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SECTION 1

EURASIAN ENVIRONMENTS

"Ghost in the Regime: The Institutional Persistence of Hydro-Hegemony in the Aral Sea Basin"

John Milton O'Neill, Temple University

Introduction

The breakup of the Soviet Union passed decades of environmental degradation and developmental asymmetries into the hands of Central Asia's five successor states. Centrally planned river diversions for cotton agriculture led to an urgent environmental catastrophe for downstream states surrounding the drying Aral Sea, while the requisite water allocations constrained upstream states' hydropower development and left them dependent on downstream energy exports. Independence now meant downstream states could begin restoring the Sea through agricultural reform, and upstream states had the autonomy to assert control over water shares to achieve desired energy independence. Trumpeting environmental protection and equity, states convened in 1991 to establish an international regime[1] for addressing issues and planning water distributions. Yet, post-Soviet Central Asia oddly witnessed a continuation, and even reinforcement, of the same asymmetries and practices of the Soviet era. The Aral Sea's conditions worsened from continued cotton production, while upstream states' water shares remained static as disputes surrounded their hydropower ambitions.

Soviet-era water allocations and state behavior in Moscow's absence present problems for core expectations of rational choice institutionalism and design. Notably, upstream states agreed on and cooperated under historically unfavorable terms despite a gain in bargaining power through spontaneous control over a shared resource. Regime provisions weighed heavily in favor of upstream states by excluding provisions enforcing water releases, but downstream states maintained their own reciprocal-retaliatory capacity in water-energy exchanges while diminishing that of their upstream neighbors. Furthermore, the overseeing international organization, formed as a crisis response, remained complacent to its titular issue. Given that a relative gains increase reinforced the status quo, perhaps the question lies not in upstream cooperation as a matter of choice, but one of genuine consent.

This paper argues that the design of international institutions does not reflect power asymmetries, nor does the distribution of benefits from institutional design invariably translate into shifted or consolidated power. Ideational and normative factors matter in determining both. Hydro-hegemony describes how a riparian state uses tactics—from coercive to ideational—for resource capture.[2] Tactics falling into the latter end of the spectrum may be exercised through or built into the legal framework of an international organization during and after its formation. In the case of Central Asia in the early 1990s and 2000s, Uzbekistan emerged as a *de facto* hydro-hegemon on the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers despite a loss in bargaining chips. Water-sharing arrangements were chosen and maintained due to a prevailing narrative of urgency pushing cooperation, the false assurance of equity through international water law, and how metrics for success were crafted. These factors fit explicitly within the framework of hydro-hegemony.

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[1] Following Stephen D. Krasner, regimes (also called "institutions") are understood as "implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue-area." See Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 186.

[2] Mark Zeitoun and Jeroen Warner, "Hydro-Hegemony—A Framework for Analysis of Trans-Boundary Water Conflicts," *Water Policy* 8, no. 5 (2006): 435–60.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section II reviews the literature on neoliberal environmental economics, institutionalism, and institutional design to theorize how various provisions of organizations presiding over transboundary externalities change the bargaining phase of regime formation. Section III extrapolates the framework of hydro-hegemony to this theory and hypothesizes how a hydro-hegemon might set up or engage in resource capture through the bargaining phase by influencing target states or altering their perceptions of regime provisions. Section IV looks at the design of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia (ICWC) and examines how its outcome contradicted expectations of institutionalism. Section V explores the hypotheses in Section III with the creation of ICWC and its early implementation by using a combination of its legal framework and secondary source analysis. Overall, the section offers an account of hydro-hegemony through institutional means. Section VI discusses findings and revisits the predictions in Section II. Section VII offers brief concluding thoughts.

Literature Review

Regime formation over transboundary rivers

Theories of cooperation and conflict made their way to scenes of water sharing during the height of institutionalist discourse. While water scarcity and competition were initially cited as a potential for conflict,[3] others pointed to an absence of "water wars" and even cooperation problems along rivers often are sources of institution building.[4] Water as an interstate resource prone to depletion often falls into the category of common-pool resources. A common-pool resource is a type of non-excludable good or resource consisting of a stock variable (the sum of resource units at a given time) and a flow variable (a dynamic measure of the quantity of the resource). While users benefit from the provision of goods, river basin water is subtractable, meaning that appropriation is zero-sum. Subtractability makes common-pool resources prone to overuse and depletion, an issue that requires states to decide how to prevent over-exhaustion.[5]

Rivers generally fall into two types: *border creators*, in which the river forms a political boundary and cannot be appropriated exclusively, and *through-border* rivers, which flow from one boundary into another and create a sequence to its use.[6] The latter present greater inherent

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[3] Mirriam R. Lowi, *Water and Power: The Politics of a Scarce Resource in the Jordan River Basin* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1–11; Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, "Environmental Scarcities and Violent Conflict: Evidence from Cases," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 5–40. Both argue environmental scarcity itself may not be a direct cause of conflict but is a significant contributing factor. Both also maintain that conflict along rivers induce cooperation; Peter H. Gleick, "Water and Conflict: Fresh Water Resources and International Security," *International Security* 18, no. 1 (1993): 79–112.

[4] Shlomi Dinar, "Assessing Side-Payment and Cost-Sharing Patterns in International Water Agreements: The Geographic and Economic Connection," *Political Geography* 25, no. 4 (2006): 412–37; Natalie Kempkey, Margaret Pinard, Víctor Pochat, and Ariel Dinar, "Negotiations Over Water and Other Natural Resources in the La Plata River Basin: A Model for Other Transboundary Basins?" *International Negotiation* 14, no. 2 (2009): 253–79; Jaroslav Tir and Douglas M. Stinnett, "The Institutional Design of Riparian Treaties: The Role of River Issues," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 4 (2011): 606–31. Tir and Stinnett finds that institutionalization of water agreements increases with scarcity. "Institutionalization" in this sense means the level of regime robustness; Also see Thomas Bernauer, "Explaining Success and Failure in International River Management," *Aquatic Sciences* 64, no. 1 (2002): 1–19.

[5] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*, (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21–23; Oran Young describes subtractible resources as shared natural resources. See Oran R. Young, "International Environmental Governance," in *International Governance: Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society* (Cornell University Press, 1994), 22.

[6] David LeMarquand, "Politics of International River Basin Cooperation and Management," *Natural Resources*

asymmetries and complexities for solutions. Through-border rivers geographically privilege an upstream state since it accesses the river first, while those downstream rely on their upstream neighbor to not overuse resources. Downstream states must also look to the prior riparian state for information regarding variations in flow due to seasonal availability or extraction. Resource reciprocity is not available to the downstream riparian. For example, if Egypt decided one day to dam the Nile River or withhold flow rate information, Sudan could not "dam" or "withhold" back the water or knowledge. In this sense, through-border rivers present a form of transboundary externalities, since any activities the upstream state takes on a river directly affect either the quantity or quality of water available downstream. The upstream state has no inherent economic incentive to use less water than the amount from which it can possibly benefit.[7] Inducing changes in an upstream state's behavior requires incentives outside the river.[8]

Through-border rivers present cooperation problems commonly met by an international regime for water management.[9] Member states decide on specific provisions and procedures for water use and the level of robustness for each. However, collective relinquishment of water and transaction costs are of lower value to headwater controllers (or more upstream-positioned states) since increased downstream position places states further into the negative externality. Therefore, conflicting interests arise and shape upstream-downstream interactions when deciding the form and function of an organization. James Fearon's bargaining and enforcement model can be used to explain how riparian states choose provisions for a water governing institution, since chosen deals (i.e., during the enforcement phase) directly influence bargaining.[10] Although the model is limited to bilateral cooperation, riparian positions can designate states as generally "upstream states" (US) or "downstream states" (DS).

Fearon's model begins with a bargaining phase in which states negotiate over a specific agreement from a range of possibilities that, if chosen, initiate an enforcement phase resembling a repeated prisoner's dilemma wherein states face repeated incentives to defect for short-term gains. Agreements exist as points (z) across a policy space axis along the interval $[X_0, X_1]$. If states have multiple *enforceable* agreements to choose from, a subset of two {x, y} are chosen with, for the purpose of this analysis 0 representing the downstream ideal and 1 the upstream ideal.[11]

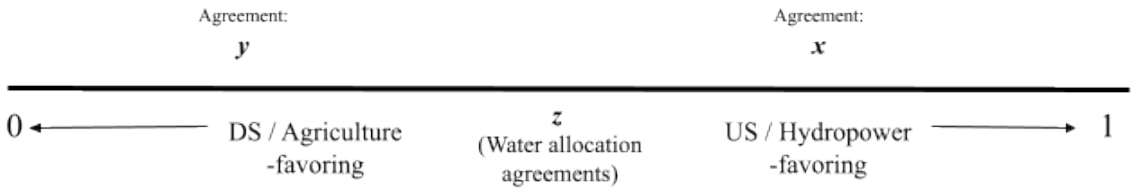


Figure 1. Array of deals, with 0 being the DS ideal and 1 being the US ideal.

The bargaining phase starts at time $t = 0$ and ends when it reaches either state's quit time $\{t_{US}, t_{DS}\}$. As states negotiate, they incur a per-time-unit cost of delay (c_{US}, c_{DS}), which is the

Journal 16 (1976): 887.

[7] LeMarquand, "International River Basin Cooperation," 887; Lowi, *Water and Power*, 4. Lowi offers the view that upstream states will prefer to act unilaterally even if cooperation offers absolute gains.

[8] Dinar, "Assessing Side-Payment," 412–37.

[9] Young, *International Governance*, 22.

[10] James D. Fearon, "Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation," *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (1998): 269–305.

[11] This can be thought of in terms of $|y - 0| < |x - 0|$ and $|x - 1| < |y - 1|$.

continual penalty they bear as an agreement is not in place. States also constantly discount future payoffs (r) at the per-time-unit rate by comparing cooperative payoffs to those of noncooperation.[12] A state's quit time increases as it can bear the costs of noncooperation (decreased c) or values the benefits of future cooperation (decreased r).[13] Agreements are chosen and enter the enforcement phase when the value of future payoffs outweigh non-cooperation for both states.

$$t = \frac{x - y}{r[1 + c_{US} + c_{DS}(x - y)]}$$

Figure 2. Time represents the point at which either state concedes to a competing deal. Modified from Fearon (1998).

An agreement is chosen only as long as it is enforceable, meaning all states care enough about future payoffs to cooperate. Once the enforcement phase begins, the z value determines the per-unit-time payoff for mutual cooperation. One-time defection yields a short-term gain value (a), while the "sucker" cooperates, incurring a per-unit-time cost (b). Detection lag (Δ) designates the time before a "sucker" state detects and halts cheating. Mutual defection incurs the per-unit-time cost equal to the cost of delay (c_{US}, c_{DS}).

Distribution problems from transboundary river regime provisions

Transboundary rivers are subject to a variety of cooperation problem types, especially a select number from environmental governance and institutional design. Generally, problems of cooperation fall between ones of *interests* and ones of *constraints*.[14] Of the former for states governing transboundary waters, at the very least, are problems of enforcement, distribution, commitment, and coordination, as states must decide how to divide water and prevent defection. Of the latter are uncertainty about behavior and the state of the world or environment, since violations travel at the speed of the river and climate change or weather creates unpredictable flows.

Respondent provisions for sustainable joint management regimes are commonly cited as strong centralization, monitoring, arbitration, and graduated sanctions.[15] However, since states downstream face higher costs from externalities, they receive greater payoffs for transaction costs than those upstream. Due to this, states are predictably less likely to desire membership the more upstream they sit.[16] For example, the payoffs of a punishment provision that ensure a state does not extract more water than its agreed-upon limit are higher for downstream users, who are now protected from unilateral power, than upstream users which receive no inherent benefits. In another example, information-sharing mechanisms that counter world and behavioral uncertainty are less beneficial with increased upstream position, as these states must pay costs for benefits that increase with downstream positioning. Assuming both upstream and downstream states desire water equally, specific provisions either decrease or increase their policy choice (z) regarding water

[12] Fearon, "Bargaining and Enforcement," 278–279. Fearon refers to this last idea as a long "shadow of the future."
[13] Fearon, "Bargaining and Enforcement," 276–282.
[14] Barbara Koremenos, *The Continent of International Law: Explaining Agreement Design* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 31–39.
[15] Elinor Ostrom, "Analyzing Long-Enduring, Self-Organized, and Self-Governed CPRs," in *Governing the Commons*, 58–102.
[16] Douglas M. Stinnett and Jaroslav Tir, "Institutionalization of River Treaties," *International Negotiation* 14, no. 2 (2009): 245–246. They find that upstream/downstream relationships negatively affect institutionalization. Young, in *International Governance*, 22, similarly makes the case that conflicts of interest make equitable outcomes difficult.

usage by altering the degree of temptation to cheat and ability to detect cheating, broken down as follows.

Graduated sanctions or punishment provisions (*S*)

Punishment provisions (*S*) have greater payoffs for downstream users. Enforcement problems are a greater concern for a DS, which is vulnerable to US consumption and temptation to cheat on agreements. Controlling the headwaters, the US pays the greatest costs for punishment provisions, as there are no water-related tradeoffs for loss of autonomy. A lack of mechanisms to punish cheating leave the DS to rely on its reciprocal abilities to ensure US cooperation, and any agreement becomes unenforceable without reciprocity.

(*S*) increases → (*a*) decreases → (*b*) is mitigated		
DS	Secures compliance and water supply reliability.	*z* moves towards *y*
US	Restricts water usage.	

Figure 3. The effect of sanctions or punishment provisions on bargaining and enforcement as they pertain to upstream/downstream utility.

Monitoring mechanisms (*M*)

Monitoring provisions (*M*) involves collective observation of states' compliance with the agreement. Even if the stock variable is known, states cannot adequately determine compliance without knowing the flow variable after each time a prior user appropriates the resource. Without states delegating information on usage, others cannot determine whom to sue. Thus, the more effective monitoring is, the less states are likely to cheat and the more efficiently states can sue. However, there is no reason for a US to sue a DS for water usage, so the associated sovereignty costs yield unequal utility.

(*M*) increases → (*b*) is mitigated → (*a*) is mitigated		
DS	Impinges on sovereignty at increased benefit.	*z* moves towards *y*
US	Impinges on sovereignty at reduced benefit.	

Figure 4. The effect of monitoring provisions on bargaining and enforcement as they pertain to upstream/downstream utility

Centralized information-sharing (*I*)

All riparian states are susceptible to seasonal flow variation, meaning all would benefit from information to adequately predict and adapt to the flow variable. Additionally, if the stock variable is collectively unknown, monitoring mechanisms are rendered useless since possible fluctuations confound with appropriation and it becomes impossible to determine the source of discrepancies. This would also mean that an abundance could be appropriated inequitably. Therefore, centralized information sharing is of value for determining appropriate allocations. But a US is less incentivized to collect information and delegate authority since only a US has the ability to determine the river's total stock variable, but holding the uppermost riparian position

means it determines the flow variable at the moment of appropriation. Therefore, under this provision, it shares information regarding the sum of all resources units but cannot prepare for variations. The US would then theoretically pay the costs of information-sharing at no payoff while the DS would enjoy the benefits of more predictable flows. In addition, revealing the initial stock variable enables the DS to deduce whether a US violated the terms of the agreement by subtracting the stock variable at the time of its own appropriation. In effect, the US pays the cost of granting DS capacity to sue.

(I) increases → (Δ) decreases → (b) is mitigated		
DS	Benefits from mitigating flow variation, can credibly reciprocate.	z moves towards y
US	Pays for DS to check US behavior, no gains from information on climate change.	

Figure 5. The effect of information sharing provisions on bargaining and enforcement as they pertain to upstream/downstream utility.

Alternate Framework: Hydro-Hegemony

This section explores normative and hegemonic tactics from the framework of hydro-hegemony and hypothesizes how these interact with interstate bargaining. Such tactics increase in efficiency as they move from coercive to ideational. At the lower end are expressions of force by bilateral and coercive means (e.g., military intervention, covert actions), which are costly and least desirable. Less costly, though suboptimal yet, are utilitarian mechanisms for compliance, such as material incentives—e.g., trade or protection. However, these remain insufficient in explaining status quo stability during relative gains shifts and thus another dimension of more efficient, less tangible tactics are assumed: tactics of norm-induced, which pressures target states to act within the hegemon's interests. Above this in efficiency are means by which an actor creates and shapes truth or knowledge, possibly neutralizing opposing interests *before* they materialize.[17] The latter, more efficient strategies are of interest for this analysis.

This section interrogates normative and hegemonic tactics straight from the framework of *hydro-hegemony* to visualize how interactions with institutional bargaining occur. A brief demonstration of how each weaker state's decisions to enter agreements are altered is provided after a description of each strategy. All definitions are drawn directly from Zeitoun and Warner.

Normative compliance-producing tactics: treaties and principles of international law

Though treaties serve as tools of cooperation, a hydro-hegemon may use them for power consolidation. Negotiations under duress (effectively, higher c) can lead to the codification of inequitable water distribution, while the inclusion of international water law principles works in tandem by legitimizing the treaty, which in turn legitimizes the hydro-hegemon's dominance.[18] Absent effective arbitration and sanctions, treaties become answerable only to the balance of power, while the included international law remains ambiguous and selectively applicable.[19] When

[17] This is a condensed version of the entire framework from Zeitoun and Warner, "Hydro-Hegemony," 446–451.

[18] Zeitoun and Warner do not include "international law" as a specific normative compliance-producing mechanism but instead describe it as a general aspect of water agreements.

[19] Zeitoun and Warner, "Hydro-Hegemony," 449–451; Jessica Vapnek et al., *Law for Water Management: A Guide to Concepts and Effective Approaches* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009), 103.

forming a water-sharing regime, international water law principles can decrease weaker states' perception of the costs associated with defection.

Exploitation of treaties & international law → target actor perceived decrease of b; perceived increase of z

Hegemonic tactic: securitization

Securitization involves constructing certain solutions as essential to national security, strategically elevating the importance of deals closer to the hydro-hegemon's water interests. Securitization can also frame stronger measures as justified. It ranges from manipulating weaker states into signing treaties that justify unilateral actions to proclaiming opposition as treasonous or violent. Framing essential as quelling national security concerns increases target states' perceived costs of not signing, and subsequently the resulting payoffs of doing so.

Securitization → target actor perceived increase of c

Hegemonic tactic: knowledge construction, sanctioned discourse.

Knowledge construction is the process by which a hegemon creates and shapes others' understanding of an issue such that approaches are confined to its preferred range of solutions. Falsified information or misrepresenting realities leads to unfavorable ideas never being considered in the first place. Similar to the concept of "bounded rationality,"[20] a hegemon shapes the degree and scope of boundedness. Knowledge construction is ideologically facilitated by the use of sanctioned discourse, which involves limiting the type of dialogue that may take place and in turn limiting understanding of certain issues.

Knowledge construction[21]; *sanctioned discourse* → $(k)X_1 - X_0 < (X_0 + X_1) / 2$

The Central Asian Case

This section provides an empirical survey of Central Asia's hydrological makeup, ICWC legal framework, and the water allocations instated after independence from the Soviet Union. It sets up for an examination of regional water sharing through a lens of hydro-hegemony with theoretical bargaining and enforcement variables.

The Soviet Union imposed water-sharing arrangements in the Aral Sea Basin which saw upstream states exchange agriculture-optimal timed water releases with hydrocarbons from downstream states. For example, in the Syr Darya Basin, Kyrgyzstan provided water for downstream agricultural production in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during summer months while receiving natural gas and coal from downstream republics in the winter to meet heating needs. To sufficiently achieve the summer releases, upstream states had to withhold water in reservoirs during winter, precisely when they preferred to use flows for hydropower generation.[22] Upstream

[20] See Joseph Jupille, Walter Mattli, and Duncan Snidal, *Institutional Choice and Global Commerce* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[21] The k coefficient might imagine some kind of knowledge construction variable, with a lower k value creating more limited issue-understanding.

[22] Dinara Ziganshina, "Rethinking Institutional and Financial Mechanisms on Water and Energy Cooperation in Central Asia," report presented at Expert Platform on Water Security, Sustainable Development, and Future Studies, 2023; Max Spoor and Anatoly Krutov, "XI. The 'Power of Water' in a Divided Central Asia," *Perspectives on*

states also bore the costs of maintaining reservoirs within their borders. To offset costs and compensate upstream states for water releases, the Soviet Union subsidized infrastructure and provided financial support for maintenance and socioeconomic development.[23]

The Soviet water-energy system had three main effects. The first and most consequential is that diversions for downstream cotton production led to the ongoing desiccation of the Aral Sea.[24] The second is that downstream states became much wealthier than upstream states due to cotton exports. The third is that upstream hydropower generation was underdeveloped by the time of independence, and those states would remain dependent on downstream states as long as energy infrastructure did not improve. A fourth and later relevant effect is that after independence upstream states still bore the costs of water infrastructure maintenance, yet lost compensation from Moscow.

Having inherited the task of coordinating water allocations and restoring the Aral Sea following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Ministers of Water Resources of Central Asian states reached an agreement in Tashkent in 1991 to manage water resources.[25] It outlined the incipient provisions for the 1992 Almaty agreement,[26] which operationalized the prior agreement and initiated an effort to form the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia (ICWC) while recharting its Basin Water Organizations (BWO) "Syrdarya" and "Amudarya."[27] A decision was made to retain the quota system established by the Soviet Union.[28] No procedure for proportional cost-sharing over upstream water infrastructure is mentioned, and later this would become of concern to states who contributed equally to the ICWC budget without benefiting from its maintenance.[29]

The status of ICWC shifted throughout the 1990s, although on paper the commission's core responsibilities were to determine "unified" regional water policy and oversee the BWOs. It was later relegated to the oversight of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). ICWC is composed of national water-economic organizations' leaders (also called water ministers) that meet quarterly to determine the water policy, allocations, and limits, all taking into account the interests of their respective countries as well as those of the entire region.

BWOs were established in the 1980s but came under ICWC in April of 1992. They implement ICWC decisions and conduct joint water control measurements with

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Global Development and Technology 2, no. 3 (2003): 593–614.

[23] Ziganshina, "Rethinking," 27–28; Joseph MacKay, "Running Dry: International Law and the Management of Aral Sea Depletion," Central Asian Survey 28, no. 1 (2009): 23–24.

[24] See, for example, Maya K. Peterson, *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin, Studies in Environment and History* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[25] Statement of heads of water economy organizations of Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan adopted on 10–12 October 1991 meeting in Tashkent, Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz; the 1991 Tashkent agreement served to remain until a more formal one would be reached.

[26] Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan on Cooperation in the Field of Joint Management on Utilization and Protection of Water Resources from Interstate Sources, Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz, Articles 8–9.

[27] Statute of ICWC, Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz.

[28] 1991 Statement of Heads of Water Economy Organizations, http://icwc-aral.uz/statute2.htm; 1992 Almaty Agreement, https://www.caee.utexas.edu/prof/mckinney/papers/aral/agreements/ICWC-Feb18-1992.pdf.

[29] For more on proportional cost sharing, see Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, 92; Ostrom cites "congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions" as a feature of enduring water management regimes.

hydrometeorological services at border sites to maintain a balance account of river flow. Each BWO is also responsible for submitting an annual water resources balance to the Ministers of Water Resources. They then submit proposals to the ICWC on water-intake limits for the upcoming year, broken down by growing and non-growing periods.[30] BWOs do not have the status of international law and are not recognized by national legislatures.[31] Since they lack authority over national use of resources, states are not constrained in their water use.

The Scientific Information Center of ICWC (SIC ICWC) is located in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, though it has national branches.[32] The center designs and executes technical projects for improving and managing water resources. Other functions include maintaining a regional information base and coordinating international projects.[33]

All ICWC decisions regarding compliance with water limits are binding and mandatory.[34] The 1992 Almaty Agreement guarantees[35] a mechanism for the liability of violations to be elaborated within the year, though no such mechanism exists. Disputes are deferred to the Ministers of Water Resources with the "involvement of a third party, if necessary."[36] Decisions are made on a consensus basis, with each minister holding veto power, while the dispute resolution mechanism has remained unchanged.[37]

The most glaring problem with the form of ICWC is that there is a lack of any significant shift toward upstream interests. Allocations should have moved toward hydropower generation, yet Soviet-era quotas were agreed on and upstream states lost subsidies for infrastructure. For post-Soviet agreements to be self-enforcing, each state's received utility $\{z_{US}, z_{DS}\}$ from either deal needed to be greater than or equal to their respective costs of noncooperation $\{c_{US}, c_{DS}\}$. In the case that both an upstream and downstream deal (x, y) *were* on the table, bargaining would not have come to water allocations similar to the Soviet Union (closer to y) because the absence of external enforcement likely would result in a decreased downstream quit time, since their long-term costs of noncooperation were unequivocally higher than those of upstream states ($c_{DS} > c_{US}$).[38] This means that for downstream states to have held out (i.e., $t_{DS} > t_{US}$) for the DS-favoring agreement (y), their discount rates must have been much less than upstream discount rates ($r_{DS} >$

[30] "Status of the Basin Water Association 'Amudarya,'" Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz; 'Status of the Basin Water Association 'Syrdarya,'" Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz.
[31] Spoor and Krutov, "Power of Water," 607.
[32] The center was established by the 1992 Tashkent Agreement, but only a 1999 revised statute is available.
[33] "Statutes Scientific-Information Center of the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination in Central Asia," Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, at http://www.icwc-aral.uz.
[34] "1992 Almaty Agreement," Article 11. Due to a grammatical error, it appears that compliance is mandatory regarding "established water withdrawal quotas, rational water use, and protection…" though the meaning of the latter two items is unclear due to this ambiguity.
[35] "1992 Almaty Agreement," Article 12.
[36] "1992 Almaty Agreement," Article 13.
[37] According to a 1997 draft agreement ICWC was to create an unspecified arbitration court, which has not materialized.
[38] Noncooperation would involve downstream states ceasing energy transfers and upstream states using water during winter, but the adverse effects are not equal. While c_{US} indicates a net energy loss due to the lack of hydrocarbon deliveries from downstream, upstream states can produce *some* hydropower during winter months. Conversely, c_{DS} involves lower cotton yields from decreased summer water and a potentially uncontrollable and immediate drying of the Aral Sea since water flows would be solely determined by upstream users. Although diversions for downstream cotton agriculture *are* mostly responsible for the crisis, no agreement means having no control over water quantity and thus no ability to manage the sea.

r_{US}) with upstream utility somehow being great enough that the agreement was still acceptable. Downstream discount rates were likely lower in this case, but the lack of graduated sanctions and a weak conflict resolution mechanism doesn't explain real received utility.

Since it is likely that bargaining would have landed in a deal at least slightly more favoring to hydropower (x), it can be inferred that upstream states were left with only the choice to agree with agreement y. This could be the case if downstream states were so averse to any agreement that jeopardized the cotton industry that they could not credibly commit,[39] but it would also have to be true then that upstream states net-benefitted from the *agriculture* deal y ($z_{US} \geq c_{US}$). Yet, it is hard to understand how upstream utility could have improved from Soviet-era allocations beyond that of non-cooperation. It is conceivable to think of upstream utility (z_{US}) during Soviet rule as artificially increased through subsidies and planned hydrocarbon deliveries from downstream, with noncooperation (c_{US}) as the loss of those benefits. Without Soviet rule, a sufficient upstream utility (z_{US}) would need to somehow arise from agreeing to forego hydropower (y).

Arrangements Through the Lens of Hydro-Hegemony

Securitization 1—Aral crisis and resource scarcity

To what extent did the language of '*crisis*' play into the favor of downstream states during the period of institution building? It is not apparent or obvious from treaty language alone whether the crisis aspect was framed to purposefully induce upstream agreements, but securitizing rhetoric certainly became entangled with the Aral Sea crisis. During the first meeting in 1991 in Tashkent, Ministers of Water Resources presented the issue as the "inevitability of [a] complicated situation connected with rising water deficit and ecological stress strengthening in the Aral Sea Basin,"[40] and yet expressed the desire to not interrupt former economic patterns.

Outside of official ICWC agreements, the Aral Sea piece of the crisis has been instrumentalized by downstream cotton-producing states. Speech acts show states leveraging the crisis to justify water allocations in their favor. Marek Musioł analyzes examples of securitizing speech by Central Asian leadership in regard to the Central Asian Regional Water Security Complex (CARWSC). Kazakhstan links scarcity to the national security concern of economic development, attributing shortages to climate change; Kyrgyzstan warns downstream states of potential health hazards due to water shortages from climate change; Tajikistan cites limited access to clean water as a source of instability; Turkmenistan cites the Aral Sea crisis as a national security concern; However, Uzbekistan frames the Aral Sea crisis as an existential threat before warning that upstream dam projects in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could lead to war.[41]

Securitization 2—Conflict

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[39] Erika Weinthal, "Sins of Omission: Constructing Negotiating Sets in the Aral Sea Basin." *The Journal of Environment & Development* 10, no. 1 (2001). Weinthal even implies this in its tracing of interactions between Central Asian water *nomenklatura* and international donors, in which these agencies hesitated offering arrangements that impinged on cotton agriculture.

[40] "Statement of Heads of Water Economy Organizations of Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan," Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz.

[41] Marek Musioł, "Securitization of Water in Central Asia: Insights from the Regional Water Security Complex," *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 53, no. 1 (2024): 200.

Concerns about water conflict in water-scarce regions were a prevailing global narrative during the time of independence.[42] The Aral Sea Basin itself presented a conflict-ripe scenario.[43] Certainly, this influenced donor interactions with the region[44] and, as Philip Micklin notes, "there [was] a widespread misconception, primarily outside the Central Asian republics, that the so-called 'Aral Crisis' is strictly related to the desiccation of the sea and its most intense consequences for the surrounding ecological disaster zone ... a more appropriate appellation would be the 'Aral Sea Basin Crises' … long-term improvement of the situation depends on a multinational, basin-wide approach to resolving key water and agricultural management issues."[45] Indeed, water scarcity became the predicted target issue for the following decades:

> "Central Asia is another region severely affected by climate change. An increasing shortage of water, which is both a key resource for agriculture and a strategic resource for electricity generation, is already noticeable … There is thus considerable additional potential for conflict in a region whose strategic, political, and economic developments as well as an increasing trans-regional challenge impact directly or indirectly on EU interests."[46]

Potential conflict influenced international donor interactions to the extent that initial efforts focused primarily on water sharing agreements and preventing disputes. Instead of pushing for reforms, donors worked with the existing water management institutions inherited from the Soviet period.[47]

Knowledge construction—Defining root causes

Though the Aral Sea Crisis has served as the impetus for much of the efforts in post-Soviet Central Asia, this label or view is limited in explaining the multitude of *types* of problems the region faced. Issues were linked by their physical, environmental, economic, political, and social characteristics, thus a new idea of multiple Aral Sea *crises*.[48] Because of overlapping issues, substantive solutions required thorough cross-sectoral approaches that addressed the root issue of downstream cotton monoculture.[49] Of course, crops continued to see limited sustainability reforms. Cotton agriculture persisted despite multiple international organizations and efforts that cited the Aral Sea crisis as its cardinal issue and the framing of the issue from independence onward played a major role in how states came to terms on agreements and how international donor agencies responded, interacted with, and made arrangements with Central Asian states. Accordingly, no agreement or proclamation from the entire ICWC framework, with the exception of one, cites the Aral Sea crisis as an issue of crop choice or sustainability. Conflating the problem

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[42] E.g., Gleick, "Water and Conflict"; Homer-Dixon, "Environmental Scarcities."
[43] Joyce R. Star, "Tomorrow's Critical Resource: Water," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 10, 1990; David Stern, "Receding Aral Sea offers fertile ground for conflict," *The Financial Times*, May 28, 2003; "Eastern Europe economy: Aral Sea is fertile ground for conflict," *EIU ViewsWire*, May 5, 2003.
[44] Weinthal, "Sins of Omission," argues that initial efforts from the World Bank and USAID were shaped by concerns over conflict.
[45] Philip Micklin, "International and Regional Responses to the Aral Crisis: An Overview of Efforts and Accomplishments," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 39, no. 7 (1998): 403.
[46] High Representative and the European Commission, *Climate Change and International Security* (paper presented to the European Council, March 14, 2008): 7.
[47] Weinthal, "Sins of Omission," 60.
[48] Micklin, "International and Regional Responses," 403.
[49] Weinthal, "Sins of Omission."

of the environmental issue with a purely cooperative issue moved the target for how issues were approached.

In 1991, during the first Tashkent meeting after independence, Ministers of Water Resources presented the issue as, "[the] inevitability of [a] complicated situation connected with rising water deficit and ecological stress strengthening in the Aral Sea Basin,"[50] and yet expressed the desire to not interrupt former economic patterns. In the 1992 Almaty agreement, which states ICWC holds authority on water allocation decisions, water ministers too presented the issue at hand as "...socio-economic problems, ecological stress, which originated as a consequence of water resources exhaustion," whereas addressing the solution involved "...respecting established structure and principles of water allocation and relying on regulatory documents of allocation of water resources from interstate sources currently in force."[51] The presented solutions seem to solve a collective action problem, while citing the environmental problem as justification.

The first show of intent to acquire NGO assistance, the 1995 Nukus Declaration to reassert the depth of the crisis, does mention the main reason for "...excessive expenditure of water needs [for] irrigation…"[52] However, it does not seem to regard crop choice as the issue either. The two causes of "degraded lands" are listed as "growing deficiency of water" and a "decrease in efficiency of irrigated agriculture." A "decrease" in efficiency implies a previously higher level of efficiency and therefore a solution of improving infrastructure. This has largely emerged through the sanctioned discourse characteristic of hydro-hegemony for preserving cotton.

Sanctioned discourse—"Rational use" and efficiency

The concept of rational use refers to the practice of using water efficiently and responsibly in agricultural settings by applying the optimal amount of water at the right time.[53] This does not take into account the sustainability of crop choice and therefore may be a digestible course of action for a state seeking to preserve unsustainable cash crops. As long as the water-inefficient crop is watered in the most efficient way, *rational use* is achieved.

Rational use is a basic goal, effort, or proposed solution in nearly every foundational regional basin-wide agreement during the period of World Bank assistance, whereas agricultural reform is omitted in all agreements except for the possibility of one.[54] "Rational use" is first articulated in the preamble of the 1991 Tashkent statement as the very purpose of the meeting.[55] In the 1992 Almaty Agreement, ensuring rational use is cited as responsibility of the parties in the preamble[56] and Article 1,[57] Article 7 (outlining the purpose and functions of ICWC),[58] Article 10

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[50] "1991 Statement of Heads of Water Economy Organizations."
[51] "1992 Almaty Agreement."
[52] "Nukus Declaration," Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, http://www.icwc-aral.uz.
[53] See definitions by the United Nations Development Program.
[54] Due to an apparent translation error, the meaning of this stated goal is unclear: "Transition to more balanced and scientifically grounded system rural and a forestry" under Article I. 'Adherence to principles of steady development.' In "Nukus Declaration."
[55] There may exist translation ambiguities: "We [the parties] as a professionals assessing inevitability of complicated situation connected with rising water deficit and ecological stress and strengthening in the Aral Sea basin, grounding on historical community equal rights and responsibilities for region water resources' rational use reckon necessary."
[56] Agreement states, "based on…their equal rights and responsibilities for ensuring rational use and protection of water resources…have agreed upon the following:"
[57] Agreement states, "While recognizing community and integrity of water resources in the region, the Parties shall have equal rights to water use and responsibility to ensure rational use and protection of water."
[58] Agreement states, "The Parties decided to establish on a parity basis Interstate Commission for Water

(outlining one of two commitments of the commission),[59] and Article 11 (as a component of binding decision).[60] It is further cited in the ICWC statute as the first main objective.[61]

Initial donor assistance was led in 1993 by the World Bank with the help of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and United Nations Development Program to establish the Aral Sea Basin Program 1 (ASBP–1). The main goals of the program included stabilizing the environment in the Aral Sea Basin, restoring the affected environment of the Aral Sea Region, improving management of water and land resources in the basin, and creating management structures at all levels for planning and implementation of the program.[62] Nine of its action programs implemented from 1995–2003 included (1) Regional water management strategy; (2) Improved efficiency of water resources management; (3) Hydrometeorological services and the region environmental information system; (4) Water quality management, drainage program in Uzbekistan; (5) Restoration of wetlands and regulation of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya flows; (6) Clean water and health; (7) Water management in the upper catchment; (8) Automation of water infrastructure; (9) Capacity building.[63]

Treaties, and international water law

The combination of the use of international law principles with a lack of punishment provisions and weak arbitration seems to have worked in favor of geographically inferior states. Customary law is derived from consistent state practices and *opinio juris*—the belief that a practice is legally obligatory—and forms the basis of international law while providing a baseline set of norms and principles that govern state behavior.[64] Whether or not treaties codify customary law, states may feel obligated to adhere to widely accepted norms and principles of international law, even in the absence of enforcement mechanisms because violations can damage a state's reputation and its relationships with other countries or donors.[65]

The use of customary law has increasingly become a source of international authority in water governance.[66] Even when treaties exist, it may be used to interpret language and guide state behavior in areas not explicitly covered by the treaty, or offer a basis for dispute resolution.[67] Yet this type of legal guidance can even be contradictory and offer little predictability in the outcome of negotiations or adjudication.[68] What is considered 'equitable and reasonable' is often decided

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Coordination to deal with the issues related to regulation, rational use, and protection of water resources from interstate sources, which would be comprised of the heads of water agencies to meet quarterly and as the occasion requires—on the Parties' initiative."

[59] Agreement states, "The Commission and its executive bodies shall ensure that…measures for rational water use and conservation…are implemented.

[60] Agreement states, "Decisions taken by the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination regarding compliance with established water withdrawal quotas, rational water use and protection are mandatory for all water consumers and users."

