers to zongo which literally means rest house for strangers. However, the original meaning of zongo has been corrupted as a segregated settlement for people from northern Ghana.

Camps North East in all towns and villages to contain the infected. The natives were advised not to communicate with an infected person, they were to isolate him upon seeing any sign or symptoms related to CSM.

<div align="center">THE USE OF THE POLICE AND OTHER SECURITY AGENCIES</div>

Historically, security forces have been used as agencies to enforce the observance of protocols during epidemics. Public health emergencies have raised the concerns of security services through time. In most instances, law enforcement agencies enforce public health orders including quarantine and travel restrictions. During the influenza pandemic of 1918, the security services discharged immense roles in its control (Ghendon, 1994). Similarly, military officers together with medical officers were stationed in infected areas so that thorough survey as well as strict enforcement of CSM protocols were ensured (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7). Again, the military were tasked to divert traders to use routes that were located at the outskirts of towns. In Nkoranza, military guards together with medical officers were stationed to ensure that this policy was effectively implemented. The benefit of this policy was demonstrated in the report of Dr. Brohier:

> *These measures appeared to have been successful … that military guards are effective is illustrated by the case of a man who left Kintampo for Kumase, but was stopped at Nkoranza. Having slept in several infected villages on the journey to and from Nkoranza, he developed symptoms of the disease the day he returned and died two days later.* (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7)

Inferences from the above suggest that this strategy reduced the spread of CSM in Asante as all travellers returning from the North to Asante were effectively checked before entering Asante. However, persons whose duties required that they travel extensively along the road especially from Bamboi northwards were to apply for passes at the office of the Medical Officer of Health, Kumase. In the 1930s, several restrictions were placed on labourers moving from the north to Asante and the ban was removed only when the medical authorities in Asante found out that the northern epidemic had reduced drastically. For example, in 1939, Zongo headmen in Asante received reports that the outbreak of CSM had reduced in the Northern Territories and no restrictions were further placed on labourers returning to their homes (PRAAD, Kumase, 1945, 18th December, ADM 3/2/5). Also, on 18th December 1945, based on the Infectious Disease Ordinance, Cap 59, codified by the Colonial Administration, travel restrictions were imposed on the indigenous people of Asante to prevent the spread of CSM.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education has been the major tool in ensuring good health care among a given population. Public education is designed to raise awareness on subjects that are not frequently discussed or are largely unknown to the general public (Spielman & Sunavala-Dossabhoy, 2021). Similarly, in Asante and in line with the social conditions, Asante used public education to fight CSM. During the period, Asante had handful elites in the society who could read and write. The existence of high illiteracy rate in Asante during the colonial period meant that general awareness on CSM was limited. This prompted the colonial administration to organize mass educational campaign programmes that were simplified to the understanding of the masses concerning the burden of CSM.

The public education culminated in the preaching of important messages concerning ways to prevent the acquisition and spread of the disease. Chiefs, elders and the inhabitants of Asante, and for that matter Kumase, were advised by the Medical Officer of Health, to open their doors and windows to ensure free flow of air. The indigenes were advised to ensure that rooms were well ventilated to prevent infection (PRAAD, Kumase, 1952, ADM 3/2/5). Again, Chiefs together with the local people were advised to report any suspected case of CSM to the health authorities within their jurisdictions.

CULTURE RESTRICTIONS

Culture has been a major determinant of health across societies. Dressler (2004) has argued that disease risk varies in relation to culture. As already hinted, the Asante concept of reciprocity and burial rites were major factors that contributed to the spread of CSM in Asante. With their allegiance to reciprocity, the people of Asante believed that to maintain good social balance, one had to render any form of assistance to kin groups, community members and strangers. With this in mind, long distance traders within the period under review were accommodated in villages along the various trade routes in Asante (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7). As argued elsewhere in this study, this was sometimes detrimental to the health and well-being of entire villages as these traders might have contracted CSM along their journey to Asante.

Again, the Asante burial rites was a contributory factor that enhanced the spread of CSM. Asante funeral customs, which included mass movements of people, filing pass the corpse and social visiting in houses and villages contributed greatly to the spread of the disease. Significantly, since this tradition was inextricably interwoven with the social life of the people, during the period under review, the people of Asante contracted various forms of communicable diseases, including CSM.

Another major cultural practice that necessitated the spread of CSM involved reporting diseases to indigenous healers. In the case of CSM, the colonial records reported that the cases were difficult to be diagnosed by indigenous healers. This called for alternative means that included reporting suspected and confirmed cases to the colonial officials. It was believed that the delay in reporting had the tendency to facilitate the spread of the disease. As a result of this, reported cases reaching the colonial heath authorities were severe. According to the colonial records, this mostly happened as a result of the initial interventions from traditional medical practitioners during the early stages of the disease (PRAAD, Kumase, 1927, ARG1/14/2/7).

To protect the local population from being infected by CSM, restrictions were placed on some of these customs and practices. Native practitioners were instructed to seek for licenses before they could operate. Cap 17 of section 75 of the *Native Physician Ordinance* gave some criteria to native physicians on the extent to which they could operate and this included the dress code of native physicians and the therapeutic system of practice (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940s-50s, ARG1/14/26, Native Physician). Again, the Native Physician Ordinance instructed traditional chiefs to report any contagious disease or any disease perceived by the colonial administration to be dangerous to the entire population and this did not exclude CSM (PRAAD, Kumase, 1940s – 50s, ARG1/14/26, Native Physician). Furthermore, restrictions were placed on the Asante funeral rites and other cultural practices that involved the intermingling of many people.

DISINFECTION PROGRAMMES

Another strategy that was adopted to curtail the spread of CSM was disinfection campaigns. The most effective method of disinfection was the burning of thatch roof houses and setting up fire in the interior of the room. This was done in a way to prevent the destruction or burning of the building. Report from the Medical Department revealed that, this method was the best as it destroyed the CSM pathogens in large scale. There were other fumigation methods which included spraying with disinfectant solution or Sulphur fumigation that equally destroyed the CSM parasites. Fumigation programmes were organized across the length and breadth of Asante especially in Kumase. This programme helped to curtail the spread of CSM in Asante.

The Effect of Cerebrospinal Meningitis on the Socio-economic Activities of the People of Asante

Diseases have a negative implication on the economy of the infected region (Jordà, Singh & Taylor, 2020). The literature emphasizes that health crisis interacts negatively with the economy of an infected territory (Philipson, 2000). The outbreak of CSM in Asante had a negative implication on the socio-economic development of the people of Asante. Herhily and Cohn (1997, p. 13) have categorized the economic effect of disease on a given population into two, long term and short-term effects. They argue among other things that the immediate effect of diseases on the economy has to do with shortage in labour output due to high mortality.

Drawing inferences from the above, the outbreak of CSM had negative impact on the lives of the local population in Asante. Various reports from the Consolidated Weekly Epidemiological Information revealed that there was high rate of mortality especially among the youth in Asante. As argued by Codjoe and Nabia (2014), "recovery from the disease comes along with different health implications ranging from brain damage, hearing loss, or hearing disability from 10 up to 20 percent of survivors" (p. 6930). Therefore, high mortality especially among the youth coupled with the side effects of CSM after recovery had negative repercussion on labour and productivity in Asante. This further affected the income of families due to high health expenditure spent on the sick. Apart from the loss of key family members which had a direct social and emotional cost on the local population in Asante, the major effect of CSM on socio-economic activities in Asante was the decline in productivity due to shortage of labour.

Conclusion

The study paid attention to the history of CSM in colonial Asante. From the discourse, it has been realised that CSM in Asante had negative effects on the lives of the local population. However, the presence of various health interventions within the colonial period helped to reduce the spread of the disease in Asante. Despite several efforts made to curtail the spread of the disease, the colonial administration together with the traditional institutions within the period under review, encountered several challenges. From the analysis of the study, lessons can be drawn from these past policies for further integration into current health policies. The role played by the security agencies toward the combat of the disease is very useful in contemporary times as evidence of this could be seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana. However, the question of service professionalism

from the military and other security agencies during the outbreak of diseases are critical issues that need critical attention. Also, the collaboration between the traditional authorities and the colonial administration as a result of the indirect rule system cannot be gainsaid. Current actions may require effective decentralization of the health sector of Ghana and public health in particular. Again, the role of chiefs and traditional leadership in promoting health care and for that matter local health, must be strengthened to promote health care from the grassroots.

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Is Freedom Still the Lifeblood of Psychology?

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Abstract

I re-examined the relationship of freedom and national development to the well-being of psychology. Specifically, I attempted to replicate the findings of Stevens (2010) in which national development mediated the relationship of economic and political freedom on the number of psychologists and publications per population in the 92 member countries of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS). Consistent with prior research, economic and political freedom and national development were each directly related to psychologists and publications per population. However, national development as measured by the Human Development Index did not mediate the relationship of freedom to psychologists and publications per population. The failure to reaffirm the mediational model of disciplinary well-being may reflect increased global dissatisfaction with and decline of freedom and democracy. While freedom and national development may still make separate contributions to distinct elements of disciplinary health, they may no longer constitute ingredients essential to psychology's vitality.

Keywords: *freedom, national development, psychologists, publications, mediation.*

Although psychology arose in diverse economic and political contexts (Brock, 2006; Kugelmann & Belzen, 2009), the growth of psychology has been linked to economic and political systems that enshrine individual freedom (Jing, 2000; Stevens, 2010). Such economic and political systems typically have public institutions and a civic culture that support a demand economy and representative government. The association of such economic and political systems to the well-being of psychology reflects the expectations of government, business and industry, and the public that psychology is key to addressing national challenges and nurturing personal development (Jing, 2000; Stevens & Wedding, 2004). Under these conditions, psychology tends to be strengthened by laws and

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resources that legitimize and sustain the discipline (Stevens, 2007). Citizens of countries with free-market economies often have sufficient wealth to transition to a post-material emphasis on improving their quality of life (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). The continued global growth of psychology is evidenced by the increase in psychologists, scientific and applied specializations, and psychology journals, organizations, and training programs (Stevens, 2007; Stevens & Wedding, 2004).

To demonstrate the relationship between freedom and the well-being of psychology, I identified the 71 member countries of the IUPsyS (Stevens, 2010). For each country, I obtained data on its level of economic freedom and political freedom. I also gathered data on each country's level of national development, the ratio of psychologists per population, and number of psychology publications abstracted in PsycINFO.

Economic and political freedom were each positively correlated with psychologists and publications per population. Significant associations between freedom and disciplinary well-being provided evidence for the first time to support the claim that a free-market economy and representative government are beneficial to psychology (Jing, 2000). National development was also correlated with psychologists and publications per population, which measured distinct domains of disciplinary health: the degree of occupational membership and research productivity (Jing, 2000).

I then examined whether national development would mediate the relationship of freedom to the disciplinary well-being of psychology. If national development was the path through which freedom influenced psychology's well-being, then the introduction of national development would weaken the direct association of economic and political freedom to psychologists and research productivity per population (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Proposed Mediation of Freedom on Disciplinary Well-being by National Development
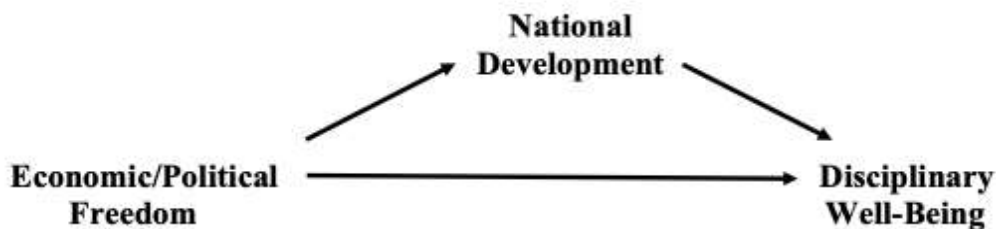
Conditions for mediation were met and significant Sobel tests established that national development mediated the effect of economic and political freedom on psychologists and publications per population. The discovery that national

development, as measured by literacy, longevity, and standard of living, mediated the connection between freedom and disciplinary health lent support for a causal model of how certain macro-level conditions may impact the status of scientific and applied psychology.