[61] "Article II. Main Objectives. 2.1. Determination of unified water policy, elaboration of its major directions with regard to population and industry branches, water resources rational use and protection, large reservoirs regulation, river flow provision."

[62] Kazaral.org ASBP–1.

[63] Aral.uz ASBP–1.

[64] Vapnek et al., "Law for Water Management," 103.

[65] Zeitoun and Warner, "Hydro-Hegemony," 442–443.

[66] Kai Wegerich, "A Critical Review of the Concept of Equity to Support Water Allocation at Various Scales in the Amu Darya Basin," *Irrigation and Drainage Systems* 21, no. 3–4 (2007): 185.

[67] Vapnek et al., "Law for Water Management," 113; Although ICWC has no legal arbitration, apparently it is relevant in bilateral dispute resolutions.

[68] John Waterbury, "Between Unilateralism and Comprehensive Accords: Modest Steps toward Cooperation in

by *ad-hoc* interpretations.[69] At worst, interpretations or bilateral adjudications are answerable only to powerful states.

As part of the Soviet water-energy exchange system, a reservoir was constructed on the Toktogul River and subsequently a hydroelectric dam for winter energy. This was subsidized by the Soviet budget and provided financial support to Kyrgyzstan for water infrastructure maintenance and overall socioeconomic development.[70] The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 disrupted the system by removing the central coordinating authority and funding mechanisms. This presented two issues for Kyrgyzstan. One is that it preferred water releases during the winter to power heating, just when downstream states prefer water to be stored. The other is that the reservoir, which benefited *both* downstream states and Kyrgyzstan, was placed solely in the hands of the latter for maintenance.

During the transition period to independence, Central Asian states signed the 1991 October Tashkent Agreement[71] and, four months later, the 1992 Almaty Agreement, both of which sought to preserve "the existing structure and principles of allocations based on existing regulating allocation of water resources of interstate significance" (referring to the Soviet-era water allocation system that heavily favored downstream cotton production), and asserted that states "...shall have equal rights to water use…"; "Shall refrain from actions on their respective territories that might affect the interests of other…parties and cause them harm…"; and both "...according to the principles common for the entire region and equitable regulation of their use…"[72] After the World Bank began development projects, the states reaffirmed their commitment to water law principles in the 1993 Kzyl-Orda Agreement (...states participants…confirming their commitments to the international water law principles).[73]

Although "equitable and reasonable use" and "duty not to cause significant harm" are more associated with 1997 UN Convention on the Law of the Use of International Watercourses written five years later, these norms recognizably existed via their foundations in the 1966 Helsinki Rules[74] and were a component of water governance in the Aral Sea Basin. Although states were later not signatories to the convention, these *were* regarded as customary law in Central Asia.[75]

Preserving the Soviet-era water allocations through the 1992 Almaty Agreement seems to serve the purpose of offering a semblance of stability and predictability for upstream states. In a sense, the absence of enforcement mechanisms in the agreement and inclusion of international water law creates a vulnerability for all parties but grants an increase in relative gains to Kyrgyzstan. Without binding supranational authority dictating water releases, Kyrgyzstan retained, at least in theory, the autonomy to manage its reservoirs and prioritize its own energy

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International River Basins," *International Journal of Water Resources Development* 13, no. 3 (1997): 281.

[69] Vapnek et al., "Law for Water Management," 108.

[70] Ziganshina, "Rethinking," 27–28; MacKay, "Running Dry," 23–24.

[71] "1991 Statement of Heads of Water Economy Organizations."

[72] "1992 Almaty Agreement"; "1992 Tashkent Agreement."

[73] Agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on joint activities in addressing the Aral Sea and the zone around the Sea crisis, improving the environment, and [ensuring] the social and economic development of the Aral Sea region, Interstate Commission for Water Coordination of Central Asia, accessed October 12, 2024, at http://www.icwc-aral.uz.

[74] Article IV states that "Each basin state is entitled, within its territory, to a reasonable and equitable share in the beneficial uses of the waters" in the basin; Article X states that "consistent with [Article IV], states "must prevent any form [or] … increase in the degree of existing water pollution … which would cause substantial injury in the territory of a co-basin state."

[75] S. C. McCaffrey, *The Law of International Watercourses: Non-Navigational Uses* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 347; cited in McKay, "Running Dry," 20–21.

needs. In another sense, "equitable and reasonable use" and "duty not to cause significant harm" restricts Kyrgyzstan from depriving downstream neighbors of their water. This created an opening for Uzbekistan to dictate water use patterns in the Syr Darya basin by leveraging customary law in its favor. Indeed, the Almaty Agreement, while lacking enforcement mechanisms on water allocations, did maintain continued water deliveries from Kyrgyzstan to downstream states, while simultaneously omitting the reciprocal energy provisions that had existed during the Soviet era.

Uzbekistan eventually began demanding market prices for their coal and gas resources in the absence of any explicit energy provisions, and this placed a significant financial burden on Kyrgyzstan since it could not afford to pay such prices.[76] Yet, it was still obligated under "equitable and reasonable use" through the Almaty Agreement to maintain the Toktogul reservoir and provide water downstream, unilaterally limiting Kyrgyzstan's reciprocal power. In response, Kyrgyzstan's legislature passed a law[77] declaring Kyrgyz water a state property with an associated market value and asserted its right to financial compensation from downstream users for the costs of operating and maintaining water infrastructure, as well as for any economic losses incurred due to water releases.[78] This required unilateral water policy since Kyrgyzstan had further ceded its right to compensation under customary law in the Almaty Agreement, which acknowledged international water law but did not factor in energy *reciprocity*. In addition, ICWC's bilateral dispute resolution mechanisms failed to arbitrate any outcome within reason. Uzbekistan challenged the legality of "selling water" by citing the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which were legally and rhetorically much better positioned within the principles of regional water law.[79] Since cutting off water clearly would have violated customary law, Kyrgyzstan had little power to operationalize its domestic water policy.[80]

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that Kemelova and Zhalkubaev point out that following this, Uzbekistan, without notification, began building the Rezak Reservoir, which it planned to feed with the North Fergana Canal using diverted water from the Naryn-Syr Darya, and the Karaman Reservoir in the Southern Hungry Steppe Canal. Both of these would allow Uzbekistan to save Toktogul winter water releases. While agreeing to Articles X of the Helsinki accords when in its own favor, and citing the Transboundary Watercourses Convention, Uzbekistan had violated Article 29 of the Helsinki rules (and later Article XI of UN Watercourses Convention): Exchange of information and prior notification of planned measures.[81] Additionally, construction of the reservoirs may be in direct violation of the 1991 Tashkent Agreement that states "We, heads… reckon necessary: …provide full information exchange about water resources use, water consumption infrastructure."[82] Article 5 of the 1992 Almaty agreement states "The parties will facilitate wide information exchange on scientific and technological advances in the field of water

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[76] Dinara Kemelova and Gennady Zhalkubaev, "Water, Conflict, and Regional Security in Central Asia Revisited," *New York University Environmental Law Journal* 11, no. 2 (2003): 481–482.

[77] Kyrgyzstan Law on inter-state use of water objects, water resources, and water economy construction, July 23, 2001.

[78] Eric W. Sievers, "Water, Conflict, and Regional Security in Central Asia," *New York University Environmental Law Journal* 10, no. 3 (2002): 389.

[79] Kemelova and Zhalkubaev, "Water, Conflict, and Regional Security," 488.

[80] Kemelova and Zhalkubaev, "Water, Conflict, and Regional Security," 488; MacKay, "Running Dry," 24.

[81] Vapnek et al., "Law for Water Management," 110. Vapnek et al. posits that states have a specific duty to cooperate and exchange data when they plan measures that may affect or threaten any existing uses on a shared watercourse.

[82] "1991 Statement of Heads of Water Economy Organizations."

management."[83] Limitations such as these and a lack of donor support on the matter forced Kyrgyzstan to look for agencies that would implement a more concrete water-energy agreement.[84]

Discussion

The rhetoric at the time of ICWC creation does seem to support that fear of heated conflict was a driving factor in upstream acceptance of unfavorable agreements. The potential for militarized conflict seems to have influenced behavior in the region, even though ICWC agreements themselves do not suggest this. Rather, it is seemingly a global concern regarding post-Soviet arrangements. In this sense, there is less evidence for securitization through potential militarization as an explicit hegemonic strategy after independence. The "crisis" part of the Aral Sea Crisis and militarized conflict do, however, appear to be at least a continued resource capture strategy for downstream states in securing water resources from upstream neighbors. Although further research of ICWC's legal framework or meetings may reveal otherwise, secondary sources support that *securitization* is employed continually to increase upstream costs (c_{US}) for noncompliance with agreements that ensure water for downstream states. This study would benefit from including research on securitization in the Amu Darya basin over the Rogun Dam. Limited support has found that securitization was used during the creation of ICWC, but the trending global narrative of potential water conflicts could have substituted the need for this type of strategy. It is plausible that upstream states complied for this reason.

Technical solutions offered an apolitical and objective way to address the "crisis" without requiring significant changes to economies. This strategy served the interests of downstream cotton agriculture in two ways. The first is that framing the issue as one of water efficiency and quantity rather than of water purpose/usage allowed downstream states to protect cotton agriculture from reform by limiting available options for addressing the issue. A second and related way is that framing the issue as a technical problem changed the definition of success to the extent that as long as the technical solution of efficiency or rational use was addressed/improved, the problem was effectively being solved. The solutions presented sidestep cotton agriculture while remaining Pareto-efficient. ICWC decisions preempt any external decisions, and because international donors are often financially invested in *successfully* implementing solutions, actions were limited to improving irrigation efficiency, modernizing infrastructure, and implementing water-saving technology rather than reform. Because various NGOs and environmental groups have vocalized the need to reform the cotton sector,[85] yet ICWC's legal framework marginalized this approach, there does seem to support that the range of solutions was limited—$(k)X_1 - X_0 < (X_0 + X_1) / 2$— through a hegemonic sanction discourse. as various NGOs and environmental groups had vocalized the need to reform the cotton sector. The disparity between the problem and solutions points toward a "technical solution" discourse being heard above reform efforts.

The invocation of international water law principles may have granted a sense of fairness and legitimacy to Soviet-era allocations; however, the definition of what was considered equitable, fair, or harmful was constrained when operationalized. Halting water was prevented, but preventing unilateral actions through ceasing energy deliveries was not. Furthermore, the inclusion of principles that refer to environmental and humanitarian norms, notably the visible effects of the sea and water scarcity, seem to have combined with the limitations in the agreements and placed greater normative pressure for upstream states, particularly Kyrgyzstan, than on downstream

[83] Due to a possible translation error, it remains uncertain, yet noteworthy, the extent to which these principles may be based on international law and how entrenched they are in ICWC's legal framework.
[84] Weinthal, "Sins of Omission," 60.
[85] Weinthal, "Sins of Omission," 55.

states. The realization that including these principles lacked teeth decreased actual upstream utility, forcing Kyrgyzstan to seek options outside of those implemented by USAID.

Conclusion

Cooperative approaches to water governance and management will become more relevant with intensifying water scarcity, and our relationship with unsustainable practices will be tested as global temperatures rise. As short-term interests lead to greater global devastation, we are called to question the structural and political mechanisms that perpetuate the degradation of our planet. The Aral Sea shows a re-evaluation of the meaning of "progress" and "development" must take place. *Who benefits*? *Who suffers?*

This case demonstrates that environmental path dependency is not inevitable, and failure to seize the moment has deeper consequences than foregoing short-term gains: cotton was bought for the price of the Aral Sea and upstream development. The perpetuation of the system responsible was made possible by marginalizing reform and constraining the policy space, while downstream water shares were reinforced by instrumentalizing the crisis—a vicious feedback loop. A dominant discourse of *rational use* and technical solutions and selectively cited aspects of the crisis suggested and induced solutions that sidestepped cotton agriculture to remain palatable for bureaucrats and donors. The invocation of international water law principles legitimized agreements and negotiations but became a tool that solidified interests of cotton agriculture. All the while, the Aral Sea crisis became the rhetorical weapon that compelled upstream states to comply with their neighbors.

Using a rational choice model allows for a symbolic representation of how hydro-hegemonic strategies distort the decision-making processes and compliance of weaker states. The counterintuitive acceptance of unfavorable water-sharing agreements by upstream states can be explained by the strategic deployment of hydro-hegemonic strategies by downstream states, particularly Uzbekistan. These findings have implications for the study of international relations. The Aral Sea case provides empirical support for the framework of hydro-hegemony and demonstrates that geographic asymmetries in transboundary river basins are not bound to geography. Future research could test the theoretical model of regime design over transboundary rivers across a large database such as FAOLEX or the International River Basin Organization Database. There is room for historical research on the case involving micro-level factors, such as with behavior among national water *nomenklatura* and non-state stakeholders. It should also investigate the long-term implications of the initial agreements and assess how state behavior has evolved and operated under them since the mid-twentieth century.

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"Reflections of a Chance Activist: Superimposing Development Politics in Serbia in Relation to the Jadar Project onto that of Siberia in Relation to the Baikal Project"

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"And more and more often, current conditions put us at cross-purposes in our public activity, causing sporadic confrontations in various fields of endeavor that can only be compared with the most famous military battles."[1] In this quotation from "A Baikal Prologue without an Epilogue," Rasputin alludes to Siberia as a place where various stakeholders are engaged in political dialectics concerning various aspects of public life. The specific issue in the Rasputin's piece concerns the development and consequences of sustaining the paper industry on the shores of Baikal, which in Siberia is often called "Glorious Sea" or "Holy Sea" because of its beauty, magnificence, and the importance to the surrounding ecosystem. The opposing parties in this conflict are the Soviet government and "the people," those who live in the area as well as all those around the country who are concerned with preserving this national treasure for the benefit and enjoyment of the future generations. The government championed the development of the Baikal because of its allegedly crucial impact on the country's economy.[2] Such advancements ignored the disastrous consequences for the ecology of the lake and the region. The government even claimed, however absurdly, that the lake's water quality improves by the discharges from the plant.[3] "The people," on the other hand, could not be convinced that the nation needed more cellulose fiber, pulp, and paper more than it needed Baikal.[4]

Development politics of the Soviet government in Siberia, as described in Rasputin's piece, translates rather directly to development politics of the current Serbian government in the Loznica region, as I encountered it during my last trip there in 2024. This was also the time when activism aimed at preserving the Drina River and Loznica region, which most Serbs regard as national treasures;[5,6] the criticism reached the apex and culminated in massive street protests all over the country.[7] The citizens condemned the predatory approaches to developing lithium mines and battery factories in the Jadar Valley, together known as the Jadar project. The project is championed by the Serbian government and the transnational mining corporation, Rio Tinto, neither of which is showing an adequate concern for the local population or the environment,[8] but both developing narratives and strategies for action that resemble those of the Soviet government and the paper industry sector in relation to the Baikal project.

I participated in one of the protests, in Gornji Milanovac, my parents' hometown located in Western Serbia. The protests were the grassroot response to the government and Rio Tinto's

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[1] Valentin Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire: Essays*. trans. Margaret Winchell and Gerald Mikkelson (Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 195.
[2] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 201.
[3] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 197.
[4] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 201.
[5] "Protesti protiv iskopavanja litijuma održani u više gradova, privedena dvojica aktivista" [Protests against lithium mining held in several cities, two activists were detained], *NIN*, August 9, 2024. https://www.nin.rs/politika/vesti/54727/protesti-protiv-iskopavanja-litijuma-u-gornjem-milanovcu-priveden-aktivista.
[6] "Protesti protiv iskopavanja litijuma."
[7] "Protesti protiv litijuma u Subotici, Gornjem Milanovcu, Kruševcu" [Protests against lithium in Subotica, Gornji Milanovac, Kruševac], *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, August 8, 2024. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-protesti-litijum/33071030.html.
[8] "Takovska 10: Jesmo li spremni za debatu o litijumu" [Takovska 10: Are we ready for the lithium debate", posted April 16, 2024, by RTS Sajt - Zvanični kanal, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyhFJVVgTM8.

Machiavellianism aimed at generating enormous profits to a select few at the expense of ruining, perhaps irreversibly, an unimaginable natural beauty and the surrounding ecosystem.[9,10] How are the Baikal project, as described by Rasputin, and the Jadar project, as I understood it during the tumultuous summer of 2024, related to one another, despite their temporal and geographical detachments and despite their different contexts? Development politics in Siberia and Serbia in relation to the Baikal and Jadar projects, respectively, indicate that the ruling classes are unburdened with moral implications of their actions. They also suggest that money and power easily corrupt even those parts of society that should be motivated by the public interest (intellectuals and scientific experts). However, political protests in Serbia as I experienced them also suggest that massive grassroot activism might facilitate halting the drive of the rich and powerful toward reaching their ignoble aims.

Projecting the Jadar Project onto the Baikal Project: the Roles of Government, Government "Experts," and Conscientious Opposition

The stakes of the Jadar project are extremely high for the Loznica region, the downstream Drina basin, and the whole country of Serbia and beyond. One might say that the project puts the environmental map of the region in jeopardy because the entire ecosystem is going to be altered permanently if the project proceeds. The waters and lands in question have been given to us by our ancestors in perfect order. We should guard them and preserve them for future generations, not adjudicate our children and grandchildren of their rights to use them. It is, therefore, imperative that we resolutely abandon our destructive practices that harm the environment and avoid instilling them into our children; otherwise, we would be condemning them to accelerate the destruction that we so recklessly started.

This recklessness in relation to the Jadar project suggests that Serbian political leaders, notably, President Aleksandar Vučić and his government, lack aspects of common morality, namely, the system of beliefs that should stand between what the subject chose to do and what are the anticipated outcomes. When morality is lacking, decisions are made too casually and future consequences disregarded indifferently.

Disregarding the future is frightening, and as Ivan Turgenev so eloquently put it so long ago, "What's frightening is that nothing is frightening."[11] The Serbian political elite does not own Jadar nor Drina River. These national treasures are perfect the way they are, the way they have always been. Nor should we resign to following such elites as if they were prophets. This is why I joined 2,000 conscientious residents of Gornji Milanovac to protest the Serbian elite and the Jadar project. We sounded the alarm because we knew, should the project continue, those who come after us would never forgive us for not stopping the intemperate actions of the leaders who adopted their roles too casually.

However, the task of stopping the Jadar project is challenging because of the demagoguery[12] devised and so relentlessly pursued by the Serbian political elite in order to secure

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[9] Đorđević, Dragana, et al., "The Influence of Exploration Activities of a Potential Lithium Mine on the Environment in Western Serbia," *Scientific Reports* 14 (2024): 17090. 1–9. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-68072-9.

[10] Sanja Sakan, "Rasturila Vučića u Malom Zvorniku. Doktor Sanja Sakan naučni savetnik u borbi protiv Rio Tinta" [She destroyed Vučić in Mali Zvornik. Dr. Sanja Sakan scientific advisor in the fight against Rio Tinto], posted August 14, 2024, by Politički Globus Srbije, YouTube, https://youtu.be/8eDrQcZ56M8?si=mEGtsOneXq4r_9ai.

[11] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 195.

[12] According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, a demagogue is "a leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power." In this context, demagoguery could be understood as political practices that seek support by appealing to the desires/prejudices of ordinary people rather than by using rational

the popular support and thus legitimize the project. Demagoguery has been used in human affairs since time immemorial, and even great causes may not be spared from its ignoble influences. Through demagoguery, an unjust cause could lead to the distortion of the sacred concept, reducing it to a demagogic clatter. In the case of the Jadar project, the unjust cause is achieving personal gains through environmental destruction; the sacred concept is the preservation of the environment; and demagoguery is the absurd assertion of the Serbian political elite that the environment will remain unimpacted by the project. The lack of moral foundations is all too apparent in the development politics of the Serbian political elite in relation to the Jadar project: simply, the government is unconcerned about the connection between the role it assumes and its consequences. Moreover, the Serbian political elite deliberately engages in the distortion of reality in order to gain legitimacy in the shameful pursuit of its goals.

As contemptible as the behavior of the Serbian government seems to be in relation to the Jadar project, I find the behavior of some environmental experts even more contemptible because of their readiness to help the government and its transnational business partner justify their shameful profit grab. Specifically, by asserting that the environmental impact of lithium extraction in Jadar Valley will be negligible, these experts are effectively providing the justification for the project. Unfortunately, this is precisely what the government and Rio Tinto are planning to implement. Thus, instead of being chief and persistent defenders of the Loznica region and the Drina River, as I would expect from scholars, they effectively become the government and business mouthpieces and chief promoters of the profit-inspired Jadar project. Additionally, instead of trying to keep the structures of wealth and power in check, as the true intellectuals should be doing in my opinion, these alleged experts seem to be lining up and singing hosannas to wealth and power. I was hugely disappointed to learn that lining up such specialists presented no special problem for the government and Rio Tinto. The list includes experts from the Faculty of Mining and Geology in Belgrade, the Geological Institute of Serbia, the Chamber of Mining and Geology Engineers of Serbia, the Association of Mining and Geology Engineers of Serbia, the Technical Faculty in Bor, and the Mining Institute from Belgrade,[13] a surprisingly long list indeed.

One of these so-called experts, on whom the government and Rio Tinto rely rather heavily, made a particularly strong, albeit negative, impression: Dr. Aleksandar Jovović, professor from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Belgrade. His interviews on Serbian national television showcase eloquence and skillful manipulation of facts in support of the Jadar project. In one of these interviews, which I found particularly memorable,[14] Dr. Jovović indifferently expostulates that misinformation is being spread by the critics of the Jadar project in order to propagate fear among the citizens of Serbia; he avows that if the project is done according to Rio Tinto's technical specifications, there would not be any pollution of the land and rivers or streams. To substantiate his assertions, he uses the study from the Faculty of Biology at the University of Belgrade. However, he fails to acknowledge that Rio Tinto labelled their own technical specifications with the disclaimer that "no express or implied statement or warranty is made regarding the content of this draft, including, but not limited to, its accuracy, adequacy, timeliness, completeness, and/or reliability."[15] Moreover, Dr. Jovović also fails to state that the

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argument.

[13] "Bez rudarenja i kriticnih mineralnih sirovina nije moguc tehnoloski razvoj i napredak" [Technological development and progress are not possible without mining and critical mineral raw materials] *Politika*, July 31, 2024, https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/625476/Bez-rudarenja-i-kriticnih-mineralnih-sirovina-nije-moguc-tehnoloski-razvoj-i-napredak.

[14] "Takovska 10."

[15] "Lithium Mining in Serbia: 'An Open and Productive Debate Is Not Possible,'" *Heinrich Böll Foundation*, July

study from the Faculty of Biology he cites concludes with the recommendation that the Jadar project should not proceed because of the environmental concerns and precisely in opposition to Dr. Jovović's claims.[16]

Dr. Jovović's interview left me feeling stunned and appalled, not because of what he said but because of what he chose to omit. How could it be that the roles that supposed experts like him assume fail to be grounded in basic morality? How could it be that they fail to place national interests above all else and even subordinate them to the petty profit for the select few? How could it be that their actions are devoid of common sense? After listening to such experts as Dr. Jovović, I genuinely doubt their sincerity. In fact, I suspect that they were hired by Rio Tinto and the Serbian government to provide seemingly plausible environmental assurances to the skeptical public thereby serving the lithium exploitation machine at the expense of national interests. Through the example of Dr. Jovović, it is evident that if one has money and power, it is always possible to line up the chorus of experts willing to sing praises to the leaders who obsessively proclaim their magnificent deeds despite obvious absurdity.

Unfortunately, the behavior of scholars and experts like Dr. Jovović is not uncommon. In relation to the Baikal project, Rasputin says that "lining up advocates presented no special problem, for you can always find experts willing to support anything whatsoever."[17] He uses as an example one Zhavoronkov, a similarly questionable expert in the field and academician, to show how someone who should be the chief defender of Baikal becomes the chief defender of the industrial plants at the expense of Baikal—not unlike what is happening in the Jadar project. In doing so, Rasputin might also be understood as using the example of Zhavoronkov as a device to alert the reader to a human impulse one ought to confront with all the might of reason: the impulse to submit to authority (here, the government), even if the evidence suggests otherwise.[18] Even scholars, as Rasputin demonstrates to the reader through Zhavoronkov, are not immune to such an impulse.[19]

There are exceptions, however, for not all experts are like Dr. Jovović or Zhavoronkov. For example, Dr. Sanja Sakan, a Scientific Advisor at the Centre of Extraordinary Values for Environmental Chemistry and Engineering at the Institute of Chemistry, Technology, and Metallurgy in Belgrade, is one such exception. Her specialty is pollution of sediments and water by heavy metals around old mines. In addition to being an expert with strong moral foundations, she is particularly passionate about the Jadar project because she is originally from the Jadar Valley. I saw her talk about the Jadar project in a town hall meeting days before the protest in Gornji Milanovac.[20] Her talk, specifically, motivated me to attend the protest. I was equally impressed by the definiteness of her findings and the indifference toward facts displayed by the

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18, 2024, https://www.boell.de/en/2024/07/18/lithium-mining-serbia-open-and-productive-debate-not-possible.

[16] "Takovska 10: Jesmo li spremni za debatu o litijumu."

[17] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 197.

[18] The extent to which people are willing to submit to authority is the subject of the famous study conducted at Yale University by Milgram in mid-twentieth century. See, Stanley Milgram, "Milgram's Experiment on Obedience to Authority," *UC Berkeley Nature & Agriculture Labor Project*, University of California, Berkeley, accessed June 19, 2025. https://nature.berkeley.edu/ucce50/ag-labor/7article/article35.htm.

[19] Particularly enlightening thoughts about the relationship between intellectuals and the structures of power are offered by Noam Chomsky (see e.g., Noam Chomsky, "Intellectuals I," an excerpt from a debate at Palacký University in Olomouc, posted November 25, 2015, by Chomsky's Philosophy, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgzG8QiaFp4, or Noam Chomsky, "Intellectuals II," an excerpt from a lecture series "On Power, Dissent, and Racism," posted December 13, 2015, by Chomsky's Philosophy, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=huMUGm5z6RE.

[20] Sakan, "Rasturila."

country's political elite in relation to the project. The talk lasted about six minutes; however, it was enough to captivate the audience of a few dozen, except for the government officials, who remained unphased. Dr. Sakan's passionate message was delivered composedly, and her argument was substantiated with overwhelming evidence pointing to an unmistaken conclusion that the Jadar project would destroy the environment, wreck the local economy, and continue ruining the health of thousands for decades even after lithium exploitation would be ceased and mines closed.

In her research, Dr. Sakan examined the samples of water and soil, and her colleagues from the Chemistry Department at the University of Belgrade helped her with the analytics. The results are intriguing.[21] One of the key problems is that lithium in Jadar is present in the silicate form, which means that it is strongly bound in the structure in which it resides. This means that, for lithium to be extracted, very strong acids, such as concentrated sulfuric acid, are needed. However, lithium is not the only element: in the ore, boron, arsenic, and other toxic elements and substances can be found, and these elements will remain in tailings (*jalovišta*) after lithium is extracted. Since the entire Loznica region is a flood zone and subject to regular flooding, irrespective of how well the tailings are protected, because of underground waters, rain, flooding, etc., it will be impossible to contain the toxins from being released into the natural environment at some point. Đorđević *et al*. cite numerous examples of accidents involving tailings, which resulted in the release of toxins in high concentrations, and which continued to pollute the environment many years after the mines were closed.[22]

Another problem with the Jadar project, as Dr. Sakan points out, is that lithium exploitation is planned in Jadar Valley, a densely populated agricultural area near a remarkably clean river Drina, which contains enough water to sustain eighty million people.[23] According to Dr. Sakan, both the granary and the river should be regarded as national treasures, especially the river, considering the fact that a substantial portion of the rest of the world has to deal with severe water scarcity. Nowhere in the world is lithium exploitation done under such circumstances—in populated agricultural areas, near rivers and streams used to provide water to millions of people.[24]

Lithium extraction requires large amounts of water, which the Drina River certainly can supply. However, the disposal of enormous amounts of highly concentrated sulfuric acid is poised to irreversibly alter the ecosystem of the river as well as that of the downstream rivers, Sava and Danube respectively. Supposedly scientific arguments made by Rio Tinto and Serbian government experts assert that the releases of highly concentrated acids and other toxins in the Drina River would not be damaging to the river and the life it sustains are akin to the arguments in Rasputin's piece made by the paper industry and Soviet government in relation to the Baikal project. As Rasputin so piercingly remarks, "Hardly anyone, even among the plant managers, actually believed [the experts'] 'scientific' arguments."[25] It appears that forty years later, the authorities in the Jadar project in Serbia copied the arguments from the Baikal project in Russia. By looking at the two projects, it is crucial to question if science could be trusted unless anchored in strong moral origins.

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[21] Đorđević et al., "The Influence." 1–9. Dr. Sakan was among the contributors to this paper that underwent a rigorous peer-review process, spanning over year and a half. This is the first paper of this kind because it uses trial wells to show how mining could cause catastrophic environmental damage; usually, such papers are published after the exploitation in old mines has long been ceased.

[22] Đorđević et al., "The Influence," 3; Sakan, "Rasturila."

[23] Đorđević et al., "The Influence," 3.

[24] Đorđević et al., "The Influence," 7; Sakan, "Rasturila."

[25] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 197.

Ironically, Dr. Sakan's results indicate yet another absurdity to be associated with the Jadar project: it is *not* expected to contribute to the net reduction in CO_2 emission.[26] This is because the extraction of lithium from the type of ore found in Jadar Valley produces enormous amounts of CO_2 thereby defeating the original government's goal of the Jadar project—the net reduction of CO_2 emission. Despite these findings, the government still continues to push for the project by applying, however absurdly, the reduction of CO_2 emission as its main justification. Significantly, the manipulative narrative concerning the CO_2 emission reduction has had other adverse implications; it has also served as a barrier to discourses of the negative impacts of lithium mining, notably, on public health and environment. This could be yet another reason why the informed public remains skeptical and assumes that trivial greed might be behind the government's drive for the project.

Suppressing the truth in order to shape the discourse, especially when the focus is profit, is, unfortunately, not uncommon. In this regard, similarities are striking between the Baikal and Jadar projects. For instance, Rasputin writes: "During its twenty years of operation, the PDK (the allowable maximum concentration of pollutants) in the wastewater from the plant has been changed six times … they have simply been adjusted to fit the purification capabilities of the plant."[27] Mirroring these rather disturbing discoveries in relation to the Baikal project, Dr. Sakan writes that for the Jadar project, "[Rio Tinto] has been unable to meet legal limit values for boron in soil and water. However, the limit values for boron … imposed by local laws have been increased, therefore boron is no longer considered to be harmful substance … according to newest regulations in Serbia."[28] In other words, the government—late-Soviet and Serbian alike—simply kept adjusting the acceptable limits for harmful substances in order to match what the industry can deliver, rather than to stick with the limits that the science says is safe for health. Such regulatory practices prove to be devoid of even elementary morality and serve to undermine people's faith in government and its ability to serve them.

In fact, it was clear from the start that neither the Baikal nor Jadar project should proceed. Rasputin writes: "The fact that Baikal is no place for industrial plants was clear even then, in the 1960s, when they were trying to make a final decision on how to utilize Baikal."[29] Similarly, Dr. Sakan found that even around the trial wells,[30] nothing grows—no corn, nor other vegetations—and wonders what kind of impact we will be bracing for if the mine is built in this area. The problems are coming from all angles: extraction of ores, processing of ores, as well as tailings. She has no doubt that, if the mines are built, "we will be leaving for future generations who will live in these areas total devastation."[31]

The Protest

The protest against the Jadar project that I attended took place on 8 August 2024 in Gornji Milanovac. Most of my relatives, friends, and acquaintances took part in it. It is remarkable that in the town of about 15,000, more than 2,000 people took part in the protest. It was entirely a grassroots initiative through which people were expressing a strong demand to preserve the cleanliness of soil, freshness of air, and purity of water in the Loznica region. The slogans were

[26] Đorđević et al., "The Influence," 7.
[27] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 199.
[28] Đorđević et al., "The Influence," 3.
[29] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 197.
[30] Sakan, "Rasturila." The sample size used in Dr. Sakan's research is substantial: over 500 exploratory wells. They were dug over the course of the past two decades during the exploratory phases of the project.
[31] Sakan, "Rasturila."

reading: "For fresh air, for clean water, for future, not Rio Tinto" ("Za čist vazduh, za čistu vodu, za budućnost, ne Rio Tinto"), "Rio Tinto, stop profit, not my future" ("Rio Tinto, stopiraj profit, ne moju budućnost"), "We don't give up Jadar" ("Ne damo Jadar"), etc. The atmosphere was electric, but peaceful. There wasn't a single incident that I noticed.

The protest's speakers were as stern in their criticism of the Jadar project and of those who championed it as were the protesters. Dr. Ivanka Popović, professor at the University of Belgrade, said that the Jadar project is "the epitome of the unscrupulous behavior of the authorities" and that "We fear that those who govern our country do so only for their own personal benefit and for the benefit of their business partners, without regard for the welfare of other citizens."[32] Furthermore, she said that "we demand [the ban on the exploitation of lithium] not because we are opponents of development, but because we want to manage the resources in our country responsibly and domestically, and that our descendants have the same chances as us, to breathe clean air, to have drinking water and they walk on unpolluted earth."[33] It is as if Dr. Popović were echoing Rasputin's sentiments concerning the behavior of those who own the present: "Somewhere inside each person there is a wellspring bubbling out of the earth on which he, grateful for his origins, was born… But while some people live by drawing from this wellspring, others have filled it in and made it dry up. Some use it to gauge every action on earth; others calculate its material advantages."[34]

Dr. Popović, along with 2,000 conscientious citizens of Gornji Milanovac whom she was addressing, are those persons who are aware of the existence of the "wellspring" inside of them that is coming from the earth and fuels the life in them, and which they draw from in order to understand the consequences of every action on earth before they take it. These people have strong moral foundations and consider every important action on earth carefully, adopting no roles casually.

But Dr. Popović also spoke of the other persons, those who choose to fill that "wellspring" to stop it from bubbling and make it dry; these are the "authorities," the political and business elite, whose "unscrupulous behavior" concerns only "material advantages." These "other" people do not have strong moral foundations, for there is little that stands between the actions they take and the consequences of their actions.

For people who cherish the "wellspring" inside of them—the protesters of Gornji Milanovac—the fight against the Jadar project takes epic significance, as if reverberating the sentiments from the opening quotation. They know they only inherited the land from their ancestors and thus are only its stewards whose responsibility is to preserve it for the future generations. They know they don't own the future, and they know the earth is not theirs to test if they accrued enough power to turn it upside down. And even if they have never heard of Rasputin, Rasputin could be their spokesperson: "We are not owners of the nation's soil but merely its tillers, reaping nourishment and prosperity; the land is the mother and nurturer of the people, their eternal refuge, their sole dwelling place, to which nothing more can be added from the outside."[35] Indeed, the protesters were not against the development and progress. They were only against irresponsible exploitation that is poised to pollute the soil and water, destroy the environment and the ecosystem, and destroy agriculture, the economic engine of the entire Loznica region.

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[32] "Protesti," *NIN*.
[33] "Protesti," *NIN*.
[34] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 194.
[35] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 196.

As for those who found themselves on the other side of the protest—the government officials—they accused the protesters of the Jadar project as being "the enemy of the people" because "Serbia can't survive without the lithium from Jadar."[36] These absurdities cohere well with assertions made by the Soviet's officials in relation to the Baikal project—i.e., "whoever opposed the cellulose plant was an enemy of the … people"[37] because "the nation [is] practically doomed to destruction without [cellulose from the Baikal plants]."[38] Thus, whether in the Soviet Union in the 1980s or in Serbia in the 2020s, those in power resort to invoking the national interest and patriotism when they search for rational justification for things that have none.

Conclusion

"We neglect what we have, then cry when it's gone."[39] This old Russian proverb has become a global and universal truism. On August 8, 2024, the citizens of a small town in Western Serbia sounded the alarm and spoke loudly; there will not be any crying, for neglecting what they have is not an option. In the Loznica region, the Drina River has enough water to support a dozen times the present population of the entire country, and their granary can feed the entire country several times over. The citizens are proud of the river and the granary, and they are intent to keep them intact irrespective of what Rio Tinto's formidable capital and the country's political elite aspire toward. For the conscientious citizens of Gornji Milanovac, the River Drina and the Loznica region are not the "surrounding environment" of the Jadar mine-to-be. Instead, they are the national treasures, shrines to be admired and cherished, and not something to raise a hand against. Additionally, regardless of how much they hear about the need for the Jadar mine and the lithium battery plant, and how much they are harangued about the EVs as the cars of the future that their lithium would power, according to one of Gornji Milanovac's protesters, "[they] would rather ride bikes than drive EVs if it means the end to the river and land as [they] know them."[40] Simply, the citizens' consciousness cannot accept the notion that they might need more lithium batteries than they need their Drina and their Loznica granary.

In this context, by juxtaposing the development politics between the Jadar project in Serbia and the Baikal project in Siberia, this paper interprets the dispensation under the current Serbian government to be strikingly similar to the late-Soviet government. Both dispensations could be seen as being rooted in a prosaic retention of predatory mode in its exploitation of nature. Such exploitation is presented to the society in the form of Machiavellian *Realpolitik*, which is devoid of morality. A possible antidote to the Serbian government's Machiavellianism might be found in massive grassroot activism, such as the one seen throughout Serbia during the summer of 2024. In fact, what other peaceful means could better facilitate putting an end to the relentless pursuits of higher profits by the rich and powerful at the expense of national interests?

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"Bez rudarenja i kritičnih mineralnih sirovina nije moguć tehnološki razvoj i napredak" ["Technological development and progress are not possible without mining and critical mineral raw materials"]. *Politika*, July 31, 2024. https://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/625476/Bez-rudarenja-i-kriticnih-mineralnih-sirovina-nije-moguc-tehnoloski-razvoj-i-napredak.

[36] "Protesti," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*.
[37] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 198.
[38] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 201.
[39] Rasputin, *Siberia on Fire*, 201.
[40] Milos Mijatović, private communication, August 8, 2024.

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"Developing Urban Sustainability: A Focus on SDG 11 in Affordable and Sustainable Transport Systems in Slovakia"

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Many countries have pledged to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, starting with their proposal in 2012 at the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference in Rio de Janeiro.[1] The goals themselves would only be adopted formally in 2015, after the end of the eight Millennium Development Goals that preceded the SDGs.[2] According to the European Commission, as of 2024, only about 16% of the SDGs are planned to be met by 2030.[3] While this low percentage may seem disappointing to some, and this number could always be higher, the point of the goals is to give us somewhere to go as society progresses. They are lofty targets that will not be perfectly met in only 15 years, but they serve as a strong roadmap for continuing to fund development in societies across the planet. Former Soviet Union republics in particular face issues with meeting the SDGs due to their long and complicated history that often pushed environmentalism to the backburner in favor of industrialism and production.[4] This paper hopes to act as an in-detail review for the Slovak Republic's continued progress and stagnation, as well as roadblocks and successes toward a specific target around SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The Slovak Republic, otherwise known as Slovakia, is a small country located in the heart of Europe. It was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the formation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, then became a satellite state until the Velvet Revolution in 1989. The country dissolved into Czechia and Slovakia in 1993. Slovakia has faced many challenges with transitions to a capitalist society, especially when it comes to tackling the challenge of climate change. Overall, the country is extremely rural, with only two main cities: Bratislava, the capital city, and Košice, but contains various towns and urban spaces scattered throughout its rolling hills. Currently, Slovakia has a sustainable development score of 79.35.[5] This means that its scoring of sustainable practice is fairly high (21st out of all nations pledged to the SDGs) but it still lags in comparison to other nations similar to where Slovakia is developmentally.[6] SDG 11 focuses on urban sustainability, and one of the specific indicators refers to affordable and sustainable transport systems that are accessible to all. The direct definition of SDG 11.2 is listed in the establishment of the SDGs and is defined as such:

> 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special

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[1] "Sustainable Development Goals: Background on the Goals," United Nations Development Programme, accessed December 1, 2024, https://www.undp.org/sdg-accelerator/background-goals#:~:text=The%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs,Rio%20de%20Janeiro%20in%202012.

[2] Thomas Hickmann et al., "Success Factors of Global Goal-Setting for Sustainable Development: Learning from the Millennium Development Goals," *Sustainable Development* 31, no. 3 (2022): 1214–25. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2461.

[3] Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guillaume Lafortune, and Grayson Fuller, *Sustainable Development Report 2024: The SDGS and the UN Summit of the Future* (Dublin University Press, 2024), https://doi.org/10.25546/108572.

[4] Julian Agyeman and Yelaena Ogneva-Himmelberger, eds., *Environmental Justice and Sustainability in the Former Soviet Union*, 1st ed. (MIT Press, 2009).

[5] Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller, *Sustainable Development*.

[6] Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller, *Sustainable Development*.

attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.[7]

The Slovak Republic is slowly making efforts, through the European Union, to update public transportation systems within its urban areas, in order to fulfill Sustainability Development Goal 11, Target 11.2.

Public transportation within cities and towns in Slovakia takes on various forms. Locations focus on and prioritize electric trams, buses, and convertible trolleybuses. No city in Slovakia has access to a metro or subway, so above-ground transportation must be further developed. Bratislava's electric tram system has been running since 1895, and over recent years has undergone many updates not only in infrastructure, but also in the sustainability of vehicle fleets.[8] New trams that utilize European Union funding cover 42 km and have many updates for disabled patrons, follow the requirement under SDG 11 for equitable access to any transportation system users.[9] New buses also follow this route. In order to expand the fleet of accessible transportation in Bratislava, the city invested in 4 new hydrogen fuel cell buses in 2019 in order to increase the sustainability of available public transportation.[10] Trolleybuses are also following in the tracks of trams, as they connect to the electric lines above the streets for the trams to charge their batteries. Batteries in the new trolleybuses can last up to 12 km without additional charges, and are often found connected to lines so these limits do not need to be pushed and they can solely rely on electricity.[11] Between investments on upgrading the public transportation systems, combined with efforts to lower the amount of greenhouse emissions they release, Slovakia's main public transportation system in its capital city of Bratislava continues to sustainably develop.

Public Transportation Accessibility

While transport systems have been upgrading infrastructure and vehicles to become more sustainable, accessibility within Bratislava's transportation system has also continued to expand. Researchers Richard Hluško, Richard Stanek, Pavol Ďurček, and Dagmar Kusendová from Comenius University approached this topic in their paper "Urban public transport system accessibility for different groups of residents: Case of Bratislava city." They point out that most of Slovakia is still reliant on cars for transportation, most likely because of how rural the country is, causing a dependence on automobiles for movement between villages and towns. Therefore, urban transportation systems, where they can be used, are incredibly important. However, accessibility of Bratislava's public transport systems can be sometimes challenging. The study follows the accessibility in populations of women, men, children, seniors of 60 years old and above, and low-income households in relation to the Ružinov Hospital in Bratislava. From reflecting upon populations, researchers found that only 32% of 60+ year-olds had access to a bus stop within 10 minutes of them.[12] At night this issue becomes exacerbated. 66.61% of the overall

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[7] United Nations, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," September 27, 2015, https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf.

[8] "Bratislava's New Skoda Tram on Test," *Main Spring*, September 4, 2023, https://www.mainspring.co.uk/industry-news/bratislava%E2%80%99s-new-skoda-tram-on-test/.

[9] "New Skoda Tram."

[10] Mestská hromadná doprava, "Solaris Urbino 12 Hydrogen," *Imhd.Sk Bratislava*, https://imhd.sk/ba/popis-typu-vozidla/1054/Solaris-Urbino-12-hydrogen.

[11] Mestská hromadná doprava, "SOR TNS 12," *Imhd.Sk Bratislava*, n.d., https://imhd.sk/ba/popis-typu-vozidla/1036/SOR-TNS-12.

[12] Richard Hluško et al., "Urban Public Transport System Accessibility for Different Groups of Residents: Case of

population faces this issue when night falls, as stops and transportation lines decrease.[13] This exhibits issues within line access and convenience, especially for populations that continue to face more and more mobility issues as they continue to age. In order for public transportation systems to be sustainable, more focus must be paid on how equitable they actually are. Otherwise, the Slovak society faces issues of creating green technology that no one utilizes, which further perpetuates dependence on personal vehicles.

Transportation Environmental Effects

Besides the societal impacts of accessibility concerns in Bratislava, environmental impacts of deficits in public transportation systems are evident as well. "Concentrations of selected trace elements in surface soils near crossroads in the city of Bratislava (the Slovak Republic)" focuses on pollution in the ground around urban areas resulting from roadway usage. Copper, lead, antimony, and zinc were commonly found in soil and water, all of which were traced with origins from automobiles.[14] Unfortunately, this pollution will continue to affect wildlife, and eventually these heavy metals sitting in the environment will also have an impact on the people living near them. In the local water systems, people will ingest them if they are not filtered properly from road runoff. The Research Institute of Water Management Bratislava (VUVH) reported in 2019 that out of these metals, only antimony was actively removed from drinking water provided to the city.[15] Therefore, the heavy metal pollution from transportation sectors in Bratislava may still be contaminating potable water sources without active monitoring practices. Simply because an organization does not test or filter certain heavy metals does not mean that they are not there and do not affect citizens ingesting the water. For Slovakia to move forward with SDG 11.2, part of creating more sustainable transportation systems will need to be involved in monitoring and removing heavy metal pollutants coming from the transportation sector.

Not only do these issues impact soil and water quality, greenhouse gas emissions from cars also contribute to airborne pollution. According to the Odbor Emisie a Biopalivá (OEB/Department of Emissions and Biofuels of Slovakia), "Total greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector in the last year (2021) accounted for 18% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Slovakia, which is 7 523 Gg CO2 eq."[16] Depending on the type of airborne pollutants the transportation sector is producing, some of these numbers have started to decrease. The OEB continues to report that the transportation sector in Slovakia has seen a drop in NOx emissions at 60% since 2005, and 64% since 1990 in comparison to 2021.[17] Should this promising trend continue in Slovakia, the country will remain on track to improving this target. However, other emissions like CO2, Hg, and Cu continue to rise and do not appear to reduce themselves any time soon.[18] Harmful emissions have been decreased in only some areas, demonstrating there is still an overall reliance in the transportation industry on fossil fuels.

Bratislava City," *Case Studies on Transport Policy* 16 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cstp.2024.101200.

[13] Hluško et al., "Accessibility."

[14] Edgar Hiller et al., "Concentrations of Selected Trace Elements in Surface Soils Near Crossroads in the City of Bratislava (the Slovak Republic)," *Environ Science and Pollution Research* 28 (2020): 5455–71, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11356-020-10822-z.

[15] Monika Karácsonyová, Karol Munka, and Margita Slovinská, "Drinking Water Supply in Slovakia," *Výskumný Ústav Vodného Hospodárstva Bratislava*.

[16] "Transport: Greenhouse Gas Emissionis and Air Pollutant from Transport," Odbor Emisie a Bioplalíva, https://oeab.shmu.sk/en/emissions/transport/trends.html.

[17] Odbor Emisie a Bioplalíva.

[18] Odbor Emisie a Bioplalíva.

This is not to say that nothing is being done to curb the environmental effects from transportation that Slovakia's urban areas are facing. Alongside 27 other countries, Slovakia has been placed under a Recovery and Resiliency Facility (RRF) plan by the European Commission to receive grant money that will fund disparities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. A portion of this grant money is funding sustainable transportation upgrades to Slovakia's, and many other nations', transportation usage. For instance, in 2023 Slovakia used its RRF plan grant money to buy 400 new electric and hybrid police vehicles to replace the aging cars and vans in their current fleet.[19] This is only the first wave of vehicles from this purchase, as more than 700 in total are expected in total over the next few years, accounting for only 10% of Slovakia's police vehicle lineup.[20] However, the infrastructure in Slovak urban spaces needs heavy updates to support an increase in electric vehicles. As recently as March 2025, Slovakia's Ministry of the Economy released plans to move forward with the implementation of 228 new electric vehicle charging stations across the country utilizing the money received from RRF grants.[21] While these measures are promising, sustainable transport systems will need further and more extreme projects to counteract environmental issues stemming from current transportation modes.

Bike-Share Programs

What about public transportation that does not involve direct greenhouse gas emissions from its continued usage? Bike-share programs have been rapidly appearing in cities and towns across the country as Slovakia continues to westernize. This form of transportation is much cheaper to run than buses, trams, or trolleys, and requires significantly less infrastructure, with 11 towns and cities adopting the programs as of 2019.[22] The 2021 paper "The Bike-Sharing System in Slovakia and the Impact of COVID-19 on This Shared Mobility Service in a Selected City" reports on the various mechanics of bike-sharing programs in Slovakia. Programs around the country operate with varying companies, therefore, different bike storage methods such as docking or free-floating stations can potentially impact where the customers park their bikes.[23] Trnava, a town in Western Slovakia, was the only reported community to not use either of these methods, but a geo-fencing model for their bike-share program.[24] Similar to free-floating bikes, the geo-fencing model allows bikers to have some more mobility options when traveling because this model does not require the installation of docking stations.[25] Geo-fencing differs from free-floating because the parking is slightly more limited; users must leave bikes within designated GPS-tracked areas, typically painted on the ground to prevent parking bikes in random locations, where they may

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[19] Ministerstvo Vnútra Slovenskej Republiky, "Prvé policajné autá financované z Plánu obnovy a odolnosti SR už sú v teréne" [The first police cars financed from the Slovak Republic's Recovery and Resilience Plan are already in the field], *Ministerstvo Vnútra Slovenskej Republiky*, May 2, 2023, https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=prve-policajne-auta-financovane-z-planu-obnovy-a-odolnosti-sr-uz-su-v-terene.

[20] Ministerstvo Vnútra Slovenskej Republiky, "Prvé policajné autá."

[21] Ministerstvo hospodárstva slovenskej republiky, "Projekt výstavby nabíjacích staníc pre elektromobily na diaľniciach sa posúva vpred" [The project to build charging stations for electric cars on highways is moving forward], *Ministerstvo hospodárstva slovenskej republiky*, March 5, 2025, https://www.economy.gov.sk/top/projekt-vystavby-nabijacich-stanic-pre-elektromobily-na-dialniciach-sa-posuva-vpred?csrt=14531262440061291338.

[22] Stanislav Kubaľák, Alica Kalašová, and Ambróz Hájnik, "The Bike-Sharing System in Slovakia and the Impact of COVID-19 on This Shared Mobility Service in a Selected City," *Sustainability 2021* 13, no. 6544 (2021), https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126544.

[23] Kubaľák, Kalašová, and Hájnik, "The Bike-Sharing System."

[24] Kubaľák, Kalašová, and Hájnik, "The Bike-Sharing System."

[25] Yutong Cai, Ghim Ping Ong, and Qiang Meng, "Bicycle Sharing Station Planning: From Free-Floating to Geo-Fencing," *Transportation Research Part C: Emerging Technologies* 147 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trc.2022.103990.

block areas with high foot traffic.[26] All of these provide different user experiences, along with pros and cons that affect their utilization in communities.

Barriers to Bike Shares

While the growth of the bike-share systems in Slovakia is positive, the public still faces some remaining challenges when it utilizes the share systems. Kubaľák points out that some of the main barriers for the bike-share system are cost, the age of the renter, system (docking station or free-floating), weather conditions, and seasons.

Cities in Slovakia tend to have cheap bike-share programs, the most expensive program being in Štúrovo-Ostrihom, with a cost of €2.80/two hours, and the least expensive being in Nitra, with a cost of only €1 for two hours. Piešťany does not even charge for their bike system, which is desirable for users, especially if they can find a bike; Kubaľák et al. mention that because there is no cost to the user and the bikes do not require docking stations, the number of rented bikes often exceeds the demand. This program marks a considerable difference from Bratislava's program, which faces a larger monetary barrier where patrons must pay €30 upfront as collateral for the bicycle.[27] When the bike is returned at the end of the rental period, the customers receive their €30 back, but this may be unattainable for lower income households that cannot pay the upfront charge.

Age caps within programs often limit younger users from accessing the share programs. The majority of programs have an age restriction requiring users to be at least 16-18 years of age, a limitation which can bar teenagers with jobs from using bikes to commute to work or school.[28] This could pose a problem to younger university students, a population that, according to Kubaľák, significantly relies on bike-share systems in Slovakia because these programs ease commute time to classes and campuses.

The placement of bikes also affects their utilization. The appeal of a bike-share system comes from the ability to travel longer distances outside of the regular public transportation system routes. Docking stations pose limitations on this because their location and the patron's destination do not always align. The exact data for this category was not measured within the study but was acknowledged as a potential source of hesitation for patrons using the bike-share system.

Notably, seasonal weather trends further hinder the usage of the bike-share system in Slovakia. Slovakia's national promotional campaign, Good Idea Slovakia, reports that in the wintertime, Slovakia's average temperature is -2^{o}C, however, winter weather can make temperatures typically dip toward -15^{o}C.[29] Slovakia also has a continental climate, with hot summers and cold winters, but this also means that about a third of the days every month will see rain.[30] A combination of rain and either extremely hot or cold weather could pose an issue for any user trying to interact with public bikes and easily dissuade their utilization.

Triple Bottom Line Analysis

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL), coined by American Sustainability Expert John Elkington in 1994, is a leading and established definition on what it means to follow sustainable development for businesses.[31] This approach creates a compromise between the economy, the environment, and society to create a working definition of whether a business, organization, or any given object is

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[26] Cai, Ping Ong, and Meng, "Bicycle Sharing Station."
[27] Slovnaft - Member of MOL Group, "Prices," Company, *Slovnaft Bajk*, n.d., https://slovnaftbajk.sk/en/prices.html.
[28] Kubaľák, Kalašová, and Hájnik, "The Bike-Sharing System."
[29] "About Slovakia - Geography," Government, *Good Idea Slovakia*, n.d., https://www.researchinslovakia.saia.sk/en/main/welcome/about-slovakia/geography.
[30] "About Slovakia - Geography."
[31] Andrew W Savitz, *The Triple Bottom Line: How Today's Best-Run Companies Are Achieving Econoimc, Social, and Environmental Succes—and How You Can Too*, 2nd ed. (Wiley, 2013).

considered sustainable.[32] It serves as an important roadmap for defining sustainability for everyone involved and can be applied to Slovakia's pursual of SDG Target 11.2. Therefore, how effectively does Slovakia execute transportation projects that balance economic growth with the well-being of its people and environment?

Creating a safer environment has been at the forefront of Slovakia's campaign to transition to more eco-friendly public transportation vehicles, as well as reducing the need for cars on the road. As mentioned in previous sections, the environmental impact of roadways around Bratislava remains damaging to the surrounding environment, even though some transportation emissions have been decreasing. Extending public transport access will help decrease the need for personal vehicles and further reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As RRF funds continue to build electric vehicle charging stations, more private citizens have the option to utilize a more environmentally friendly, private form of transportation.

Societally, Slovakia's public transportation vehicles have transitioned to physically become more accessible to users. Six out of seven tram lines have been updated to vehicles that can have "step-free access" for wheelchair users, families with strollers, those with carts, and any other mobility issues.[33] Physical accessibility continues to increase in new sustainable trams, but as previously mentioned, bus and tram route accessibility, especially in minority groups, leaves something to be desired. Consequently, society's access to public transportation still needs development to fulfill this pillar of the TBL.

Finally, involving the economic pillar of the TBL, updates to the public transportation system were funded by European Union and European Commission grants; therefore, Slovakia was not facing the bulk of costs on its own. Many economic issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are being counteracted with the previously mentioned RRF grants, providing the public with funds to reach EU living standards that target the three sections of the TBL. As of February 2024, the recovery and resilience plan boasts €6.4 billion in grant money entering Slovakia through projects focusing on "green, transformative, and fair projects."[34] According to this plan, "€759.3 million will be invested into sustainable transport," and part of this investment in sustainable transportation includes expanding and reforming the public transportation systems within six of Slovakia's eight regions.[35] With the continued implementation of these funds, Slovakia could see an increase in jobs to fulfill proposed projects. Potentially, the increase in sustainable transportation systems will draw businesses and people to urban Slovak spaces and further support the economy, as is seen around Europe and the rest of the world.[36]

Within the three main pillars of the Triple Bottom Line, Slovakia continues to receive aid or invest directly in each category. While there is still room for improvement within each pillar as publicly reported information lacks vital research, continued recent updates for improving each section of society show promise.

Future Prospects and Discussion

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[32] Savitz.

[33] Richard Bonde, "Step-Free Access on the Transport," *Imhd.Sk*, January 1, 2020, https://imhd.sk/ba/doc/en/18930/Step-free-Access-on-the-Transport.

[34] European Commission, "Slovakia's Recovery and Resilience Plan," February 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/economic-recovery/recovery-and-resilience-facility/country-pages/slovakias-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en#rrf-funded-projects-in-slovakia.

[35] European Commission, "Slovakia's Recovery."

[36] Andreea Matyas, "Impact of Public Transportation on European Countries' Development: A Spatial Perspective," ed. Codruța MareBabeș-Bolyai and Katarzyna Kopczewska, *Central European Economic Journal* 10, no. 57 (2023): 403–13, https://doi.org/10.2478/ceej-2023-0023.

The Slovak Republic is a small country that celebrated its 30th anniversary as an independent nation in 2023. Prior to its sovereignty, Slovakia faced the common challenges that came with being a part of the Soviet Union: lack of openness to discuss problems, lack of budget, and even lack of resources. From this unfortunate position, Slovakia managed to progress to a point within the worldwide stage that it is now the 21st most sustainable country according to the UN's rankings out of 166 countries and states that have pledged themselves to the Sustainable Development Goals.[37] This progress and achievement is not something to be underappreciated for such a small, and often overlooked, nation.

Despite updates in utilizing EU funding, the country clearly still faces issues with public transportation systems in cities, especially as cars are still a necessity for many today, and bus, trolleybus, and tram systems are not reliable during the day and at night. Suggestions for improving Slovakia's standing on SDG 11.2 could include the extension of public transportation accessibility and operational timetables where these systems currently exist, as well as the generation of access to other towns that are not already covered by currently established public transportation. These implementations could prove to be a challenge with funding, especially when considering payment of workers' wages in comparison to system users.

Bike-share programs continue to see great progress and advancements into smaller towns and are the only field where small towns across Slovakia were evaluated in research for public transportation access. A large gap in literature exists in research pertaining to small towns, which could easily be changed by various universities in Slovakia. This would allow researchers to examine the country's status better within the SDGs.

Conclusion

The United Nations have marked Slovakia for Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities as "Score moderately improving, insufficient to attain goal," with "challenges remain" covering the entire SDG 11 category.[38] After addressing growth and challenges with public transportation in cities, this report maintains fair accuracy. If target 11.2 is reflective of the rest of the targets for SDG 11, then it may be assumed that Slovakia has not fulfilled, nor is doing enough, to achieve sustainable city spaces by 2030. Altogether, Slovakia continues to progress toward fulfillment of SDG 11, Target 11.2.

[37] Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller, *Sustainable Development*.
[38] Sachs, Lafortune, and Fuller, *Sustainable Development*.

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SECTION 2

EU PRESSURES, CONFLICTS, CHALLENGES

"Navigating Rising Nationalism in Europe: Policy Recommendations for the United States"
Francesco Lanzieri, *Temple University*

[Summary] The European continent, strategically positioned between Asia, Africa, and the Americas, holds immense global economic and geopolitical significance, yet recent years have seen a surge in far-right nationalist parties in European politics, posing challenges to stability. This paper analyzes the root causes of this trend—primarily driven by issues such as immigration and economic decline—and presents three policy options for the United States in response: maintaining current policies; conducting patrols to control migration flows; and leveraging trade relations to counter hostile stances. After evaluating the costs and benefits, the paper recommends maintaining the status quo, citing the United States' significant contributions to European defense and favorable perceptions among European states, as the most viable option to safeguard strategic interests and alliances while navigating the evolving political landscape in Europe.

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Located between Asia, Africa, and the Americas, the European continent holds significant economic and geopolitical importance to the world. However, stability within Europe, or lack thereof, has consistently complicated the intrinsic benefits the European continent has to offer. As a result of the Second World War, ideologically aligned Western democracies aimed to prevent another massive war in Europe, culminating in the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Established on April 4, 1949, NATO has since brought stability to Europe through principles such as fostering cooperation between member states, providing for the common defense of its member states, and deterring violence between NATO members.[1] Through NATO, the United States military enjoys access to various military installations scattered across Europe. The North Atlantic Treaty is the cornerstone of much of America's foreign policy. It continues to play a vital role in allowing the United States to be actively involved in world conflicts and ensure the security of both the U.S. and its European allies. The North Atlantic Treaty grants the United States such benefits due to the European continent's central location to Africa and Asia.

However, American military access across Europe may come into question in the near future. In recent years, Europe has seen a rise in far-right nationalist political parties winning seats in various European state parliaments, and this trend has not slowed. In June of this year, elections for the European Parliament will take place and are expected to take a right-wing turn.[2] Undoubtedly, the United States will need to monitor the evolving European political arena and ensure its European allies will maintain the same hospitality the U.S. has enjoyed and planned around for the past decades.

In November 2023, various European states such as Hungary, Poland, Italy, Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden had at least 20% of their national parliament seats held by the main far-right party in each state. However, Hungary, Poland, and Italy have much higher percentages of right-wing parties comprising national parliaments.[3]

The ascension of right-wing nationalist political parties across European parliaments presents a critical problem for the United States: will our closest European allies maintain the

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[1] "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949," *U.S. Department of State-Office of the Historian*, Accessed April, 14, 2024, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/nato.
[2] "2024 European Election Results," Politico, June 2024, https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/european-parliament-election/.
[3] Martin Armstrong, "Where Europe's Far-Right Has Gained Ground," Statista, November 23, 2023. https://www.statista.com/chart/6852/seats-held-by-far-right-parties-in-europe/.
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hospitality the United States currently appreciates? The United States military has bases in Spain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Denmark, Ireland, Finland, Romania, and Bulgaria.[4] If the United States were to lose privileges to any of said bases, the United States would lose global power as the American sphere of influence would diminish. Moreover, the United States military would be less prepared to deal with national security, respond to threats overseas, and protect our allies abroad. However, it is necessary to understand the current political climate in Europe before options can be presented to counter rising nationalism across Europe.

As mentioned above, far-right political parties have gained a significant presence within European parliaments. However, such increases are most notable in Hungary, Poland, and Italy. In Hungary, 59% of their national parliamentary seats are held by Fidesz, the party of longtime right-wing, populist Hungarian president Viktor Orbán. While slightly lower, Poland's Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party, PiS) holds 35% of the seats in the Polish parliament. Lastly, Italy's Fratelli d'Italia (FDI) holds 30% of the seats in the Italian parliament and is led by current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni. Such statistics beg the question, where has this blip in the radar come from?

Issues such as immigration, job insecurity, and economic hardship across Europe have given rise to far-right nationalist parties. In Spain, a far-right nationalist group, Nucleo Nacional, has attracted primarily young men to their cause by speaking out against increased immigration to Europe. In their rallies, Nucleo Nacional leaders claim that Spain must maintain its culture and traditions, which originated mainly from Christianity.[5] Simultaneously, Spain is experiencing high unemployment rates, further fueling distrust in the left-wing government and granting traction to nationalist groups such as Nucleo Nacional.[6]

Similar scenes are unfolding across Europe. In France, farmers have taken to the streets to protest EU-driven environmental protection legislation, which places increased restrictions on farmers.[7] Such restrictions include scrapping tax breaks on diesel for farmers, requiring 4% of farmland to be left fallow, and requiring farmers to restore hedges on arable land as this classifies as a natural habitat. Furthermore, French farmers are angered by the European Union's decision to waive quotas and duties on Ukrainian produce, which the farmers claim leads to unfair competition within France.

While these two instances explore what is occurring in Spain and France, much of the tension between Europeans and the European Union is rooted in increased migration into Europe from the Middle East and North Africa. Since 2016, over 1.6 million migrants have arrived in Europe, and their reception by Europeans has remained lukewarm since 2016 as well.[8] A poll conducted of 18 European states in March 2024 found that every state views the fight against

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[4] Mohammed Hussein and Mohammed Haddad, "Infographic: US Military Presence Around the World." Al Jazeera, September 10, 2021, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/10/infographic-us-military-presence-around-the-world-interactive.

[5] Sue Reid, "Rise of Europe's New Far Right: From Spain to Greece, An Army of Young Nationalists is on the March, So Will They Trigger an Earthquake at the Ballot Box?" Daily Mail, April 29, 2024, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13362909/SUE-REID-Europe-new-far-Right-Spain-Greece-army-young-nationalists-ballot-box.html.

[6] Emilio Sánchez Hidalgo, "Why Does Spain Continue to Lead Europe in Unemployment?" El País, August 2, 2023. https://english.elpais.com/spain/2023-08-02/why-does-spain-continue-to-lead-europe-in-unemployment.html

[7] Gus Trompiz and Sybille de La Hamaide, "Why are Farmers Protesting in France and Other Parts of Europe?" Reuters, January 29, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/why-are-french-farmers-protesting-2024-01-29/

[8] "Migration Flow to Europe-Arrivals," International Organization for Migration, April 7, 2024 https://dtm.iom.int/europe/arrivals.

irregular immigration as a main priority.[9] In Spring 2016, a Pew Research Center survey of 10 EU countries unanimously disapproved of how the European Union handled the arrival of 850,000 arrivals in 2015, with Greece being the highest dissident at 94% disapproval.[10] In comparison, Sweden at 88%, Italy at 77%, Spain at 75%, Hungary at 72%, Poland at 71%, France at 70%, Germany at 67%, and Netherlands at 63%.[11]

Europeans are also concerned with the economic decline plaguing the continent's economy. The European economy has stagnated, mainly due to the Russia-Ukraine War. The war resulted in energy prices soaring during the winter when Europeans faced a harsh winter and needed to heat their homes.[12] However, after all of this, why should the United States and the Biden Administration take an interest in rising nationalism across Europe?

This June, the European Parliament election is anticipated to take "a sharp right turn" as far-right nationalist parties are projected to win seats in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia. Further, such right-wing parties are expected to come in second or third in an additional nine countries, making it 18 out of 27 European Union member states with nationalist parties winning seats.[13] Unlike the American political structure, most European states have parliamentary governments, often forming coalition governments to lead. Coalition governments share the ruling powers of the state, whereas, in the United States, only one party can be in the White House or have a majority in Congress. In Europe, if far-right parties perform well at the polls in their respective countries, they earn seats in parliament and, with enough seats, can be part of a coalition government. Election forecasts predict that the far-right members of Parliament will gain a majority in the European Parliament for the first time.

If such nationalist parties began to lead European politics, would they continue to extend hospitality towards the United States? The European Continent continues to be a critical contributor to the United States military. The Mediterranean Sea flows into the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Black Sea to the north, and the Red Sea to the south. The American military presence in Europe allows the United States to act with the full power of its armed forces. It can more easily launch, plan, and support military operations in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Crucially, friendly European host states grant the United States close access to the Suez Canal, the world's major economic artery, pushing through tens of millions worth of cargo per day.[14] Now, knowing why

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[9] Jorge Liboreiro and Vincenzo Genovese, "Half of Europeans Disapprove of EU Migration Policy and Demand Stronger Border Controls, Poll Shows," Euronews, March 26, 2024, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/03/26/half-of-europeans-disapprove-of-eu-migration-policy-and-demand-stronger-border-controls-po.

[10] "Europeans Disapprove of How the EU Has Handled the Refugee Issue," Pew Research Center, August 2, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/global-migration-and-demography/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/.

[11] "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015" Pew. Research Center, August 2, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/global-migration-and-demography/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/

[12] Alessia Fulvimari et al., "Economic and Distributional Effects of Higher Energy Prices on Households in the EU," European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2023), https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/49249.

[13] Kevin Cunningham et al. "A sharp right turn: A Forecast for the 2024 European Parliament Elections," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 23, 2024. https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/.

[14] Gregor Gowans, "Record Amount of Cargo Volumes Passed Through Suez Canal in 2021," Trans.info, January 4, 2022, https://trans.info/en/suez-canal-2021-269383.

nationalism gained a political foothold within European politics and understanding what the United States has to lose, policy options can be presented and primed for the president's desk.

Here, I will present three different policy options regarding how the United States could respond to the rise of far-right nationalist parties across Europe. Ironically, the first option is no policy change, and the United States continues with its current policy objectives with the European Union. Due to European attitudes towards the United States, no action is a viable option. In a poll from the spring of 2023, ten European states were polled on whether they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the United States. The poll concluded that every European state besides Hungary viewed the United States favorably.[15] As this poll is less than a year old, it is logical to assume that if far-right nationalist parties gain control over European politics, it is unlikely that said parties will move to exile the United States from their respective countries.

Moreover, European states rely on the United States military for their defense, so American military installations within European states would seemingly be a mutually beneficial agreement.[16] As Europe is closely positioned to current combat zones, it would be incredibly short-sighted to kick the United States, a NATO Ally, out of the continent. Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty asserts that if any NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, every other NATO member will consider said attack as an act of violence against all NATO members.[17] In 2023, European states collectively spent $295 billion on defense spending, significantly less than the United States defense budget of $816 billion alone. Barring any significant changes in European attitudes toward the United States and its presence in Europe, the option of "no change" seems the most realistic and actionable for both the United States and Europe.

The second option is for the United States Sixth Fleet to begin conducting patrols of known migratory paths in the Mediterranean Sea to send the migrants back to their point of origin. For this option to be logical, two instances must occur first. First, there would have to be significant discontent within Europe regarding immigration to the point where far-right nationalist groups would start calling on global institutions such as the United Nations or NATO for assistance. Second, far-right nationalist political parties would have to have already significant political power to sway the United States to such an option. However, if these two instances occur, this option would be a means to maintain the current American military infrastructure in Europe by reassuring our European allies of unwavering American support.

Logistically, American patrols of known migratory paths within the Mediterranean Sea would be feasible as Italy hosts crucial American military installations. The United States Sixth Fleet is based in Naples, Italy, and is in close proximity to Sicily. Most of the migrants in Italy arrived through the Port of Pozzallo, at the southernmost point of Sicily.[18] Additionally, Naval Air

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[15] Richard Wike et al., "Overall Opinion of the U.S.," Pew Research Center, June 27, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/06/27/overall-opinion-of-the-u-s/.

[16] Jeremy Shapiro, "Why America? "The US Role in European Defense and the European Mind," Panthéon Sorbonne-University of Paris, March 18, 2019, https://chairestrategique.pantheonsorbonne.fr/themes/2019/why-america-us-role-european-defense-and-european-mind.

[17] "Collective Defense and Article 5," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm#:~:text=Article%205%20provides%20that%20if,to%20assist%20the%20Ally%20attacked.

[18] Lorenzo Macchi, "Main Ports Where Immigrants Arrived in Italy in 2018," Statista, August 30, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/624852/ports-affected-by-immigrant-landings-italy/#:~:text=Main%20ports%20where%20immigrants%20arrived%202018&text=From%20January%20to%20December%202018,thousand%20migrants%20landed%20in%20Italy.

Station Sigonella, located outside of Catania, Sicily, would be able to offer air support to assist in surveilling the Mediterranean for migrant vessels.[19]

However, this second option would require significant cooperation between the various European Union member states that border the Mediterranean Sea. Each state has its own territorial waters and maritime jurisdiction. Any American naval operations in the Mediterranean would require coordination with the various states that have maritime jurisdiction before any military action could be taken. Overall, option two is a "medium level" response to rising nationalism across Europe.

The third policy option is removing select European states from the Normal Trade Relations Schedule. Normal Trade Relations (NTR), or Most Favored Nation (MFN) status, is a principle of global trade in which the United States grants trade advantages to receiving nations. Such benefits include low tariffs, equal access to the American consumer market, integration into global supply chains, and trade stability. To clarify, this third and final option would be reserved for European governments led by far-right nationalist political parties that actively take a "hostile stance towards" the United States. Possible "hostile stances" include but are not limited to calling for the removal of U.S. troops or revoking American privileges over military installations. This policy option would give the United States considerable leverage as the economies of Europe and the United States are highly interconnected. However, such a course of action is associated with many risks. Removing European states from the NTR schedule may elicit retaliatory responses toward the United States. Ultimately, this could result in increased trade barriers, reduced market access, the rising cost of goods, and adverse market effects stemming from economic uncertainty.

Moreover, removing European states from the NTR schedule would likely strain the diplomatic relations between the U.S. and European states. As mentioned previously, the European continent is centrally located and within reach of many points of American geopolitical interest. Souring relations with critical European allies would present a significant blow to the U.S. military capabilities, lessen the quality of the U.S. as an ally, and limit the American sphere of influence in regions where Russia and China could potentially compete. Overall, this is the worst-case scenario response toward hostile far-right nationalist governments within Europe. The third policy option holds significant bargaining leverage for the United States but comes with incredibly high risk.

Above, three policy recommendations have been presented for consideration towards countering the risks associated with rising nationalism across European governments. The first policy option calls for no new or altered foreign policy initiatives toward European states. The first option draws on polling data, which concludes almost all European states hold a favorable view of the United States. Coupled with the disparity in defense spending between the United States and Europe, it is more than likely the United States would not have to worry about far-right nationalist parties gaining seats in the European Parliament or the individual parliaments of European states due to the leverage the U.S. enjoys over the European Union.

The second policy option calls for American naval operations in the Mediterranean Sea aimed at reducing the flow of migrants into European states, primarily through Italy. Option two is highly feasible logistically based on preexisting military installations throughout Italy. However, as many states hold maritime jurisdiction within the Mediterranean Sea, option two becomes clouded by the diplomatic coordination required to grant the United States Sixth Fleet the authority to patrol known migratory routes within the Mediterranean Sea.

The third option represents a worst-case scenario if the United States ultimately has to deal with hostile European states. Option three intends to levy the interdependence between the

[19] "NAS Sigonella," United States Navy, https://cnreurafcent.cnic.navy.mil/Installations/NAS-Sigonella/About/.

economies of the United States and Europe to maintain the United States' access to current military installations across Europe, a critical component of U.S. foreign policy objectives. However, such a course of action would more than likely inflame relations with the European states and result in a net loss for the United States' relationship with Europe.

After weighing the costs and benefits of each policy option, I formally recommend policy option one. The United States will unlikely face hostility from its European allies regarding military installations and other related privileges due to its significant contributions to Europe's military defense capabilities. The United States remains one of the main contributors to NATO, widely outspending virtually every European state.[20] Furthermore, European states are in close proximity to various military conflicts, most notably, the Russia-Ukraine War, thus making collective defense through NATO even more of a luxury for European states. Additionally, policy option one does not require additional funding or new diplomatic relations. Keeping normal relations with Europe will be the best counter to far-right nationalist political parties that may come to power. Lastly, policy option one is significantly less likely to deteriorate relations with European states and would maintain close ties with preexisting European allies, allowing the United States to achieve its foreign policy goals of the present and the future.

[20] Hanne Cokelaere, "NATO: Who Are the Biggest Defense Spenders in Europe?" Politico, February 13, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-nato-spending-ukraine-war-donald-trump/.