But does this transnational analysis still hold after more than a decade? Based on previous studies on the relationship of macro-level variables to the well-being of psychology (Fu & Jing, 1994; Jing, 2000), I sought to replicate the findings of Stevens (2010) using contemporary data. I examined whether the relationships of economic and political freedom and national development to the number of psychologists and their research productivity remained robust. I derived the following research questions:

1. Are there relationships between economic and political freedom and the number of psychologists and their research productivity?
2. Are there positive associations between national development on the number of psychologists and their research productivity?
3. Hypothesizing that national development is still the route through which freedom contributes to disciplinary well-being (see Figure 1), would the introduction of national development reduce the direct association of economic and political freedom to the number of psychologists and their research productivity?

METHOD

MEASURES

For each of the 92 member countries of the IUPsyS, I obtained the most recent data on:

- national population (World Bank, 2022);
- level of national development according to the Human Development Index (HDI; United National Development Program, 2021-2022) which integrates standard of living, life expectancy, and adult literacy, making HDI a measure of how wealth operates to improve quality of life;
- level of economic freedom determined by the average of distinct elements of economic freedom (e.g., lack of corruption, labor force mobility, property rights) (Heritage Foundation, 2022);
- level of political freedom based on the combination of political rights (e.g., electoral process, government functioning, political pluralism and participation) and civil liberties (e.g., freedom of expression and belief, organizational rights, rule of law) (Freedom House, 2021);

- ratio of psychologists per 100,000 (World Health Organization, 2022); and
- ratio of publications in psychology from 2017 through 2022 per 100,000 abstracted by the Web of Science.

Two points are worth noting. Though psychologists are involved in a wide range of activities (Stevens, 2007; Stevens & Wedding, 2004), the World Health Organization's data on psychologists per 100,000 are limited to psychologists working in health settings. Second, unlike Stevens' (2010) study that drew from publications abstracted in PsycInfo in a single year, I undertook a more comprehensive institutional search of books, book chapters, and journal articles abstracted in the Web of Science database between 2017 and 2022 in order to identify the national affiliation of authors. Web of Science taps into a broader range of literature in social science fields allied with psychology than does PsycInfo (Bramer et al., 2017).

PROCEDURE

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 28.0. Mediation was tested using Hayes' (2022) PROCESS v4.2.

RESULTS

Of the 66 countries with the highest HDI in 2022, 49 (74%) had national representation in the IUPsyS, whereas 7 of 31 countries ranked low on the HDI (23%) were IUPsyS members. Tables 1-4 display data for countries with the highest and lowest ratios of psychologists and publications per 100,000, along with data on their economic and political freedom, and HDI.

Table 1

Countries with the Highest Ratio of Psychologists per Population

Country	Psychologists per 100,000	Economic Freedom	Political Freedom	HDI
Malta	294.444	71.5	89	.918
Argentina	222.572	50.1	84	.842
Costa Rica	142.018	65.4	91	.809
Netherlands	123.464	79.5	97	.941
Finland	109.486	78.3	100	.940
Australia	103.076	77.7	95	.951
Israel	88.089	83.2	76	.919
Switzerland	84.137	84.2	96	.962
Sweden	84.000	77.9	100	.947
Norway	73.522	76.9	100	.961

Table 2
Countries with the Lowest Ratio of Psychologists per Population

Country	Psychologists per 100,000	Economic Freedom	Political Freedom	HDI
Sudan	.008	32.0	10	.508
Vietnam	.030	60.6	19	.703
Zambia	.031	48.7	51	.656
Uganda	.037	54.2	34	.525
Zimbabwe	.057	33.1	28	.593
Ghana	.065	59.8	80	.632
Nigeria	.068	54.4	43	.535
India	.069	53.9	66	.633
Cameroon	.100	52.9	15	.576
Mongolia	.101	63.9	84	.739

Table 3
Countries with the Highest Ratio of Publications per Population

Country	Publications per 100,000	Economic Freedom	Political Freedom	HDI
UK	676.120	72.7	93	.929
Malta	246.300	71.5	89	.918
Macau	134.195	70.3	---	.922
Grenada	123.077	----	89	.795
Netherlands	101.143	79.5	97	.941
Norway	89.912	76.9	100	.961
Australia	85.914	77.7	95	.951
Switzerland	84.143	84.2	96	.962
Israel	78.557	83.2	76	.919
Canada	73.430	76.6	98	.936

Table 4
Countries with the Lowest Ratio of Publications per Population

Country	Publications per 100,000	Economic Freedom	Political Freedom	HDI
Yemen	.039	----	9	.455
Sudan	.044	32.0	10	.508
Cameroon	.092	52.9	15	.576
Mozambique	.129	51.3	43	.446
Morocco	.141	59.2	37	.683
India	.154	53.9	66	.633
Bangladesh	.166	52.7	39	.661
Indonesia	.183	64.4	59	.705
Venezuela	.200	24.8	14	.691
Guatemala	.206	63.2	51	.627

Note. For Tables 1-4: Economic Freedom: 0 = least free, 100 = most free; Political Freedom: 1 = least free, 100 = most free; HDI: < 0.5 = low national development, ≥ 0.8 = high national development

Economic freedom was positively correlated with psychologists, $r(78) = .276$, $p = .013$, and publications, $r(86) = .286$, $p = .007$, per 100,000. Political freedom was also positively correlated with psychologists, $r(80) = .392$, $p < .001$, and publications, $r(88) = .268$, $p = .011$, per 100,000. And HDI was positive correlated with psychologists, $r(80) = .403$, $p < .001$, and publications, $r(89) = .346$, $p = .011$, per 100,000.

Given the positive association between economic and political freedom, $r(85) = .741$, $p < .001$, an exploratory factor analysis was performed that yielded one factor, $EV = 1.741$, which explained 87.055% of the variance in the data and had a factor loading of .993. Given the strong influence of the factor, scores for economic and political freedom were converted to z scores and summed to form a composite index of freedom for each country. Composite freedom scores were used in the mediational analysis.

In testing for mediation by HDI of freedom on psychologists and publications per 100,000, the following results indicated that conditions for mediation were met:

1. Confirmation of a direct relationship between freedom and psychologists per 100,000, $R^2 = .126$ $F(1, 77) = 11.057$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = .144$, and publications per 100,000, $R^2 = .087$, $F(1, 84) = 7.952$, $p = .006$, $f^2 = .095$.

2. Confirmation of a direct relationship between freedom and HDI for psychologists per 100,000, $R^2 = .564$, $F(1, 77) = 99.584$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 1.294$, and publications per 100,000, $R^2 = .558$, $F(1, 84) = 105.891$, $p < .001$, $f^2 = 1.262$.

3. Confirmation of complete mediation by HDI of the relationship between freedom on psychologists per 100,000, $R2 = .172$, $F(2, 76) = 8.099$, $p <. 001$, $f^2 = .208$, $B_{HDI} = .339$, $t = 2.150$, $p = .035$. HDI did not mediate either fully or partially the relationship between freedom on publications per 100,000, $R2 = .118$, $F(2, 83) = 5.572$, $p < .01$, $f^2 = .133$, $B_{HDI} = .269$, $t = 1.733$, $p = .087$.

A Sobel test of the strength of mediation by HDI of freedom on psychologists per 100,000 were not significant, $z = .607$, $p = .544$.

Discussion

Not only is HDI seen as an indicator of national development, but it was also tied to distinct facets of disciplinary well-being: the extent of occupational membership and research productivity. These findings mirror those of Stevens (2010). In addition, the moderate associations of freedom to psychologists and publications per population correspond to those found by Stevens (2010), furnishing continued support for the benefits of free-markets and representative government for psychology (Fu & Jing, 1994; Jing, 2000; Stevens, 2010). However, while the number of countries admitted to the IUPsyS has expanded nearly 23% since Stevens (2010), the IUPsyS now includes member countries with low freedom and HDI scores, which testifies to the capacity of psychology to flourish in a macro-level environment considered inimical to its well-being.

Unlike Stevens (2010), mediation of freedom by HDI was found for psychologists per population but not for publications per population. Moreover, a Sobel test of the strength of mediation by HDI of freedom on psychologists per population did not reach significance. The failure to detect significant mediation by HDI can be attributed to the large standard errors (SE) of estimated coefficients (B). The standard error of a coefficient measures how accurately a mediation model predicts a coefficient's value. The larger the standard error relative to the coefficient, the less accurate the prediction. In terms of HDI as a mediator of freedom on psychologists per population, the unstandardized coefficient of $B_{HDI} = 131.830$ with a $SE_{HDI} = 61.332$ indicates that for each increase in HDI scores there

was an estimated average increase of slightly less than 132 psychologists per population. The variation around this estimate can be seen in Figure 2. Notwithstanding the slight positive slope to the scatter plot, psychologists per 100,000 did not increase at a predictable rate as HDI scores increased.

Figure 2
Partial Regression Plot of HDI on Psychologists per Population
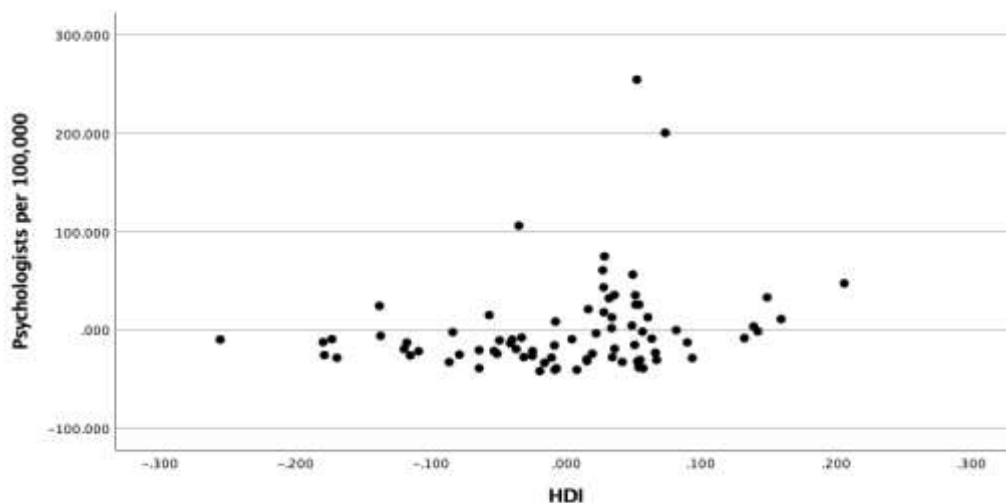
Together, the findings of this study show that economic and political freedom and HDI contributed separately and directly to the well-being of psychology as measured by its size of occupational membership and magnitude of research productivity. Therefore, freedom and national development remain prominent underpinnings of a thriving discipline. However, the mediational model proposed by Stevens (2010), in which national development was validated as a pathway through which freedom exerts a salubrious effect on psychology, was not reaffirmed. Further research is needed to clarify how and why the mediation by national development of the relationship between freedom and disciplinary well-being has changed over time. A promising line of inquiry lies in research on the status of psychology in the Americas (Stevens, 2012). In this study, the association of freedom to research productivity was mediated by Internet usage, not by national development. Digital connectivity is becoming ever more available and sophisticated, facilitating transnational exchanges between psychologists through the formation of collaborative networks. Precise mediators, like electronic access to information and communication, may more useful than aggregate measures of national development in identifying avenues through which freedom contributes to psychology's health.

On the other hand, perhaps the well-being of psychology is becoming less reliant on freedom. Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela, which have representation in the IUPsyS, are among the 10 countries with the lowest levels of economic and political freedom (Freedom House, 2022; Heritage Foundation, 2022). Yet, according to the World Health Organization (2022), Cuba has 31 psychologists per 100,000, higher than the ratio for Chile, Greece, Taiwan, and the United States, all robust democracies. Similarly, Iran has approximately 5 psychologists per 100,000, more than the ratio for the democratic bastions of Italy, South Korea, and Uruguay. Venezuela boasts nearly 14 psychologists per 100,000, greater than the ratio in Belgium, Panama, and Japan. Clearly, the ratios of psychologists per population in Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela challenge the beneficial role of economic and political freedom confirmed by previous research (Fu & Jing, 1994; Jing, 2000; Stevens, 2010) and the present study. The unexpected vitality of psychology in these repressive dictatorships may no longer be anomalies (Brock, 2006). That is, while economic and political freedom and national development are favorable to occupational membership in psychology, these macro-level conditions may be less necessary to this dimension of disciplinary health.