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"Why Did the British Government Decide to Hold the Brexit Referendum? The Pressures and Personalities Behind the Decision"

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Introduction

Brexit, the now household portmanteau of British exit, seems like a topic of research that has been beaten to death, resurrected, and beaten to death again. Surely, such a simple question as "Why did the British Government Decide to Hold the Brexit Referendum?" should have a straightforward answer without any room for nuance. However, while many look at the British parliamentary system as a whole when discussing this question, sometimes for better or for worse, the final nail in the coffin will be hammered in by one man, who in this case is former British prime minister, David Cameron. Brexit was and continues to be one of the most divisive events in contemporary British politics, and David Cameron seems to bear the brunt of the blame, even if his individual decisions and policies may not have been the sole deciding factors. Nonetheless, his name has proven to be synonymous with Brexit, and vice versa. Ironically so, given that Cameron stated in his memoir that he was looking forward to "five relatively Europe-free years."

David Cameron and the Referendum

Knowing what Cameron envisioned for his time at 10 Downing Street, how did we get here? Brexit was created out of the idea of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. At a glance, the future of the United Kingdom as a non-EU member state seems promising, not having to be governed by an additional Court of Justice anymore, different trade relationships with both member and non-EU member states, and sole control of the UK's monetary policies and borders, and national sovereignty. Yet, disentanglement and separation have not been easy to navigate because of how integrated the United Kingdom and the European Union have historically been. Despite the difficulties that some may have predicted, the government still held and honored a referendum. Three hypotheses to consider regarding the question of why the British government, but more specifically the prime minister, David Cameron decided to hold the referendum, all revolve around three key factors and how they all in some way influenced Cameron to hold the referendum, whether that be out of peer pressure or the need for respect from the members of his own party, the fear and pressure brought on by a fast-growing newly establishing political juggernaut that was the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), or David Cameron's personality and the perceptions of him based on the relatively palatable yet rather moderate persona he cultivated for himself.

Infighting Under Cameron's Leadership

The Conservative and Labour parties are considered to be the two main political parties in the UK, with both taking up a majority of the seats in the British Parliament– the Liberal Democrats trailing behind in terms of relevance and seat numbers at a far third place—and a majority of prime ministers have come from either of the two parties. However, there are bound to be deep-seated core differences in values, even when MPs can appear united under one party's name. The Conservative party, especially under David Cameron's leadership and the decade or so leading up to the now infamous referendum was stacked with notable voices of both Euroscepticism and those who were pro-European Union, or at least were less against it than their "hard Eurosceptic" fellow party members. Euroscepticism and the fact that it could be looked at as a spectrum, rather than something staunchly black or white, allowed for pluralism within the Conservative party, as was evident under Margret Thatcher, who was famously in support of the European Union, and the UK's membership in it.[1] Yet, this coexistence seemed to reach a tipping point when the 2010

[1] Alma-Pierre Bonnet, "From 'Compassionate Conservatism' Champion to Thatcher 2.0: Storytelling, Ethos

general election resulted in a hung Parliament, and no party received an overwhelming majority vote in the House of Commons. A subsequent coalition agreement was reached between the heads of the Conservative and Liberal Democratic parties, David Cameron and Nick Clegg. This led to even further division of the Conservative Party, with many members expressing disdain or worry toward the coalition. Staunch Eurosceptics and some older party members had the fear that the coalition would muddle or water down Conservative sentiments instead of reaching compromise that would appease both parties[2] or that the Liberal Democrat influence would lead to a radicalization of the Conservative Party at large. Cameron himself felt that many of his fellow party members "would've preferred a minority government, opposition—anything but an alliance with what they saw as the sandal-wearing, tofu-eating brigade."[3]

This tension within the Conservative Party eventually came to a head in 2012, during which Member of Parliament John Barron drafted a petition that was signed by a hundred other MPs, essentially forcing David Cameron to promise in writing that a referendum regarding the UK's membership status of the EU would be held in 2015.[4] This pressure from inside his own party was placed on Cameron after the successful ratification of the Lisbon Treaty during the last month of 2009, with the treaty's primary goals being to improve the efficient functioning of the EU and to grant the EU full legal personality. By granting the EU full legal personality, the European Union will present itself further as an even greater united front because the EU was then allowed to sign international treaties and join international organizations of their own free will. Member states would also only sign agreements in accordance with EU law. The morale and faith in the leader of the Conservative Party post-Lisbon Treaty was low, especially for the harder Eurosceptic members after Cameron backtracked on his initial "cast-iron guarantee" for an eventual referendum, with the now-former Conservative Party leader stating, "We cannot hold a referendum and magically make those posts—or the Lisbon treaty itself—disappear, any more than we could hold a referendum to stop the sun rising in the morning."[5] These flipflopping decisions on Cameron's part, the already divided stance on Cameron's politics within the party, and the growing restlessness of Conservative Eurosceptics in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty that amended foundational bases of the European Union's structure and capabilities, subsequently arming the EU with more agency and decision-making power; all could have very likely contributed to why a referendum was held. Reflecting on his time in politics in his memoir *For the Record*, he noted that some members of parliament thought it was just Cameron's own personal shortcomings that contributed to the various issues happening both inside and outside of the Conservative party, whereas Cameron held the belief that the party should operate as a "we" and present as a unified front to the rest of Parliament. Conflicts like these meant that Cameron rarely felt secure as a leader, as was mentioned in his memoir, and he accepted that he did not do enough to manage the rift between the leadership and backbenchers.

Building and the Evolution of Tory leadership (2005–2022)," *Observatoire de la Société Britannique* 31 (2024): 33–53, https://journals.openedition.org/osb/6210.

[2] Richard Hayton, "Brexit and the Conservative Party," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Brexit* (Routledge, 2018), 4.

[3] David Cameron, *For the Record* (William Collins, 2019), 237.

[4] Patrick Law, "Why and How Did David Cameron Decide to Hold an EU Referendum?" *The Independent,* November 29, 2021, https://www.independent.co.uk/independentpremium/longreads/why-david-cameron-eu-referendum-b1955015.html.

[5] Deborah Summers, "David Cameron Admits Lisbon Treaty Referendum Campaign Is Over" *The Guardian*, November 4, 2009, www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/nov/04/david-cameronreferendum-campaign-over.

Alternatively, those close to Cameron could disprove speculation that a significant catalyst that allowed for the referendum to be held is that David Cameron eventually succumbed to the intense pressure and infighting already present in the Conservative party. Preexisting tensions and interparty divides were just exasperated under Cameron's rise to party leader and merging with the Liberal Democratic party. George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer and political advisor to David Cameron during his time as prime minister, was opposed to holding a referendum out of fear that it would prove to divide the party further rather than uniting Conservatives.

Therefore, he advised Cameron to adopt something more akin to an avoidance strategy.[6] Notably, Osborne cautioned that holding a referendum during the earlier stages of the idea being on Cameron's agenda as early as 2012 would be unwise because Britain was recovering from a significant financial crisis, at least the most significant seen in recent history. Further expanding on Osborne's strategy, David Cameron seemed largely unconcerned with confronting the harder Eurosceptics in his party regarding their views on the EU, placing a greater emphasis on party-wide unity rather than needless confrontation and division.

Yet not everyone thought of this advice as being nuanced and pragmatic, but more so letting Cameron stave off the inevitable. In "Why and How Did David Cameron Decide to Hold an EU Referendum?" Patrick Law states that Kate Fall, who served as David Cameron's Chief of Staff thought it to be a serious error rather than a pragmatic tactful decision, and to go through with this advised course of action seemed to further fan the flames rather than diffuse tensions as it was planned to do. She felt that it became up to David Cameron to "feed the crocodiles" or essentially.[7] Here, however, Cameron disputes this claim, stating his awareness of people's speculations that his call for a referendum was employed as a tactic of appeasement for the more aggressive Conservative MPs:

> One of the arguments made against having a referendum is that it was all about managing the parliamentary party…In a parliamentary democracy, the leader of a parliamentary group has to pay attention to the views of that group. And that group was pressing for a referendum. So, holding the EU referendum was not a rejection of parliamentary democracy, it arose out of it.[8]

Instead of framing it as a moment of weakness for him, this quote paints the decision to hold a referendum as not only a challenging one, but one that was made deliberately and in line with the core of parliamentary democracy.

UKIP and the New Right Wing

When asking why the British government held the Brexit referendum, the attention shifts onto UKIP, particularly, on the new dynamics between them and the Conservatives. Whenever Brexit is mentioned, the political parties that seem to be most synonymous with this period in recent British political history were, of course, the majority party at the time, the Conservative Party led by David Cameron, and surprisingly, the Labour Party does not come second in terms of relevance. Instead, the other most mentioned party was UKIP, the United Kingdom Independence Party, a true underdog story, swooping in from the depths of the right-wing, armed with catchy slogans and led by the ever polarizing yet charismatic Nigel Farage.

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[6] Law, "David Cameron."
[7] Law, "David Cameron."
[8] Cameron, *For the Record*, 406.

UKIP, originally having been called the Anti-Federalist League, was founded in 1991 under heavy Euroscepticism and made itself known as a single-issue party. However, even after changing the party's name in 1993, growth was minuscule and it looked like UKIP did not stand a chance against the two main parties dominating Parliament, the Conservatives and Labour. The tides seemed to change however in 2006, under the new leadership of Nigel Farage, who broadened the party's breadth of issues focused on, largely pandering to white middle and working-class Brits—coincidentally, also the target Conservative voters—with promises to quell their fears and secure their jobs in the wake of increased rates of immigration to the UK. It would also be remiss to discuss the rise of UKIP without touching on populism, a concept defined as follows by Cas Mudde, "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the 'pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the 'volonté générale' (general will) of the people," differentiating the particularities and intricacies of right-wing populism as "with right-wing populism more particularly focusing on immigration and national sovereignty, an exclusionary version of nationalism in cultural terms."[9]

During its rise to relevance in the 2010s, which led to subsequent growth in support during the local elections in 2013, the 2014 European parliamentary elections, and the 2015 general elections, UKIP presented itself as a party for the common people, for those who felt tired or disillusioned by the Conservative/Labour divides,[10] painting a picture of an EU-free Britain with a stable economy fueled by jobs secured for and kept by rightful British citizens. UKIP took the "us versus them" narrative early on in their branding and framed it more as "UKIP and the common Brit versus the Conservative Party" which would prove to bode well during the years leading up to the 2016 referendum, and during the campaign when Farage situated himself and UKIP collectively as Leave supporters and endorsed Leave.EU.

However, when attributing the rise of UKIP and right-wing populism to being one of the main driving forces as to why the referendum was decided to be held, understanding the timeline was crucial. A potential reason why UKIP may not be considered a driving factor in the British government deciding to hold the 2016 referendum, was simply because of Cameron's thinking of holding a referendum precede UKIP's surge in relevance in the British political sphere by years. While writing his reflective memoir, *For the Record*, Cameron unearthed tapes of himself he recorded seemingly in hopes of settling any questions or claims pointing to the why behind the Brexit referendum in no uncertain terms:

> 'At some stage altering Britain's relationship with the European Union in some regards and then putting it to a referendum I think would be a good Conservative policy for the next Parliament.' So there it is. As early as January 2012 I was thinking that this would be the only way to change things. Long before the UKIP threat. Long before immigration started to rise. Two years before the European election and three before the general election. Anyone who claims we were bounced, or didn't give the strategy enough forethought, has their riposte right there.[11]

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[9] Karine Tournier-Sol, and Marie Gayte, *The Faces of Contemporary Populism in Western Europe and the US*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 2.

[10] Pol Morillas. "Setting the Brexit Agenda: Populism and UKIP in the United Kingdom." *Populism in Europe: From Symptom to Alternative? CIDOB* 1, no. 13 (2017). www.cidob.org/en/publications/setting-brexit-agenda-populism-and-ukip-united-kingdom.

[11] Cameron, *For the Record*, 339–340.

As previously mentioned, Cameron went back on what was referred to as his "cast-iron guarantee" to hold a referendum concerning the UK's future as a member state of the European Union, which he spoke on for UK news publication *The Sun*, "Today, I will give this cast-iron guarantee: If I become PM, a Conservative government will hold a referendum on any EU treaty that emerges from these negotiations. No treaty should be ratified without consulting the British people in a referendum."[12] At this time, when Cameron made the statement to *The Sun* and again when the Lisbon Treaty was ratified two years later, UKIP's popularity was not enough of a significant threat to make it onto Cameron's radar. Not noticing any out-of-the-ordinary popularity trends outside of the main already dominating political parties, it would be difficult to predict that UKIP would have its infamous rise just before the era of Brexit, then the subsequent and fairly rapid demise of the party into something even further right-wing post-Brexit. Additionally, at the time when Cameron was first entertaining the idea of a referendum, UKIP was not focusing on the EU and whether Britain should or would Remain or Leave, nor was this issue a significant portion of UKIP's party manifesto. Instead, UKIP was selling the party as something more niche, advertising that their main platform as a single-issue party was immigration.

According to Andrew Cooper, a pollster for David Cameron, UKIP surprisingly was on his radar, more notably since the party's initial surge in popularity during the 2013 local elections. Because of UKIP's steady gaining of traction, it seemed that this would make pressure for a referendum inevitable, so Cooper stated that Cameron felt he needed to get ahead of UKIP and announce a referendum on his own terms,[13] whether or not that grab for control was just a face for Cameron to put on for the British public or an actual pragmatic decision remains unclear. However, a real argument could be made for David Cameron dismissing UKIP's relevance and electoral prospects all too quickly. During what Nigel Farage called an earthquake —UKIP winning twenty-four seats in Parliament during the May 2014 election—Cameron later brushed off in his memoir as being something more akin to a tremor. The former prime minister also had some choice descriptors of UKIP party members, that even today follow him as a painful reminder of what he and Remain lost, "It was a mistake of mine to refer to UKIP as 'fruitcakes, loonies, and closet racists' in 2006—not because it was not true of some of its members, but because saying so alienated those UKIP supporters we were trying to get back."[14] He goes on to describe Farage, who many would consider Cameron's main political opponent, as nothing short of a hypocrite, one with charisma, but a hypocrite nonetheless, "A man who preaches anti-politics but who has himself been a politician for twenty years…Someone who bemoaned European immigration, but was married to a German, and lambasted an EU gravy train he'd been riding for years."[15] These jabs at both UKIP at large and Farage illustrate just how unconcerned Cameron seemed to be, perhaps to his detriment.

Leader Psychology of David Cameron

As a politician, David Cameron was a divisive figure, with some more traditional Conservatives giving him labels such as "compassionate conservative" or being a "soft

[12] Deborah Summers, "David Cameron Admits Lisbon Treaty Referendum Campaign Is Over" *The Guardian*, November 4, 2009, www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/nov/04/david-cameronreferendum-campaign-over.
[13] Law, "David Cameron."
[14] Cameron, *For the Record*, 512.
[15] Cameron, *For the Record*, 512.

Eurosceptic" to serve as digs at either his progressive views, or fence-sitting tendencies when it came to endorsing Euroscepticism, in contrast to party members who labelled themselves staunchly for or against the UK's involvement with the European Union. These labels typically came with negative connotations, at the very least that is how it was perceived by many members of his own party who disliked Cameron for a number of reasons. The label of Cameron being a "compassionate conservative" grew with him, originating at the start of his career in the early nineties, painting him as something of a bleeding heart for such taboo topics as same-sex marriage. Critics in the British press and public alike of Cameron modernizing the conservative party theorized that his stances were merely a "paint job" to appeal to a wider range of voters with more progressive concerns. Cameron scorned the ideas of the press and his own party that his more modern and compassionate conservatism, or slogans like "Vote blue, go green" were just empty words without any intent to back them. Doubling down on this in his memoir, he noted that he was always strongly motivated by reform, even if it seemed more idealistic than plausible. The aspect of Cameron's personality highlighted more frequently in the press and other think pieces on him is his seemingly insatiable appetite for taking part in political gambles and risks. This is exhibited most notably, in another quote from his recorded tapes in reference to reform and the potential dangers holding a referendum could do to the long-standing UK-EU relationship, "The risks of playing with fire are now safer than sitting and watching the fire burn."[16] Was this risky and almost Icarian thought process potentially a contributor to David Cameron's later seen failure as one of the louder voices of the Remain campaign?

While older or more seasoned voices of the Conservative party and hard Euroscepticism may have made Cameron feel small and insecure in his position at times, others believe that Cameron exuded self-confidence and assuredness. Even in the face of failure, he reflects on his decision to hold a referendum with a clear sense of righteousness, "But I made the pledge because I genuinely believed it was the right thing for Britain. It was right to try and get a better deal for us in Europe. It was right for us to have our say on that deal, and on our membership more broadly."[17] Cameron's background before politics was in media, eventually becoming the head of communications at Carlton TV, which could be argued was to his advantage and that indirect media training he received just from being surrounded by it on a day-to-day basis primed him with the ability to appear calm, pragmatic, and self-confident even at the most uncertain of times, which the referendum campaign would surely put to the test.[18] To further expand on Cameron's "pragmatic" nature, many counterclaims of the idea that Cameron was unprepared or otherwise taken by surprise, center around the fact that Cameron seemed to already be one or two steps ahead. Examples of this pragmatism include choosing an avoidance strategy to not further fan the flames of a restless Conservative party looking for answers and action, and preeminently anticipating UKIP's rise in popularity to get ahead and announce the referendum on his terms rather than Farage's.

Since David Cameron was so concerned with his public-facing image, it could be argued that appearing poised and pragmatic came at the cost of holding tight to his political beliefs or values in order to placate extremists on either end of the right-left spectrum, or to just generally appeal to the masses. The label of David Cameron being called a "soft Eurosceptic" comes from the idea that he is in the school of thought that is somewhat critical of the European Union and that

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[16] Cameron, *For the Record*, 413.

[17] Cameron, *For the Record*, 400.

[18] David Seawright, "'Cameron 2010': An Exemplification of Personality-Based Campaigning." *Journal of Political Marketing* 12, no. 2–3 (2013): 167.

some areas of the constitution and other foundational texts could use some revision as the EU and its member states have changed with time, but is not opposed to having a European Union or Britain being a member state, albeit with some reforms, but Cameron is also by no means a staunch separatist. This softer stance could be seen by many political actors on either side of the debate as nothing more than fence-sitting. In contrast, Cameron notes in his memoir that while he was given the "soft Eurosceptic" label by many, he understood the points of the current EU membership terms that more staunch Eurosceptics were frustrated with, and even to an extent, shared them, "And far from holding the views of Eurosceptics in disdain, I shared a lot of their dissatisfaction. The EU had become too big and too bossy… I knew we were better staying in: what happened in the EU still affected us, whether we were in or out; better that we were at the table, having our say."[19]

Additionally, as mentioned previously, Cameron seemed unpopular with some of his fellow Conservative party members from the start because of his tolerant views on divisive topics like same-sex marriage or multiculturalism, which gave him the label of being a "compassionate conservative" and those more progressive beliefs or modernist ideals that made Cameron unpopular could also paint him as trying to stamp out long-standing Conservative party ideologies in favor of pandering to different previously untapped demographics of voters who might look at the Conservative party in a new light with someone like Cameron at the helm.

As for David Cameron's decision from the perspective of foreign policy analysis, specifically with the intention of delving into leader psychology, the decision to hold the EU referendum was not taken lightly, nor is there only one singular causal factor at play. In clinical psychology, most practitioners recognize the causes behind psychological abnormalities or disorders to be multidimensional and dynamic, rather than one static factor that never changes. The same could be said for David Cameron and the Brexit referendum. Ideally, Cameron would not have felt pressure seemingly from all sides to call a referendum so he could stand soundly in a more concrete Remain or Leave position from the beginning, rather than promising a referendum, going back on said promise, and only calling for one with finality when threatened either by his own louder, more concrete positioned constituents or by a relatively new-to-the-game political party led by a man who appears to have just as much charisma and media training as Cameron. He writes near the end of *For the Record*, "There is no scenario in which the British public—and the Conservative Party—would accept anything other than a prime minister committed to carrying out the verdict of the referendum result."[20] Cameron's stepping down according to his accounts was largely due to feelings of failure and inadequacy to lead Britain during a complex transitional period into something he had ultimately vehemently campaigned against. Upon reflection, all of these hypotheses likely collectively contributed to the decision to hold a referendum, just as much in the way that all of these factors likely took a toll on David Cameron for the worse and contributed to his subsequent resignation almost immediately.

[19] Cameron, *For the Record*, 408.
[20] Cameron, *For the Record*, 680.

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"Minority Politics in Slovakia and Hungary: Historical Roots and Contemporary Challenges"

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Introduction

In hegemonic nation states, minorities can provide a wavering form of culture that provides a contrast to that of the dominant group, be it through religion, cuisine, clothing, music, dance, or language. Minorities can be recognized as such dating from legacies of past migration, such as the Lutheran Slovaks who traveled south to the Vojvodina region of modern-day Serbia, or from shifting borders as was the case for ethnic Germans in South Tyrol who found themselves in Italy following the end of World War I. From a theoretical perspective, the nation state combines territory, state, and the collective consciousness of a nation together, and it can often be the result of nationalism. However, most nation states are ever truly a state of one particular nation, yet they possess the dominant culture, the majority, and a smaller, sometimes non-conforming and separate culture or ethnic group which constitutes the minority.[1] In many cases, a desire for homogeneity can lead to conflict.

The phenomenon of ethnic minorities within new nation-states was commonplace in a post-Habsburg Europe, on a continent that had been ravaged by war for four years and led to the creation of new, sovereign states such as Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland. A notable example of minorities in new nation state was the large number of ethnic Hungarians within the new Czechoslovak state as well as in Romania and Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the formation of new states also saw the isolation of groups who were now essentially removed from countries that shared their native language and culture, an example of this being ethnic Germans in Hungary and Romania who were no longer within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This paper seeks to examine how historical events and policies have shaped the current political landscape of minority politics in Slovakia and Hungary through the use of case studies supported by historical research, census data, and election results.

Historical Turmoil

Prior to the onset of World War I, both the Austrian and Hungarian crowns united a plethora of ethnic groups with the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 (*Ausgleich*/*Kiegyezés*) and introduced the dual monarchy; the Emperor of Austria was also the King of Hungary.
Austrian Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, Poles, Ruthenians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, and Italians were united under the crowns. The decision was made to appease ethnic nationalists but also as a measure to keep this pluralist state intact.[2]

[1] Erika Harris, "Moving Politics Beyond the State: The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia," *Perspectives*, no. 28 (2007): 43.

[2] Katrina Witt, "The Politics of Managing Pluralism, Austria-Hungary 1867-1918," *Constellations* 1, no. 1 (2009): 82.



Figure 1. The ethnic groups of Austria-Hungary in 1910 according to *Distribution of Races in Austria-Hungary*[3]

The Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen alone—also referred to as Transleithania— was the Hungarian part of the empire that spanned across some of the most ethnically and religiously diverse regions of Europe. Data from 1890 reports the population as 15 million with 48.6% of inhabitants speaking Hungarian as a native language, 17.1% Romanian, 13.1% German, and 12.5% Slovak with the remainder consisting of Croatian, Serbian, and Ruthenian/Ukrainian speakers. Meanwhile, religious affiliation was dominated by Roman Catholicism at 47.8% of the population, Calvinism at 14.6%, and smaller numbers of Lutherans, Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Jews.[4]

Leading up to World War I, various ethnic divisions and policies were challenging the Dual Monarchy. Specifically in Bosnia, which had been annexed in 1908, and in neighboring Serbia. Austro-Hungarian and Serbian relations were tense, and nationalism was on the rise. There were even discussions about creating a "Triple Monarchy" to better include the southern Slavs into the Austrian and Hungarian state. The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the heir to the throne, by Serbian nationalists in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 prompted a declaration of war on Serbia and initiated a causal chain that would forever change the course of world history and politics.[5] Such events further supported the notion that Austria-Hungary was a "prison of nations" where national minorities were denied the right to self-determination. Policies of Magyarization

[3] Note: The city of Bratislava is incorrect; the Slovak name at the time was Prešporok, but the city was most commonly referred to by the German name of Pressburg or the Hungarian name of Pozsony, reflecting the prominent German and Hungarian majorities and the small Slovak minority in the city.

[4] Balázs A. Szelényi, "From Minority to Übermensch: The Social Roots of Ethnic Conflict in the German Diaspora of Hungary, Romania and Slovakia," *Past & Present*, no. 196 (2007): 222.

[5] Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2011), 163–164.

under the Hungarian crown provide substance for this claim.[6] Eventually, the end of the war and the subsequent treaties sought to change this perceived injustice.

Changing Borders

The dissolution of Austria-Hungary was largely based on the division of ethnicities, yet not entirely. The Treaty of Trianon was the treaty signed with Hungary on June 4, 1920, and as a result, Hungary lost approximately two-thirds of its land and a large number of ethnic Hungarians who were now living in Romania, Yugoslavia, or in the newly formed Czechoslovakia. Woodrow Wilson and his Fourteen Points, especially that of national self-determination, was applied in a manner that stirred discontent and alienated ethic groups such as Austrian Germans and Hungarians.[7] After the idea of a German and Austrian unification was quashed, Austrians requested land in western Hungary due to the presence of German speakers there and this, the modern-day Burgenland, was granted. However, when Sudeten Germans in the Czech borderlands expressed desire to join Germany, their request was denied. In Romania, two million Hungarian Székelys in Transylvania became part of the Kingdom of Romania.[8] From these examples, it is clear how the idea of self-determination was not applied equally, thus stirring resentment in the time after the Great War.

Case Study – Ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia

Hungarians residing in Slovakia can be traced back nearly a thousand years, when through all that time the present-day territory of the Slovak Republic was that of Upper Hungary, or *Felvidék*, and belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary until the formation of Czechoslovakia. Remnants of this legacy continue to the present as large numbers of Hungarians still reside in the south of Slovakia in cities and towns such as Dunajská Streda, Galanta, Nové Zamky, Šamorín, and Štúrovo (*Dunaszerdahely*, *Galánta*, *Érsekújvár*, *Somorja*, and *Párkány* respectively). It is estimated that there were just under 600,000 Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia before the start of World War II, and, beginning in 1943, President Edvard Beneš of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile had started to plan for Hungarian and German expulsions. He wanted to expel 90% of the Hungarians, at this point approximately 600,000 people[9] and believed that the expulsion of Germans from Hungary would allow enough space for the resettlement of the Hungarians from Slovakia.[10] Although this was originally supported by the Allies, their support changed by the end of the war in the wake of the violent German expulsions in the Sudetenland. Unlike the fate of ethnic Germans across Europe, the vast majority of ethnic Hungarians were able to remain in Slovakia following World War II and the Beneš decrees, or they were only expelled for a short time. With the Sudetenland in need of labor, some Hungarians were resettled there.

The 1950 Czechoslovak census reported Hungarians as being 10.3% of the total population, which we can be calculated as approximately 354,500 people belonging to the ethnic Hungarian minority. Census data from 1980 gives a number of 559,490 or 11.2% of the population,

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[6] Gary B. Cohen, "Our Laws, Our Taxes, and Our Administration: Citizenship in Imperial Austria," in *Shatterzone of Empires* (Indiana University Press, 2011), 103.

[7] Johnson, *Central Europe*, 181.

[8] Johnson, *Central Europe*, 182–184.

[9] The number of ethnic Hungarians had increased due to the Vienna Awards in which Hungary received previously lost territory from the Treaty of Trianon.

[10] Ágnes Tóth, *Telepítések Magyarországon 1945–1948 között. A németek kitelepítésé, a belső népmozgások és a szlovák-magyar lakosságcsere összefüggései* [Resettlements in Hungary Between 1945 and 1948: the Expulsion of the Germans, Population Movements, and Context Behind Slovak-Hungarian Population Exchanges], (Bács-Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára, Kecskemét, 1993), 153.

and census data from 1991 reports 567,296 ethnic Hungarians or 10.8% of the Slovak population.[11] Tensions between the Slovak and Hungarian populations arose following the collapse of socialism in Czechoslovakia and even more so following the so-called Velvet Divorce which saw the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic separate officially on January 1, 1993.

Hungarians felt as though they were not being treated fairly by the Czechoslovak and, subsequently, by its successor Slovak state, that they as a minority hardly had the privileges and comforts of other European minority groups.[12] Hungarians argued that their historic Felvidék had been turned into a Slovak nation-state with battles over language, street names, surnames, education, and the like all too common.[13] This struggle speaks to the larger debates about minorities and assimilation, since a solution needs to have both a degree of autonomy yet also a degree of integration and civil participation.[14]

A distinguishing mark of Slovakia's democracy is that its Hungarian party, the Hungarian Alliance [Maďarská Aliancia/Magyar Szövetség] was a dominant political party for much of the late 1990s and early 2000s, having been both part of the governing coalition and in the opposition.[15] The party was also notable for rejecting Slovakia's 1999 Minority Language Law, which granted protection for minority language usage in public institutions as they believed it to not be expansive enough.[16] A 2009 amendment quickly became very controversial as it essentially made the Slovak language preferential to any other, and Hungarians viewed it as targeted, but parts of the amendment were repealed in 2011.

A recent and notable instance of Slovak-Hungarian tension occurred when Hungary passed changes to the Hungarian Citizenship Act in 2010. The primary purpose was to offer citizenship to ethnic Hungarians outside of Hungary's borders. For many applicants it would mean dual nationality.[17] As a response to this legislation, Slovakia amended the Slovak Citizenship Act, which now stated that acquiring another citizenship would result in the loss of Slovak citizenship, and this was viewed as directly denying dual nationality to the country's ethnic Hungarian population. The 2010 amendment clarified dual nationality in Slovakia as that which is only to be obtained through birth or marriage.[18]

The Hungarian Alliance last won seats in the unicameral parliament, the National Council of Slovakia [Národná rada Slovenskej republiky], in the 2006 elections where they were in the opposition with 11.68% of the vote. Vote share has been decreasing throughout the 2010s with Alliance receiving just 4.39% or 130,183 votes in the 2023 elections. A newer Hungarian minority party known as the Hungarian Forum [Maďarské fórum/Magyar Fórum] was also on the ballot and received 0.12% or 3,486 votes.[19]

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[11] "Demografické údaje zo sčítaní na Slovensku" [Demographic Data from the Slovak Census], Infostat, accessed June 17, 2025. http://sodb.infostat.sk/sodb/eng/1848-2001/tab.III.2-2B_en.html.
[12] Peter Procházka, "The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia and the Autonomy Issue," *Medzinárodné otázky* 1, no. 3 (1992): 41–42.
[13] Miroslav Kusý, "The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia Under the Conditions of the Slovak Nation State," *Perspectives*, no. 6/7 (1996): 63.
[14] Procházka, "The Hungarian Minority," 43.
[15] Harris, "Moving Politics," 49.
[16] Harris, "Moving Politics," 51.
[17] Mónika Ganczer, "International Law and Dual Nationality of Hungarians Living Outside the Borders," *Acta Juridica Hungarica* 53, no. 4 (2012): 317–318.
[18] Ganczer, "International Law," 321.
[19] "Súhrnné výsledky hlasovania 2023" [Summary Results of the 2023 Poll], Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/en/suhrnne_vysledky.html.

The ethnic Hungarian population has also been on decline with Hungarians accounting for 7.75% or 422,065 members of the population in the 2021 census.[20] This is a decrease of over 145,000 from 1991. However, since Slovak citizens are not required to disclose their ethnicity, the census of 2021 alone reported 295,558 people as "not found out", so there is a very strong chance that some of these people could also be ethnic Hungarians.

Case Study – Ethnic Germans in Hungary

As previously discussed, the dissolution of Austria-Hungary left many minorities existing in borderlands in what were now new, neighboring states. Yet a different example of ethnic minorities is that of the ethnic Germans in Hungary, also known as *Donauschwaben* or *Ungarndeutsche*. This minority group traces its roots to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries following Hungary's emancipation from Ottoman rule, and this group largely settled in the counties of Baranya, Tolna, and Bács-Bodrog.[21] Habsburg motivation was two-fold; they supported resettlement from an economic and workforce perspective, and also from the view of mixing the Magyar population with ethnic Germans. The German language was also an important factor as it was the *lingua franca* of the multinational empire and was thought to help foster a sense of unity in this new area of resettlement on the Hungarian lowlands.[22] The name of *Donauschwaben* itself was not chosen by these migrants themselves, rather it was given to them by the Hungarians in the region.[23] These ethnic Germans also occupied a different place in society when compared to other ethnic minorities within the Kingdom of Hungary as they were hierarchically incorporated yet predominantly located in rural areas.[24]

For multiple centuries, the *Donauschwaben* were quite loosely organized and only a few attributes united them: they spoke a dialect of German, were mostly Roman Catholics, and were peasants. They could be described as not having developed a "collective group consciousness" and this can be explained by the fact that they as an ethnic group had assimilated into Hungarian life and society.[25] On a personal note, my great-great grandfather who came from an ethnic German family in Hungary was himself the son of a German father and a Hungarian mother.

However, such attitudes eventually changed after the emergence of romantic nationalism in the late nineteenth century. The idea of a united ethnic identity first grew among the poor German peasants and farmers in rural areas, and the leaders of the movement were educated and upper-class city dwellers.[26] Such attitudes lasted through the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and into the new, independent Hungary during the interwar period.

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[20] Sčítanie obyvateľov domov a bytov 2021 [Census of Residences in 2021], Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, https://www.scitanie.sk/en/population/basic-results/structure-of-population-by-ethnicity/SR/SK0/SR.

[21] G. C. Paikert, *The Danube Swabians: German Populations in Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia and Hitler's Impact on Their Patterns* (Springer, 1967), 13–14.

[22] Paikert, *The Danube Swabians*, 15.

[23] Szelényi, "From Minority," 227.

[24] Szelényi, "From Minority," 228.

[25] Szelényi, "From Minority," 230.

[26] Szelényi, "From Minority," 230.

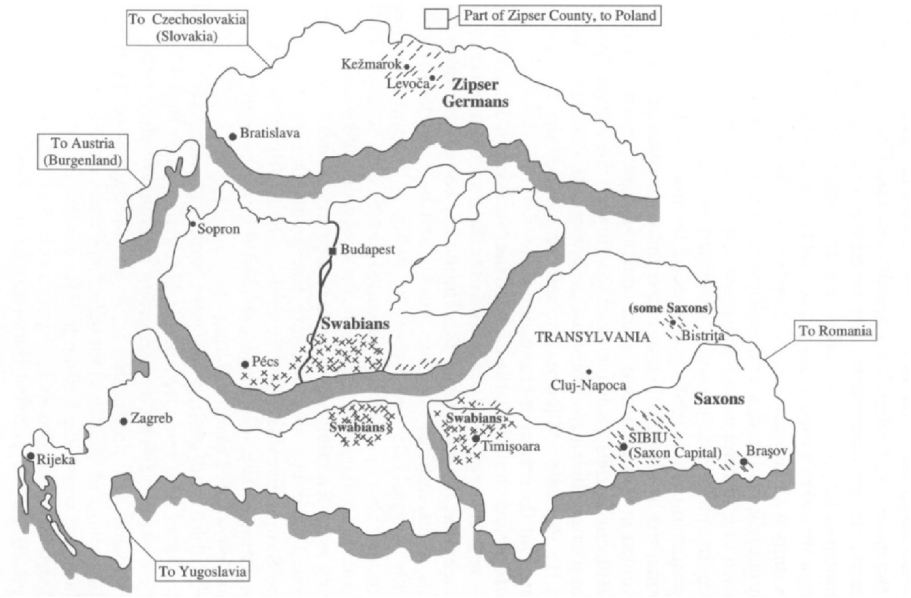


Figure 2. Partition of Hungary and the German Diaspora by Balázs A. Szelényi.

According to census data, approximately 450,000 ethnic Germans were living in Hungary following the Treaty of Trianon.[27] However, one must be skeptical of the validity of this data as other sources present much smaller numbers for the true number of ethnic Germans living in Hungary at this time. Some statistical data makes point to distinguish knowledge of German as a language from German as an ethnic nationality. These numbers can total 477,000 or 303,000 respectively.[28]

Similar to the case with the German population in Czechoslovakia, the fate of the Germans in Hungary was also decided at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, however, no official preparations for the expulsions were taken until December of that year. Some Germans had already left Hungary prior to the expulsions, be it as prisoners of war by the Red Army (40,000–60,000) or by their own will (60,000–70,000).[29] It was eventually decided that only 10% of the local German population for each district could remain, and the first transport headed for occupied Germany left on January 19, 1946.[30] Most of the expelled Germans were from rural areas, and the urban populations of ethnic Germans were not so affected by the deportations. It was also possible to avoid deportation through participating in a political party, working in an economically lucrative industry such as mining or carpentry, marrying a Hungarian, or bribing the authorities who were not keen on deporting the Germans and would often exempt them.[31] Protests also accompanied the expulsions and there were many demonstrations of sympathy. Beginning in May of 1946, the Ministry of the Interior [Belügyminisztérium] began limiting the number of people who could be expelled, for example, those with ties to the Schutzstaffel (SS) not by coercion. In July, the American occupation zone within Germany briefly suspended the expulsions until conditions improved due

[27] Balázs Apor, *The Expulsion of the "German" Communities from Eastern Europe at the End of the Second World War* (European University Institute, 2004), 36.
[28] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 38.
[29] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 36.
[30] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 39.
[31] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 39–41.

to the poor physical health of the ethnic Germans who were already deported.[32] Further, a new agreement between the United States and Hungary from August of 1946 established the following new goals and provisions: separation of expelled families was forbidden, the luggage allowance per family was increased to 100 kilograms, the number of transports leaving was decreased, and each expelled German was to receive 500 Reichsmarks.[33] The deportations resumed in November but were quickly halted a few weeks later. In 1947 with Hungary now under the Soviet sphere of influence through the Hungarian Communist Party, deportations resumed with more violence and far less sympathy and support for the Germans. This time, deportees were sent to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany.[34]

With expulsions ending in June of 1948, estimates are unable to accurately trace how many Germans were expelled from Hungary, where they went, and how many died on the journey. As some had been expelled or left during the war, estimates of the number of Germans expelled range from 175,000 to 250,000. Interestingly, this example of ethnic cleansing is often considered to be less violent and tragic than the German expulsions that occurred in Czechoslovakia or in the former German territories now belonging to post-war Poland. The Hungarian census from 1949 showed that 22,445 citizens claimed German ethnicity, a stark contrast to the over half a million Germans who previously resided in Hungary just eight years prior.[35]

Post-war advancements were slow, however, in 1995, the National Self-Government of Germans in Hungary [Landesselbstverwaltung der Ungarndeutschen/Magyarországi Németek Országos Önkományyzata] was formed to represent German minority interests as a unified body. In the 2018 parliamentary election, the organization's candidate Imre Ritter received enough votes to gain a seat in the Hungarian National Assembly [Országgyűlés] and is part of the ruling government with the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. The National Self-Government of Germans in Hungary retained its seat in the 2022 elections.[36] In terms of recent population figures, the Hungarian Mikrocenzus of 2016 reported people claiming German nationality to be 178,837, an increase from the number of 120,344 in 2001 yet a decrease from the number of 185,696 in 2011.[37]

Comparative Analysis – Contemporary Minority Challenges and Commonalities

Generally, the size of each minority largely determines their status, privilege, and challenges within their respective country. Ethnic Germans in Hungary are a much smaller group than ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. The ethnic Germans living in Hungary have a variety of cultural organizations, German language schools, and political representation. Meanwhile, the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia also possess many of the same attributes yet have faced discrimination and oppression from the Slovak government, for example, with citizenship and language usage.

A common challenge for both Slovakia and Hungary is the presence of the Roma within their countries. The Roma likely first came to what is now Slovakia in the 13th century after having previously traveled through the Balkans, and they were first mentioned as being in the Spiš region in 1322. The Roma population then grew during the 15th through 18th centuries and most lived within their own communities. Even early in their history, some local administrations started to

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[32] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 41.
[33] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 41.
[34] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 42.
[35] Apor, *The Expulsion*, 43.
[36] Országgyűlési képviselők választása 2018 [2018 Election of Members of Parliament], Nemzeti Választási Iroda, https://www.valasztas.hu/ogy2018.
[37] "Mikocenzus 2016" [2016 Microcensus], *Központi Statisztikai Hivatal*, 11, table 2.1.1. https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/mikrocenzus2016/mikrocenzus_2016_12.pdf.

control their immigration to protect local economic interests.[38] The nineteenth century saw a more nomadic group of Roma arrive, and it is estimated that roughly 36,000 Roma were living in present-day Slovakia in 1893.[39]

By 1947, around 84,000 Roma were living in post-war Czechoslovakia, mostly in the southern and eastern parts of Slovakia with the most concentrated in and around Košice, Levoča, and Prešov. State-sponsored investigations into Roma settlements in the early 1950s identified 95,092 people which was believed to be only 83% of the true number.[40] Beginning after 1991, Roma were first able to declare their nationality on the census. 75,802 Roma were reported in the 1991 census and the highest reported was 105,738 in 2011.[41] The 2021 census listed 67,179 people as Roma, yet it is probable that data on the Roma in Slovakia is highly underreported,[42] with some estimating the true number could be over 300,000 or more.[43]

Now focusing on Hungary, which has one of the largest Roma populations in Central Europe, it is estimated that there are 400,000–600,000 Roma living within Hungary's borders[44] and that the number of 309,632 reported in the 2016 Mikrocenzus is inaccurate.[45] Since Slovakia was once a part of Hungary, the Roma history and timeline in Hungary is quite similar to that of Slovakia. Roma and Romani languages have been recognized as a legal ethnic minority in Hungary and minority languages since the passage of the 1993 Minority Act, but the Roma experience many disadvantages and discrimination due to not being socially integrated in the mainstream society as various other minorities in Hungary are (i.e. ethnic Germans). This discrimination often takes place in educational systems, in labor markets, or in daily life, and public opinion is also openly negative.[46] Due to school segregation against Roma children, some even grow up to be illiterate adults.[47]

In Slovakia, Roma face much discrimination from bureaucracy, which often occurs when they wish to resettle; additionally, they deal with prejudice in institutions related to education.[48] Current debates in both Slovakia and Hungary focus on the "Roma problem," a term with an admittingly negative connotation. It is argued that the Roma must be better understood in order for them to become more socially integrated, however, it will be a challenge to undo centuries of discrimination to allow for new respect and cultural appreciation.[49]

A shared commonality for all discussed minority groups (ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, ethnic Germans in Hungary, and the Roma in both countries) is the range of discrepancies related to their census results. Because each group has a history of persecution, during the Holocaust (the Roma) or after World War II (in the cases of the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and ethnic Germans

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[38] Matlovičová, Kvetoslava et al., "The Roma Population in Slovakia: Basic Characteristics of the Roma Population with Emphasis on the Spatial Aspects of Its Differentiation," in *Roma Populations on the Peripheries of the Visegrád Countries: Spatial Trends and Social Challenges*. DIDAKT Kft., 2012, 80.
[39] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 81.
[40] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 82.
[41] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 79.
[42] Sčítanie obyvateľov domov a bytov 2021 [Census of Residences in 2021].
[43] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 86.
[44] Lídia H. Balogh, "Minority Cultural Rights or an Excuse for Segregation?: Roma Minority Education in Hungary" edited by Daniel Pop, *Education Policy and Equal Education Opportunities*, Open Society Foundations, 2012, 208.
[45] Mikocenzus 2016 [2016 Microcensus], 11.
[46] Balogh, "Minority Cultural Rights," 208-209.
[47] Balogh, "Minority Cultural Rights," 213.
[48] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 91.
[49] Matlovičová et al., "The Roma Population," 93-94.

in Hungary), it is reasonable to assume that one would be hesitant to report sensitive information such as nationality to the government. Such hesitancy has long been assumed about the Roma and censuses, and I believe it could also be the case for the ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Germans, albeit on a smaller scale.

When comparing the Roma to the other minorities discussed, it is the Roma's lack of social and political integration that positions them as societal outliers, whereas the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and the ethnic Germans in Hungary support the idea of cleavage theory. Cleavage theory, as proposed by Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan in 1967, argues for the presence of three key concepts for a cleavage (a lasting division between groups based on conflict) to be present: the sociological element (e.g. difference in language), the collective identity element (e.g. the group viewing itself as a minority), and organizational manifestation (e.g. political parties of the minority). In the case of the ethnic minorities apart from the Roma, it is clear to see how they fit into cleavage theory and how the Roma do not support this idea due to the absence of political mobilization.

Conclusion

As has been explored in this paper, today's political landscape of minority politics in Slovakia and Hungary has been shaped by notable historical events such as the World War I and the Treaty of Trianon, and policies such as ethnic cleansing and modern discriminatory laws targeted at ethnic groups. Therefore, further research needs to be undertaken on the topic of ethnic Germans in Hungary as they are not mentioned much in recent literature. In Slovakia, I believe more should be done to understand why support for the Hungarian Alliance has waned so much that they are no longer in the parliament; this topic is also missing from recent literature. It will be interesting to see if the party is able to gain any ground before the 2027 elections, or if they will perform strongly in a possible snap election that could occur before then.

Regarding the Roma populations, I am curious to see if they will ever become more empowered, possibly more socially integrated and politically engaged; Slovakia and Hungary could both witness the formation of Roma political parties to support Roma interests within the countries. As ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and ethnic Germans in Hungary have shaped their respective societies, perhaps it is time for the Roma to do the same.

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SECTION 3

NATION FORMATION

"The Ancient Amalgamation of Religion and Politics and its Influence on Modern Iran"

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Four thousand years ago, a man inspired by spiritual understanding conceived thoughts that would lay the foundation for a myriad of doctrines and theologies. Among the many concepts recorded was: "two spirits confront each other [to fight for a person, then that person] determines [his] first [existence, with] vitality or lack of vitality, and how his existence will be in the end. [The existence-] of the deceitful will be very bad, but best thought will be [in store] for the truthful one."[1] This is an idea, a verse, that can be administered as both a question and an answer for countless conundrums, standing as a vague yet complicated allegory—a perfect reflection of the complex capabilities of human consciousness and potential. It is the very definition and inquiry of consciousness itself.

How is it that human beings have the competence for such inspiration and profound abstraction? Is the source of such cognition biological or yet to be cemented in scientific evidence? The idea of what consciousness constitutes is constantly propelled by theories and questioned among neuroscientists, scholars, and spiritual individuals alike. Is consciousness a gift from powers beyond comprehension, a reaction between chemicals in ways society has yet to discover, or something else? Whether or not an answer to these questions will be found is in some ways irrelevant. At present, it can be established that consciousness is the reason behind the evolution of humankind, the many progressions it made, and the faults it witnessed. It is from the aptitude of human consciousness that ideas of religion and politics originate.

Simplified, politics is the invented structure designated for the functioning of human beings in or as part of a society. It is a creation meant for the objective meliorism of civilization constructed by subjective architects. It is through this paradox that the many complications of politics stem from. The inception of politics can be traced back to rules driven by biological instincts and innate reasoning which melded into layers of interactions and relationships. These intrinsic behaviors: the need for fairness, the protection of one's own, the experience of loss and ingrained empathy are all ways in which the structure of politics was founded. Yet, as humans evolved and became more complex beings, the politics that laid the foundation for the operation of society became increasingly influenced by human bias. The idea of power became a focal point in how politics affected society and formed a spectrum still maintained today: on one side are those with power and on the other side, those without it.

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> "How many paths are there…What is my religion?
> Where does my profit lie, and where my loss?"[2]
> — R. C. Zaehner, *The Teachings of the Magi*

The creation of religion demonstrates the boundlessness of human curiosity. It is a framework constituted to answer the questions that human beings do not have the capacity to know the answers to. Religion "consist(s) of complex theories of life and practice, and include(s) both

[1] Helmut Humbach and Pallan R. Ichaporia. *The Heritage of Zarathushtra: A New Translation of His Gāthās* (Winter, 1994), 31.
[2] *A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs* (Oxford University Press, 1976).
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myth and…organized rituals that are…rooted in some form of divine revelation."[3] Most, if not all religions center around ascertaining the meaning of life, and the purpose of existence. The magi, priests of the Zoroastrian religion, reference these critical questions in their teachings: "to whom do I belong? From whence have I come? and whither do I return? From what stock and lineage am I? What is my function and duty on earth? and what is my reward in the world to come? Did I come forth from the unseen world? or was I (always) of this world?"[4] Religion is meant to guide individuals on their journey of unearthing the answers to these essential questions. Additionally, religion has the facility to bring people together — to unify and aid in the growth of the individual. Similarly to politics, religion was not conceived with the intention of anything beyond having a constructive influence on humanity, but due to human limitation. Whether it be greed exacerbating the inability to see forces more valuable than power or the false hubris erected to keep others from invalidating one's beliefs and experiences, humanity convoluted the purpose of religion for their own personal gain. Although not all religions have been misused in such a way, all religions are realized by the impressionable and biased creator.

Both religion and politics are neutral concepts that have had positive and negative impacts on society. They are prominent pillars of civilization that have intersected many times and continue to influence each other today. The results of the amalgamation of religion and politics have had lasting effects throughout centuries, and the association will continue to result in complex developments. The fusion between the two has the potential to benefit and damage those who fall under its influence. This dyad can be observed throughout the history of Iran. Religion and politics have evolved together alongside Iran from the beginnings of the empire to the country it is today. The intertwined nature established between religion and politics in ancient Iran has led to the present reality of their complicated relationship within Iran today.

The notion of government originated from the Medes, an Iron Age people who formed the first Iranian empire. They established several significant systems that would change the way society functioned for years to come. The Medes laid the foundation for currency and implemented an arrangement in which tribes would come together to elect a shah. That particular practice was modified when Hukhshathra or Cyaxares started a dynastic rule. It was after the downfall of the Medes that the renowned ruler Cyrus the Great came to power. During his sovereignty, he made meticulous and advantageous choices that ultimately led to his success as a ruler. Amid his rule, while conquering lands and opposing the Babylonians, he decided to end the enslavement of the Jewish people and permit the worship of their God. The Jewish community there, who had been under Babylonian captivity for decades, regarded Cyrus II as their liberator. There could have been many reasons for making this judgment. Perhaps Cyrus II was driven by his morality and faith or perhaps he had no idiosyncratic reason to keep the Jewish people persecuted. However, it is evident that his choice to do so held great political significance. He was able to establish trust and respect by choosing to convey his power as a king through tolerance rather than instilling fear into his citizenry. Consequently, the communities he freed continued to support him throughout his reign.[5]

In the years following Cyrus the Great's death, another eminent figure rose to power: King Darius. Originally, Cyrus II's son succeeded to the throne, but a rebellion broke out in the Persian

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[3] Ahmad R. Motameni, "Iranian Philosophy of Religion and the History of Political Thought" (PhD diss., University of California, 2014), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8t2507mw.
[4] Zaehner, *The Teachings*.
[5] Muhammad A. Dandamayev, "Cyrus II the Great," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 6, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/cyrus-iii/.

heartland while he was in Egypt, and another claimed the rights to the throne. This imposter spread lies and false claims in order to gain control of the kingship, until Darius arrived, implementing authority and regaining command of the empire.[6] Darius ruled over an extensive empire, yet unlike his predecessor Cyrus the Great who governed without uprisings breaking out, there were many rebellions throughout his reign.[7] However, similarly to Cyrus II, he was a "strong and wise ruler [who was] tolerant toward other religions and cultures."[8] To emphasize his power and cement his legacy, Darius left an inscription of his successes and beliefs. Within the inscription, the fusion of politics and religion in ancient Iran was clearly revealed. Darius used religious references to convey his credibility as a leader and expound his competence.

He first set out to establish his credibility and right to the throne by inscribing: "I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of Vishtaspa, grandson of Arshama, an Achaemenid"[9] Darius used his inscription as a political tool to influence the his contemporary society and the societies of the future. He employed profound and assured language while writing his history and imparting his knowledge. When recounting the story of taking the throne, he asserted his rightness by claiming that all that had happened was due to the will of Ahurhamazda, God of the Zoroastrians. He started by validating his rise to the throne, referencing the imposter before him: "a man, a Magician (a Mede), Gaumata by name…he lied to the people…he seized the kingship…this kingship had belonged to our family from long ago…people feared him greatly…for this reason he would kill people…no one dared say anything about Gaumata the Magician until I came. Then I prayed to Ahuramazda: Ahuramazda bore me aid."[10] He continued to explain that Ahuramazda was the reason he held the title of king: "by the will of Ahuramazda they became my subjects. They bore me tribute. What was said to them by me, by night or by day, they did. In these lands the man who was loyal I supported well: whoever was evil I punished well. By the will of Ahuramazda these countries respected my law(s). What was said to them by me they did."[11] By reaffirming his position with the support and bestowal from the Zoroastrian God, Darius presented clear and irrefutable evidence of his competency. To question his status and influence meant to question Ahuramazda. The equation was set to his advantage. He placed himself as a savior sent by God, taking back his rightful place and restoring honor to his family. He continues to emphasize Ahuramazda's role in bestowing power upon him: "Ahuramazda gave me kingship. Ahuramazda bore me aid so I could uphold the kingship. By the will of Ahuramazda I hold this kingship."[12] The use of religion to solidify and persuade others of one's power is why religion and politics have become so intertwined. This tactic influences the Iran of today and continues to stagnate the progression of political movements.

Even during ancient Iranian times, leaders inspired by those before them would apply similar devices in order to ensure their political positions. After the Achaemenids, Seleucids, and Parthians, the Sasanians gained control of Iran. The same pattern of rule used by the greatest Iranian kings of the past was adopted and implemented once again. Among the Sasanian rulers,

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[6] Pierre Briant, "Gaumāta," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 10, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gaumata/.
[7] Alireza Shapur Shahbazi, "Darius I the Great," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 7, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/darius-iii/.
[8] Iran Chamber Society: History of Iran: Darius the Great. "Darius the Great." Accessed December 28, 2022, https://www.iranchamber.com/history/darius/darius.php.
[9] Richard N. Frye, "The Behistun Inscription of Darius, Near Kermanshah, Iran," in *The History of Ancient Iran* (Beck, 1984), 363.
[10] Frye, "The Behistun Inscription," 363.
[11] Frye, "The Behistun Inscription," 363.
[12] Frye, "The Behistun Inscription," 363.

Shapur I, in particular, had an affinity for the methods that previous Iranian kings used to maintain control. Not unlike Cyrus II and Darius, he exhibited a tolerance for other religions and cultures. He had a positive relationship with the Jewish communities in Iran and after conquering new territories, allowed the Christians to continue practicing their faith. He went as far as to bring Bishops and Archbishops to Iran to establish an institution for captured Christians to worship. Additionally, he allowed the religious leader, Mani, to evangelize and convert individuals within Iran.[13] Shapur I also left an inscription that he had carved for the public to see. Similarly to Darius, he established his credibility as a leader through acknowledging the Gods and recounting the stories of the many difficulties faced and victories won.[14] The inscription begins by introducing "the mazda worshipping lord Shapur, king of kings of Iran and non-Iran, whose lineage is from the Gods."[15] Following a detailed lineage, Shapur continued to recount stories and reveal the morals behind them:

> "We searched out for conquest many other lands, and we acquired fame for heroism…we ordered it written so that whoever comes after us may know this fame, heroism and power of us. Thus, for this reason, that the gods have made us their ward, and with the aid of the gods we have searched out and taken so many lands, so that in every land we have founded many Bahram fires and have conferred benefices upon many magi-man, and we have magnified the cult of the gods…now as we serve and worship the gods with zeal, since we are the wards of the gods and with the aid of the gods we have searched out these peoples, have dominated them and have acquired fame for bravery, also whoever comes after us and rules, may he also serve and worship the god with zeal, so the gods may aid him and make him their ward."[16]

Through the use of religious language and calculated description, Shapur proved his value as a king and confirmed his worth through the support of the gods. The significance of artifacts like the inscriptions of Darius and Shapur lies in the message they send to the readers who value their faith. At the time, the majority of the citizens in Iran were followers of Zoroastrianism. Therefore, as followers of a faith, to see that their leader came to be by the will of their God, they were more likely to continue supporting him. If it is God's will for someone to attain control of the empire, the faithful will recognize their rightful king. Using religion in these documents convinces the people that the King has been chosen by forces beyond their comprehension. This strategy also influences subsequent generations. The religious followers to come will look back on the King's rule with respect and support.

Although politics tackles topics and issues that may affect the individual, religion is extremely personal and highly valuable to those who follow it. Support for ideas, leaders, and movements ebb and flow. People will support a cause until a position more important to them is threatened or takes precedence. For many followers of religion, their faith and devotion become the priority and focal point of their lives. Consequently, incorporating religion and religious aspects into politics guarantees that those in power continue to hold the attention of the followers.

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[13] Alireza Shapur Shahbazi, "ŠĀPUR I: History," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/shapur-i/.
[14] Shapur, "ŠĀPUR I: History."
[15] Richard N. Frye, "The Inscription of Shapur I at Naqsh-e Rustam in Fars," in *The History of Ancient Iran* (Beck, 1984), 371.
[16] Frye, "The Inscription of Shapur I," 372.

The use of religion in politics takes a macro-concept and makes it a micro-issue; it funnels larger politics into matters apparent in the day-to-day. It is easy to ignore what does not have an effect. Applying religion to politics makes it impossible for religious individuals to ignore political issues. The reality of this interaction factors heavily into the current relationship between religion, politics, and the people of Iran today.

Yet the interplay between religion and politics is not unilateral. There are plenty of politics at play within religions as well. When the founder of Islam, the prophet Muhammad died, there was a rift within the Islamic community. His wife Aisha believed that Muhammad would want her father, Abu Bakr, to take over as leader. Those who rejected Aisha and Abu Bakr believed that leadership should stay within the family, and Ali, Muhammad's cousin, should take leadership. The conflict that followed permanently altered the dynamics of the religion. The followers who supported Abu Bakr as the next leader of Islam became known as the Sunnis and those who followed Ali were known as the Shi'ites. The separation between the two sides never entirely resolved even though they both follow the Qur'an and share many of the fundamental beliefs. Islam's integration and spread throughout the centuries had and continues to have a cogent impact on the interrelations of religion and politics in Iran. As Islam becomes a stronger force, the influence it has on Iran becomes further ingrained into the society. Even after Islam's official ingress into Iran, leaders and political figures continue to use religion in their rule to further their political aspirations.[17]

Islam moved into Iran after the fall of the Sasanian empire. The religion spread throughout the Iranian territory during several dynasties. Sunni Islam entered Iran with the rise of the Umayyads and Abbasids, and by the end of the Abbasid rule, 80% of the region followed Islam. However, there were ramifications when politics and Islam began to intersect. There were dynasties that benefitted from the exclusivity of Islam. The Umayyads particularly, were not interested in missionizing and converting others. The reasoning behind their choice proved their true motives and revealed their political priorities. By keeping the majority of the population non-Muslim, they reaped economic benefits with the enforcement of religious taxes. Subsequently, the conversion of religion was no longer fueled by personal and faithful yearning, rather conversion became an economic transaction. Conversion and religious standing continued to evolve beyond the original purpose of following their faith and developed into a more complex system.[18]

Over the next few centuries, Sunni Islam was the primary religion of the region, and the Iranian region dealt with many obstacles and adversities. However, there was a major shift in the sixteenth century. The complicated inner workings of politics and religion led to the inception of one the most notable empires in the history of Iran: the Safavids. Inheriting a position of power at the mere age of twelve, Isma'il became the founder of the Safavid Dynasty. After his father was killed, he was exiled and hid from the Turkic Oghuz by staying in a Shia court at a young age. There, he was introduced to Shia Islam while he was tutored in his exile. In 150,1 he was crowned in Tabriz and took on the title of Shaykh. As Shaykh, he claimed divinity and believed he was invincible and infallible. With origins in Sufism, the authority he held resembled the Sufi master-disciple relationship and he expected unquestioning obedience. Isma'il I referred to himself by the names of the greatest conquerors, rulers, and even God. His elevated sense of self was not entirely untenable. Isma'il I conquered lands and sought new territory. He held the reputation of never

[17] Mohammad Iqbal, "Sunni-Shia Division in Islam: Its Origin, Development, Political & Socio-Economic Implications & Contemporary Relations," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2020), http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3692983.
[18] "The Economy During the Umayyad Caliphate," History of Islam, accessed March 5, 2024, https://historyofislam.org/umayyad-caliphate/economy/.

failing against his enemy until he lost at the Battle of Chaldiran against the Ottomans in 1514. After the humiliating defeat, he experienced a serious identity struggle and a crisis of faith. The great Safavid Shaykh's defeat signaled to those under his reign that his claims of power and divinity had been apocryphal. At this point, when all hope seemed lost, Isma'il I found a solution in the permutation of the admix of religion and politics. Following adoption and adaptation Shia Islam, the shaykh made conversion mandatory for the Sunni population. With the transition, Isma'il claimed to have been awakened, and alleged it was the absence of Shi'a Islam that had led to his failures. He used the implementation of Twelver Shia Islam to restore his reputation and standing as a leader. As a result, Iran became a theocracy and the line between religion and politics became intensely blurred. By the end of the Safavid period, 90% of the Iranian population were followers of Shia Islam.[19]

The evidence of the significance between the crossing of religion and politics is clearly portrayed through the actions of Isma'il and the Safavids. Due to the involvement of religion in politics, a majority Sunni population were almost completely converted. The results were drastic considering the inspiration for religious change stemmed from a desire to maintain power. Not only did the decision to make religious changes, from Sunni Islam to Shia Islam, affect the population but the political mechanics as well. The line between political power and religious influence was no longer distinct and there was no longer a clear separation between the two.

The notions of secular leadership as opposed to theocratic leadership have been relevant from the beginnings of Islamic presence and influence in Iran. The leveraging of religion and politics in ancient Iran heavily influenced the more recent leaders; however, the extent of the commix took a considerable turn after the rule of the Safavids.[20]

The presence of religion in politics did not always dominate the system of power in Iran. There were durations in which religion and politics were not used to control power dynamics or interfere with the societal setup. The Qajar dynasty, although tied to Shia Islam, focused on regaining Persian territory and brought a period of stability to Iran. Despite being followers of Shia Islam and considerably influenced by religion, they allowed society to prosper and develop without heavy religious enforcement. The Qajars reinstated security for the nation and set in motion the beginnings of comprehensive modernization to take place. They would be the last dynasty with religious ties, as religious ideals faded with the rise of Reza Shah and the establishment of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and Iran entered a new era of secularism.

With the appointment of Reza Shah, Iran underwent considerable societal changes. He took the position of Shah with ambitious intentions of making the necessary developments to further the expansion and modernization of Iran. Reza Shah worked to transform Iran into a modern nation with a secure infrastructure by constructing new transportation systems, implementing public education, and improving the judiciary and health care systems. With new advancements, the country of Iran began to progress into a modernized nation. Yet, even in the early days of the Pahlavi Dynasty, there were traces of dissatisfaction from the religious community who resisted and disapproved of the Shah's reforms. When Mohammad Reza Shah took the throne, he was adamant about maintaining and attributing to the reforms his father had made. His increased involvement in governmental affairs and the rapid growth of modernization

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[19] Roger M. Savory and Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Esmāʿīl I Ṣafawī," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 8, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/esmail-i-safawi/#:~:text=(1487%2D1524)%2C%20SHAH,the%20subsequent%20history%20of%20Persia.

[20] Hamid Algar, "Religions in Iran (2) Islam in Iran (2.3) Shiʿism in Iran since the Safavids," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 13, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-ix23-shiism-in-iran-since-the-safavids/.

laid the foundation for the forthcoming uprisings and fueled the desire for change. As the Shah acted on further plans for westernization and modern socioeconomic advancements, the unrest amongst Iranians grew. His plans for changing the country were set at a faster pace than the traditional population was ready for. The Islamic movement continued to grow and gain support from those who were angered by the nation's increased western influence, corruption, and expanding inequalities. Religion sustained a movement that served as an opportunity for change, a change that the Iranian people couldn't afford to lose. The Islamic Revolution provided the people with an opportunity to address the issues they had dealt with for years. In 1979, Iranians were unaware of the true consequences of the exchange they had made. The new government built around Islam would alter the nation's society as religion became woven into politics. The religious figurehead of the revolution, Imam Khomeini himself, declared that the "Islamic government is a government of law. In this form of government, sovereignty belongs to God alone and law is His decree and command. The law of Islam, divine command, has absolute authority over all individuals and the Islamic government."[21]

The Iran-Iraq war following the revolution deterred the realization of the political ramifications that the installation of a theocracy caused. And yet the changes enacted by the Islamic Republic were felt across the nation. The formerly up-and-coming modern nation that held relevance among the leading countries of the world was no longer. The Islamic republic enforced complete Islamic rule on the entire society. Alcohol was banned, hijab was mandated, the teaching of Islamic studies became obligatory, coed schools were no longer allowed, and there was an inhibition of western and pre-revolutionary culture. With the Islamic Republic instating such limitations – depriving Iranians of their rights in the name of Islam, the younger generations distanced themselves from religion. Before the revolution, the changing nation was modernizing too quickly for the traditional and religious communities, but afterward, the heavy restrictions, constrictive reforms, and the infringement of rights began to dissipate the strong support behind the Islamic republic. As a result of the religious enforcements on the society, the members of the younger generation are not followers of religion and yearn for a society that will keep pace with the rest of the world. The intertwining of religion and politics in society complicates both religion and politics. When the two overlap, it becomes difficult to handle one without getting involved in the other. The people of Iran did not anticipate the extremity of the religious changes that would follow the revolution. Every change and every gain come at a cost, and foresight is difficult in the present moment. Even now with the various movements and the brewing of an uprising, there is no way to know what sort of reality awaits the Iranian people on the other side of a new revolution. The desire for a government free from religion has been spreading and developing in Iranian society for decades. And with the recent developments and uproars against the Islamic Republic, the change of the theocratic dynamic of Iran's government is not only expected, but inevitable.[22]

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"[I]gnoring people's demands in the name of religion…will only create disappointment."
"[I]gnoring moralities is always undesirable, but doing so systematically is really worrisome."
– Mohammad Khatami (5th President of Iran)

[21] Ruhollah al-Musaui Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, trans. Hamid Algar (Mizan Press, 1981).
[22] Ali Ansari, "Iranian Revolution of 1979," accessed July 4, 2025, https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/war_peace/middleeast/hiranianrev.html.
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The argument that the fusion of religion and politics in ancient Iran has served as inspiration for the employment of religious-political tactics in modern times does not rely on whether ancient Iran has influenced the nation's present state. Rather, it depends on the recognition of human tendencies and the relativity of perception. One could argue that despite the repetition of the amalgamation of religion and politics throughout Iranian history, its use in the past is unrelated to the present relationship between religion and politics, However, it all depends on perspective, as "how events play out depends on the reference point of the individual."[23] Examining isolated parts of history will never reveal the whole picture. The correlation found between religion and politics requires dedicated analysis of Iranian history in its totality. By knowing history, the pattern of religion and politics having a mutual effect on and within one another becomes apparent. Through analyzing the religions of Iran, evolution of Iranian politics, and where they intersect and influence one another in the total history of Iran, one can identify a specific sequence: that political figures use religion to advance. The motif lies within the identification of the same repeated outcomes. Why does religion affect the mechanisms of politics and vice versa? It is because of what they both mean to the people of that society. The use of religion in politics aids in the movement of power and the effectiveness of authority. When Darius and Shapur I left inscriptions portraying their own spiritual motivations and divine support from God, they were able to communicate their dedication on a personal level to the people. The citizenry may not know, nor care to know about the inner workings of the government but simultaneously hold their leader to certain expectations. So, when a leader sends a message that resonates spiritually with the community, the community is more likely to concern themselves with supporting that leader. When Isma'il, who had declared himself invincible and almighty, was shamefully defeated in battle, he used religious and political tactics to prevent questioning his right to the throne. Although his intentions and motivations served his own agenda, they made an extraordinary impact on the nation and a lasting effect on its religious ties. The entrance and support of Islam in the twentieth century, not only aided in, but allowed for the downfall of the Pahlavi dynasty. The people backed the Islamic movement in hopes that political changes would take place, and they did. It is evident that the leaders of the present, and those of the past, look back on those who came before them for insight.

Human beings draw upon history for inspiration to improve and prevent making the same mistakes of the past. Yet, they still seem to mimic the cycles of the past. Humanity is constantly trying to self-correct. Humans seek growth and progress and yet find themselves in one way or another repeating similar mistakes and bearing the same shortcomings. History can be a powerful tool, and it holds the capacity to make a significant impact on the present. The repeating of these patterns raises an important question: will we ever be free of our past? Perhaps the devotion to the study of the past keeps us there and influences us in ways that enforces the repetition of societal movements and duplicates the same results. Yet, the "studying (of) history gives us deeper insight into our lives and the lives of others."[24] Maybe the problem is not if we will, but if we should be free of the past. Perhaps we should not dwell on failure to free ourselves from the past but rather focus to become one with it. Humanity and society have evolved immensely over the millennia. It

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[23] Ella Alderson, "Everything Exists at Once: Past, Present, and Future," *Medium*, February 19, 2020, https://medium.com/predict/everything-exists-at-once-past-present-and-future-264b252e0748.

[24] Johann N. Neem, "Connecting Past to Present," *American Historical Association*, October 21, 2018, https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/why-study-history/careers-for-history-majors/connecting-past-to-present.

is important for humanity to recognize how we are different from those of the past and where we are the same. In the understanding of why and how events unfolded, we recognize the humanity of the people before us and with that knowledge step into the future.

> "When the calamity of time afflicts one limb
> The other limbs cannot remain at rest
> If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
> Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of man."[25]

[25] Saʿdī, *The Rose Garden (Gulistan)*, trans. Edward Rehatsek (New Humanity Books, 1990).

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"Ideological Foundations of Russian *Gleichschaltung*: Russia as a Body, an Organism, and an Information System"[1]

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Introduction

I argue that Vladimir Putin is undertaking a *Gleichschaltung*, or consolidation, of Russianness focused on Russian culture and language and Russian speakers.[2] This iteration of *Gleichschaltung* is informed by ideas of Russianness in Ivan Il'in's conception of Russia as a political "organism,"[3] Lev Gumilev's idea of *passionarity* and the *ethnos*, and *russkii mir* ideology. This paper examines Russia's assimilative and imperialist state behaviour through the lens of *Gleichschaltung* and establishes the term's usefulness in understanding contemporary Russia.[4] I focus on two targets of Russian *Gleichschaltung*: Russophone Ukrainians, and Indigenous peoples in Russia.

What is *Gleichschaltung*?

Gleichschaltung is a German term, meaning "'synchronizing,' in the sense of 'imposing mandatory conformity.'"[5] The term describes the Nazi Party's standardization and regulation of state, cultural, and social institutions. *Gleichschaltung* also means the "switching on" of an electrical current: thus, "the removal of anyone who was 'stained' or 'soiled' was 'switching them off'—an *Ausschaltung*."[6] *Gleichschaltung* was thereby the formula through which the "ethnic body politic [Volkskörper]" could be purified.[7] Additionally, while the Nazi regime promoted German national identity at home, it "recognized the importance of waging cultural warfare against enemy peoples as a means for destroying the basis of their national identities."[8]

This dual aspect (domestic/abroad) is integral to *Gleichschaltung* and understanding its contemporary Russian iteration.

For Putin, "Russia-ness [*sic*] is a cultural identity derived from the civilizational greatness of the ethnic Russian people, whose mission is to unify the rest of society around its historical values."[9] Russia is portrayed as the great nation, and Russian language and culture is glorified,

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[1] This paper is a revised version of the author's earlier publication. It is available as Julian Kelly, "Ideological Foundations of Russian *Gleichschaltung*: Russkiy Mir & Ivan Ilyin's 'Russian Organism,'" in *Messages in the Media*, vol. XI, Toronto, (2025): 139–148.

[2] To be clear, *Gleichschaltung* [in English, enforced conformity] is an effort at cultural genocide: "For Lemkin, … the *essence* of genocide was cultural – a systematic attack on a group of people and its cultural identity; a crime directed against *difference itself*." (italics mine). Leora Bilsky, and Rachel Klagsbrun, "The Return of Cultural Genocide?" *European Journal of International Law* 29, no. 2 (2018): 374.

[3] Timothy Snyder, "Individualism or Totalitarianism," in *Road to Unfreedom*, (Tim Duggan Books, 2018), 23.

[4] It is difficult in an essay of this length to decisively prove whether Putin believes in the ideologies his policies draw from. For Hannah Arendt, propagandists, or "political technologists" end up believing in their own lies. With so many lies, Arendt writes, "what prevents these new stories, images, and non-facts from becoming an adequate substitute for reality and factuality?" See Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," *The New Yorker,* February 25, 1967, 14.

[5] Zadie Smith, "The Dream of the Raised Arm," *The New York Review of Books*, November 14, 2024, https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2024/12/05/the-dream-of-the-raised-arm-third-reich-of-dreams-beradt-zadie-smith/.

[6] Claudia Koonz, "Chapter 4: The Conquest of Political Culture," in *The Nazi Conscience* (Belknap Press, 2003), 72.

[7] Koonz, "Political Culture," in *The Nazi Conscience*, 73.

[8] Alan E. Steinweis, "German Cultural Imperialism in Czechoslovakia and Poland, 1938–1945," *The International History Review* 13, no. 3 (1991): 466.

[9] Maria Snegovaya et al., "The Ideology of Putinism," *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, September 27,

while at the same time becoming standard. Notably, the Kremlin "actively promotes the fundamental Russian identity."[10] The Russian war against Ukraine has been ideologically based upon the destruction of the Ukrainian national identity, whilst domestically Russia has pursued a promotion of the Russian language at the cost of Indigenous languages. Similar to Germany, which pursued a so-called racial purification program (the Holocaust), Putin's Russia is also becoming *gleichgeschaltet*, synchronized, through the idea of Russianness.

Ivan Il'in

The writing of Ivan Il'in (1883-1954) is integral to understanding contemporary Russian *Gleichschaltung*. Il'in was a Russian philosopher first known for his works on Hegel and philosophy of law.[11] After his expulsion from Russia in 1922 with more than one hundred other academics on a "philosophers' steamer," Il'in "became more of an ideologue than a thinker, and as early as the 1920s he expressed admiration for fascism and Nazism."[12] Il'in's works faced a resurgence in the 1990s after decades of his writing being suppressed or ignored by the Soviets.[13]

Putin has gone to great lengths to rehabilitate Il'in's writings in Russia, demonstrating the value Putin places on Il'in's thought: Il'in's corpse was given a state reburial in Moscow in 2005, and in 2006 his corpus was patriated from Michigan State University. As Snyder writes, "Ilyin was returned [to Russia], body and soul."[14] In 2014, the book *Our Tasks,* a compilation of Il'in's political writings, was distributed to Putin's inner circle and Russian civil servants.[15] When asked at a conference which thinker has most inspired him, Putin said "You know, I would prefer not to say that this is Ivan Ilyin alone. I read Ilyin, I read him to this day."[16] But beyond Il'in, Putin cited only one other thinker (Nikolai Berdiaev) and vaguely stated that he most liked other "people who were thinking about Russia and its future."[17]

Il'in's *Russian Organism*

Il'in did not conceive of Russianness as inherently defined by Russian ethnicity. Hanuš Nykl argues that Il'in's idea of Russianness is tied to a fraternal belonging to the Russian state, and recognizes this Russianness as "derived from unity with the Slavic-Russian ethnicity" while not being synonymous with it.[18] As Snyder writes, Il'in conceived of the nation as "a creature," the fact of belonging to "the Russian organism" was determined by Russian culture, which "automatically brought 'fraternal union' wherever Russian power extended."[19] Il'in's idea of the Russian organism recalls the Nazi "ethnic body politic [Volkskörper]," in that "Each Russian's place in the … structure would be fixed like a cell in a body, and each Russian would experience this immobility as freedom."[20] Russians were "cells": not individuals, but parts of a whole.[21]

2023.