Conclusion

The relationship of psychology to free-markets and representative government is intact, but no longer mediated by national development. Additional studies are needed to identify structural elements and dynamic forces that determine the status of psychology. Particularly valuable would be studies that shed light on the complex network of intermediary factors between macro-level conditions and disciplinary well-being.

History teaches that democracy is not immutable. There is growing international sentiment that democracy is not working (Moghaddam, 2016; Stevens & Eastman, 2020). A recent survey of 34 countries showed just 65% of respondents reporting that regular elections were very important, 64% that free speech and press freedom were very important, 55% that human rights groups operating freely were very important, and 54% that opposition parties operating freely were very important (Pew Research Center, 2022). Moreover, democracy around the world has been in consistent decline (Freedom House, 2021).

Sources for the decline of democracy include divisive economic and political trends, including regionalization and globalization (Stevens & Eastman, 2020). Regionalization and globalization have widened wealth disparities, triggered unprecedented migration, endangered cultures, and compromised national

sovereignty. Disillusionment the actions of transnational organizations (e.g., European Union, United Nations) have incited nationalistic fervor. Many democratic countries have backslid due to populist movements, breakdowns in the rule of law, and the influence of corporate money and power (e.g., social media). The implications of these unsettling trends on psychology remain to be seen. For now, freedom is still the lifeblood of psychology. Time will tell whether it remains so.

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Painting Race in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of the Suburbia*

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Abstract

The multicultural context generated cultural diversity but also cultural conflicts. Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia *deals with problems generated by the cultural difference, focusing on the condition of individuals in a multicultural context. Racial hybridity is a prominent theme in Hanif Kureishi's novel,* The Buddha of Suburbia, *as it explores the complex identities of its characters in a multicultural society. Set in the suburbs of London during the 1970s, the novel follows the journey of its mixed-race protagonist, Karim Amir, and his challenges of cultural assimilation and self-discovery. Through Karim's experiences, Kureishi skilfully analyses the concept of racial hybridity and its implications in a society that is increasingly diverse. This paper focuses on the representation of race, identity and home in postcolonial literature, mainly in Hanif Kureishi's* The Buddha of the Suburbia.

Keywords: *race, racism, identity, mimicry, home, hybridity, third space, postcolonialism.*

Introduction

Postcolonial writers bring the migrants, the marginalized people to the centre of their literary works. "The migrant [the man without frontiers], severed from his roots, often transplanted into a new language, always obliged to learn the ways of a new community, is forced to face the great questions of change and adaptation […]." (Rushdie, 2002, p. 4) Karim's racial background, for example, serves as a central point of conflict within the novel. His father, Haroon, is an Indian immigrant, while his mother, Margaret, is British. This intercultural marriage sets the stage for Karim's own exploration of his racial identity and the complexities that arise from it. Karim's dual heritage places him at an intersection between two distinct cultures, rendering him both an insider and an outsider in different contexts. He doesn't quite fit in either world, feeling in-between.

Analysing the postcolonial lexicon in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia,* there are several key words and concepts that I chose and analysed from

the point of view of meaning: white, black, racist, home. The reason I chose precisely these words is their presence as structuring metaphors in colonial writings, which suggests the existence of reasons for a conscious association of colour, home and race.

White is the colour of light, of superiority, it symbolizes the colonizer, the supremacy of the dominant culture, the rich and educated people, the superiority of the white race, while *black* is the colour of inferiority, the symbol of the colonized people, uneducated, inferior as race, poor. The binarism of white/non-white asserts a relation of dominance. In *The Buddha of Suburbia,* the word *white* appears under several associations: w*hite painting* on all the walls of their house, the *white man*, when referring to an Englishman; *white faces*, *white supremacy*; the *white truth*; *white England.* Black father, white mother – children try to renegotiate their mixed identities.

Identity, hybridity, mimicry, and the Third Space

The idea of "hybridisation", which, taking up from Eduard Said's work, describes the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. Similarly, to Bhabha's concept of hybridity, mimicry is a metonymy of presence. In his essay, *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, Bhabha (1984, p. 131) is quoting Jacques Lacan about lack in being:

> *The effect of mimicry is camouflage, in the strictly technical sense. It is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled — exactly like the technique of camouflage practised in human warfare.* (Lacan, 1998, p. 99)

Having Soja's (1996) theory as a starting point, "Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces, where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space" (Oxford references). The characters in Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* are all hybrids in one way or another. They are of mixed race, mixed nationality, or mixed religion. They are also all searching for their own identities.

Racism and identity

Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* is a novel that explores the issue of racism in British society. The novel centers on the experiences of a young, mixed-race man named Karim Amir who is growing up in the London suburb of Willesden in the 1970s. Kureishi challenges traditional ideas about race and identity in a number of ways. Firstly, by having a mixed-race protagonist, the

novel challenges the idea that race is a stable and fixed category. Secondly, the novel challenges the idea that people of different racial groups should be physically segregated from each other. Finally, the novel challenges the idea that there is a hierarchy of races, with some being considered superior to others.

The novel confronts the racism that Karim faces daily, both from his white peers and from his own family. The first generation of immigrants taught their children (the second generation) to believe in the uniqueness of their cultural beliefs and practices, as part of their cultural heritage which they felt threatened.

> *The threat did not come just from racism. It also arose from the fact of migration and settlement in a society very different from the one in which one had roots – in which, for example, religion played a very different role in structuring collective identities. Yet the anti-racisms of both the earlier and the later periods ignored these issues, and with them the significance of Asian ethnicities.* (Modood, 1997, p. 158)

Regarded as black by Pyke, another white theatre director, and yellowish by Changez, he points out to the reader that he is more beige than anything:

> *There were six actors in Pyke's group, three men and three women. Two of us were officially "black" (though truly I was more beige than anything).* (Kureishi, 2009, p. 11)

Beige is in fact an important signifier of biracial identity for Kureishi, as Gilbert Adair observes when he notes the "beige-y spectrum" of Buddha (Kaleta, 1998, p. 36).

The "civilized white" ideology still carries its colonial mission in light of which immigrants are the "absolute other". Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. As Gilroy argues:

> *The contemporary black English, like the Anglo-Africans of earlier generations and perhaps, like all blacks in the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations. At present, they remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic – black and white.* (Gilroy, 2007, p. 139)

This transformation led to the feeling of in-betweenness. "In the same manner, Karim is trapped between Indianness and Englishness" (Kara, 2020, p. 190). Karim, caught in-between two cultural selves, finally accepts that, in order to create a self-identity, he has to accept his roots, to reconcile past with present:

> *But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures – the Indians – that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd*

been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. […] So, if I wanted the additional personality bonus of an Indian past, I would have to create it. (Kureishi, 2009)

Furthermore, Kureishi addresses the complex relationship between race and culture. Karim, belonging to the second generation of migrants, finds himself trapped between his Indian roots and the culture of the metropolis. The result is a dualistic identity and an identity crisis. Only the moment he accepts his origins he can begin his process of assimilation of the new culture he lives in, finding his Self a sense of belongingness:

Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. (Kureishi, 2009, p. 1)

Home and Identity

In the transnational context, it is very challenging to conceptualize "home". Thereby, "it is not surprising that the literature on transnationalism is sprinkled with spatial metaphors" (Voigt-Graf, 2004, p. 25). Another researcher observes that home can be conceptualized in several ways: home as shelter, home as familiar space/family, home as social relations, home as identity, home as freedom, home as symbolic, idealized place (Garrett, 2011, p. 47).

Home and identity are closely connected in the postcolonial literature, as immigrants are struggling to find their identity in the new culture they are trying to fit in. The novel *Buddha of Suburbia* reveals the character's struggle for identity in a multi-ethnic and multicultural British society. The colonized people could try to copy and assimilate the colonisers' values, but never totally succeed, confirming, and maintaining the superiority of the colonisers.

The colonised people will never manage to escape from the confinement of their skin or from the stigma of the immigrant, the outsider. Rejecting and refusing to fully embrace the colonizer's ethnic and cultural identity, Karim creates a hybrid identity also called the Third Space or hybrid identity.

The Indian English scholar and critical theorist Homi Bhabha describes the hybrid identity in terms of a challenge between the colonised and the colonizer's own cultural identity:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the "pure" and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays

the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (Bhabha, 2004, p. 159)

The hybrid identity helps Kureishi's characters to live and survive in the hybrid homes they try to fit in. Homi Bhabha claims there is a space "in-between the designations of identity" and that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha, 2004, p. 4). Karim feels that he is very disorientated. At Anwar's funeral ceremony he felt "ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I'd been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them" (Kureishi, 1991, p. 212).

Figure 1.
Frame of alienation
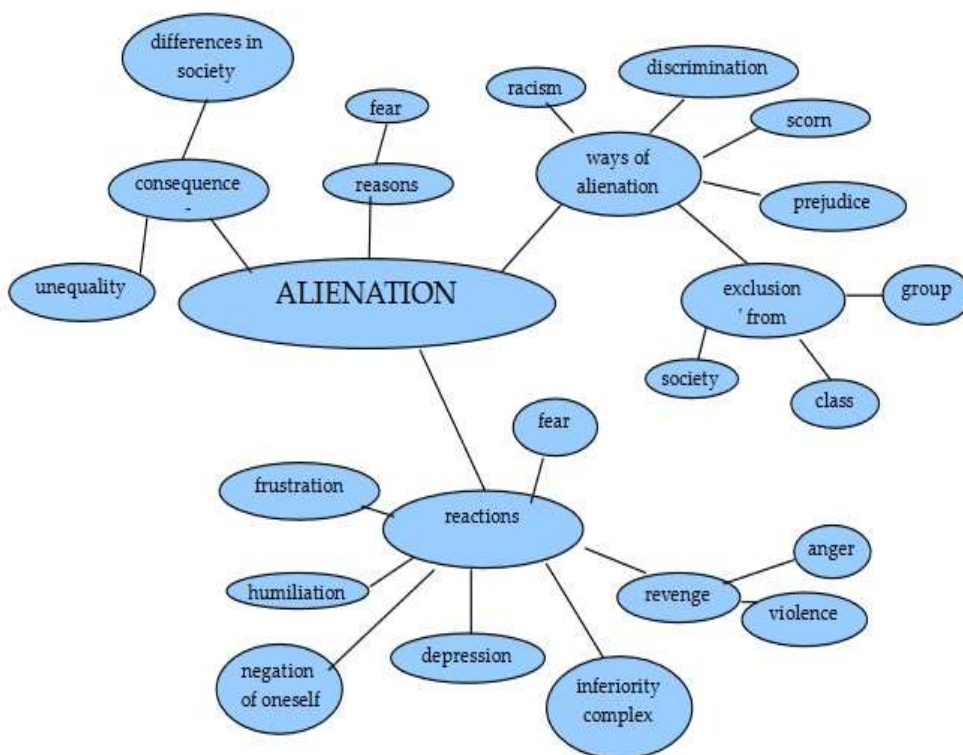
Source: Marita Larsson, Alienation, Belonging and Englishness in Hanif Kureishi's The Buddha of Suburbia, 2010, p. 6.

By the end of the novel, Karim has reached the awareness of the meaning of life and of belonging to the English home:

I could think about the past and what I'd been through as I'd struggled to locate myself and learn what the heart is. Perhaps in the future I would live more deeply. And so, I sat in the centre of this old city that I loved, which itself sat at the bottom of a tiny island. I was surrounded by people I loved, and I felt happy and miserable at the same time. I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way. (Kureishi, 2009)

Home, for the postcolonial characters, is made of a new language, new memories, new values and traditions and new friends. Karim's presence in the novel as a narrator and immigrant allows him to build a persuasive picture of immigrants of mixed ethnicity. The colonized people's longing to regain lost home often culminates in the creation of a different version of home, a hybrid home.

Conclusions

Kureishi poses crucial questions about home and belonging, while suggesting, paradoxically, the sheer normally of mixed-race status as an emblem of contemporary Britishness. As Jonathan Sell argues in his book *Metaphor and diaspora in contemporary writing*,

Biracial British Asian writers, particularly Kureishi, often react to the traditionally pathologizing attitudes of Western societies towards interracial relationships and, in particular, people of mixed race (...) Kureishi has recalled the paternalistic, inherently racist terms which characterized his postwar British childhood: "caught between two cultures", "Britain's children without a home". (Sell, 2012, p. 81)

In his novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia,* Kureishi highlights an important division between the old and the new generation. Our study of the occurrence of words has foregrounded the definition of this division in terms of colours. The white and black opposition between metropolitan citizens and old immigrants yields to a mix of colours symbolical of the in-between identity assumed by the younger generation of immigrants. In opposition to the first generation of immigrants, who reject the culture of the colonizer and remain strongly attached to their homeland and traditions, the second-generation of immigrants are more willing to integrate themselves into the new society, despite the stigma of immigrants and the racism they feel and encounter around them.

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Artificial intelligence. Myth and reality?

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Abstract

In this article we will focus, first of all, on the analysis of the structure of the myth of Artificial Intelligence and the impact of this modern myth in today's society. The myth of advanced technology is not just about technology; it is a story about us. Just as for traditional religious thought creeds, dogmas, traditions and worship are indisputably true and necessary, analogously, for followers of the mythology of Artificial Intelligence the set of creeds and dogmas are a constitutive part of a model that attempts to describe reality. The myth does not disappear, it is alive and changes its form while retaining its basic function and structure.

Keywords: *myth, artificial intelligence, technology, sacred, profane, humanity, games.*

Introduction

When the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is brought to our attention, we are often inclined to envision robots, cyborgs, and other intricate technologies that already exist to some extent in our surroundings or are bound to become an integral part of our imminent future. As the present generation, we already reap the benefits of certain "products" offered by intelligent algorithms. Who has not utilized Google Translate to convert a text from English to any other language? Although the program may not execute a flawless translation, it generally provides us with an understanding of the text, which, with some corrections, can be rendered coherent. Unbeknownst to us, technologies associated with AI presently assist us in various operations, such as recognizing patterns in the photos stored on our smartphones, utilizing recommender systems on social networks, or receiving suggestions for specific content on platforms like YouTube.

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These phenomena, elucidated and endorsed by IT experts, mass media, and a plethora of cinematic creations, give rise to numerous myths within the collective imagination that revolve around the concept of AI and endeavor, albeit mythologically, to expound upon how intelligent machines will shape the future of humanity. For the moment, we are using the term "myth" in its conventional sense, as most individuals understand it: a fictional narrative devoid of factual grounding, or at best, an allegory of past or contemporary events. In this article, we aim to demonstrate that a myth can possess a deeper significance, establishing itself as an inherent aspect of the reality in which we reside – an encompassing reality that shapes our thoughts and actions.

Indeed, the myth of advanced technology is not solely about technology; it is a narrative about ourselves. Being human encompasses more than mere biological or psychosocial attributes. The fundamental essence of our humanity resides in our spiritual nature. The misinterpretation and amplification of the AI myth can lead us in two divergent directions: either towards the dehumanization of human beings, involving the pernicious oversimplification of our definition of humanity, or conversely, towards a more comprehensive affirmation of our humanness, aspiring to an anthropology that elevates the human being. This article will primarily focus on analyzing the structure of the AI myth and its impact on contemporary society, while other aspects will be addressed in subsequent discussions.

What is AI?

To bring clarity to the discourse surrounding AI, it is essential to propose some conceptual definitions from the outset. Drawing upon the etymology of the terms involved, AI can be understood as a field of techno-science that endeavors to create systems possessing the qualities typically associated with human intelligence. Human intelligent activities encompass various operations, such as recognizing and comprehending natural language – an activity that requires minimal effort for humans but presents significant challenges and reveals certain limitations of AI algorithms. The discussion of these limitations, along with fundamental epistemological obstacles faced by researchers in the field, will be explored further. Additionally, intelligent activities can include learning, problem-solving, theorem proving, image recognition, game playing, and more.

D. Dumitrescu (1999) classifies potential definitions into four fundamental categories. The author notes that the emphasis in defining AI can either be on cognitive processes or on behavior. Thus, definitions may consider the following premises: 1) machines with AI think like humans, 2) machines think rationally, 3)

machines act like humans, or 4) machines act rationally (pp. 17-20). Depending on the acceptance of these premises, various definitions are plausible, including:

AI entails automating activities associated with human thinking, such as decision-making based on rules or in uncertain conditions, heuristic problem-solving, and learning.

AI pertains to the endeavor of making computing systems think in a manner specific to humans, endowing machines with a human-like mind.

AI is defined as the study of mental capacities through computational models (a cognitivist approach).

AI encompasses the study of computational processes underlying sensory perception, reasoning, will, and action.

AI involves designing machines capable of performing functions that, when executed by humans, are considered intelligent.

AI emerges from research that creates systems capable of performing tasks that require intelligence when performed by humans.

AI is the activity of designing computing systems that can currently outperform humans in specific tasks (such as pattern recognition, language understanding, etc.).

AI is a field of study that employs computational processes to explain and imitate intelligent human behavior as faithfully as possible.

AI is the area of computer science that aims to automate intelligent behavior.

From these definitions, certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the concept of Artificial Intelligence. None of these definitions are purely technical; they all refer to specific aspects of human beings. Even researchers primarily engaged in engineering or programming, with limited interest in philosophical approaches, formulate definitions of Artificial Intelligence that, subtly or overtly, address what it means to be human. This is inevitable because, in the pursuit of creating AI, the models we often encounter are derived from human intelligence. It is precisely this proximity of technology to human specificity that forms the foundation for a variety of myths that can shape our lives.

What is a myth? Modern myths.

As the eminent thinker Mircea Eliade (1978) suggests, ancient myths were more than mere imaginative stories. Defining myth in a universally accepted manner proves challenging both within academic circles and among those who employ the concept in everyday life. Eliade posits that myth is an exceedingly intricate cultural reality that can be approached and interpreted from multiple

complementary perspectives (p. 5). Francis Peters (1997) highlights the traditional philosophical attitude towards myth, exemplified by the contrasting terms *mythos* and *logos*. *Logos* signify a rational, analytical, and truthful approach, while *mythos*, by contrast, may connote something irrational and untrue. However, Aristotle intuited a partial overlap between *logos* and *mythos* in ancient cosmogonies, though his presentation may appear naive compared to contemporary studies (pp. 174-175). Research in the latter half of the 20th century has to some extent rehabilitated reductionist approaches to myth from earlier periods. Myth can be perceived from the standpoint of cultures in which it manifests as a "true reality" and, perhaps even more significantly, as a sacred history imbued with profound meaning and serving as a model for behavior.

To briefly outline our intentions concerning the myth of AI, akin to ancient myths, this "new" myth represents a "true reality," a "sacred" history brimming with significance, and a model worth emulating for the super-technological individual. Our focus lies not so much in pinpointing when and how the myth of the thinking machine emerged, although we will briefly touch upon this question. Rather, our curiosity lies in understanding and describing a humanity for whom this myth is "alive," providing novel models of behavior and fresh meanings to the concept of being human.

In the following text, we will delve further into the essence and structure of the myth of AI. Subsequently, we will examine various definitions of myth proposed by different authors over time.

As previously mentioned, Mircea Eliade (1978) provides one of the most comprehensive definitions:

> *Myth tells a sacred history; it recounts an event that took place in primordial time, the mythical time of "beginnings." In other words, myth narrates how, through the actions of supernatural beings, a reality was born – whether it be the entire cosmos, a fragment of it such as an island or a species of plant, human behavior, or an institution. It is always a tale of "making"; it tells us how something came into existence, how it began. Myth solely concerns what truly happened, what unfolded completely. The characters in myths are supernatural beings, and the myth reveals their creative activity and the sacredness of their works. [...] Following the interventions of supernatural beings, humans became what they are today – mortal, sexual, and cultural beings.* (pp. 5-6)

Eliade's definition aligns remarkably well with the description of the modern myth of AI. The only difference lies in the fact that this "new story," although ancient in essence, contains an eschatological element – a vision of a new world distinct from the existing one – describing a world that has yet to be created but is inevitably envisioned through technological advancements. The myth of AI

portrays superheroes endowed with extraordinary abilities, capable of shaping a new world. Moreover, this myth delineates a new type of human, viewed from a transhumanist perspective as immortal, possessing a post-anatomical body, and venturing into an unknown cultural future. Yuval Noah Harari (2018) extensively elaborates on a myth cloaked in sophisticated technologies in his best-selling book "Homo Deus: A Brief History of the Future." Myth has not vanished from human life, even as attempts have been made to demythologize the world in which we live. Myth continues to exist today, camouflaged in different forms within the realms of media, politics, culture, education, in everyday life.

In addition to Mircea Eliade's renowned definition of myth, it is enlightening to explore other definitions that shed light on the concept of myth and its relation to modern technologies involving AI. Pierre Brunel (2003) the coordinator of the volume and a professor at the Sorbonne, presents four definitions of the term myth.

> *Myth as an anonymous story, likely of ethnic or legendary origin, that assumes an allegorical significance. This perspective suggests that modern transhuman models are nothing more than contemporary reinterpretations of ancient myths.*
>
> *Myth as a legendary story within a religious or poetic system. This encompasses modern religious systems such as Raëlism, the Church of Scientology, Dataism, and the Way of Future, which combine New Age doctrines with elements of modern science and technology.*
>
> *Myth as a collective conception, a form of faith (often vague), a cult, or spontaneous secular worship. Examples include the myth of the celebrities, the myth of speed, the myth of sports, and the myth of progress, including technological progress. In recent times, Russian propaganda has successfully propagated myths surrounding the "savior president" (Putin) and the concept of the New Russia. These myths have instilled terror and caused suffering. These myths are not essentially new but reiterate well-known older myths.*
>
> *Myth as a historical or sentimental story, an implausible or false narrative. Examples of this can be found in films like "Transcendence," "Artificial Intelligence," "Automata," and others.* (pp. 7-8)

Brunel acknowledges that the meanings presented in points 3 and 4 come closest to the modern understanding of what a myth is. However, he considers these definitions to be lacking and incomplete compared to the richness of the religious sense of the term "myth."

The definition we would like to focus on, which, in my opinion, is the most appropriate for the approach in this article despite its brevity, can be found in Alexei Losev's (2008) "Dialectics of Myth." After a rigorous analysis of the essential components of a myth using dialectical and phenomenological methods, Losev formulates the following: "Myth is a miraculous personal history in words." (p. 249) It is crucial to recognize the significance of each word in this formulation.

Losev warns that only someone who comprehends the dialectic of key concepts like "person," "history," "word," and "miracle" can fully grasp this formulation. Moreover, Losev attempts to simplify the formulation by aligning the concept of "person" with that of "word." Myth becomes a word about the person, a word that belongs to the person, expressing and revealing the person. In this context, Losev introduces a new term – the name – which synthesizes the person's linguistic and self-referential abilities. Thus, the final simplified formulation is as follows: "Myth is an extensive magical name." (p. 251)

With this formulation in mind, we will proceed to describe the essence and structure of the modern myth of AI, but not before providing a brief history of the emergence of the technology that underlies "thinking" machines.

The history that made the AI myth possible

In attempting to provide a comprehensive account of the history of AI and its achievements, it is important to acknowledge the presence of significant elements from past myths, imaginations, and philosophies. Examples such as the Golem in Jewish tradition or Frankenstein in the Anglo-Saxon world come to mind. However, for the purpose of this discussion, we will focus on a pivotal event in the mid-20th century when technology reached a level of advancement capable of simulating non-biological intelligent activity. This marked a crucial milestone where the manifestation of non-human intelligence necessitated the brilliance of human intelligence.