[10] Snegovaya et al., "The Ideology of Putinism."

[11] Hanuš Nykl, "Ivan Ilyin: fascist or ideologue of the White Movement Utopia?" *Studies in East European Thought* 77 (2024).

[12] Nykl, "Ivan Ilyin," 352.

[13] Snyder, "Individualism or Totalitarianism," 17–19.

[14] Timothy Snyder, "Putin's Philosopher," *The New York Review of Books*, March 16, 2018, https://www.nybooks.com/online/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/.

[15] Snyder, "Putin's Philosopher."

[16] Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 18th Annual Meeting," Transcript of speech delivered at Sochi, Russia, October 22, 2021.

[17] Putin, "Valdai Discussion Club."

[18] Nykl, "Ivan Ilyin."

[19] Snyder, "Individualism or Totalitarianism," 23.

[20] Koonz, "Political Culture," 73; and Timothy Snyder, "Individualism or Totalitarianism," 29.

[21] Snyder, "Individualism or Totalitarianism," 23.

Gumilev and the Russian *Ethnos*

Lev Gumilev was a Russian philosopher who theorized extensively about the *ethnos*. At a Valdai Discussion Club (a Russian think-tank) meeting in 2021, Vladimir Putin cited him alongside Il'in, referring to Gumilev's idea of the *ethnos*: "According to [Gumilev], peoples, nations, ethnic groups are like a living organism: they are born, reach the peak of their development, and then quietly grow old."[22] For Gumilev, the *ethnos* was a biological organism[23] but also "operated … as a sort of ecological network."[24] One of the key aspects of the *ethnos* was its *passionarity*, or the vital energy that drove and sustained it.[25] Notably, Bassin links Gumilev's idea of the *ethnos* to cybernetics and systems theory. The "ethnos was a systemic entity … defined by the system of functional relationships and interconnections between them."[26] The idea of the cybernetic system is significant for understanding *russkii mir*, in which language is the means of information transfer within the system. In this respect, all Russian speakers are part of the Russian cybernetic system, in that they are able to interact meaningfully with other units in this system. Distinct from Il'in's conception of the Russia itself as an organism, Gumilev distinguishes the *ethnos* from the state, which is a social phenomenon; for Gumilev, since the *ethnos* is biological, states "can include *ethnies* but cannot be identified with them."[27]

Russkii mir

Russkii mir (literally "Russian World") is an idea that arose in the 1990s; it emphasizes the fraternity between Russian speakers and their belonging to a "Russianness" which is not limited by citizenship or ethnicity. Originally, *russkii mir* was conceived as a way of theorizing the Russian diaspora, but Mikhail Suslov argues that it now constitutes its own ideology.[28] For Anatolii Babynskyi, *russkii mir* "resonates with [Ivan] Ilyin's vision of 'Great Russia,' encompassing Ukraine and Belarus, as a unique spiritual, linguistic, and cultural unity."[29] This essay differentiates *russkii mir* as an ideology, and the so-called Russian World itself, which describes Russophones as a supposedly unified group extending beyond Russia proper (similar to the Anglosphere or *la Francophonie*).[30]

In initial conceptions of *russkii mir,* speaking Russian was the only criteria for belonging.[31] One of the earliest theorists of *russkii mir,* Petr Shchedrovitskii, subscribed to a philosophy of language that follows the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the theory that language shapes thought so far as to constitute a separate worldview.[32] This version of the Russian World was rhizomatic, porous, and was not confined to a specific territory: for Shchedrovitskii, it included foreigners who had learnt Russian.[33] Shchedrovitskii held that the periphery, or Russian diaspora, was more important

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[22] Putin, "Valdai Discussion Club."
[23] Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 29.
[24] Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, 26.
[25] Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, 44–45.
[26] Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique,* 25.
[27] Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, 28.
[28] Mikhail Suslov, "'Russian World' Concept: Post-Soviet Geopolitical Ideology and the Logic of 'Spheres of Influence,'" *Geopolitics* 23, no. 2 (2018): 333, https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1407921.
[29] Anatolii Babynskyi, "Resentment, Ideology And Myth: How 'Holy Rus' Haunts the Russian Soul," in *The Churches and the War: Religion, Religious Diplomacy, and Russia's Aggression against Ukraine* (2024): 63.
[30] Suslov, "Russian World," 333.
[31] Note the similarity between *russkii mir* and Il'in's idea of individuals as cells belonging (involuntarily) to a political *body*. Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.
[32] Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.
[33] Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.

than the core community, because they served as the interface between Russia and the world, as mediators between the globalized international community and domestic Russians.[34] In this sense, the Shchedrovitskiian *russkii mir* emerges in dialogue to the cybernetic lens of Gumilev's *ethnos*, in that Russians on the periphery serve as nodes within two cybernetic language systems, that of the Russian World and that of the other country in which they live. However, the *ethnos*, which is confined to a territory, is distinguished from the Shchedrovitskiian Russian World, which is rhizomatic and porous.

For Suslov, *russkii mir* supposedly serves as a strong ideological tie for extraterritorial Russians and is directly related to the "sphere of influence" argument used by Putin.[35] According to the theory, Russians outside of Russia form part of an extraterritorial Russian "archipelago" which remains connected to Russia proper through their shared language.[36] The concept of *russkii mir* has been picked up and used by Putin, who created the Russkii Mir Foundation with the aims to maintain and deepen connections with Russian speakers abroad.[37]

Linguistic *Gleichschaltung*: Healing the Russian 'Organism'

All three aforementioned understandings of Russia have informed Putin's imperial policies of assimilation and expansion, which have affected Ukrainians and Indigenous peoples in Russia alike. In a talk radio interview, Putin described Russia as a body, citing Il'in and following Gumilev's idea of the *ethnos*. Reflecting on whether Russians "now have a strong, healthy state" since the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin said, "No, of course she [Russia] is still quite ill; but here we must recall Ivan Il'in: 'Yes, our country is still sick, but we did not flee from the bed of our sick mother.'"[38] In this story, *Gleichschaltung* is an attempt to "heal" the "sick" Russian body, with Putin playing the role of doctor.

In the Shchedrovitskiian vision of *russkii mir,* the Russian language itself serves as a tool of *Gleichschaltung*. Indeed, Putin's policy of mandatory Russian-language education for Indigenous peoples in Russia (where previously Indigenous peoples were allowed in most republics to study in their own languages) is indicative of this Russian project of linguistic *Gleichschaltung*. If Russian informs one's worldview, one's understanding, then Russian citizens must speak Russian, Indigenous or not—Russians without this shared *Weltansicht* [world view] pose a security threat to the Russian State in their betrayal of their Russian-speaking compatriots. Previously, in the republics of the Federation, which have large and often majority-Indigenous populations, local governments had the option to mandate education in their indigenous language.[39] However, in 2017, Putin ended this practice, giving a justificatory speech that emphasized the importance of Russian and implying that the use of and learning through other languages was detrimental to studying Russian.[40] In order to maintain "Russia's greatness," Putin has mandated Russian-medium education, to the detriment of Indigenous peoples and their languages.[41] Speaking Russian has thus become a test of loyalty to the regime: if the Kremlin holds the Russian language in such high esteem, speaking one's Indigenous language is an act of betrayal

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[34] Suslov, "Russian World," 335.
[35] Suslov, "Russian World," 333.
[36] Suslov, "Russian World," 334
[37] Andis Kudors and Robert Orttung, "Russian Public Relations Activities and Soft Power," *Russian Analytical Digest* 81 (2010): 2–3, https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-a-006249299.
[38] Snyder, "Putin's Philosopher."
[39] Szymon Jankiewicz et al., "Linguistic Rights and Education in the Republics of the Russian Federation: Towards Unity Through Uniformity," *Review of Central and East European Law* 45, no. 1 (2020): 60.
[40] Jankiewicz et al., "Linguistic Rights," 60.
[41] Jankiewicz et al., "Linguistic Rights," 60.

in Putin's view; at the same time, for Indigenous peoples, doing so regardless is speaking truth to power, reclaiming their existence.[42]

***Russkii mir:* Rejecting Rhizomaticity**

As previously stated, *russkii mir* originated as a means of theorizing the Russian diaspora. Diaspora usually implies an emigration from the motherland, however, the Russian diaspora in post-Soviet countries has often lived in the same place, calling into question whether the borders of the nation-state of Russia are where they should be.[43] Suslov cites Gradirovskii in stating that "the 'Russian World' was not Russia writ large but rather an alternative project for Russianness."[44] But must the existence of Russian speakers outside of Russia necessitate that Russia should be larger, to incorporate the cells of its body, as it were?[45] The existence of extraterritorial Russophones creates a problem for Putin in that he cannot control these so-called Russians: The existence of a democratic Ukraine demonstrates that there is an alternative to Putin's political system, threatening to destabilize his regime.

I argue, following Suslov, that Putin has rejected the Shchedrovitskiian vision of a rhizomatic *russkii mir* in favour of an irredentist, statist version that privileges Russia proper and attempts to mask the power of its so-called diaspora or compatriots abroad.[46] In this view, Russian speakers on the periphery of Russia are fragmented extensions of the Russian organism which should form part of Russia proper. These "Russians" have a higher *passionarity* which increases their value to the state. Putin's new iteration of the *russkii mir* follows a stricter criteria of Russian-majority communities nearby to or bordering Russia, such as in the eastern Baltics, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and some of the Caucasus.[47] While Suslov believes this is a geopolitical iteration of the *russkii mir*, I believe Putin is following an Il'inist and Gumilevian interpretation of this system, in which Russia constitutes a body defined mostly by its cultural and linguistic aspects.[48] To be precise, rhizomaticity is rejected, but the state as a body or system is preserved: Putin does not have aims to conquer London because there are Russian speakers, there, but his focus is rather on the Russian "near abroad."[49]

Applying *Gleichschaltung* to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Considering all of the above, the illegal invasion of Ukraine should be read as a program of Russification that prioritizes Russian language and ethnicity over subaltern Ukrainians. When the Nazis annexed the Sudetenland, they also performed *Gleichschaltung* on the Czechs: the land and people "were to be thoroughly and rapidly Germanized, racially, linguistically, and artistically."[50] Like the Nazis, who believed that their "loss of portions of the Reich after the First World War had deprived them of important parts of their cultural inheritance," Putin believes that

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[42] In Arendt's understanding, speaking truth to the propagandized public makes one a social pariah (Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 13–14), and for Pomerantsev, lying serves as a loyalty test in modern Russia, establishing an individual's submission to the regime: thus, speaking one's Indigenous language is an act of power, resistance against the regime. (Peter Pomerantsev, "Autocracy Is in the Details," with Hanna Rosin, Radio Atlantic, *The Atlantic*, November 21, 2024).

[43] Suslov, "Russian World," 332–333.

[44] Suslov, "Russian World," 335.

[45] Suslov, "Russian World," 333.

[46] Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.

[47] Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.

[48] Suslov, "Russian World," 334–335.

[49] Thomas de Waal, "The End of the Near Abroad," *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 16, 2024, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/05/the-end-of-the-near-abroad?lang=en.

[50] Alan E. Steinweis, "German Cultural Imperialism in Czechoslovakia and Poland, 1938-1945," *The International History Review* 13, no. 3 (1991): 469.

the independence of Ukraine has denied Russia an integral part of its historical body and many of its cultural institutions.[51] It is not a coincidence that the Ukrainian territories currently occupied by Russia are also those where the greatest concentrations of Russian speakers are to be found.[52] The annexation of Novorossiia follows similar logic to the annexation of the Sudetenland: despite being Ukrainian, residents of Novorossiya are Russian enough to be Russified and become authentically, "purely" Russian. Suslov notes that Gumilev held that the Russian "borderlands" and diaspora contain the highest energy and passion, and that therefore the Russian state is suffering from a lack of energy.[53] This "passion" refers to Gumilev's idea of *passionarnost',* or *passionarity*.[54] In the Il'inist conception of Russia as a *body*, this body is weakened through its separation from these parts of the *russkii mir*. Michael Khodarkovsky draws the parallel between Putinist and Nazi irredentist policy as well, which aimed to restore the former German empire "by claiming lands to German-speaking populations outside of its national boundaries."[55] This effort to assimilate people who are both Russian and not-Russian, that is to say, who are russophones but not citizens, or citizens but not russophones, is an attempt to *gleichschalten*, standardize, Russianness. This *Gleichschaltung* has an ethno-linguistic basis which attempts to justify ethnic cleansing as an alleged "purification", eliminating the supposedly impure Ukrainian identity by subsuming it into the Russian *ethnos*. It also serves to establish a stronger Russia, by unifying two peoples who Putin (and Il'in) consider as one.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the invasion of Ukraine and domestic Russification policy are intricately linked to serve the *Gleichschaltung* or standardization of Russianness. Il'in's understanding of Russia as an organism implies Ukraine as a severed limb, and Gumilev's idea of the *ethnos* and of *passionarity* inform Putin's attempt to recapture borderland regions such as Novorossiya, which contains a high number of Russian speakers in order to reinforce the Russian state. Language and control are key here, both in gaining control over Ukraine and in the enforcement of Russian-language education for Indigenous peoples. These efforts both facilitate the regulation of the cybernetic system that is the Russian World. These policies are all aimed at healing the weakened Russian organism. What does all of this reveal? In Putin's attempted *Gleichschaltung* of Russianness lies a desire to strengthen what he perceives as a weakened or impotent Russia, a Russia lacking in *passionarnost'* or vitality.

[51] Steinweis, "German Cultural Imperialism," 468.
[52] Suslov, "Russian World," 344.
[53] Suslov, "Russian World," 336.
[54] Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique*, 44–45.
[55] Michael Khodarkovsky, "Russia's War in Ukraine: How the 19th Century Imperialism and 20th Century Fascism Found Home in the 21st Century Russia," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 35, no. 1 (2022): 101.

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SECTION 4

THE BODY: AGENCY AND RESISTANCE

The Body as an Instrument for the Existence of Spirit in Genrikh Sapgir's Poetry

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Genrikh Sapgir, known as a prominent Jewish author of children's literature, faced significant challenges when attempting to publish his more experimental and less child-friendly works. This experience is emblematic of a broader pattern among Soviet unofficial writers, whose careers were often shaped by a tension between state-sanctioned creativity and their desire for artistic freedom. Despite these obstacles, Sapgir's contributions to the Soviet literary underground were profound, particularly as a founding member of the Lianozovo School—a loose collective of poets, writers, and artists who gathered in the 1950s around Yevgeny Kropivnitsky, a painter and poet, became Sapgir's mentor. The works of this group, created on the margins of official Soviet culture, engaged with language in radical ways, reshaping the possibilities of poetic form and content. Sapgir's own poetics, as noted by Iurii Orlitskii in his studies of Lianozovo poetry, can be seen as part of this larger tradition of experimentalism.[1] Yet, while much has been written about Sapgir's stylistic innovations, very little attention has been given to the role of the human body in his poetry. In contrast to the abstract and cerebral qualities often emphasized in his work, Sapgir's exploration of corporeality reveals an undercurrent of physical and sensory engagement. In this paper, I seek to explore how Sapgir imagined the body as an instrument for an individual, in particular as a communication device.

Genrikh Sapgir's body of work is remarkable not only for its volume but also for its striking diversity, encompassing a wide range of genres, styles, and themes. The poet conducted nearly every conceivable poetic experiment, engaging with diverse genres, exploring forms, experimenting with word destruction, creating visual poetry, and many more. In his works, Sapgir stretched the boundaries of literary traditions and transformed them. Consequently, his poetics became a dynamic fusion, blending seemingly contradictory elements. As Iurii Orlitskii put it, Sapgir simultaneously rejected tradition, including modernism, while actively using it in his experiments.[2] This is why, according to Orlitskii, the defining feature of Sapgir's poetry is the "resolution of contradictions,"[3] meaning that Sapgir harmonizes opposing elements within his work. This involves bringing together contrasting themes and forms in a way that creates a sense of unity or balance, even though the elements themselves might initially seem incompatible. For instance, Sapgir can merge within one text the classical literary tradition and modernism, prose and poetry, the mundane with the sublime, and much more.

Despite Sapgir's tendency to resolve contradictions in his poetry, he remains conventional in maintaining the binary opposition between the body and spirit. In the Russian literary tradition, shaped by its Christian heritage, the body is frequently associated with sinfulness and mortality, while the spirit occupies a more ambiguous position. It is often linked to the sublime and transcendent but is not immune to corruption. Sapgir does not assess the body and spirit directly and avoids addressing these entities from a religious point of view. However, his poetry still reflects classic hierarchical relationships between the spiritual and the corporeal, where, even though the symbiosis is undeniable, the spirit is more important than the body. More specifically, the poet presents the body as a vessel for the spirit, thus emphasizing its purely instrumental nature.

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[1] Iurii Orlitskii, "Vvedenie v poetiku Sapgira," in *"Lianozovskaia shkola": mezhdu barachnoi poeziei i russkim konkretizmom* [Lianozovo school: between prison poetry and concrete art], ed. Zykova et al. (Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2021), 407.

[2] Orlitskii, "Vvedenie v poetiku Sapgira."

[3] Orlitskii, "Vvedenie v poetiku Sapgira." Translation is mine unless otherwise indicated.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the hierarchical relationships between body and spirit in Sapgir's poetry and to see how the "instrument" of the body endows the spirit with agency and uniqueness.

The analysis in this chapter will be limited to the poems from the collection *Elegies*. The selection is based on the list of Sapgir's works compiled by Maxim Shrayer and David Shrayer-Petrov in *Sapgir: Classic of the Avant-garde* [Sapgir: klassik avant-garda], specifically in the chapter "Sapgir's Formula" [Formula Sapgira], where the authors attempt to attribute characteristics of his poetics to the collections in which these traits are most vividly expressed. Given that this project focuses on corporeality, the characteristic of "carnality"[4] is particularly significant for developing some of its key themes. The Shrayers associate three collections with this notion: *Elegies* [Elegii], *Love Poems* [Lustikhi], and *Love at the Dump* [Liubov' na pomoike]. The scholars also define *Elegies* as "philosophical lyrics,"[5] suggesting that the collection serves as a striking example of both ontological and bodily poetry in Sapgir's work. The current project embraces both concepts; however, the focus shifts to the poems that depict the lyrical hero's transformation from life to death. In this paper, considering space constraints, I will limit my analysis to the poem "Dead Cat"[6] [Dokhlaia koshka] from that collection.[7] In these works, Sapgir explores the moments when body and spirit separate. By allowing each to reveal its distinct functions, he redefines their roles within the relationship.

Additionally, it is essential to include such poems as "The Body"[8] [Telo] and "The Spirit" [Dukh], which were published in another collection, *Sonnets on Shirts* [Sonnety na rubashkakh].[9] Created before most other works included in the collection, these poems serve as a manifesto for the body/spirit relationship in Sapgir's poetry. They seek to define the body and spirit as distinct and separated, each with its own specific characteristics.

To demonstrate the connection between "The Body" and "The Spirit" and to uncover a significant aspect of hierarchical relationships between the concepts they describe, it is necessary to turn to the history of their creation. These poems were put on public display as art objects and written on shirts, as their hierarchical structure was emphasized through the relationships between these mundane objects. They were first introduced to the public in 1975 as a part of a prominent exhibition of contemporary and avant-garde art at *Pchelovodstvo* [Beekeeping] pavilion at VDNKh exhibition park. The exhibition at VDNKh was a heavily censored event and partly an attempt by the government to put the non-conformist art life in Moscow under their direct control.[10] Just a year before, an unauthorized street exhibition of the non-conformist art had been crushed with heavy machinery on the order of the authorities (it became known as *The Bulldozer Exhibition* [Bul'dozernaia vystavka]). For Sapgir, who regarded himself as a poet rather than an artist, participating in the VDNKh exhibition was in a large part a forced measure. Since he was unable to publish his poetry under the constraints of Socialist censorship, as his work did not conform to

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[4] Maksim Shraer and David Shraer-Petrov, *Genrikh Sapgir: Klassik avangarda* [Genrikh Sapgir: An avant-garde classic] (Izdatel'skie resheniia, 2017), 72.
[5] Shraer and Shraer-Petrov, *Genrikh Sapgir: Klassik avangarda*, 72.
[6] See Appendix 3 for the text of the poem.
[7] See the Appendices for the poems and their translations.
[8] See Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for the poems.
[9] Mariia Dvoinishnikova, "Sistema zhanrov liriki Genrikha Sapgira: spetsifika i poetika" [Genrikh Sapgir's system of lyric genres: specifics and poetics] (PhD diss., South Ural State University, 2011), 121.
[10] "Chetyre vzgliada na 'Pchelovodstvo'" [Four ways of looking at "Beekeeping"], *Artgid*, July 7, 2022, artguide.com/posts/2436.

the expectations of Socialist Realism, he chose to write his poems on shirts and present them as an art object—the gesture would allow him to share the texts with others.[11]

There are no extant photographs of Sapgir's shirts as exhibited at the VDNKh. The knowledge about them as objects is derived from Sapgir's own writing and the accounts of other exhibition participants. Most likely, no one was able to take a picture of the show anyway: in the preface to *Sonnets on Shirts*, Sapgir writes that the shirts were quickly removed due to the fact that the poems written on them did not pass censorship.[12] However, other contributors would later recall how the shirts were displayed. Victor Krivulin, a friend of Sapgir's and an active contributor to unofficial culture, recalled that the shirt "The Body" was cut up and full of holes, while the shirt "The Spirit" was starched and ironed.[13] Sapgir gives more details about these art objects in his interview to the journal *Voprosy Literatury*.[14] During a conversation with interviewer Tatiana Bek, he mentions that the shirt "The Body" was "clownish" [shutovskaia] and he also cut its sleeves at "mocking angles" [shuteinye ugolki]. For another shirt, however, which featured the text of "The Spirit," Sapgir used amber cufflinks. Also, the poet mentions that, at the VDNKh exhibition, the shirt "The Spirit" was hung over the shirt "The Body." In the preface to *Sonnets on Shirts*, Sapgir describes the shirts similarly to how Krivulin saw them, saying that the text "The Body" was written on a torn and cut-up shirt, while "The Spirit" was written on a clean and freshly ironed one.[15] From these descriptions, the hierarchical relationship between the poems—and their respective subjects—becomes clear. The shirt representing the spirit is positioned above, exuding beauty and refinement, whereas the body hangs below, appearing dirty and untidy, which suggests the supremacy of the spiritual over the corporeal.

Sapgir also emphasizes the hierarchical relationships between spirit and body by attributing to the former the qualities of *prima materia*. The concept alludes to the raw, formless substance that is the base for everything ever created. Aristotle introduced the concept of *prima materia* as the substance that, combined with form, creates all material objects. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes that it is "in itself neither a particular thing nor a quantity nor anything else."[16] This formless matter becomes something only when it acquires form, making this underlying substance the potential of all physical reality. Thus, the perception of spirit as *prima materia* underscores the body's subordinate nature as in this case, the spirit is the basis for the creation of the body. In Sapgir's "The Spirit," the portrayal of the spirit diverges from both Christian and Jewish conceptions. Unlike the spirit in Christian or Jewish traditions, Sapgir's spirit is not as static; instead, it constantly "rears up," "flies," and "molds" the universe from chaos. The spirit in the poem is characterized by contradictions—it is both omnipresent and isolated, both creator and creation, both transcendent and intimately connected to the world.

Moreover, the actions of the spirit are not clearly defined or attributed solely to human beings, but also to objects. The poem uses abstract and metaphorical imagery such as "a star," "a

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[11] Tatiana Bek, "Risovat' nado umet', ili v iskusstve vsegda est' chto delat'. Beseda s G. Sapgirom" [One has to know how to draw, or there is always something to do in art. A conversation with G. Sapgir], *Voprosy Literatury* 4 (1996), https://voplit.ru/article/risovat-nado-umet-ili-v-iskusstve-vsegda-est-chto-delat-besedu-vela-t-bek/.

[12] Bek, "Risovat' nado umet'."

[13] Victor Krivulin, "Genrikh Sapgir. Poslednie stikhi" [Genrikh Sapgir. Last poems], *Arion* 1 (2000), https://magazines.gorky.media/arion/2000/1/poslednie-stihi-2.html.

[14] Bek, "`Risovat' nado umet'."

[15] Genrikh Sapgir, "Introduction," in *Sonety na rubashkakh* [Sonnets on shirts] (Prometei, 1989), 1.

[16] Aristotle, "Metaphysics" in *Aristotle: In Twenty-three volumes*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Harvard University Press, 1933), https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0086.tlg025.perseus-eng1:7.1029a.

bull," "a tiny bird's heartbeat," and "a jasmine moth and sun." These symbols evoke living objects rather than depicting literal scenes or objects. The poem focuses on the inner experience and the abstract movement of the spirit ("molding," "unraveling"), rather than focusing on external, concrete actions or objects.

Since "The Spirit" is written from the perspective of this entity, in the line signifying the creative activity of the spirit, "on the fly from chaos, I'm molding / … new forms," Sapgir asserts that physical objects owe their existence to the nonphysical agency. This is also emphasized through the enumeration of unrelated objects in the first quatrain: "A star a child a bull a tiny bird's heartbeat." All these objects contain a part of the spirit within. The poet expresses this thesis in the line, "But how lonely I am / When all is me—all me the jasmine moth and sun." The loneliness of the spirit arises from the fact that all forms are mere derivatives of primordial matter. The spirit is alone because everything in the world is a manifestation of itself. It is the spirit that holds the creative power in life and in the text.

The text also indicates chaos as the initial state of the primordial matter—the spirit eventually returns there after the death of a form: "I striving from eternal to defeat / Aspired to catch myself in closeness." At the end of the poem, the spirit is also presented as the cause and an integral part of human essence. Thus, the last line of the text finally reaches the description of spirit in a man: "In drunken poet's mind wild with excess / I know no bounds of time or place / And shake my sonnet hard from where I've spun." By closing the text by attributing the activity of the poet to spirit, Sapgir again emphasizes the creative nature of the spirit. He likens it to an artist, who is able to create his own world with boundless imagination. It shapes an array of creations—ranging from the vast and celestial, like "a star" to the intimate and delicate, like "a tiny bird's heartbeat." The spirit gives form to both innocence, symbolized by "a child," and power, represented by "a bull." Its creative reach extends to fleeting, fragile elements of nature, such as "jasmine," "moth," and also the monumental phenomena, such as the "sun." Through these diverse images, Sapgir underlines that the spirit, much like an artist, continuously crafts a universe that is dynamic, multifaceted, and rich in meaning.

In addition to illustrating the superiority of the spirit, Sapgir highlights the body's instrumental role, portraying it as a functional, almost mechanical entity, subordinate to the spirit's higher purpose. In "The Body," this is conveyed through the metaphor of the body as a "suit" or "shell" that houses the spirit. While the body is presented as secondary and even dismissible, it is nevertheless essential as the vessel through which the spirit operates. The epigraph to the poem, "Here lies only the shell. Dry your tears," underscores this dynamic, emphasizing the body's temporary nature in contrast to the eternal spirit. However, the body still plays a crucial role in human experience, as it is the medium through which the spirit interacts with the physical world. This relationship is further illustrated in the first tercet, where Sapgir asserts that the body is necessary for existence in the material world, even though its eventual death allows for the release of the soul. The body is depicted as something that can be "taken off," but it is still required for the spirit's temporary earthly journey, reinforcing the assumption that while the spirit is superior, the body is an integral part of the human condition. The imagery of the body being both "cramped" and "wide" suggests that the spirit experiences the physical realm through the limitations and capacities of the body. The body is not merely a passive vessel but actively shapes the spirit's experiences of confinement or freedom. Ultimately, while the poem ridicules bodily desires such as food, sex, and sleep, it highlights the body's importance in creating a space for the spirit to fulfill its journey, revealing a complex interdependence between the two.

While the body may be seen as secondary to the spirit, it is essential for the spirit's expression and growth in the material world. By framing the body as a "shell," the poem suggests that, despite its fragility and subordination to the spirit, the body is necessary for the spirit's existence in the physical realm. The shell may be delicate, but it provides the structure needed for the spirit to interact with the world: without a body, the spirit could neither sleep, eat, nor love, even if it "makes you sign."

Sapgir often emphasizes the complementary relationship between body and spirit by highlighting the body's inherent weakness. The body is designed to serve the spirit, and unlike it, it is fragile and finite. In the poem "The Body," these vulnerabilities are brought to light. The text starts with the lines "Sun-blown through—all full of gaping holes, / And a waterfall of time—it flows through me." These lines present a body as a shaky, fragile object—something that has "gaping holes" in it cannot be stable. Besides that, the author enhances the depiction of this unsteady construction by introducing a destructive force of immense power that constantly tries to ruin it—"a waterfall of time." These waterfalls symbolize the relentless passage of time and how it deteriorates the body, exposing its inherent fragility. Bearing in mind that further along the text it turns out that this flimsy structure exposed to strong streams of water consists of plaster ("Yet I freeze stiff as plaster")—not the most durable material—the body is described here as extremely weak, constantly on the verge of destruction. The body is only "keeping the appearance": by trying to be an unshakable plaster, it creates an illusion of stability and permanence. Only when people can agree with this illusion, can they immerse themselves in the mundane routines of everyday life. When they spend their time in banal, ordinary places such as "In subway cars in taxis streets, and homes," they appear to continue their lives without questioning the transient nature of their existence.

In the second quatrain of "The Body," Sapgir disfigures the human body using various comparisons with hideousness and absurd objects. The body is described as "flesh," which aligns it with the concept of animal meat. It is also compared with "a sweating chunk of cheese"—the possibility of a spoiling, sweating product adds to the disgustingness of this image. The movement of muscles inside this body is described in the text as "a quiver flesh" in coarse cloth. These are not very common ways of describing a body. Here, the corporeal gets disconnected from its human nature, since Sapgir does not describe the beauty of someone's eyes or legs but rather presents the body as it lies in an anatomical theater. The disconnect is also manifested through his comparisons of the human body with the body of an animal: "Imagine me a horse: it's easy, see," and in how the poet describes purely biological processes that happen in a body—swelling and moving muscles. From this perspective, the poetic narrative dehumanizes the body. For Sapgir, in short, true human nature lies in the spirit, not in the "shell" that hosts it within.

This theme of bodily disconnection extends beyond the living form to the body after death. Sapgir also writes poetry where, during this transition, the emphasis is on the body left behind during this transition, highlighting the transformations it undergoes. The poet illustrates how, even before decay begins, the dead body experiences dramatic changes. As a result, those witnessing this transformation abruptly stop perceiving it as an integral part of the person it once was. This shift emphasizes that, without the soul, the body is no longer connected to the individual and becomes an eerie object—a part of *nature morte*. Through this portrayal, Sapgir reinforces the secondary nature of the body, reducing it to a mere object devoid of agency, once the soul has departed.

The poem "Dead Cat" serves as a compelling example of the changes that occur with a dead body and how it is perceived. It not only illustrates how others perceive the dead body but

also presents a fantasy of how the deceased could experience this shift in attitude. The first and second paragraphs of the text contain a description of the body of a deceased person; first in the first days after death, and then "after autopsy," that is, after some time after passing away. The description of the body in the first paragraph is very similar to the usual perception of a living person. Instead of directly stating that a person has died, the narrator talks about him as if he had just fallen asleep: "they still retained the elegance of their face in sleep." Judging by this description, the narrator has not yet realized the death of a person. It is impossible to believe in his death, and his body does not yet reflect these changes (or does not reflect enough). A recently deceased body is so similar to a living one that the text describes it as someone who buries a person, "it seemed their eyelashes might flutter." The only thing that distinguishes it from an alive human being—"a smile of understanding drew the corner of the ashen lips."

The second paragraph already contains a description of the corpse that the body becomes when it is brought "after the autopsy, on the third day." Here the body becomes scary-solemn and unfamiliar, not a shell of the soul of a loved one. Rigor mortis erases the smile from the face and creates "lips stubbornly shut." Morgue workers give the body an official and artificial, uncharacteristic pose for any living person with "hands folded obediently." These changes are highlighted, among other things, by a change in facial expressions that close people of the dead do not recognize anymore—instead of "a cherished face" they see only "a grim mask." The face of the dead now not only does not belong to their loved one. Having changed beyond recognition, it ceases to look like any human face. It becomes an artificial form of a face—a mask. Here comes the point where people finally realize what happened to the human body because of its inanimate appearance: "We look on, quietened: cadaver." This awareness is also emphasized by the absolute inaction of the buriers. At this moment, people can only quietly look at the corpse, but they can do nothing about it because they are powerless in the face of death.

To indicate awareness of death, it was important for Sapgir to use the word "cadaver" instead of "dead body" or "corpse." The word "cadaver" is a part of the professional lexicon that denotes a body used for medical purposes, such as the study of anatomy, organ transplantation, and other purposes.[17] Using the word in the context of change after death, Sapgir emphasizes the transition of body being a shell for spirit to losing it and thus becoming a mere object: "limbs stiffened—placed me on the platform—a hand in a rubber glove—something flashed—and lilac cold penetrates the brain…"

The first part of "Dead Cat" leads the narrator into a fantasy of being dead, revealing how others' attitudes toward a dead body shift, described from a first-person perspective. The sight of the dead body described in the first part leaves him so shocked that he begins to ask himself: "How does *it* happen?—and how will *it* happen with me?" In an attempt to answer the question, the hero turns to bodily experience, trying to imagine his own life after death. He calls it "a mock death" because his consciousness is still functioning in this fantasy—he still has the ability to think, feel, touch, and hear. Since this fantasy is a reaction to the funeral in which the hero has just taken part, he imagines his fake dead body in the same situation in which the corpse he had just buried turned out to be.

During his mock death, the narrator starts noticing how his attitude toward his body changes. If at first people cried about him, "masked" their horror with grief for the departed personality, then in this paragraph, he begins to be treated not as a person, but as an object. Because other people perceive his body as insensitive, they "just roughly drag" him, "laying … on [his]

[17] "Kadavr," in *Istoricheskii slovar' galitsizmov russkogo iazika* [Historical dictionary of gallicisms of the Russian language], http://rus-yaz.niv.ru/doc/gallism-dictionary/fc/slovar-202-2.htm#zag-16867.

stomach," without caring that he will be hurt or uncomfortable. For the same reason, no one "thinks to brush away" a fly that landed on the hero's face. People are "whispering quietly" without paying attention to the body and without addressing it, because for them it is now just an empty shell, almost unrelated to their loved one. To dehumanize the body even more, the words "flesh" and "bones" are used here to denote it. People no longer perceive this object as a person, but only as a shell in which the soul used to be. Therefore, the hero feels that his bones are being washed "as if they weren't mine"—which probably means without the proper affection, and attention that was characteristic of caring for a loved one. In this transformation from a thinking subject into an object that scares the lyrical hero, he cannot realize this transition.

The text then moves to the funeral scene, where the transformation of the dead person into an object becomes evident. People no longer associate the lyrical hero's body with his personality, treating it as a mere physical form rather than the individual they once knew. As the character himself says, they have "accepted that I am no longer me." He also says that the "friends and relatives talk about some person"—the hero also does not recognize himself in the speeches of these people, because they have become artificially elevated and describe him as "handsome noble beloved by all." The hero cannot react to this in any way other than "and only a smile can I manage." Finally, the corpse is taken away, the line between the hero's fantasy of his death and real death blurs, and the hero begins to panic. The last paragraph describes the dismemberment of the narrator's body, which is no longer accompanied by panic, but by horror. This paragraph concludes the complete devaluation of the body of the deceased. Doctors are unceremoniously "scavenging through" the character's insides, and in the end, "horrified," they "dump the dead cat."

By depicting the direct confrontation between individuality and the moment of death, Sapgir examines how one grapples with the dissolution of identity. In "Dead Cat," this shift culminates in the unsettling image of the dead cat, a symbol of the change from subject to object. This motif appears multiple times throughout the text and is reflected in the title, making it the central image for the work. The dead cat symbolizes death—a nuisance for other people, who want to put it on a deep dark shelf of one's mind. Also, the "dead cat" is not only a kind of "less significant" type of death to face, but it is also a more common occurrence, and even more so if we're talking about dead stray cats (dead home cat would be "our beloved kitty," not just "a cat"), so it is in the same time defamiliarization and domestication of the death. Or, psychiatrically speaking, kind of "de-realisation" of the occurrence of death and the idea of the narrator's own mortality. It is after the paragraph with the funeral that this image gains its strength because this is the time when everyone wants to put the corpse into the ground as soon as possible. Here, a separate line is allocated to this description, and not just a part of a paragraph. In addition, an unflattering description is added, emphasizing its disturbing nature, the "sweet smell" of the rotting flesh of a "dead cat." As this image intensifies, the invisible voice insistently begins to remove the corpse, using the word "listen," as if to attract the attention of people who kept the corpse of the hero on the surface of the earth. Ultimately, Sapgir's work confronts the reader with the harsh reality of the deep alienation that follows the loss of a loved one, illustrating how grief intertwines with the fear of death. In this struggle, the feelings of alienation and fear ultimately prevail, reducing the loved one to a mere "dead cat."