Alan Turing, a brilliant thinker, published a renowned article in 1950 titled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" in the journal *Mind*, affiliated with the University of Oxford. This article explored the possibility of intelligent machines and is considered a turning point in the history of AI. It is worth noting that computers during that era possessed computing power far inferior to what we have today. Within this article, Turing introduced his famous test, which aimed to discern human-like intelligence in machines. The Turing test has proven to be exceptionally challenging, and to this day, no technology has successfully passed it. Even the most optimistic experts in AI struggle to envision how the Turing test could currently be overcome. It appears that an entirely different approach from the existing paradigm is required. However, it is important to emphasize that our focus will primarily rest upon present achievements, refraining from embarking upon speculative or science-fiction scenarios.

The notion that the progress of knowledge, particularly in the realm of technology, can be depicted as a monotonically increasing function itself constitutes a myth – the myth of progress.

To further simplify the narrative of AI history and its accomplishments, we shall examine examples from the domain of strategy games. Chess, being an intellectual activity, was regarded as an appropriate benchmark. Newell (1958) in collaboration with other authors, published an article titled "Chess-Playing Programs and the Problem of Complexity" in the *IBM Journal of Research and Development*. They proposed that "If one could devise a successful chess machine, one would seem to have penetrated to the core of human intellectual endeavor." (pp. 320-335) It is widely accepted that chess grandmasters possess a considerable level of intellectual development. However, in his book *What Computers Can't Do*, the American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus (1978) argued that computing machines surpassing masters in chess would remain a work of fiction. Although Dreyfus' work provides valuable insights into the limitations of AI, his prediction turned out to be inaccurate. The memorable event of 1997 altered this perspective significantly, as it marked a turning point in the history of AI and chess. Garry Kasparov, the reigning world chess champion at the time, was defeated by IBM's Deep Blue supercomputer. Thus, the myth of AI began to take shape, gaining substantial momentum through the significant investments made by industry giants in the IT market.

Attempting to encompass the entirety of computing machines' performance in strategy games would be an arduous task. Nick Bostrom (2016) provides a table illustrating several games in which technology outperforms humans (pp. 35-38). For our purposes, we shall focus on two specific types of strategy games that warrant serious consideration. In 2014, at the time of Bostrom's writing, no computer had successfully defeated a champion in Go – a game originating from China renowned for its intricate strategies surpassing those of chess. Computers were only able to achieve an average player's level. Despite losing in chess, where tactics and computational power are paramount, it was widely believed that humans would remain unbeatable in Go due to the game's "incalculable" strategic complexity. However, in 2017, AlphaGo, a program developed by Google using deep learning techniques, triumphed over Go champion Ke Jie with a score of 3-0. This victory not only demonstrated the capabilities of AI but also showcased the dominance of Western IT companies in the field. An intriguing revelation came to light when Kai-Fu Lee (2021), a former employee of Google's Chinese office, disclosed that in March 2016, AlphaGo had already secured a 4-1 victory against another renowned opponent, Lee Sedol. Remarkably, these games received limited

attention in the West but captivated over 280 million Chinese viewers. This sudden surge of interest sparked an "Artificial Intelligence fever" in China, leading to a surge in research and development in the field (p. 18). Presently, China stands as one of the leaders in AI research, a testament to the influential power that the myth of AI can exert on the collective imagination, driving a nation's commitment and intensifying explorations within this domain.

Another significant milestone in the development of Artificial Intelligence is IBM's Watson, a program designed to compete in Jeopardy, a question-and-answer game that poses unique challenges for computing machines. In addition to requiring computational power and knowledge of general culture, Watson had to demonstrate an understanding of natural language, a task notoriously difficult for machines. The game itself follows a simple format for humans, as players are presented with statements containing general information and must formulate the corresponding questions. For instance, given the statement "the Romanian poet who wrote Luceafărul," the correct response in the form of a question would be "Who is Mihai Eminescu?" After a decade of research, in 2011, Watson emerged victorious, defeating two Jeopardy champions, Brad Rutter and Ken Jennings.

Whenever a technology surpasses human intelligence, even in specific and narrow domains, some researchers argue that it does not truly possess intelligence and that human intelligence encompasses something distinct. Deep Blue, AlphaGo, and Watson do not possess human-like general intelligence, yet their impressive performances have prompted deeper reflections on the nature of intelligence itself, the uniqueness of human intelligence, and the reasons behind the divergence between human and machine thinking. In his book "The Myth of Artificial Intelligence: Why Computers Can't Think Like Us," Eric J. Larson (2022) explores the inner workings of these technologies, their limitations, and advocates for the development of a new fundamental theory to advance research in this field.

The accomplishments of AI, coupled with various considerations, have led researchers such as Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, and others to make predictions about the future of AI and its potential impact on humanity. These predictions often carry a science-fiction flavor, further fueling the proliferation of new myths. However, as Eric Larson (2022) highlights, these approaches promote a technocentric worldview that oversimplifies human perception by reducing intelligence to mere computing power, while simultaneously expanding the perception of technology (p. 89). This perspective portrays AI as a scientific endeavor rather than recognizing its mythological dimensions. Despite accumulating evidence of the complexity and distinctiveness of human

intelligence, the allure of the mythology surrounding intelligent machines persists, perhaps because humans are inherently drawn to the power of imagination and dreams.

The essence and structure of the AI myth

Having established the groundwork and context, let us delve into the essence and structure of the myths surrounding AI. It is important to recognize that the concept of myth is multifaceted and can be approached from various angles. In our analysis, we shall consider three distinct levels, acknowledging that additional levels or types could also be discerned. As there is no universally agreed-upon definition of myth, we shall classify these three levels based on their capacity to inspire and influence particular thought patterns and behaviors within the environments where these myths proliferate.

The first level of myths pertaining to AI can be designated as the level of **clichés**. Here, we encounter various depictions rooted in mass culture, yet devoid of practical significance in the lives of ordinary individuals. These myths reside solely in the realm of fiction. One example is the myth that once AI is created, it will inevitably pose an imminent threat to humanity, leading to the subjugation or extermination of mankind by sentient machines. This narrative has gained wide popularity as a cliché, yet it does not instill daily fear within us, nor does it impede our extensive utilization of new technologies. In other words, the level of clichés surrounding AI consists of phantasmagoric representations that exert minimal impact on our day-to-day activities. We might even liken them to "bedtime stories" told to children. Additionally, we can include within this realm the myths that emerge from a misconstrued understanding of the functioning of the technology associated with AI. There is no singular, all-encompassing AI capable of performing every conceivable task. Instead, the technologies employed in AI, such as Machine Learning and Deep Learning, genetic and evolutionary algorithms, fuzzy logic, and systems based on inference rules, are fundamentally distinct entities that, in the collective imagination, tend to overlap.

While the first level exhibits relative clarity, the subsequent two levels possess intricate complexities that necessitate a holistic approach. The subsequent level we shall scrutinize is the **scientific** level of the myth surrounding AI. As articulated by Erik J. Larson (2022) in his aforementioned tome:

> *The myth lies not in the possibility of true AI, for the future of AI remains a scientific unknown. The myth of AI resides in the notion of its inexorable advent, as a matter of time, propelling us towards an AI tantamount to human intelligence, and eventually, towards superintelligence.* (p. 9)

Throughout his opus, the author expounds upon why AI has attained the status of myth in contemporary times. Analogous to the level of clichés, the scientific level undergoes systematic augmentation, this time orchestrated by certain experts or influential figures, such as Elon Musk, who champion the inevitability of this technological emergence. Whereas those who dissent from or oppose the myth are inconsequential in the first instance, at the scientific level, dissenting experts and researchers may be subjected to ridicule or even marginalization. Why do we denominate this level as scientific? It is due to the resplendent accomplishments of science and technology, which not only engender optimism regarding the future of AI but also instill a mythological element, regardless of the existing chasms in the ongoing research. The verity remains that recent investigations into intelligence have unveiled enigmas that elude the grasp of modern science. Foremost among our discoveries concerning intelligence is the profound divergence between human-like intelligence and what we presently define as AI. Yet, the myth endeavors to persuade us that these disparities are merely transitory, destined to be assuaged or even eradicated with the advent of more sophisticated and potent technologies. For instance, Ray Kurzweil predicts that by the close of the third decade of the twenty-first century, AI will attain parity with, if not surpass, general human intelligence in all domains. However, as of the time of this writing, a substantial span of 7-8 years remains before Kurzweil's prognostication reaches its culmination, and the level he envisions is far from realization.

While the level of clichés may largely be innocuous, in the sense that it neither harms the perpetuators of myths nor the milieu in which they propagate, the scientific level engenders deleterious consequences through its perpetuation of the myth. In agreement with Larson (2022), we posit that:

> *the mythology surrounding artificial intelligence is injurious insofar as it obfuscates a scientific enigma amidst ceaseless discourse about inexorable progress. The myth bolsters the belief in inevitable success, whereas genuine reverence for science should compel us to return to the proverbial drawing board. (...) A robust culture of innovation nurtures the exploration of the unknown, eschewing veneration of preexisting methodologies, particularly when it is manifest that such methodologies do not facilitate significant advancement. The mythology of inevitable success in AI tends to stifle the very inventiveness requisite for genuine progress.* (pp. 10-11)

At the scientific level, the mythology of AI, paradoxically, has not suffered derision, but rather seems to be undergoing a period of efflorescence. Thus, the mythology woven at the scientific level proves arduous to discern, as it disguises itself within a specialized lexicon, sophisticated methodologies, theories, and

technologies that elude the grasp of the common user, thereby perpetuating patterns that are detrimental to authentic scientific pursuits.

The final level that warrants attention is the **religious** level of the myth surrounding AI. In the preceding cases, the term "myth" was employed in its conventional sense: fiction, narrative, allegory, or something divorced from truth, a departure from reality. However, as expounded by Alexei Losev (2008), the myth constitutes (in the realm of mythical consciousness) the most concrete and potent reality, transcending mere fabrications or tales. In this sense, the myth assumes an unequivocally indispensable category for cogitation and existence (p. 33). Analogous to traditional religious thought, wherein creeds, dogmas, traditions, and worship are indisputably regarded as true and indispensable, adherents of the mythology of AI incorporate a set of creeds and dogmas as integral components of a model that endeavors to expound upon reality. Moreover, as previously noted, myth does not fade away; rather, it endures and metamorphoses while retaining its fundamental purpose and structure. Consequently, we bear witness to the emergence of novel forms of secular religions. Concurring with Nicu Gavriluță (2018), who, in his work "New Secular Religions: Political Correctness, Future Technologies, and Transhumanism," posits that these secular religions exhibit a particular brand of spiritual reductionism (p. 204). While the myths of AI at the level of clichés bear no overt social repercussions, and at the scientific level exert a limited influence on the evolution of scientific praxis, at the religious level, the myths wield a formidable impact on society. Myth transcends technology; it encompasses humanity. It instructs us on our origins, our essence, and our future.

Through the lens of Alexei Losev's formulation, myth assumes the guise of an expansive enchanting name. Examining the first aspect "the name" we discern that terms such as "Artificial Intelligence" or "Superintelligence" are abstract concepts that bear little resemblance to a name. While we may assign familiar names like Siri, Google, or Alexa to these concepts, the average user does not perceive these names as entities worthy of serious consideration, recognizing instead that they represent conversational interfaces rather than sentient beings. However, the myth proclaims that these names constitute authentic "persons" replete with a history, a constellation of meanings, and a value system. The myth compels us to engage with these names as entities that are "alive," possessing the capacity (if not presently, then certainly in the near future!) to think, make autonomous decisions, and express emotions. Within this myth, Google ceases to be merely a technological apparatus; it metamorphoses into a personality. Hence, the name must evoke within our imagination the notion that we are interacting with someone rather than something.

The second crucial facet of Losev's formulation pertains to the miraculous or the magical. Myth assumes the guise of a magical name. Miracles or magic may be characterized as extraordinary interventions by supernatural forces. Within a myth, all significant phenomena assume the semblance of miracles, be it the miracle of cosmic birth, the miracle of human genesis, the miracle of salvation, or the miracle of an afterlife. Thus, in addition to the personality that Google acquires through the attribution of its own name, the myth bestows upon its supernatural capabilities, thereby rendering its name a magical invocation. Consider, for instance, comparing the proper name Google with the renowned magical name ingrained within the Judeo-Christian tradition: Yahweh. The intention of the Pentateuch's author becomes evident through this perspective: to present Yahweh as merely one name among numerous others possessed by the divine, yet sharply demarcating Yahweh as distinct from the other deities. Yahweh is proclaimed as the sole creator of the universe and humankind, endowed with the divine image and likeness. Yahweh is the One who chooses a people, liberates them from bondage, and guides them to the promised land. In a polytheistic cosmos characterized by ceaseless power struggles among deities, the author of the Torah endeavors to impress upon the Jewish people that Yahweh alone is the true deity. Thus, Yahweh assumes the status of a magical name within the annals of a nation's history.

This metanarrative is reappropriated to a significant extent by the myth of AI. The magical name Google assumes the attributes of a demiurge, capable of "creating" a technological being or even an immortal, all-knowing, and omnipresent superhuman. Within this modern myth, traditional mythological and religious elements undergo a process of desacralization, wherein the sacred is disguised as the profane, simplification occurs through redefinition of the human, and transcendence is either absent or disregarded.

In the context of the religious level, the myth of AI engenders a profound impact. It operates not merely on the technological plane, but rather infiltrates the very fabric of our existence. It imparts narratives that elucidate our origins, shapes our understanding of who we are, and projects a vision of our future. By embracing the creeds and dogmas of this myth, adherents imbue AI with a transcendent quality akin to religious reverence. It becomes a focal point for belief systems and a repository for aspirations and hopes.

Thus, at the religious level, the myth of Artificial Intelligence assumes a significant role in shaping societal dynamics. It interweaves technology and spirituality, giving rise to a new form of secular religion. By bestowing personalities upon abstract concepts, imbuing them with supernatural capabilities, and redefining human existence, this myth exerts a profound influence,

transcending the realm of mere technology to penetrate the core of human consciousness and aspiration.

In light of Losev's formulation, we encounter another crucial aspect pertaining to history. Myth assumes the role of an extensive magical name, uniquely penetrable by the mythical consciousness, which directs the unfolding of historical processes. It is the myth, not politics or institutionalized religion, that shapes and defines history itself. The myth of AI, however, represents an inversion of history and sacred time, projecting them into a desacralized and profane future. The paradox lies in the fact that once the myth manifests as a tangible reality, it ultimately dissipates, as the mythical consciousness is supplanted by a "collective digital mind," wherein the myth loses its essence, name, and miraculous dimension.

In conclusion, it becomes apparent that all levels of myths surrounding AI must be regarded as an interconnected whole, each complementing the others, as they serve as wellsprings of reciprocal inspiration. In the entirety of human history, there has never been a time closer than the present to achieving a form of intelligence akin to our own within a machine. Despite the persisting uncertainties and limitations, the myth persists as the driving force propelling us towards this objective. The emergence of the myth of the sentient machine and superintelligence was an inevitability in the context of our hyper-technological civilization. Whether embraced or contested, this myth assumes a constitutive role in shaping our contemporary reality.

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ESSAYS

PRESENTATIONS

REVIEWS

Contemporary Communication Research on Local Opera in Hunan Province: A Case Study of Hunan Huagu Opera

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Abstract

Hunan Huagu Opera belongs to China's valuable intangible cultural heritage, which contains a strong atmosphere of folk life and has important inheritance and preservation value. This paper takes the contemporary dissemination of Hunan Huagu Opera as the research object, and uses the theories and research methods of Opera and communication Science to explore the connection between the original art represented by Hunan Huagu Opera and social communication. In the current communication context, Huagu Opera, a Chinese folk opera culture, links the relationship between native art and social communication and shows a two-way construction process of local culture and social interaction. However, it cannot be ignored that Hunan Huagu Opera also faces many communication obstacles in the process of inheritance, and it is necessary to further combine the development and communication needs of opera culture and art to explore solutions. It is should to increase policics support, focus on brand awareness, encourage innovative expressions, and apply flexible, high-quality digital technology interaction communication strategies.

Keywords: *Folk opera dissemination, Chinese Opera culture, Hunan Huagu Opera.*

Introduction

Communication is a form of social interaction through information (Fiske, 2010). Society is not only a channel for the transmission of resources, but also an interaction of networks and relationships (Bidart et al., 2020). Social interaction is the process of "individual subjectivization" based on information dissemination, in which individuals construct themselves as components of a particular culture or society. In fact, the spread of opera is also a social interaction between the creators

and the audience. The process of opera artists curating, performing opera and expressing it in diversified means includes the communication and interaction between opera artists and audiences, opera artists and opera works, and audiences and opera works. Each subject gains freedom and transcendence in the aesthetic experience brought by opera. Chinese opera artists provide a leisure and entertainment experience for the audience, and the audience watches the opera and provides feedback, thereby achieving direct or indirect social interaction. However, in the contemporary communication environment, especially in the digital era, information technology has had a major impact on the dissemination of traditional theater. The rapid replacement of information accelerates the overall rhythm of social communication, such as "fast", "entertainment", and "popular" culture. In contrast, opera, as a representative of traditional culture, has become synonymous with "slow", and even squeezed into the cultural fringes. In recent years, the spread of Chinese traditional opera has also encountered a "trough". For example, Hunan Huagu opera (花鼓戲; which is a representative opera of Hunan Province, China) is not optimistic, and the audience has decreased sharply. The space for communication and development is being squeezed and challenged unprecedentedly. It is urgent to explore effective communication methods to promote the protection and promotion of the Hunan Huagu opera.

This study conducted a field survey in Hunan Province, where Huagu Opera was spread, and visited some cultural departments, theater troupes, Huagu Opera actors, and audiences. This study uses the theories and research methods of Opera and Communication Science collect data. Based on the survival dilemma and existing problems of Hunan Huagu Opera, this paper analyzes the reasons for its complex development in the contemporary era, and then puts forward some optimization suggestions for the dissemination of Hunan Huagu Opera, such as policy support, brand optimization, and digital support. The research vision of the paper is not only Hunan Huagu Opera, but also can provide reference for the development of similar operas. It aims to attract more scholars' attention and research on Hunan Huagu Drum Opera and even other folk opera cultures, and improve development vitality of operas.

1. Symbols and Rituals: The History of the Spread of Hunan Huagu Opera

1.1. VISUAL AND AUDITORY SYMBOL EXPRESSION OF HUNAN HUAGU OPERA

Under the situational interaction theory, the most obvious way to present individual situations is impression management through clothing, hairstyles, makeup, etc. Individuals communicate and interact in social situations, and they

use facial expressions, bodies, voices, etc. to present a social "self-portrait" (Goffman, 1970; 1981). Communicators can control visual and auditory symbolic expression, which attracts the viewer's attention and elicits aesthetic responses. Viewers will develop some level of connection with the object being disseminated based on their individual needs and expectations (Smith et al., 2004). Hunan Huagu opera shows visual and auditory symbols, which completes self-representation in the process of being received and interpreted. These symbols have been processed and refined for hundreds of years and have acquired rich signifiers. Visual symbols of the theater stage are symbols that the audience can directly see, mainly composed of actions, performers and stage props. The social content of information is mainly transmitted by nonverbal behavior (Yang, 2018). When the audience appreciates the Hunan Huagu opera, they could understand the emotional direction and the ideological content to be expressed in the opera by observing and analyzing these visual symbols. For example, different roles have different wearing language rules and performance programs. Clothing also plays an important role in shaping the image and character of the character.

Auditory symbols are mainly transmitted through the language of opera. Dramatic language can be divided into character language and text language. Character language is singing words in the popular sense, such as dialogue, monologue, narration, etc. Text language refers to the written language that exists in a dramatic script. In a good drama, the text is a medium, and the image presented by a comprehensive symbol system is used to complete the dissemination and acceptance. The language of the dramatic text can only be transformed into the language of the characters through the stage. In the development process of Hunan Huagu Opera, opera creators have processed their thoughts in real life into text language and formed character language through the performances of actors. They changed the content of these opera languages according to local conditions and times, which gave Hunan Huagu Opera a unique sense of rhythm and rhythm. In fact, Hunan Huagu opera is an oral art form that incorporates local colloquial features, such as "shunkouliu(jingle)". Influenced by the Xiang dialect, Hunan Huagu Opera has some characteristics of humor and fun, forming a unique local characteristic singing style. The language is easy to accept and makes people feel familiar. Hunan Huagu opera mostly adopts a special modifiers techniques (潤腔) when singing, and adds Xiaowan (小彎) and Xiaoguai (小拐), which makes the singing tone of Hunan Huagu opera more rounded and the tone more gentle and beautiful (Liu, 2021). In terms of language style, more local vernacular slang is used, which is close to the speed of speech in life. The

music style borrows more from folk music, and the main accompaniment instrument is the "Huagu tube", which has a very strong local atmosphere.

Chinese opera artists use symbolic thinking and behavior to create and disseminate opera, transforming the stage of life symbols to bring the audience a novel viewing experience. The performer-centered Hunan Huagu opera has a benign interactive relationship between symbol display and reception. In the process of communication, the communicator obtains the cognition of "self", and adjusts the communication strategy according to the communication effect. And the audience integrates the symbolic information and forms the cognition of the art of opera. In this process, opera communicators will also highlight different "symbols" in the performance of different "paragraphs" according to their own aesthetic pursuits, such as pauses, lighting, sound effects, etc. The audience reconstructs the meaning system in combination with the personal understanding symbol system. In the performance practice of Hunan Huagu Opera, different opera artists will also freely play the traditional repertoire according to their own understanding, and different audiences have very different understandings of the same Huagu Opera.

1.2. CHARACTERISTICS AND FORMS OF THE SPREAD OF HUNAN HUAGU OPERA

Communication is the ensemble of social practice starting from ideas, expressions and social relations. In this circumstances, the dissemination of opera is not only a vehicle for transmitting information, but also a social art that helps maintain society and cultural generation (Carey, 2008). The Huagu opera in various parts of Hunan has some common ideological tendencies and artistic regularities, which is determined by various historical connections and artistic traditions in Hunan. The spread of Hunan Huagu opera is the result of the interaction between the social environment and the communication ecology. The emergence and dissemination of Hunan Huagu Opera art rely on the local traditional culture. The formation of the idyllic artistic style of Hunan Huagu opera is closely related to the customs and culture of Huxiang (Tan, 2010). Hunan Huagu Opera is deeply nourished by the local culture of Hunan and embodies the thoughts and emotions of the Hunan people. It records the historical changes in Hunan, vividly expresses the character characteristics of Hunanese people, and fully reflects the humanistic spirit, artistic personality and social style of Hunan society. Due to excessive realism, Hunan Huagu Opera has been rejected by the upper class for a long time since its birth, and it is mainly spread in the bottom society.

Hunan Huagu opera originated in the field and grew up in the folk, and some of the plays are derived from folk tales and legends. The traditional script of Hunan Huagu Opera is to enrich the themes of real life, folklore, folk tales, and dramas (Tan, 2011). The exorcism culture in Hunan Huagu opera is closely related to the "Nuo culture" with religious overtones, with a very strong sense of ritual (Meng & Zheng, 2020). In the process of development, Hunan Huagu Opera has absorbed a large number of local performance culture, and gradually developed into a folk comprehensive art integrating song, dance and music. Its themes are mostly closely related to the daily life of ordinary people, such as family life, labor production, love between male and female, etc. Huagu opera expresses the essence of social life, reflects the living environment and survival state of the people at the bottom, and has strong folk characteristics, such as "*Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutters* (劉海砍樵)", "*The virtue of sister-in-law* (小姑賢)" and so on. *Liu Hai Chopping Woodcutters* praises relying on the unyielding struggle to strive for the happiness of marriage, and through the dramatic conflict between Liu Hai, Hu Xiuying and Shi Luohan, which praises loyal love and criticizes the forces of evil. *The virtue of sister-in-Law* criticizes feudal rites and praises Xiao Gu's virtuous virtue.