In summary, Genrikh Sapgir's poetry serves as a profound meditation on the intricate and often painful relationship between body and spirit, particularly in the context of death and loss. The spirit emerges as the life-giving force that animates the body and, by extension, becomes the reason for life itself. His exploration of corporeality reveals a stark reality: the body, once a vessel

for life, becomes an alien object devoid of meaning in the absence of the spirit. Through his vivid depictions of transformation and decay, Sapgir confronts the reader with the unsettling truth of mortality, emphasizing the body's fragility and instrumental nature. While Sapgir draws on universal traditions regarding the relationship between body and spirit, this thematic focus may have contributed as well to his difficulties in being published in the Soviet Union. Marxism-Leninism dismissed the existence of the spirit, elevating the body as the primary focal point of identity and existence,[18] further reinforced by the Soviet body cult. Consequently, Sapgir's exploration of the relationship between body and spirit could be perceived as anti-Soviet. This clash highlights the dissonance between the official cultural perspective and Sapgir's portrayal of these concepts. The poet presents the body without the idealization that the USSR promoted, offering a more authentic representation that reflects the complexities of human experience. By confronting the realities of mortality, decay, and the inherent fragility of the human condition, Sapgir's work resonates with a deep-seated longing for authenticity in an era marked by ideological censorship. Through his exploration of these themes, Sapgir invites readers to reflect on the complexities of existence, encouraging a deeper understanding of what it means to be human in a world that often seeks to diminish the significance of both body and spirit.

[18] Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism i empiriokrititsizm* [Materialism and empirio-criticism] (Politizdat, 1986), 246.

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Appendix 1

Дух[19]

Звезда ребенок бык сердечко птичье —
Все вздыблено и все летит — люблю —
И на лету из хаоса леплю
Огонь цветок — всё — новые обличья

Мое существованье фантастично
Разматываясь космос шевелю
И самого себя хочу настичь я
Стремясь из бесконечности к нулю

Есть! пойман!.. Нет! Еще ты дремлешь в стебле
Но как я одинок на самом деле
Ведь это я всё я — жасмин и моль и солнца свет

В башке поэта шалого от пьянства
Ни времени не знаю ни пространства
И изнутри трясу его сонет

The Spirit[20]

A star a child a bull a tiny bird's heartbeat—
All rears up all flies — yes I'm loving —
And on the fly from chaos I'm molding
A flower a flame — all that — the things to meet

My own existence is a wondrous feat
Unraveling myself I shake the cosmos
I striving from eternal to defeat
Aspired to catch myself in closeness

Oh, gotcha! You are caught! No dreaming in a stem
But how lonely I am
When all is me — all me the jasmine moth and sun

In drunken poet's mind wild with excess
I know no bounds of time or place
And shake my sonnet hard from where I've spun

[19] Genrikh Sapgir, "Dukh," in *Sonety na rubashkakh* [Sonnets on shirts], 4.
[20] Translated by Ilya Ash.

Appendix 2

Тело[21]

“Здесь только оболочка. Слёзы вытри”,—сказал отец Димитрий

Продуто солнцем — всё в огромных дырах
И время водопадом — сквозь меня
Но стыну гипсом видимость храня
В метро в такси на улицах в квартирах

Меня легко представить как коня:
Храп трепет плоть. Но вообще я сыро:
Вспотевший кус черствеющего сыра
В рогоже скользких мускулов возня

Чудовищный костюм — мильоны клеток
Дворец из тканей радужных расцветок
Пожалуй скиньте если надоест

Я многим тесно... А иным просторно...
Но вчуже видеть просто смехотворно
Как это решето спит! любит! ест!

The Body[22]

“Here lies only the shell. Dry your tears” — said father Dimitry

Sun-blown through — all full of gaping holes,
And time, a waterfall — it flows through me with fierce perseverance,
Yet I freeze stiff as plaster, keeping the appearance,
In subway cars, in taxis, streets, and homes

Imagine me a horse: it’s easy, see —
A snort a quiver flesh. But really, I’m just a slough:
A sweating chunk of cheese that slowly sears,
Wrapped in burlap where slippery muscles brawl.

A monstrous suit of millions of cells —
A palace of fabric in rainbow swells.
Just drop it off if tired

I'm cramped for many… yet for some, I'm wide...
But watching from the outside makes you sigh:
How does this sieve sleep! eat! love!

[21] Sapgir, “Telo,” 4.
[22] Translated by Ilya Ash.

Я тоже умру — но умру понарошку — сквозь сомкнутые веки буду слушать как будут плакать человеки — уберите

I will also die — but it'll be a mock death — through closed eyelids, I'll listen to how the humans will weep — take the dead cat away

Appendix 3

Дохлая кошка[23]

В первые дни они еще сохраняли благолепие лица во сне — и при жизни присущее им выражение — слезы вопли растерянность — казалось что дрогнут ресницы — ни малейшего движения — лишь улыбка понимания оттянула угол сизых губ

Но после вскрытия на третий в гробу нам выносили труп — покорно сложенные руки — непримиримо сомкнутые губы — вместо милого лица злая маска мертвеца — и там внутри еще хихикает какой-то подлый нерв

Притихшие глядим: кадавар —

И общий ужас оглушая общим горем — спешим засунуть гроб в машину — не думать — думать о своем — сунуть в яму — какой ушел прекрасный человек! — и поскорее закидать землей — о Боже! убери его от нас

На солнце отворена дверь — прядают бабочки в огороде — и меня занавески волнуясь из окна обдувают — засохшие цветы в стеклянной банке — и бездыханный мотылек — как же *это* бывает? — и как *это* будет со мной?

Dead Cat[24]

In the first days, they still retained the elegance of their face in sleep — and the expression that was theirs in life — tears, wailing, confusion — it seemed their eyelashes might flutter — but not the slightest movement — only a smile of understanding drew the corner of the ashen lips

But after the autopsy, on the third day, they brought us the corpse in the coffin — hands folded obediently — lips stubbornly shut — once a cherished face, now a grim mask in place — and inside, a vile nerve still snickers

We look on, quietened: cadaver —

And in a shared horror, deafened by shared grief — we hurry to shove the coffin into the car — not thinking — thinking of each own — sticking it into the pit — what a tremendous loss! — and hastily cover it with earth — Gosh, take it away

The door is open towards the sun — butterflies dance in the garden — and the curtains, fluttering anxiously from the window, blow over me — dried flowers in a glass jar — and a lifeless moth — how does *it* happen? — and how will *it* happen to me?

[23] Genrikh Sapgir̦, "Dokhlaia koshka." In *Sobranie sochinenii*. *Proverka real'nosti*, ed. Svetlana Artemova, vol. 4 (Novoe Literaturnoye Obozrenie, 2024), 63.
[24] Translated by Ilya Ash.

дохлую кошку — интересно там слякоть или солнце? — ну что же вы? очнитесь позовите — я воскресну

— I wonder if it’s raining or sunshine out there? — hey, whatcha waiting for? Wake up and call me — I'll rise again

Никто не зовет — грубо тащат — кладут на живот — обтянутые мясом кости обмывают как не мои — на щеку села муха — никто и не подозревает — не догадывается смахнуть — переговариваясь тихо меня готовят в путь

Yet no one calls — they just roughly drag me — laying me on my stomach — they washing these bones covered with flesh as if they aren’t mine — a fly sat on my cheek — no one even suspects — doesn’t think to brush it away — whispering quietly, they prepare me for the journey

Все сразу примирились — поверили что я уже не я — друзья и близкие толкуют о каком—то человеке — и у меня к нему симпатия — красивый благородный всенародный — одели в старый пиджачок — а слезы катятся и катятся — жена — стереть бы со щеки — неодолимая апатия — и только улыбнуться я могу — но сладким духом тянет в ноздри — послушайте уберите дохлую кошку!..

Everyone immediately reconciled — accepted that I was no longer me — friends and relatives talk about some person — and I feel he was sympathetic — handsome noble beloved by all — they dressed me up in an old jacket — tears keep rolling and rolling — wife — I would've wiped them from her cheek — irresistibly apathetic — and only a smile can I manage — but the sweet smell pulls at my nostrils — listen, take away the dead cat!..

Постойте куда меня несут? — не пук — не пикнуть — челюсть подвязана платком — ребята что вы в самом деле! — члены одеревенели — положили на помост — рука в резиновой перчатке — блеснуло что-то — лиловый холод проникает в мозг…

Wait, where are they taking me?— no fart, no squeak — jaw bound with a cloth — guys, stop it, really! — limbs stiffened— placed me on the platform — a hand in a rubber glove— something flashed — and lilac cold penetrates the brain…

Остановись! — оставь мне жизнь хотя бы идиота — хотя бы кошки краткий век — хотя б мыслишку воробья — смешно — друзья семейство родина — копается во внутренностях гадина! — готово: сердце в банке — и ужаснувшись виду моему — беритесь за хвост! — на помойку дохлую кошку! — поспешно прячут грустные останки

Stop! — leave me live at least as an idiot — at least the brief life of a cat — at least a sparrow’s thought — that's funny —friends family country — scavenging through my guts, scrounger! — here it is: heart in a jar — and horrified by my looks — take it by the tail! — let's dump the dead cat!— they hastily hide the sad remains.

"Social Darwinism: The Construction of Modernity through Race"

Nikita Manyrin, University of Toronto

It is an acknowledged fact that the racism characteristic of Nazism found its intellectual root in social Darwinist thought,[1] a paradigm that can be described as a belief that nature will "naturally select" the "best" of society.[2] Though Darwin explicitly stated that *The Origin of the Species* was reflective of biology, not anthropology,[3] his inherently Malthusian assumptions about biotic interactions were even recognized by his contemporaries as being based on extant sociopolitical realities.[4] Thus, the popularity of Darwinism among educated Europeans stems from the satisfying twin conclusions that the theory produced: visible social inequalities were reflections of evolutionary biological truths; "natural" human interaction will necessarily improve the species teleologically. In doing so, it provided those using Darwinist arguments with a novel, uniquely modern way of legitimating their view of politics: an appeal to science. By examining how Darwinism affected identity through race, this essay seeks to establish that Darwinism was particularly successful in Germany because of how it manipulated the notion of *Bürgerlichkeit* from 1830-1870.

Discursive demand for the application of biological concepts to human affairs came from the racialization of the working class. Arthur de Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, published in two volumes in 1853 and 1855,[5] is the first to reflect on the notion of "unfitness" coined by Herbert Spencer in *Social Statics*.[6] This concept assigned varying degrees of "fitness" to specific races. Gobineau identified three racial types descending in intrinsic value: the "paler northern European 'Aryans'"; the "yellow races" of Asia, the near east and the Mediterranean; the "black races" of Africa as well as all the "other undeveloped indigenous and aboriginal peoples."[7] The hierarchical ordering of these races is significant because it marks a major deviation from the implications of the previously influential *The Races of Man*, in which Robert Knox was "strongly opposed to the use of racial difference to justify domination, colonial exploitation, or imperial adventures.[8]

Both Derek Hastings and Neil McMaster identify Gobineau's ordering of the races as the product of a paranoid class consciousness, as the result of a perceived threat to the security of his identity. Hastings notes that "Gobineau's aristocratic obsessions, which were sharpened by the threat of revolutionary mobs in 1848, fed directly into his racial theories, as did his growing phobias regarding industrialization and urbanization."[9]

Here, the increasing importance of racial identity relates to the decreasing importance of Gobineau's aristocratic identity. The aristocratic exceptionalism of Gobineau becomes even more

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[1] Richard Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859–1895," Journal of the History of Ideas 54, no. 3 (1993): 488.
[2] Neil McMaster, Racism in Europe, 1870–2000, (European Culture and Society Series, 2001), 34.
[3] Gregory Moore, "Darwinism and National Identity, 1870–1918," in The First World War as a Clash of Cultures (Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 169.
[4] Rui Diogo, *Darwin's Racism, Sexism, and Idolization: Their Tragic Societal and Scientific Repercussions* (Springer, 2022), 31.
[5] Derek Hastings, Nationalism in Modern Europe: Politics, Identity and Belonging since the French Revolution (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 113.
[6] Marius Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe, 1880–1918* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 31.
[7] Hastings, Nationalism in Modern Europe, 113.
[8] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: A Fragment (1850)*," in *Theories of Race* (Harvard University Press, 2023).
[9] Hastings, Nationalism in Modern Europe, 113.

obvious when contrasting his theory of race with that of Knox. For Knox, racial mixing should be avoided because generally in nature, "pure strains…were the hardiest and had the best chance of survival."[10] This reasoning is notably utilitarian and devoid of normative attachment aside from the implication that survival is good. Conversely, Gobineau believed that racial mixing should be avoided because human history can be understood as the continuous process of civilizational decline caused by the degeneration of the Aryan race.[11] By interpreting human history as the continuous degeneration of the Aryan race, Gobineau justified the traditional legitimacy of his aristocratic status through his theory of race. He used Spencer's notion of the "fittest" to identify the aristocracy with "the white race," attributing to "the white race" all the productions of European aristocratic high culture.[12] Accordingly, his essay is significant to the broader success of social Darwinism in Europe because it attributed civilizational decline to the failure of adhering to one's natural, or pre-political identity. Moreover, despite originating and operating on a vicious form of classism, it was able to obfuscate this exclusionary tendency by defining a broad swath of relatively "paler northern Europeans" as superior. Through his framework of racial degeneration, Gobineau was the first to redefine the parameters by which one legitimated their in-group status and understood their place in society. The legal-rational legitimacy characteristic of modern liberalism[13] and the idea of a Rousseauian *amour de patrie* serving as the common bond between compatriots grew increasingly irrelevant; commonality through collective agreement was replaced with commonality through collective constitution. After 1855, intellectual discourse changed the most fundamental and base unit of identification and categorization from nationality to race, representing a shift from a collective to an individual focus. The racialization of Europe made ethnic composition explicitly concerned with national identity.

Gobineau's portrayal of Europe as being composed of two races—white and yellow—created the discursive demand for theorists to establish the precise degree of individuality, or peculiarity, of any given race. The findings published in Darwin's *The Descent of Man* would fundamentally change how the origin of race was conceptualized, with Darwin's theory of sexual selection indirectly contributing to the degree of responsibility that would be assigned to the negative behavior of non-Aryan races. Part of the reason Europe was so enthusiastically receptive of Darwinism was the "intellectual hegemony" that Gunter Mann attributed to biology, as evidenced by Ernst Haeckel's 1863 extrapolation of *The Origin of Species*' findings to human behavior in a speech directed to the Association of German Scientists and Physicians.[14] The drive towards "higher cultural stages"[15] that Haeckel assigned to Darwinism marked the moment when the value-neutral biological determinism of *The Origin of Species* was modified into a positive teleology. As noted by Crook, it was this teleological tendency that contributed to Darwinism's "cultural malleability": "Feminists and anti-feminists, revolutionaries and revisionists, socialists, liberals and conservatives, imperialists and internationalists: all, or almost all, seemed to find something in Darwinism, and the idea of evolution which benefited their cases."[16]

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[10] Harpham, Theories of Race.
[11] Turda, Ideas of National Superiority, 37
[12] Hastings, Nationalism in Modern Europe, 113.
[13] Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings*, ed. Peter Lassman, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge University Press eBooks, 1994), 34.
[14] Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism," 473.
[15] Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism," 473.
[16] Paul Crook, *Darwinism, War and History: The Debate Over the Biology of War From the "Origin of Species" to the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31.

Accordingly, biological determinism of social Darwinist thought manifested uniquely with respect to the cultural, social, political and historical context of the relevant country and the interests of the actor using it rhetorically or conceptually. Thus, it is more appropriate to think about social Darwinism as a schema, the infrastructure that provided the appropriate means for some pursued political end, rather than as a specific ideology. This explains the sharp divergence that would emerge between British and German intellectuals employing Darwinist thinking[17]. Support for changing the dynamics of the concept of race emerged from none other than Darwin himself through the release of *The Descent of Man* in 1871. Evolutionary biologist Rui Diogo notes that Darwin intentionally minimized the role that environmental factors played in determining the appearance of racialized features, such as dark skin, on account of Darwin being motivated by having consistency in the societal implications that his biological discoveries inspired.[18] By emphasizing that race was inherited through human sexual selection instead of natural selection,[19] Darwin unintentionally established race as the foundational base of any European national identity from 1871 onwards. Race preceded every other marker of identity precisely because it was a "biological fact." One of the latent effects this had was the contempt for the non-Aryans, such as Slavs, who shared space with the "Teutonic" races of northern Germany/Prussia. Contempt for Poles in Germany can be traced to the use of the term *Wirtschaft* by George Forster—it was used to describe the backwardness of culture. These stereotypes were instilled in Germans following the influx of Poles into German territory after the partition of Poland in 1795.[20] Interestingly, this contempt was more cultural than racial as noted by the contrast of Forster's positive characterization of Polynesians as noble savages in *A Voyage Round the World* (1777) with his denigration of Poles as "beasts of burden."[21] Hence, this should be interpreted more as an affirmation of the cultural foundations that would develop into the Bismarckian *Kultur* as superior to the *Wirtschaft* of Poland, rather than as an affirmation of Aryan or Teutonic racial superiority. Notably, Jean Louis Armand de Quatrefages de Bréau, a prominent French anthropologist, claimed in 1872 that "the invasion of France and the barbaric bombardment of Paris was the work of a 'Prussian race' that was corrupted by mixing with dark Mongoloid Finnish and Slavonic elements: in contrast, the French and Southern Germans were a more advanced Aryan type."[22]

De Quatrafages' use of racial identity transcends even the borders of nation-states and employs a notion of degeneration reminiscent of Gobineau. It identifies a nation's cultural superiority or inferiority as the result of an endogenous process of racial development; it was only because the northern Germans mixed with "dark Mongoloid Finnish and Slavonic elements" that they were more barbaric and less advanced than southern Germans. This statement prompted a response from German anthropologist Virchow, who refuted him on the basis that differences in people can be explained more by cultural differences rather than physical[23]. The fact that Virchow had to refute the claim about a purely biological character of such perceived discrepancies emphasizes how dogmatized the implications of Darwin's *Descent* had become in the European intellectual environment. Just as dark skin could not be attributed to the man's environment,

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[17] Moore, "Darwinism and National Identity," 1.
[18] Diogo, *Darwin's Racism*, 91.
[19] Diogo, *Darwin's Racism*, 91.
[20] Lenny A. Ureña Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies, Imperial Realities: Race Science and the Making of Polishness on the Fringes of the German Empire, 1840–1920* (Onio University Press, 2019), 21.
[21] Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*, 22.
[22] McMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 40.
[23] McMaster, *Racism in Europe*, 40.

neither could his "lowly" condition be explained by anything other than sexual selection, according to Darwin.[24] Moreover, this demonstrates a degree of intersubjectivity and mutual agreement regarding the privileged status of a Germanic, Western European race in contrast to the polemic descriptions of "Mongoloid Finnish" and "Slavonic" elements. Intersubjectivity between Germany and France on the issue of Slavic inferiority would not have been possible had it not been for the extant perception of inferior Polish *Wirtschaft.* This belief was promulgated by Gustav Freytag's in the widely popular *Debit and Credit*, a book that portrayed a German accountant embarking on a "civilizing mission" of the eastern borderlands recently acquired from the partition of Poland in 1815.[25] By confirming that the visual characteristics of race were the product of sexual and not natural selection, Darwin inadvertently redefined how states would understand the role of civil society and how civil society would understand the role of states.

Herbert Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* was fundamental in influencing how the relationship between civil societies and states would be defined by social Darwinists. According to this worldview, civil societies would function to maintain the health of the national organism. Although such Darwinist theories were not matters of policy from 1871-1914, expounding how they imagined the role of civil society is necessary to discern why Germany's intellectual climate was so conducive to social Darwinism. Chamberlain's book specified that Gobineau's classification of Aryan superiority only truly belonged to the Prussian Teutonic race.[26] Kaiser Willhelm II, a descendant of the Prussian Hohenzollern house, was "infatuated" by the book and its accompanying theory of *Volksgemeinschaft*, which stated that a true nation was a community based on shared race.[27] Through social Darwinist interpretations of race, the nation was redefined again as not being based on social contract or on traditional honour, but on genetic similarity. Since nations were defined by everyone having the same racial origin and no other merit, it follows that one could only rise to prominence in civil society by providing some kind of value to the *Volksgemeinschaft*; in the Darwinist state, the function of civil society was to maintain the health of the racial nation, which could exist independent of society by virtue of its common race. The esteem awarded to the nation, the state, at the cost of the autonomy of civil society, explains why the crystallization of social Darwinist thought occurred during the chancellorship of the immensely popular and politically successful Otto von Bismarck, from 1871-1890.

Social Darwinism took root in German society because it was able to synonymize the pursuit of *Bürgerlichkeit* (bourgeoiseness) with modernity as well as the pursuit of national and racial glory. By associating Catholicism with backwardness and liberalism with materialism, interactions between the German state and German civil society produced the *Kultur* of *Helden* that Germans later recognized as characteristic of their nationhood. Imperative to this was the popularization of scientific education by independent actors in German civil society.[28] Between 1830 and 1870, German intellectuals such as Rossmässler and Virchow helped develop an appreciation of the natural sciences as a "cultural good" by popularizing the belief that familiarity and knowledge of the natural sciences would cultivate an attitude of *Bürgerlichkeit* in civil society, characterized by the following sentiments: "The valorization of work and a rational and disciplined

[24] Diogo, *Darwin's Racism*, 87.
[25] Valerio, *Colonial Fantasies*, 17.
[26] Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority*, 54.
[27] Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe*, 56.
[28] Andreas W. Daum, "Science, Politics, and Religion: Humboldtian Thinking and the Transformations of Civil Society in Germany, 1830–1870," Osiris 17, no. 1 (2002): 135, https://doi.org/10.1086/649361.

way of life; an appreciation of the family as the basis of that civil life; respect for high culture, the arts, and education; the pursuit of the rule of law and urban prosperity; membership in free associations as vehicles for social self-organization and intellectual activity; and the free articulation of political beliefs in the media of the public sphere."[29]

The path to *Bürgerlichkeit*, therefore, was through education, the structure of which itself contributed to the popularity of social Darwinism. The German academic tradition in the mid-nineteenth century did not separate the natural from the social sciences.[30] This was primarily because of the legacy of Kantian philosophy on German thought, characterized by its holistic and deified view of nature as seen in Humboldt's *Cosmos*.[31] However, Neo-Kantians never agreed with the application of Darwinism to society as a result of the decentralized, unspecified mechanics of evolution. Their critique, on the contrary, stemmed from what they saw as "the radical disjunction between scientific and social thought" that was caused by removing any kind of moral imperative from the engine driving human progress.[32] Nonetheless, Humboldt's *Cosmos* provided Germans with the blueprint for reconciling the materialist, decentralized mechanical process of Darwinism with the quasi-spiritual tenets characteristic of Kant, as it likened the universe to a divine creation.[33] Moreover, the conclusions from the natural sciences were perceived as "enlightened rationalism" or as almost axiomatic truth,[34] which made German thinkers more receptive to the language of biological determinism after 1871. Social Darwinism, in this case, demonstrated its aforementioned "cultural malleability."

Furthermore, the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf* boosted the popularity of social Darwinism because it exploited the emerging interest convergence between nationalists and liberal scientists of the time. Both Bismarck and scientists sought to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church on German society, with people such as Haeckel attacking the Catholic establishment since at least the 1860s.[35] Through the "twin achievements of military victory and German unification," as well as his attacks against Catholicism, Bismarck "endeared himself to many anticlerical Darwinists in the 1870s," winning the previously liberal Haeckel over as an "admirer."[36] Moreover, this also served to alienate both the proponents of the Catholic Church and the Neo-Kantians as the definitive "Other" in German society, as belonging to a morality not explicitly attached to the state. Bismarck connected the victorious, unified, militarily superior Germany of 1864-1871 to the concept of progress and modernity by identifying and targeting the opposite pole of loyalty. The interactions between the newly formed German state and its scientifically educated civil society laid the groundwork for the dichotomy of *Händler* and *Helden* identified by German thinkers during WWI. By this point, national identities had crystallized through the identification of race as the fundamental pre-political unit of identity, with the Germans identifying themselves with the idealistic and virtuous *Kultur* of *Helden* while categorizing the British as a materialistic and "shallow, degenerate *civilization*."[37] Thus, the national identity of Germany was created through the aggregation of interactions between Darwinism's teleological view of human development,

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[29] Daum, "Science, Politics, and Religion," 113.
[30] Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism," 472.
[31] Daum, "Science, Politics, and Religion," 122.
[32] Richard Weikart, "Darwinism and Death: Devaluing Human Life in Germany 1859–1920," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 2 (2002): 340, https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2002.0019.
[33] Daum, "Science, Politics, and Religion," 122.
[34] Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism," 474.
[35] Crook, *Darwinism, War and History*, 30.
[36] Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism," 475.
[37] Moore, "Darwinism and National Identity," 167.

Germany's Kantian legacy and the perception of Bismarck as a modern politician by the majority of civil society.

The success of social Darwinism in Europe stems from the transformative capacity that it had on identity. The racialization of Europeans as a result of industrialization and urbanization represented a paradigm shift in European thought as it implied that the violence that was reserved for the inferior races in the colonies could now be applied to the newly identified inferior races that emerged domestically. However, it needed a new, non-human arbiter. The Aristotelian, anthropocentric explanations for what qualified "civilized peoples" employed by Bartolomé de las Casas, the Dominican friar who asserted the humanity of indigenous South Americans was no longer satisfying. Instead, the completely modern, rapidly developing scientific *industry* would have to provide answers that would otherwise be subject to bias. Ultimately, the success of social Darwinism lay in the historical timing: institutional science had not existed long enough for its proponents to ensure that they were not falling for confirmation bias, yet no other authority, religious or otherwise, was influential enough to contend with yet another iteration of the *Great Chain of Being*.

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SECTION 5

MEDIA/FILM/TV: EURASIA ON SCREEN

"How Historical Dramas of France, England, and Spain Obscure Colonial Exploitation in the Portrayal of Royal Power"

Savannah Parker, University of Pittsburgh

Introduction

Historical dramas often take liberties with the past, blending fact and fiction to appeal to contemporary audiences. In doing so, they can revise or sanitize history, sometimes desensitizing viewers to historical injustices by omitting or diverting attention from them. This paper examines three popular series set in royal courts: Bridgerton by Netflix (set in Regency England), Versailles by Canal+ (set in seventeenth-century France), and Isabel by TVE (set in fifteenth-century Spain) and how each of them reshapes history. The analysis foregrounds the creative choices and themes in each show: Bridgerton's "what-if" racial integration of the British aristocracy, Versailles's spectacle-filled portrayal of Louis XIV's absolutist court, and Isabel's patriotic melodrama of a Spanish queen's reign. In each case, production contexts (namely, budget, market strategy, audience reception) and narrative decisions reveal a tension between historical accuracy and modern values. Ultimately, these series tend to romanticize the aristocracy, even suggesting a meritocracy of virtue and talent, while glossing over or revising the harsher truths of their eras. This has implications for viewers' understanding of history: are such dramas harmless escapism, or do they subtly reinforce myths about the past? The sections below explore these questions, with close readings of key scenes and critical commentary on the shows' themes and reception.

Race, Romance, and Revisionism in *Bridgerton*

Bridgerton (2020–) is a Regency-era romance that became a global phenomenon on Netflix, renowned for its fancy costumes, steamy storylines, and notably diverse cast. Produced by Shonda Rhimes's Shondaland, the series was an instant hit, watched by a record 82 million households in its first month, making it at the time Netflix's "biggest series ever."[1] Backed by a lavish budget (estimated around $7 million per episode),[2] *Bridgerton* was engineered for broad appeal, blending Jane Austen–inspired courtship drama with modern flair (including pop songs rendered as string quartets) and a deliberate twist on historical casting.[3] At the heart of that twist is an audacious question: *What if* high society London had not been all white?

In *Bridgerton*, Queen Charlotte is reimagined as a Black woman, and the show's aristocracy is multiracial, which is unusual for typical period dramas. This creative choice emphasizes the issues of race and historical authenticity. Rather than ignore race entirely, the series offers an in-universe explanation: The marriage of King George III to Queen Charlotte (played by Golda Rosheuvel) ushered in a new era of acceptance, erasing the color line in the aristocracy.[4] In a pivotal scene the first season, Lady Danbury pointedly reminds the Duke of Hastings, Simon, a Black nobleman–how this societal transformation occurred: "We were two separate societies, divided by color, until a king fell in love with one of us. Love, Your Grace,

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[1] Ayomikun Adekaiyero, "'Bridgerton' Is on Track to Dethrone 'Stranger Things' as Netflix's Biggest TV Series," *Business Insider*, May 22, 2024, https://www.businessinsider.com/bridgerton-overtake-stranger-things-netflix-biggest-show-2024-5.

[2] "The Bridgerton Universe Brings in the Cash," *Finance Monthly*, August 9, 2024, https://www.finance-monthly.com/2024/08/the-bridgerton-universe-brings-in-the-cash/.

[3] Nylah Burton, "Is Color-Blind Casting in Regency-Era Romances Really Problematic?" *Refinery29*, August 15, 2022, https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2022/08/11082731/color-blind-casting-cons-bridgerton-persuasion.

[4] Abby Olcese, "The True Story Behind Netflix's *Queen Charlotte*," *Time*, May 5, 2023, https://www.time.com/6277014/queen-charlotte-netflix-true-story-behind/.

conquers all," she declares.[5] Her words highlight the show's central piece of historical revisionism: the notion that royal love overcame entrenched racism. Simon, however, responds with skepticism. Aware that their fortunes hinge on the monarch's whims, he cautions that "The king may have elevated us … to dukes and royalty, and at that same whim, he may just as easily change his mind."[6] This exchange reveals *Bridgerton*'s superficial approach to race: the series-acknowledges that a racial hierarchy existed but imagines it magically dissolved by benevolent order. The dialogue in the scene, delivered amid the gilded splendor of a society ball, is accompanied by shots of diverse couples waltzing under candlelight, a tableau of a fully integrated Ton. These artistic decisions create an effect of optimistic historical fantasy, one that is self-aware of its weak plausibility through Simon's doubts.

Critically, *Bridgerton*'s attempt to remedy the historical exclusion of people of color received mixed reactions. On one hand, the show deserves credit for its inclusive casting, allowing actors of color to take on roles, such as dukes, debutantes, and even the queen, that are traditionally reserved for white actors in period dramas. The role of the duke is notable for deliberately avoiding narratives of slavery or colonial trauma, instead centering universal themes like love, desire, and family, an approach that allows a Black character to exist within the romantic fantasy typically reserved for white leads. By largely sidestepping racism within the story, *Bridgerton* allows its characters of color to experience the same romantic escapism as their white counterparts, a conscious inversion of historical reality meant to empower and include. In alternative-history fiction like *Bridgerton*, the deliberate erasure of racism can serve as a form of representation that prioritizes Black joy and romance unburdened by historical oppression. By avoiding narratives centered on past trauma, these stories open up space for Black characters to experience love, desire, and familial bonds in a landscape not defined by pain, effectively reimagining a world where Black lives are valued and free to thrive. Indeed, in Season 2, the show extends this ethos: the Sharma sisters, Indian heroines, navigate London society with scarcely a mention of colonialism, other than subtle nods to their background in costume and customs.[7] The focus remains on courtship and personal dramas, not the color of anyone's skin.

On the other hand, many commentators find *Bridgerton*'s racial revisionism problematic or incoherent.[8] The show has been labeled "positively anti-historical" and "revisionist" by critics who point out that it ignores the real Regency context of colonialism, the slave trade, and racial hierarchies.[9] The brief explanation Lady Danbury provides, essentially a "royal intervention" that ended racial prejudice, caused some viewers to think it was as too convenient and even flippant. As one reviewer quipped, "the love-conquers-all argument, though, *pleaaaaase*. We all know that it's a bunch of BS. Kings don't marry for love… if she were Black… he never would have married her."[10] In other words, the premise requires such a large suspension of disbelief that it veers into pure fantasy. More significantly, critics argue that *Bridgerton* whitewashes history by omission; it creates a beautiful unreality where racism and by extension colonial exploitation simply is not a factor, thus avoiding engagement with the very real struggles of Black and brown people in the 19th century. As Carolyn Hinds observes, the show pretends "that Black people's race and skin

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[5] *Bridgerton*, season 1, episode 4, "An Affair of Honour," directed by Sheree Folkson (Netflix, 2020).
[6] *Bridgerton*, "An Affair of Honour."
[7] *Bridgerton*, "Off to the Races," season 2, episode 1, directed by Tricia Brock (Netflix, 2022).
[8] Aja Romano, "The Debate over Bridgerton and Race," *Vox*, January 7, 2021.
[9] Amanda Hemmert, "'Bridgerton': Positively Anti-Historical or Just Erasing History?" *UVU Review*, April 19, 2024, https://www.uvureview.com/valley-life/bridgerton-positively-anti-historical-or-just-erasing-history/.
[10] Misty Krueger, "Bridgerton, Episode 4," *Misty Krueger*, December 31, 2020.

tone is of little to no significance in a setting where many who directly enriched themselves from the transatlantic slave trade are alive," calling this omission "absurd and downright insulting."[11]

The sole reason Simon is a duke at all, the show implies, is that Queen Charlotte "bequeathed [the title] to his father purely because he was Black," a plot point Hinds finds "frankly ridiculous."[12] Once that plot point is established, *Bridgerton* pointedly steers away from racial conflict; after Episode Four, racism is never again mentioned, leading to what some viewers see as a jarring incoherence.[13] The series wants to have it both ways: to populate the world with Black and Asian nobles, yet largely behave as if race does not exist.

It is worth noting that the show's popularity did spark conversations about the real history behind its fictional conceit. Responding to both fandom interest and critique, Netflix released a spin-off, *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023), which more directly grapples with the idea of racial integration. That prequel depicts the early days of Charlotte's marriage, showing court insiders balking at a Black queen and the deliberate "Great Experiment," orchestrated by the monarch, of elevating families of color to the peerage. In doing so, the mini-series addresses some criticisms by portraying racism more explicitly (white aristocrats whispering about bloodlines, etc.) and giving Queen Charlotte agency in fighting prejudice.[14] Yet even this enhanced narrative remains a kind of fairy tale resolution of racial injustice. Ultimately, the *Bridgerton* universe asks the viewer to accept a sweeping revision of social history in service of inclusion and romance. The result is entertaining and culturally resonant, but it undeniably omits a more appalling reality of the Regency era. This omission can desensitize audiences to the real historical suffering of marginalized groups. By showing a past that looks beautiful and diverse, the show avoids confronting how exclusionary and unjust that the era truly was. As Amanda Hemmert writes, *Bridgerton* raises the question of whether such a portrayal "erases colonization, Black narratives, and social class" from the Regency picture.[15] The answer, in *Bridgerton*'s case, seems to be largely *yes*: these issues are swept under a luxurious rug. The series consciously trades historical accuracy for a hopeful fantasy.

Opulence and Omission in *Versailles*

If Bridgerton rewrites history by addition, thereby imagining new inclusivity, the series *Versailles* premiered on Canal+ (2015–2018) does so largely by omission and embellishment. *Versailles* is set in the 1660s–1670s during the reign of Louis XIV, famous by his sobriquet the "Sun King" in France. The series focuses on his decision to build the glittering Palace of Versailles and entrench absolute monarchy.[16] From its inception, the series was designed to be a lavish international spectacle. It was created by British showrunners and filmed in English with the purpose of attracting a global audience.[17] With a budget of approximately €27–30 million for Season One, making it the most expensive French television series ever produced at the time, it set a new standard for high-end European historical drama.[18]

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[11] Carolyn Hinds, "Bridgerton Sees Race Through a Colorist Lens," *Observer*, January 1, 2021.
[12] Hinds, "Colorist Lens."
[13] Emma Pearce, "Netflix's *Bridgerton*: The Significance of the Insignificance of Race," *The Courtauldian*, January 12, 2021.
[14] *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, season 1, episode 1, "Queen to Be," directed by Tom Verica and written by Shonda Rhimes (Netflix, 2023).
[15] Hemmert, "'Bridgerton': Positively Anti-Historical."
[16] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 1, "Welcome to Versailles," directed by Jalil Lespert, written by Simon Mirren and David Wolstencroft (Canal+, 2015).
[17] "*Versailles* (TV Series 2015–2018)," *IMDb*, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3830558/.
[18] Laurence Thomann, "English Reigns at Versailles as French TV Eyes Global Market," *Yahoo! News*, November

Versailles spared no expense in recreating the Baroque splendor of Louis's court. The production filmed on location at various French châteaux and employed sumptuous costumes, wigs, and set designs to immerse viewers in seventeenth-century opulence. This investment was part of a clear global market strategy: Canal+ and its partners speculated that *Versailles* could be the next *The Tudors* or *Downton Abbey*, in other words, a period drama hit sold worldwide. As one report put it, France "no longer wants to sit on the sidelines of the international resurgence in television… And that means adopting English. It also means spending big," hence a costliest production aimed at maximum export.[19]

Crucially, what *Versailles* downplays or simplifies are the broader political and social issues of the time. The series does touch on Louis's exercise of power: the episodes show him outmaneuvering nobles who resist his will, raising taxes for his palace, and dealing with diplomatic affairs, yet these weighty matters often serve as background to the more titillating personal plots.[20] One notable historical event depicted is Louis XIV's crackdown on Protestant Huguenots, an act that lead to the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the show, this forms part of the narrative arc for Season Three. The audience sees the King's confessor and the notorious Inquisitor, Father Étienne, akin to real-life figures, thus urging Louis toward intolerance. In addition, there are scenes of Huguenot villagers being persecuted and preparations for mass exodus. However, the emotional resonance of this religious conflict is oddly muted. None of the characters in *Versailles* seemed truly convincing in their religious belief; even Louis's piety and his mistresses' supposed Catholic guilt feel perfunctory, as if the show itself cannot fully inhabit the pre-modern mindset. Modern audiences may struggle to identify with people prepared to be martyred for their convictions, and *Versailles* does not manage to bridge that gap. As a result, the revocation of the Edict (a hugely traumatic event in French history) is portrayed, yet its profound human tragedy is somewhat lost amidst the show's glossy presentation. The camera is more likely to linger on the King's majestic posture or the beautiful settings than on the suffering of the Protestants. Tellingly, even in these serious moments, *Versailles* often keeps Louis XIV at a loss from the ugliest aspects. Fanatical underlings carry out persecutions while Louis vacillates, looking troubled but ultimately resolute.