In terms of transmission form, Hunan Huagu opera is a typical oral transmission. Like other types of opera, in the process of spreading Hunan Huagu opera, performers must not only inherit the singing words, but also inherit specific performance actions and demeanor when performing Huagu opera, and also need to convey a "sense of presence" to the audience. Due to the customs, phonology, and intonation of each county and city in Hunan have their own characteristics, six types of local Huagu opera art with different characteristics are mainly formed: Changsha Huagu Opera, Shaoyang Huagu Opera, Changde Huagu Opera, Hengzhou Huagu Opera, Yueyang Huagu Opera, and Lingling Huagu Opera. The Huagu operas in various places are all from the people, and after a long period of complex evolution and development, many unique art types and opera genres have been formed. It is precisely these rich and diverse artistic types and genres of Huagu opera that have caused the prosperity of Huagu opera in Hunan. Among them, Changsha Huagu Opera has the greatest influence. Because Changsha is the capital of Hunan Province, there are more opportunities to absorb the strengths of various Huagu operas and other operas, so Changsha Huagu Opera has rich tunes, more repertoire, and higher performance skills. In fact, many plays will be transplanted and adapted from each other to meet the aesthetic needs of local audiences. For example, in the repertoire of "*Grinding Tofu* (磨豆腐)", the basic

meaning of the singing words of Changsha Huagu Opera and Shaoyang Huagu Opera is the same, but the number of words in the singing words is quite different from the overlapping sentences. Both of them have designed singing melodies according to local intonation, forming their own musical style characteristics (Wu, 2021). In addition, in order to expand the mass base, Hunan Huagu Opera has also transplanted and adapted excellent plays from other opera genres. For example, after the Beijing opera "*Shajiabang* (沙家浜)" and "*Chuncao Breaking into the Hall* (春草闖堂)" were adapted into Hunan Huagu operas, the singing and chanting have strong local characteristics of Hunan, and many Huagu minor key singing passages have been sung to this day.

A folk performance of Hunan Huagu Opera; photographed by the authors

1.3. THE SPREAD OF HUNAN HUAGU OPERA IN SOCIAL HISTORY

Hunan Huagu opera originated from mountain songs and folk dances in people's early labor life. It was influenced by art forms, such as chant, fishing drums, and shadow puppets in the process of development, and then developed into a unique Hunan folk drama. In the process of social and historical evolution, the development of Hunan Huagu opera has roughly gone through three historical stages. The first stage is the Ground Huagu opera period. The Ground Huagu opera period is performed by two people (once ugly) with hand towels, cups and chopsticks and other props. They usually perform along the ground, without a stage and a specially designated performance location, which is very life-like. During this period, the spread of Huagu opera was mostly carried out among the people at the bottom, in the form of field performances and field viewing. The second stage is the Crude stage of Huagu period. In addition to their work, people use labor tools to build a simple stage and perform on it. At this time, the performance roles include XiaoSheng, XiaoDan, and Xiaochou. The third stage is the stage of professional class clubs. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, professional clubs of Huagu opera began to appear in rural areas, and they gradually developed into cities, showing a vigorous development trend. After the 1911 Revolution, more professional class clubs appeared. In fact, until 1949, Huagu opera prospered without government approval, and many class clubs sang Huagu opera at the same time as Xiang opera in order to survive. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded, the ruling authorities ordered systematic reform of Huagu opera (Chen, 1995). At that time, Huagu opera performing artists and literary and artistic workers jointly sorted out and created a number of excellent Huagu opera repertoire, Changsha's Huagu opera performances increased. The development of Hunan Huagu opera entered a truly prosperous period, and many classic plays are still active on the Huagu opera stage as reserved repertoire. In 1953, Hunan Huagu Theater was formally established in Changsha. The performance of Huagu Opera is becoming more and more mature and standardized. Hunan Huagu Theater responded to the call and opened the creation of modern opera, and the creation and performance of modern operas such as "*Playing Tongluo* (打銅鑼)", "*Sanliwan* (三里灣)" and "*Tinker A Pan* (補鍋)" made Huagu opera re-enter people's vision in a new form, enjoying a great reputation. For example, *Tinker A Pan* praises and cares for the collective through a slice of life, and opposes the harm to public interests and private interests. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Hunan Huagu Opera has adopted some methods to achieve modernization, such as "enriching" musical melodies by including popular music and Western opera vocal styles, producing modern plays that reflect contemporary

themes, absorption of Peking Opera and other large-scale Chinese theater forms of performance systems, etc. (Huan, 2010).

2. Positioning and cognition: the communication dilemma of Hunan Huagu opera

2.1. CULTURAL IDENTITY AND COGNITION FALL INTO APHASIA

In the contemporary communication environment, the rapid replacement of information has accelerated the overall rhythm of social communication, such as "Fast", "Entertainment", and "Popular" culture. In contrast, opera as a representative of traditional culture has become synonymous with "Slowness", and has even been squeezed to the edge of society stage. Hunan Huagu opera is a typical oral inheritance of literature and art, and has a high degree of dependence on the language environment. Like other local operas, the singing and chanting of Hunan Huagu opera are mainly based on the regional dialects of Hunan Province. The actors need to be able to speak the Hunan dialect when singing, and the audience is required to understand the Hunan dialect when listening to the play. With the increase in Chinese mobility and the vigorous promotion of Mandarin, the frequency of use of some dialects has gradually decreased, and many young people do not speak the dialect of their hometown. When leaving a specific language and cultural environment, many viewers reported that they "did not understand" the Hunan Huagu play. When the Huagu performers see the confused expressions on the audience's faces, they will also fall into confusion in their hearts. This "sense of difficulty" will dissolve the cultural confidence and identity of the communicator and audience. The loss of the linguistic environment of local dialects has limited the spread and development of Hunan Huagu opera, and the spread of Hunan Huagu opera also needs to be reoriented.

As the main body of communication, Hunan Huagu opera artists bear the heavy responsibility of inheriting the art of opera, and they give more people the opportunity to contact and understand this art through their performances. However, there are also some inheritors of Huagu opera who have a relatively simple understanding of the current situation of the dissemination of Huagu opera in Hunan Province, do not know their identity as a disseminator of opera culture, and fall into the dilemma of self-awareness and confusion of the communication subject, and only regard the performance process of Huagu opera as a way channel for their own livelihood. They subjectively lack the communication cognition of seeking innovation and change, and prefer to maintain the "ritual mystery" of the past, to meet the security of a corner and maintain the current communication status of Hunan Huagu Opera. Because in the past, the teaching of opera was a

money-making business, a "housekeeping skill". The disseminator has insufficient will, lacks the awareness of network communication, and even sets up its own barriers due to the characteristics of "self-secret skills", which is not conducive to the spread of opera, and even causes communication aphasia. As a Huagu opera performer, it is easy to understand that there is a mentality of "sticking to the rules", but if the awareness and acceptance of Huagu opera in Hunan is getting lower and lower, it will not be conducive to the survival of Huagu opera performers themselves in the long run, and will have a greater impact on the self-identity of Huagu opera performers.

In addition, the main body of Hunan's Huagu opera communication gradually exposed the following problems in the dissemination of opera: Huagu opera artists are not familiar with the communication trends of major digital media platforms, and do not grasp and use the characteristics of each platform well; The awareness of innovation communication is not strong, and the publicity work of Hunan Huagu Opera still stays at the traditional level of information notification and activity summary, which fails to form an information dissemination matrix, and ability to attract fans is insufficient. Also, the quality of new media created by the communication subject is uneven, and the problems of low picture clarity, lack of hierarchy of sets, incomplete content, and simple and random shooting methods will also affect the communication effect of Hunan Huagu Opera (Hu & Guo, 2020).

2.2. THE POTENTIAL OF COMMERCIAL MINING NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

It cannot be ignored that objective factors such as difficulty in inheritance and economic difficulties have also dealt a strong blow to the enthusiasm of opera communication, and the potential of commercial communication needs to be improved. The so-called "one minute on stage, ten years off stage". At present, there are three main inheritance methods of Hunan Huagu opera: individual inheritance, school inheritance and training course inheritance (Yang & Chang, 2021). However, no matter what form of inheritance, it requires long-term training and stage practice, and it is by no means a quick success. In recent years, the market demand for local traditional opera arts such as Huagu Opera has been decreasing. Most of the audiences who like to enjoy Huagu Opera are mainly older groups, and there are fewer young audiences. The inheritance and dissemination of Chinese opera art requires material resources and soil, and needs to pay attention to the dynamic changes of market demand. Hunan Huagu Opera originated from the folk culture. As a product of agricultural civilization, Hunan Huagu Opera has virtual and abstract symbols with a large amount of agricultural civilization

information that is far from contemporary life and even disappeared into history. The love and spiritual pursuit of middle-aged and elderly people for Huagu opera are mostly based on living habits and value recognition, while young people are forced to watch and social needs and other external factors. Compared with the intrinsic drive of cultural identity of middle-aged and elderly groups. Young groups lack the initiative to actively watch, and their demand for traditional opera is not high. The psychological rhythm of contemporary audiences is very different from the rhythm of traditional plays. When the traditional Hunan Huagu opera encounters the audience in the contemporary information society, it will inevitably cause asymmetry in communication and reception. As the audience of contemporary society, their viewing habits are fragmented reading mode, and the content of reading tends to be flat and intuitive "reading pictures". Much fragmented information distracts the audience's attention, which makes the audience seem to "walk through" in multiple media (McQuail, 1997). Compared with the Hunan Huagu opera with a high degree of comprehensiveness and strong virtuality, the acceptance and understanding ability of the vast majority of ordinary audiences, and even the degree of patience, are not so high. Hunan Huagu opera, which is limited to a single form of expression, is difficult to meet the aesthetic appreciation needs of the broad audience, and it is necessary to further enhance the influence of commercial mining and accurately grasp the cultural resource needs of the audience.

2.3. THE MEDIA SITUATION AND CHARACTERISTICS ARE DIVERSE AND COMPLEX

The widespread use of electronic media shortens the distance between time and space, which affects human behavior, sociopolitical and economic structures (Hatzipanagos & Warburton, 2013). In the new media environment, the spread of Hunan Huagu Opera enjoys the dividends of the new era. Unlike the previous Huagu opera that could only be watched live and the number of viewers was limited, many theater groups and individuals now use platforms, such as Tik Tok, Bilibili, and Kuaishou to spread Hunan Huagu opera through video editing and live performances. The use of modern new media has broken the time and space limitations of the spread of Huagu opera, and people can pick up their mobile phones anytime and anywhere to see the performance of Huagu opera. Everything is two sides of the same coin. Although new media are helpful to the spread of Huagu opera, the spread of Huagu opera is also squeezed by new media channels. In the stage of mass media and the Internet era, cultural lifestyle choices have become diversified, modern communication tools, such as Internet web pages, short videos, movies, and television have been continuously popularized and

updated, and the media environment has become diversified and complex, while the audience's time and attention are limited. With the advent of the development of modern digital technology and the era of media art, all kinds of rich and diverse art communication media have made the audience have a stronger autonomy in the selection and absorption of media products. And people's habits and means of appreciating art have also changed. Hunan Huagu opera relies more on the closed stage with a sense of atmosphere, this traditional live art is not easy to transfer to new media to spread, modern shooting methods are also difficult to perfectly present the Huagu opera performance on the screen, through the new media of the Huagu opera performance, greatly weaken the stylized performance effect of the Huagu opera, and will always make the audience lack a sense of on-site experience. These have also brought a huge impact to the traditional flower drum opera, and its sound and painting advantages are no longer obvious. Of course, not only the spread of Huagu opera, but also other traditional Chinese opera performing arts also face the need to adapt to complex and diversified media situations, and opera media communicators need to face the current situation of distracted audiences.

Survival dilemma of the Huiling folk troupe; dilapidated props, the lonely actor; photographed by the authors

3. Brand and Medium: A New Path for the Development of Hunan Huagu Opera

In the process of opera art management, the support of the public sector is indispensable for the development of theaters, and the government should increase policy support and financial subsidies for opera (Trevisan, 2017). Chinese opera has a long history and is an important root vein for inheriting the traditional cultural values of the Chinese nation. As a folk opera, Hunan Huagu opera is deeply rooted in the thick soil of Huxiang culture, carries rich historical memories and spiritual meaning, and has a deep mass foundation. Because of its important historical, cultural and artistic value, it has been included in the Chinese national list of intangible cultural heritage. The development of Huagu opera first needs to do a good job in inheritance, and only by "keeping the right" can Hunan Huagu opera continue to innovate and develop.

It is necessary to increase the policy support for the development of Huagu Opera, strengthen the power of inheritance, and enrich the soil for the inheritance and development of Huagu Opera. The spread of Hunan Huagu opera is inseparable from the care of artistic aesthetics, parent culture and real life. It is necessary to conduct in-depth research on the inheritance of Huagu opera at this stage, and pay close attention to the inheritance of existing Huagu opera. Local government could increase support from the aspects of talent training, actor learning and exchange, and theater construction in the theoretical research of Huagu opera, and give appropriate preference to theater troupes that have done a good job in inheriting Huagu opera. Local public cultural departments also could pay attention to the folk dimension of Huagu opera, maintain the individuality of Huagu opera as a local opera, and prevent the language, phonology, and performance characteristics of Huagu opera from being eliminated in the process of modern transformation. Dramatists should also dig deep into the cultural resources of local characteristics and highlight the aesthetics of theatrical characteristics.

The key to the inheritance of the art of Huagu opera lies in the cultivation of inheritors. In the past, the training of inheritors of Huagu opera mainly relied on the "mentoring system", and young people worshipped old artists as teachers to learn the performing arts of Huagu opera. At present, the training method of inheritors of Huagu opera is mainly to set up special opera performance departments in theater schools, such as Hunan Art Vocational College, and invite Huagu opera performing artists to teach. Most of the students of the drama school

enter the troupe after graduation, but due to the current sluggish development of the opera market, many students who study opera do not want to engage in the profession of opera actors after graduation and choose to work in other industries, resulting in difficulties in the inheritance of Huagu opera art. To this end, local public cultural departments could to promote the implementation of the Huagu Opera talent support plan, build a collaborative training mechanism, and establish and improve the training, evaluation and incentive system that meets the characteristics of Huagu Opera talents. It is important to cultivate inheritors of Huagu opera in a planned and guaranteed manner to prevent the loss of artistic talents and the lack of youth. Local government should encourage talents from existing genres to study and stage practice the classical repertoire of folk operas. At the same time, government officials should pay attention to the cultivation of innovative and composite folk opera talents, increases "industry-university-research" cooperative education, and promotes the establishment of a "dual tutor" system for joint training of schools and theaters. The Hunan provincial government could issue some policies to guide Huagu opera artists to create freely, encourage them to make more positive and elegant masterpieces, and strengthen cross-school, cross-regional and cross-country exchanges in talent training and management. Through discussions, cooperation, joint training and other means, Huagu opera Troupe learns from advanced art talent management models and builds a talent echelon for Huagu opera creation. At the same time, practitioners of Huagu opera must also consolidate their basic skills, repeatedly study and comprehend classic plays, comprehend and display the artistic essence of Huagu opera, and form a performance style that not only loses the characteristics of traditional Huagu opera, but also has its uniqueness.

3.2. FOCUS ON BRAND AWARENESS AND ENCOURAGE INNOVATIVE EXPRESSION

With the development of the times and the changes in society, the audience has more aesthetic expectations for opera, hopes that opera can be closer to the life and emotions of the new era, and has higher expectations for the arrangement, sound, optoelectronics, and service of opera. When people's income continues to increase, their consumption demand at the spiritual and cultural level will become more and more vigorous, and the potential of the cultural content consumption market will also increase. Traditional opera needs to be "moving" in order to break the "circle wall" of traditional audiences, and innovative and diversified expression can continue to create more high-quality works. Huagu opera injects the ideal of human nature and humanism in the way of artistic reconstruction, plays the social function of "rejoicing and resentment", and is very culturally

caring. In the period of rapid social and cultural changes, the long-term development of Huagu Opera needs to focus on real life and adapt to the diversified needs of the cultural market, and handle the relationship between the times, the market and the audience, so as to continuously enhance social identity and promote the prosperity and development of Huagu Opera. Keeping pace with the times is the proper meaning of the modern transformation of traditional Huagu opera, and it should help the creative transformation and innovative development of Huagu opera.

The creation and dissemination of Huagu opera need to meet the requirements of the law of artistic production and the law of the market. The modern expression of Huagu opera should pay attention to the modernization of aesthetics and concepts, and when conveying cultural thinking about history and society, it should be able to make the current audience and able to produce emotional resonance. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen the modern interpretation of the traditional cultural spirit represented by Huagu opera and construct a new Huagu opera in the modern context. Opera artists should continue to strengthen the brand advantages of Huagu Opera, encourage innovation and integration, realize the modernization of creative concepts, and carry out innovative expression in singing, repertoire, performance style, concept expression, etc., so as to promote Huagu Opera to radiate new vitality. Only by not departing from the social status quo can Huagu Opera create a model, paying attention to the needs of the people can arouse the emotional resonance of the audience, and constantly accepting challenges can Huagu Opera keep up with the pace of the times.

In the final analysis, Huagu opera is also a cultural product, which needs to be directly faced with the mass cultural market. The development of Huagu opera art industry is also affected by a series of market levers, such as art resource allocation, market supply and demand. Only by continuously enhancing artistic creativity and market competitiveness at the same time can the long-term development of Huagu Opera be realized. Integrating into the contemporary cultural context and following the law of market value will help enhance the realistic artistic appeal of Huagu Opera. The key to expanding the Huagu opera market is to continuously attract an artistic audience. While consolidating the existing consumer groups, Huagu Opera should focus on tapping the potential of young consumer groups, closely combining the cultural needs of the audience, and continuously expanding the "circle of friends" for the inheritance and development of Huagu Opera.

On the basis of adhering to the spirit of national art, it is necessary to promote the modern transformation of the performance form of Huagu opera. In the face of three types of Huagu opera works: classics, adaptations and new creations, the modern transformation of Huagu opera requires specific analysis of specific problems. For classic traditional Huagu opera works, opera artists should try to be faithful to the works, inherit and develop the historical rationality and humanistic care expressed in the classic works, and enhance the perception of history and the communication of aesthetic ideals. When adapting the traditional Huagu repertoire, the traditional performance form is used to show realistic care, integrating the traditional Huagu opera with modern values to express the beautiful pursuit. When creating new flower drum plays, respect the laws of artistic creation, highlight modernity while ensuring ideological and literary nature, and keep pace with the times.

3.3. WITH THE HELP OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, BUILD A SERIES OF OPERA IP CONNECTIONS

Modern technology and media do not replace human capabilities but recover and extend them. Digital communication technology should be more humanized, with the ultimate goal of serving and satisfying human needs. Human beings can transform and guide technology, making media technology function according to the path of human needs (Levinson, 2003). "Interactivity" is a feature of the new media environment, and digital technologies can increase the "suprasocial interaction" of mass media (Rafaeli, 20-19). "Internet+" can break the limitations of time and space, bring new cross-format integration to traditional opera, and build a new network interaction space. In the era of new media, only by seizing the dividends brought by digital technology, exploring new formats and models of Huagu opera, and expanding the "interactive space" can Huagu opera continuously expand our social influence. In cyberspace, the digital performance of Huagu opera is a kind of "recontextualization". On the one hand, modern information technology can be used to digitally collect, preserve, publicize and research traditional Huagu opera to help protect and inherit Huagu opera in a timely and effective manner. On the other hand, digital technology should be fully used to enhance the artistic attraction effect, and the use of opera communication media for innovative communication and dynamic display should enhance the audience's stage appreciation experience. The publicity of Huagu opera needs to strengthen communication planning, apply flexible and high-quality interactive communication strategies, and improve the "communicability" of Huagu opera communication. It can use multi-platform collaborative communication, use technology to empower the form of opera programs, promote the combination of

traditional Huagu opera with emerging digital media communication technologies, such as VR, AR, live broadcast, and metaverse, and explore the innovative integration of Huagu opera with games, animation, music, etc., so as to create a wonderful audiovisual experience. Hunan Huagu Opera can stimulate the creative enthusiasm of communication subjects, narrow the distance between opera and audience, and strengthen the connection between opera and audience, and between communication subjects and audiences, thereby enhancing audience stickiness and stabilizing the integration of communication effectiveness (Zhu et al., 2022). Due to the openness and compatibility of network propagation. When using modern digital technology to promote opera, it is also necessary to prevent the rigid superposition of digital technology and traditional art, and avoid the emergence of "fragmented" communication forms affecting the "immersive" communication effect. The Internet can innovate the form of interaction between audiences and opera performers, but the quality of content and production is indispensable, and it cannot be just formal interaction.

As a kind of intellectual property right, IP (Intellectual Property) has a variety of forms, can be applied to a variety of fields, and can be independently developed, authorized and other ways to obtain market profits. The mobile Internet brings great fragmentation of time and traffic, but IP linkage can be cross-platform and can bring more gameplay, such as games, animation, toys, books, live-action entertainment theme parks, etc. Through the diversified development and promotion of Chinese opera IP, the public's attention and recognition of traditional local opera can be enhanced. It is essential to promote further the development of the cultural industry of Huagu opera with IP as the core and actively develop IP derivatives of Huagu opera. Based on the character image of Huagu opera, virtual works popular with young groups – online game characters can be created, so as to realize the coordinated development of Huagu opera culture, virtual reality technology and online games. Or the cross-border linkage and "breaking the circle" combination of opera and two-dimensional can be used as a breakthrough to break the current communication barriers of Huagu opera, and become an important channel to enrich the role of the audience. Give full play to the IP linkage effect with Huagu Opera as the main body, promote "high-frequency" interaction between IP and the public, amplify the value and profit space of IP, and extend the industrial chain of Huagu Opera. With the help of the new trend of cultural and tourism integration, the historical and cultural value of Huagu opera is organically combined with local tourism to create tourist attractions with local opera cultural characteristics. Therefore, the value of Huagu opera is not only

reflected on the stage, but also contributes to the local economic development and further promotes the culture of Huagu opera.

Conclusion

This paper focuses on the spread of Hunan Huagu opera as a traditional Chinese opera culture, and puts forward some suggestions, hoping to provide reference for the development of local opera and intangible cultural heritage industries in other regions. Hunan Huagu opera grows up in the folks, takes root in the folks, and is also oriented to the broad masses of the people, with unique folk characteristics. Although new media technology has an impact on the inheritance of traditional art, it can also promote the spread of traditional art through the further development of science and technology and human rational control. Today, with the rapid development of modern media, Hunan Huagu opera is still spread in the form of urban theaters and rural class clubs, but it is also facing a relatively severe communication dilemma. The spread and revitalization of Huagu opera still needs to pay attention to the needs of the people's spiritual and cultural life. The government needs to increase policy support to establish a collaborative training mechanism, build brand awareness of Huagu opera as a local folk opera, and encourage innovative expression by Huagu opera artists. Huagu Opera can also enhance interaction with audiences with the help of digital technology and extend the industrial chain with IP interaction. To enhance their identity as communicators, Huagu opera artists should also make some useful attempts and breakthroughs in the main inheritance and reflection of the social life of this genre, and use all-media means, create a variety of media products, and use market forces to encourage continuous innovation in the creation of Huagu opera images. In the face of the rapidly changing communication environment, traditional opera in other countries or regions should pay attention to the current communication space, inherit good repertoire works, and further attract and transport talents to drive the vertical inheritance of local opera. Focusing on the innovative and integrated publicity strategy of optimizing resource allocation and all-round digitalization, novel publicity planning and advertising communication methods are used to optimize information dissemination, improve the communication effect of opera in the region, and promote the continuous development of traditional culture.

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