This approach is reminiscent of *Isabel*'s tactic with Queen Isabella; this article will discuss this issue later: blame the "bad cops" so the monarch retains some sympathy. Another area of omission is the condition of the common people. Outside of a few token scenes, for instance, a starving peasant begging Louis for help or Philippe mingling with soldiers, *Versailles* is almost entirely focused on the aristocracy. The palace is a self-contained world, intentionally so, as historically, Louis XIV did aim to sequester and preoccupy the nobles at Versailles.[21] The series conveys this power by immersing the audience in a hermetic court culture of gossip, fashion, feasting, and flamboyant display. It succeeds in showing the viewer how power and image were cultivated: for example, there are elaborate ceremonies of the King's levée, where nobles vie for the honor of handing Louis his shirt in the morning.[22] Yet the series fails to juxtapose that splendor with the cost it exacted on the treasury and people in the country. The immense tax burden and the seeds of future unrest—the reign of Louis sowing conditions that, generations later, led to revolution—receive only passing mention in expository dialogue: "The people are angry about

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6, 2015. https://sg.news.yahoo.com/english-reigns-versailles-french-tv-eyes-global-market-055722999.html.

[19] Thomann, "English Reigns."

[20] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 6, "Invalides," directed by Thomas Vincent, (Canal+, 2015).

[21] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 3, "Mirror for Princes," (Canal+, 2015).

[22] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 3, "Mirror for Princes," (Canal+, 2015).

new taxes."[23] During *Versailles* one could fast-forward through the "tax lectures" and still enjoy the show's core appeal and the immersive pageantry of the Sun King's court. The show itself treats such lectures as incidental, something to be endured before the next sumptuous ball or romantic assignation. In essence, *Versailles* desensitizes viewers to the realities of absolutist rule by glorifying the spectacle and personal drama surrounding Louis rather than the consequences of his policies.

The thematic focus on glamor and intrigue has implications for how *Versailles* frames aristocratic power. The series creators certainly do not portray Louis XIV as a saint he is shown to be ruthless at times, when he is ordering arrests or executions of those who betray him and excessively ambitious, for instance when he builds Versailles to aggrandize himself. Yet the series invites the audience to understand, even admire, Louis's assertiveness. The viewer observes events largely from Louis's perspective or from the perspective of characters close to him, positioning him as the protagonist who must overcome challenges (assassination plots, rebellious nobles, his own brother's rivalry) to secure his reign. In doing so, *Versailles* implicitly justifies Louis's absolutism as necessary or at least as the natural course of events. The show often highlights Louis's cleverness and determination, for instance, conceiving the palace as a "gilded cage" to control the nobility, suggesting a certain meritocratic logic to his success.[24] By contrast, the courtiers who oppose or deceive him, such as the villainous Montcourt in Season One, or the conspirators in Season Two are depicted as selfish and short-sighted, eventually punished for their disloyalty. Good or competent nobles prosper; bad or inept ones fall. This narrative pattern reinforces the idea that Louis and his loyal circle deserve to rule because they are shrewder and more visionary. It is a subtle reframing of aristocracy into a kind of survival of the fittest. The reality, naturally, was that birth and hierarchy—not personal virtue—determined one's status. Simultaneously, *Versailles* mostly sidelines any critique of the feudal system. One rarely hears the voice of a commoner denouncing the nobles' privileges. The closest the show comes is in exploring Philippe d'Orléans' frustrations living in his brother's shadow and a few minor characters who comment on the king's demands.[25] This insular viewpoint means viewers are encouraged to invest emotionally in the royals' interpersonal struggles, such as sibling rivalry and unrequited love interests, etc., rather than in any broader moral evaluation of their regime.

The reception of *Versailles* suggests that while many enjoyed its extravagance, others were disappointed by its shallow characterizations and historical liberties.[26] French historians pointed out numerous inaccuracies and anachronisms in *Versailles*.[27] For example, the creators altered the timeline of key events for dramatic effect. Real historical figures were either combined or fictionalized; for instance, the show invents several noblewomen and adds a witchcraft subplot involving Madame Agathe. Most notably, the English-language dialogue often feels anachronistic and unconvincing for the period. *Versailles* presents French national history through an English-language, erotically charged lens, resulting in what feels like an Anglo-Saxon adaptation of Louis XIV, a portrayal that may not fully align with how many in France would choose to remember or represent him.

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[23] *Versailles*, season 3, episode 4, "Crime and Punishment," (Canal+, 2018).
[24] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 3, "Mirror for Princes," (Canal+, 2015).
[25] *Versailles*, season 1, episode 4, "The Road," also known as "Invalides" (Canal+, 2015).
[26] Sam Wollaston, "Versailles review – all hail Louis the Phwoarteenth," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2016/jun/02/versailles-review-louis-the-phwoarteenth-is-a-lot-of-fun.
[27] "Versailles: The Affair of the Poisons," *An Historian Goes to the Movies*, August 27, 2018, https://aelarsen.wordpress.com/2018/08/27/versailles-the-affair-of-the-poisons/.

Versailles is a heavily fictionalized production that provoked some controversy in France. Although it ran for three seasons, the series did not achieve the lasting success or cultural resonance of period dramas such as *Downton Abbey*. However, it succeeds in one significant respect: it vividly captures the spectacle and opulence of court life, with the palace and costumes functioning as central visual protagonists in the narrative. According to production designer Katia Wyszkop, despite the series' substantial budget, the depiction of Versailles captures only a fraction of its historical grandeur: "You have to imagine that it was a hundred times more luxurious" in reality.[28] This admission is telling, even in a show criticized for excess, the actual historical opulence was greater. Yet what the series fails to convey is the human cost behind that opulence. By largely omitting the suffering, toil, and oppression underlying Louis XIV's grandeur (except as abstract plot points), *Versailles* can desensitize the audience to what absolute monarchy entailed. The series seduces viewers much as Versailles itself seduced the French nobility, with surface splendor, distracting from the harsher truths outside its gilded walls.

Myth and Monarchy in *Isabel*

While *Bridgerton* and *Versailles* rewrite history in service of trivial entertainment, the Spanish series *Isabel* (2012–2014) approaches revisionism with a more overtly educational and nationalist intent. *Isabel*, produced by Spain's public broadcaster RTVE, dramatizes the life of Queen Isabella I of Castile (1451–1504), from her youth and ascent to the throne through the culmination of the Reconquista, Columbus's voyage, and beyond. Upon its release in Spain, *Isabel* was acclaimed for bringing a seminal era of Spanish history to life, and it attracted up to one-fifth of the national television audience in primetime, a significant feat.[29] The creators of *Isabel* approached the series with a clear emphasis on historical authenticity, shaping the narrative around documented events and known outcomes. While the show remains a work of dramatized fiction, its structure reflects a conscious effort to maintain fidelity to the historical record. Dramatic license is employed selectively, used primarily to fill narrative gaps where documentation is limited or to streamline complex developments for clarity and coherence. The storyline avoids fabricating characters who could alter the course of real events and remains consistent with the fates of actual historical figures. Key political events such as wars, diplomatic treaties, and dynastic transitions are depicted in alignment with the established historical timeline, allowing the series to function as both entertainment and a broadly accurate account of Isabel I's reign. This almost documentary zeal sets *Isabel* apart from the more fanciful Anglo-American period dramas. Indeed, some Spanish reviewers lauded *Isabel* for what they perceived as rigorous authenticity, with one noting that its appeal lies in being a true "historical series and not a mere period piece" sustained by "rigor histórico."[30]

However, *Isabel* is not a neutral chronicle: it carries a strong narrative viewpoint that ultimately serves to mythologize its protagonist. The series coincided with—and perhaps contributed to—a resurgence of interest in Isabella's legacy in Spain, positioning her as a foundational figure of the nation. The writers explicitly sought to counterbalance distortions of Isabella's image that had existed in popular imagination, especially those propagated by Franco's dictatorship, which had appropriated Isabella as the Catholic, nation-uniting queen for the purposes of its propaganda. In contrast, *Isabel* aims to present a more humanized and holistic portrait:

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[28] Laura Morgan, "Go Inside the Set Design of *Versailles*," *Architectural Digest*, September 26, 2016, https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/go-inside-the-set-design-of-versailles.

[29] Mark Evan Davis, "History, National Myth and Melodrama in TVE's Isabel (2012–2014)", *Miríada Hispánica* 17 (2018).

[30] Juan Claudio de Ramón, "Isabel, pitos y palmas," *JotDown Cultural Magazine*, April 1, 2013.

Isabella as a devout yet shrewd ruler, a "mother of the nation" who faces personal and political challenges. The tone of the series is one of respectful admiration, inviting the audience to empathize with Isabella's struggles, be it asserting her claim to the throne, dealing with unruly nobles, or reconciling her faith with governance. By design, viewers are not meant to question whether Isabella should be in power; rather, they are guided to root for her as a heroine overcoming obstacles. These character choices are evident in the way the show frames key decisions. For example, when Isabella chooses to marry Ferdinand of Aragón against the wishes of her half-brother King Enrique IV, the narrative firmly backs her resolve as wise and fortuitous. Throughout the series, Isabella often finds herself surrounded by scheming men at court and is portrayed navigating this "man's world" with quiet resolve and intelligence, albeit most explicitly in scenes from the second season that dramatize tense political maneuvers rather than outright personal betrayals. In this sense, *Isabel* functions as a melodrama that personalizes national history: it uses the Queen's family life, friendships, and inner emotions to explain and justify her political actions. The series thus merges the national myth of Isabella as the unifier of Spain, champion of the Catholic faith with a family drama that makes her relatable and virtuous.

Where *Isabel*'s revisionism becomes most apparent is in how it handles the darker chapters of Isabella's reign, notably, in the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition and the expulsion of Jews in 1492.[31] These events are not ignored; on the contrary, the show depicts them in detail, but with careful framing. Several powerful episodes cover the rise of Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada and the decision by Isabella and Ferdinand to expel practicing Jews from their kingdoms. The viewer observes violent scenes: for instance, mobs attacking *conversos* (Jewish converts to Christianity) and explicit torture of suspected heretics by Inquisition officials.[32] The pain and trauma of Jewish families forced into exile are shown through individual characters, including a sympathetic young woman in Isabella's court who is revealed to have Jewish heritage and meets a grim fate. These portrayals are surprisingly frank for network television and serve to acknowledge the human suffering caused by the monarchs' policies. However, the series simultaneously works to absolve or soften Isabella's culpability. The series does not ignore Queen Isabella's role in the expulsion of the Jews, but it often creates narrative distance between her and the most violent consequences of that decision. Moments of persecution or suffering tend to unfold off-screen or through secondary characters, allowing the Queen's image to remain largely sympathetic. In practice, this means the show often places blame for the cruelties on Isabella's advisors or fanatic clergy, while portraying Isabella as conflicted or sorrowful. Torquemada, the Inquisitor General, is a central antagonist, zealously pushing for purges, and he carries the onus of responsibility for the truly atrocious behavior. Isabella, in contrast, is depicted as anguished by the suffering yet ultimately convinced or coerced that these harsh measures are needed for the sake of religious unity and the kingdom's stability. In one scene, after signing the expulsion decree, Isabella prays with tears in her eyes, suggesting that she believes she is doing God's will but feels the weight of it. The narrative choices in *Isabel* create a distance between Queen Isabella and the moral consequences of her actions, allowing an uncritical viewer to continue admiring her piety and apparent compassion for all her subjects. This is a striking example of revisionism by diversion: the facts are not altered, the expulsion of the Jews and the brutality of the Inquisition are depicted, but the framing minimizes the queen's personal accountability. As a result, the interpretation remains skewed to preserve her saintly image, even in the face of actions that

[31] "Spanish Inquisition," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Spanish-Inquisition.
[32] *Isabel*, season 2, episode 13, "La nueva reina" (RTVE, 2013).

contemporary audiences recognize as grave moral wrongdoings. This technique extends to other contentious aspects of Isabella's story.

The conquest of Granada the last Muslim stronghold in Iberia, is presented as a hard-won triumph that finally unites Spain under Christian rule, fulfilling Isabella's long-held dream. The series shows violence and suffering in the Granada war yet again frames it through Isabella's righteous resolve to "free" her country. Columbus's expedition is depicted with excitement and national pride, evading the implications for indigenous peoples in the New World; the show ends before covering the aftermath of the 1492 voyage across the Atlantic. Throughout the series, *Isabel* maintains a tone that, while acknowledging Isabella's flaws for example, in the episodes about her jealousy of Ferdinand's infidelity, or her initial hesitation to trust one of her capable ministers because of gossip, the series still asks the audience to forgive those flaws as understandable in context. Mistakes are often attributed to either the influence of others or to the norms of the time. For instance, when Isabella agrees to the expulsion of the Jews, the script emphasizes the pressure from priests and the climate of fear after a perceived conspiracy; in effect, shifting agency away from her.[33] By the end of the series, Isabella is a figure of almost hagiographic reverence, the final episodes portray her illness and death with a mournful, reverent air, as though marking the passing of a national savior.

In terms of framing aristocracy and royalty, *Isabel* is perhaps the most explicit of the three series in suggesting a kind of aristocratic meritocracy, or at least a destiny shaped by personal virtue. Isabella's rise from a teenage princess who was initially far from the throne to a powerful queen is depicted as a result of her courage, faith, and wisdom. The narrative constantly underlines that she, unlike some other nobles, places the good of the realm above personal interest. While other aristocrats are shown as lazy, corrupt, or power-hungry, Isabella stands out by doing what is righteous, for instance, when praying for guidance, keeping her word, and protecting the poor in some instances. This narrative implicitly tells the viewer that she deserves to rule. Although no single scene perfectly encapsulates it, throughout the series *Isabel*, supporting characters, ranging from soldiers to peasants, frequently express their loyalty by referencing Isabella as the leader who will deliver justice and bring unity to the realm. These moments, while dispersed and informal, reinforce her symbolic status as a unifying figure among her followers. The series does not examine the structural injustice of feudal monarchy emphasizing the idea that no commoner could ever rise to be in Isabella's place. Instead, it operates fully within a great person view of history: Isabella was great, therefore, she achieved great things. It is almost a meritocratic fantasy within a hereditary system. This portrayal resonates with modern viewers, who like to believe that leaders should earn their position by talent and virtue, *Isabel* retrospectively applies that ideal onto the fifteenth century. The audience observes a similar though less pronounced effect in *Versailles* and *Bridgerton*, where the narrative focuses on the personal qualities of nobles to justify their happy endings or continued power. In *Isabel*, it is very much part of the text: Isabella's successes—winning the civil war for the Castilian crown, forging the unification with Aragón, and sponsoring Columbus—are depicted as the fruits of her merit, hard work, wise counsel, and steadfast vision, rather than simply a product of luck or force.

Conclusion

From the ballrooms of Regency London to the galleries of Versailles and the throne rooms of Castile, these three dramas demonstrate the powerful allure of a reimagined past. *Bridgerton*, *Versailles*, and *Isabel* each use the trappings of history, actual figures, settings, and events as a stage upon which to project contemporary ideals and anxieties. In doing so, they inevitably rewrite

[33] *Isabel*, season 2, episode 13, "La nueva reina" (RTVE, 2013).

history, whether by painting it with romance, dressing it up in scandal, or bending it into a nationalist narrative. This revisionism is not necessarily done in bad faith; often, it springs from creative goals or even principled choices, such as *Bridgerton*'s desire to diversify the period drama genre. Yet, the effect on audiences is worth pondering. These series can spark interest in historical topics and humanize long-dead figures, but they can also reinforce myths or oversimplifications. A viewer without additional historical knowledge might come away thinking the 1810s U.K. was far more egalitarian than it was, or that Louis XIV's court was dangerous mostly because of romantic intrigue rather than relentless political repression, or that Queen Isabella's reign was marked only by noble intentions and just outcomes apart from a few regrettable excesses by others.

The concept of "historical desensitization,"—namely, becoming numb to or unworried by the brutal realities of the past—is visible in all three shows through what they choose to omit or understate. For instance, *Bridgerton*'s genteel fantasy omits the violence of colonialism and the rigor of social class prejudice, potentially leaving viewers with a rosier view of the society at the time of the British Empire. *Versailles* revels in decadence but seldom dwells on the oppression that funded that decadence, normalizing absolute monarchy as an aesthetic, not a tyranny. *Isabel* confronts violence but couches it in a narrative of providence and necessity, softening the moral outrage one might feel toward the monarch. In each case, diversion, focus on love stories, palace conspiracies, or the personal moral journey of a ruler, serves to cushion the blow of historical truth.

Nevertheless, these dramas also reflect the values and questions of the present. They demonstrate to the viewer how present-day society likes to interpret history. The push for diversity in *Bridgerton* speaks to a present-day demand for inclusion in the media and perhaps a yearning to imagine a better past. The emphasis on personal freedom and pleasure in *Versailles* (alongside critiques of religious extremism) mirrors modern secular individualism, effectively transposing twenty-first-century attitudes onto the seventeenth century. *Isabel*'s blending of patriotism with a call for understanding and even repenting for historical wrongs shows a society negotiating with its own historical memory, balancing pride with remorse. In this light, revisionism is not simply distortion: it can be a form of dialogue with history, a way of stating what if, why, or how far we've come. The key is that as consumers of these shows, we remain aware that entertainment is not the same as education. The onus perhaps falls on the viewers to enjoy these dramas for their merits, charismatic performances, engaging plots, stunning visuals, while also thinking critically about the differences between the stories the society is told and the documented past.

In summary, *Bridgerton*, *Versailles*, and *Isabel* each foreground the people at the top of old social orders and invite us to care deeply about them. By making kings, queens, and dukes into the viewers' emotional companions for the journey, the shows succeed in making history feel personal. At the same time, this choice is a double-edged sword. The audience empathizes with individuals but may overlook institutions; the viewer is sympathetic to the monarchy to succeed on screen, even if in real life monarchy can be oppressive. The fiction of aristocracy-as-meritocracy provides narrative satisfaction: the spectator wants the just queen to win, the brilliant king to shine, the deserving debutante to get her duke, and in these series, they do. Real history is rarely so just. Perhaps the greatest service these dramas can do is to stimulate curiosity: to send viewers to verify information, to read books, to discuss and debate. If a fan learns that the real Louis XIV had a harsher approach to dissent than shown, or that the real Regency elite did not have enlightened discussions about race, or that Isabella's policies had very complex and devastating repercussions, then the shows have opened a door to deeper understanding. If not, if viewers take the dramatized world at face value, then a degree of misunderstanding or romanticizing of history is the price of the entertainment.

In any case, it is clear that historical dramas are as much about the present as they are about the past. They succeed when they forge a connection across time, even if that means bending facts to fit themes. *Bridgerton* asks the viewer to reconsider who has a chance to be represented in stories. *Versailles* asks how far the viewer is willing to go for ambition and image. *Isabel* asks the viewer to think about leadership and legacy. All shows cause the audience to lose itself in another era. While the costumes and dramas may be enticing, a responsible recipient should remember to occasionally peek behind the curtain of historical revisionism. In doing so, they become more informed consumers of history and myth and are able to enjoy the story while recognizing what is not being said. The aristocrats of these series may be more virtuous or charming than many were in reality, but that, perhaps, says more about the audience's desires than about the past. Ultimately, the conversation between then and now, facilitated by shows like *Bridgerton*, *Versailles*, and *Isabel*, can be fruitful, as long as the audience is aware of the liberties taken along the way.

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"Masking and Bureaucrats in *Carnival Night*: Jung's Persona and Ego in Thaw-Era Soviet Film"

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Karnaval'naia noch [Carnival Night][1] directed by Eldar Ryazanov, is a Soviet-era film encouraging Thaw ideology. Lena, Grisha, and other youth plan a New Year's carnival and struggle incessantly with the bureaucratic *apparatchik* Comrade Ogurtsov, as he tries to censor the celebration and remove any seemingly anti-Communist, anti-Soviet, or anti-revolutionary features, as often done in Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. Three years before the film was produced, Stalin died, and Nikita Khrushchev came into power. This transfer of power started the period of Khrushchev's Thaw with a time of loosened censorship and cultural restrictions.[2] Khrushchev also gave the Secret Speech in 1956 denouncing Stalin and many of his policies and atrocities. This event marked the beginning of the de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union to disconnect Socialism from Stalin and his rule. Under Stalin, bureaucracy was tied to severe censorship and many of the wrongdoings of the Stalin era.[3] This bureaucracy served as a mask through which the old Soviet Union could act and oppress.

As *Carnival Night* promotes Soviet ideology, the carnival's entire image is meant to symbolize the utopian, Communist future. Soviet musicals, such as *Carnival Night, Volga-Volga*,[4] and *Circus*[5] attempt to build a society where the need for work is eradicated and creative expression is celebrated by a successful and stable Communist community.[6] This vision is presented as a reliably attainable goal so long as the necessary effort is put forth. *Carnival Night*'s utopian vision was built on Thaw-era and de-Stalinization ideology. Many scholars have explored the film's cultural and cinematic features; Birgit Beumers writes about the individual and collective interests portrayed in Soviet musicals and Laura-Zoë Humphreys notes youth protagonists' comparison to the New Soviet Men and Women.[7] Additionally, Evgeny Dobrenko discusses satirical comedies' intentions to legitimize the "recreation and resurrection of authority."[8] This essay builds upon this literature and analyzes the satirical bureaucrat, his role as a mask to the Soviet Union, and the critique of said bureaucrat as a form of resistance. Furthermore, this project builds upon Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of carnivals, masks, and social order in literature and considers the psychoanalytical impacts of masquerade masking in Soviet film. More specifically, I investigate how *Carnival Night* compares Soviet bureaucracy to a physical "mask" and, in doing so, depicts Carl Jung's theories of persona and ego as reasons for the increase of oppressive tactics in Stalin's Soviet Union, which results from the merging of persona and ego on a collective level. That is to say, the Soviet Union's bureaucratic mask, in film and history, can be compared to the alignment of the state's persona and ego and explain the loss of reality that prompted an environment of complete ideological devotion. The application of persona and ego in *Carnival Night* can be

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[1] *Karnaval'naia noch* [Carnival Night], directed by El'dar Riazanov (Mosfilm, 1956).
[2] Birgit Beumers, "Soviet and Russian Blockbusters: A Question of Genre?," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 3 (2003): 442, https://doi.org/10.2307/3185800.
[3] Laura-Zoë Humphreys, "Death to Bureaucrats! The Bureaucrat Comedy from the Soviet Union to Cuba (1928–1966)," *Discourse* 44, no. 2 (2022): 139.
[4] *Volga–Volga*, directed by Grigorii Aleksandrov (Mosfilm, 1938).
[5] Tsirk [Circus], directed by Grigorii Aleksandrov (Mosfilm, 1936).
[6] Evgeny Dobrenko, "Soviet Comedy Film; or, The Carnival of Authority," *Discourse* 17, no. 3 (1995): 51.
[7] Beumers, "Soviet and Russian Blockbusters," 448; Humphreys, "Death to Bureaucrats!," 133.
[8] Dobrenko, "Soviet Comedy," 52.

widened to analyze a government's loss of legitimacy and rise of corruption as a result of false transparency provided by a mask.

Jungian psychoanalytic theory on persona and masking details the consequences of aligning the persona and ego. Jung's theories explain that persona is the *mask* someone wears "to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual."[9] The ego is the conscious self that controls identity and self-awareness.[10] When the persona matches the ego, the alignment causes a loss of genuine identity, as the persona overpowers the ego and hides the true self. In other words, when persona and ego align, one believes they are what they pretend to be. This alignment becomes especially apparent when one constantly has to live through their persona, for instance, in an authoritarian state subjected to strict ideologies and punishments.[11] These environments are largely dictated by societal pressures and expectations, among which the need for psychological masking increases. Jung states that a perfect persona is created by an entire concession to the external world, "a genuine self-sacrifice which drives the ego straight into identification with the persona."[12] Under these conditions, one lives only for the outer world and struggles to find their identity. Living through a mask results in "unconscious reactions in the form of bad moods, affects, phobias, obsessive ideas, backslidings, vices, etc."[13] These consequences negatively impact the individual and lead to the alienation from the collective. A person can become disassociated from reality and place extreme or harmful views on the world.

Comrade Ogurtsov represents the company's regulatory, bureaucratic mask as he condemns any elements of the carnival he sees as too entertaining and lacking in adequate Soviet didacticism. Ogurtsov is introduced in the film wearing a New Year's mask while in his office, ironically asking, "Zachem nashim sovetskim liudiam skryvat' svoe litso?" [Why should Soviet citizens hide their faces?][14] in regards to having masks at the carnival. This opening scene forms the initial connection between bureaucracy and masks as well as pairing Ogurtsov's *mask*, or persona, with a censoring agent.[15] Ogurtsov's persona is expressed as a controlling, strict bureaucrat who is enforced by his job. Although Ogurtsov's ego, or conscious self, is not explored in the film, this perceived absence does not mean he lacks an ego. Instead, Ogurtsov's ego is aligned with his persona for the film's entirety. Before and during the carnival, Ogurtsov scrutinizes the acts attempting to fulfill his social and civil duties, demonstrating the scarcity of Ogurtsov's visible ego. In other words, Ogurtsov, who constantly lives through his persona, condemns masks because they hide one's identity and dismiss any accountability of the true self, ego.[16] At the beginning of the film, Ogurtsov is shown with a mask on while simultaneously rebuking the mask, implying he is lying or hiding parts of himself, that he is still speaking from behind a mask.

As bureaucracy was often used as a scapegoat for the Soviet Union's economic failures and human and civil right violations, bureaucrats were also often used as an absurd, comedic character in Soviet comedies. As Humphreys points out, bureaucrat comedies directed frustrations

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[9] Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung: Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R. F.C. Hull, vol. 7 (Princeton University Press, 2014), 264, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400850891.
[10] Jung, *Collected Works*, 304.
[11] Jung, *Collected Works*, 263–265.
[12] Jung, *Collected Works*, 265.
[13] Jung, *Collected Works*, 266.
[14] *Carnival Night*, at 00:03:08-11.
[15] *Carnival Night*, at 00:03:07.
[16] Dobrenko, "Soviet Comedy," 52.

with Socialism's failures away from top political leaders to the bureaucrats.[17] The character of a bureaucrat was often portrayed through caricaturistic means, as is the case with Ogurtsov, in order to emphasize the illogical regulations enforced and place criticism upon them.[18] Ogurtsov embraces his bureaucratic position and becomes a censoring *apparatchik*. For instance, Ogurtsov disdainfully watches a comedic skit by clowns who joke about cheating on their fiancées.[19] The skit is meant to be a silly, nonsensical, traditional clown skit, but Ogurtsov condemns the immoral elements and demands an honorable skit. Ogurtsov's ideal skit, the version he expects, is incompatible with reality's demands, as seen when his secretary and other workers enjoy the skit and all its absurdity.[20] In short, Ogurtsov is disconnected from the collective's interests and believes that others will only enjoy the skit if they learn or reaffirm what they already know. When Ogurtsov finishes editing the clown's skit, two men in plain clothes restate a few sentences about the threat of immorality in marriage. This drastic shift in the skit's mood represents the absurdity of his demands and in turn calls for criticism of censorship. Ogurtsov overemploys his bureaucratic persona to demonstrate his complete devotion to the Soviet Union as an *apparatchik*, causing the inability to separate his persona and his ego. Ogurtsov's persona, his outward expression, is highlighted in his attempts to impress his supervisor, Comrade Telegin, by producing an academic and utilitarian carnival. We meet Telegin when he slides down the slide into the carnival laughing. Ogurtsov sees Telegin enjoying the carnival and immediately adjusts his outward expression to complement Telegin's happiness. Ogurtsov cannot concede to enjoying the carnival, he remains steadfast in his ideology. The disingenuous Ogurtsov represents the state's ability to appear benevolent even with harmful intentions. Viewers know Ogurtsov concealed his full truth from Telegin, however, identifying this false persona is more complicated when the persona belongs to a state.

Physical masks and references to masks are often used to visualize the alignment of Comrade Ogurtsov's persona and ego. In one scene, guests command Ogurtsov to take off his mask as a distraction, even though he is not wearing a mask, highlighting the merge of his psychological *mask* and conscious self.[21] In other words, Ogurtsov's outer expression, his scornful view of the carnival and level of censoring, is to the point of absurdity that it must be a mask.[22] The guests see and acknowledge Ogurtsov's pretend self (mask or persona), not his true self.[23]

As Ogurtsov constantly tries to execute the Soviet bureaucrat's social duties, he alienates his true self and takes on the image of his role. The alignment of persona and ego is also considered self-alienation as the self, or ego, reflects the imagined self, or persona. Self-alienation is often caused by fulfilling a social duty or virtue.[24] Stalin's cult of personality, which required complete devotion to Soviet ideology, aided in creating an environment that fostered the merging of persona and ego. The domination of the persona then results in irritability, bad moods, and obsessive ideas.[25] These negative consequences appear near the carnival's conclusion, when Ogurtsov lashes

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[17] Humphreys, "Death to the Bureaucrats!" 125.
[18] Beumers, "Soviet and Russian Blockbusters," 443.
[19] *Carnival Night*, at 00:24:43-00:28:42
[20] *Carnival Night*, at 00:26:46.
[21] *Carnival Night*, at 00:37:19.
[22] Note the above clown scene from the film for an example of absurd censorship.
[23] It must be noted that the guests act this way as a ruse to distract Ogurtsov; however, for the viewers, the external affirmation of Ogurtsov's persona as his full self solidifies his complete alignment of persona and ego.
[24] Jung, *Collected Works*, 238.
[25] Jung, *Collected Works*, 265.

out at Lena and Grisha about all of their tricks to resist his censoring efforts throughout the night.[26] Then again, Ogurtsov writes a letter expressing his discontentment with the carnival's utilitarian shortcomings compared to his expectations, thereby displaying his disconnection from reality.[27] Due to self-alienation, Ogurtsov develops an obsession with organizing a perfectly regulated and educational carnival. He also grows more irritable as reality continually fails to meet his expectations, causing moments of beratement and anger.

Comrade Telegin's ability to balance his work-based persona and to enjoy his true self, as a high-ranking Communist, emphasizes Thaw-era policies. Comrade Telegin, a lesser character, is a senior Soviet official who enjoys the entertainment aspects of the carnival. Telegin represents the new, modern Soviet authorities, which at this time would be Khrushchev, in stark contrast to the Stalin-influenced Ogurtsov. Telegin's character shows the new Soviet government's allowance and even promotion of both individual and collective interests. If the persona equates to what society—or the collective—demands, the ego is the individual interests one possesses.[28] Therefore, the balance of persona and ego is representative of the balance of collective and individual interests. When Telegin and Ogurtsov first meet, Telegin quickly takes off his mask to express his joy in the slide entrance.[29] The act of Telegin taking off his mask, both figuratively and literally, symbolizes the endorsement of recreational time and his capacity to accept the future. While Telegin is a government official, he is able to act outside of that role and take off his socially imposed mask.

Throughout the carnival, Telegin is seen enjoying himself and time with his wife and not focused on regulations. At the end of the night, Telegin laughs and dances, relishing the collective feat of the carnival and the individual interest of his wife.[30] In contrast, Comrade Ogurtsov's obsession with regulations and utilitarianism, dictated by his persona, prevents him from enjoying the collective celebration. This deviation from performing his job as an official helps to safeguard his ego from the persona. That is to say, the separation of Telegin's persona and ego prevents him from experiencing the negative consequences of their alignment and allows him to achieve personal and societal satisfaction.

Young electrician Grisha, in a similar manner, balances his persona and ego to help the collective good while fulfilling his individual interests. Throughout the film, Grisha takes on the persona required of him from his social duty to assist with the carnival.[31] While Grisha eagerly helps Lena with the night, he is not blindly devoted to the task but regularly poses suggestions and questions and even diverts from the carnival to follow his individual interests. Grisha's individual interest, his love for Lena, represents his ego, what he consciously desires. In the film, Lena accidentally plays Grisha's love declaration for her on the public address (PA) system, making his inner thoughts known to the public.[32] In other words, Lena exposes Grisha's ego, drawing a stricter separation between Grisha's persona and ego. The acknowledgment of Grisha's ego enables him to accept a weaker persona, fully disconnected from his ego. By doing so, Grisha achieves both his individual and collective goals. Like Telegin, this balance results in Grisha enjoying the carnival, the collective goal, and kissing Lena, his individual interest.[33]

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[26] *Carnival Night*, at 01:04:28-42.
[27] *Carnival Night*, at 01:08:18-01:09:55.
[28] Jung, *Collected Works*, 264.
[29] *Carnival Night*, at 00:33:15-17.
[30] *Carnival Night*, at 01:11:42.
[31] *Carnival Night*, at 00:24:34
[32] *Carnival Night*, at 00:08:05-00:09:12.
[33] *Carnival Night*, at 01:10:55-01:11:38.

The separation of persona and ego allows for self-reflection and encourages the forward movement and development of Socialism to fit the New Soviet Men and Women's evolving needs, including the value of occasional leisure. The division of persona and ego equates to open-mindedness, political enlightenment and involvement, and the dismissal of the past, the key traits of the New Soviet Men and Women. The film visualizes this separation by the action of taking off one's physical mask. Additionally, youthful protagonists, often in bureaucrat comedies, struggle against the bureaucracy "as new men and women working to institute creative solutions to collective problems."[34] The youth devise a feasible solution because they separate their persona and ego. The division allows for the consideration of both reality and expectations to impact the youth's decisions. That is, the youth create solutions promoting Socialist ideology, while still being attentive of individual interests.

The merging of persona and ego, along with the alienation of reality, can also occur on the collective level as seen in the Soviet Union and in modern nations. Bureaucracy was Stalin's Soviet Union's persona. This bureaucratic mask works in two ways: 1) the persona oppresses and censors others, and 2) the persona shields the *true oppressor* from the Soviet people. The bureaucracy was used by Stalin to control and seize culture, in addition to diverting accountability and blame from Stalin. Conversely, Khrushchev used bureaucracy as a scapegoat for the Soviet Union's past mistakes. Stemming from Stalin's cult of personality and the required devotion to the Soviet cause, the Soviet Union, as an agent, was pushed to constantly live through its persona. A need for censorship and control under Stalin's Soviet system and the pressure to completely lean into this persona is always present. The persona, or the bureaucracy (the mask), then aligned with the ego, or Stalin's Soviet system (the conscious agent). This alignment produced consequences mirroring those Ogurtsov experienced, but on a larger level: corruption, paranoia, and instability. Generally speaking, the dangers of self-alienation for a nation can come from the constituents or the government system itself. When a government or leader calls for its constituents' complete devotion, it cultivates an environment which pressures people to always live through their persona and results in mass negative effects. Governments can inflict these consequences on themselves when the system portrays a false image to the public or lacks transparency with their constituents. False transparency and accountability decrease public trust in the government and increases public discontent.

In cases of a merged persona and ego on a governmental level, the public must observe state-regulated media to detect self-alienating traits which can identify dangerous ideology. Analytical skills are a resistance tactic to government manipulation and oppression. Any individual or collective agent is susceptible to the alignment of persona and ego, especially those living in an environment that stresses living through a specific persona constantly. This environment is cultivated whenever an ideology is state- or party-endorsed or societal expectations are de facto. Comparatively to the film, Ogurtsov faces state-endorsed ideologies and expectations to fulfill his social duties resulting in the use of a constantly demanded persona. Viewers can watch *Carnival Night* noting the implications of the dangers of censored culture and complete ideological devotion. However, contemporary viewers must also recognize that while the Thaw lessened censorship, cultural and political regulations were still present and still shaped the films produced during this era. This is the reason for the amicable Comrade Telegin character and the resolution that the state, not the bureaucracy, still supports its people's best interests.

Furthermore, Ogurtsov's resistance to joining in the laughter with Telegin causes *Carnival Night* to be classified as separate from the socialist realism genre enforced by Stalin. Socialist

[34] Humphreys, "Death to Bureaucrats!" 133.

realism requires a happy ending which meant the villain would join the hero's side. Ogurtsov's aversion to joining the youth demonstrates the greater inability to move towards the Communist future. This reluctance is also highlighted with Ogurtsov's ineptitude to take off his mask like his fellow comrades were able to do. The shift away from socialist realism showed the loosened censorships on art and changing ideology of the Soviet Union during the Thaw.

Even if the persona and ego merge, the unconscious self will always remain, in single persons or entire nations. In other words, while the persona may overpower the conscious self, "the unconscious self can never be repressed to the point of extinction."[35] Applied to the Soviet Union, this means the foundational ideals of Socialism remain no matter how the Soviet Union's mask is configured. A person's inner self, their true passions and beliefs, will remain under their mask, just to a lesser extent. For a nation, their essential doctrines and values will persist. This perseverance provides hope that the alienation of reality and ensuing extreme ideology, for nations or individuals, is irresolute. The question of when these values will become visible, if these values are benevolent, and how much damage is done prior should be a greater concern.

[35] Jung, *Collected Works*, 217.

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"Legitimizing Arbitrary Microphysics of Power: State Narratives and Prison Representations in Cross-Cultural Contexts"

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In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault presents the concept of the "microphysics of power," which challenges traditional views of power as something concentrated at the top and exercised downwards. Instead, Foucault argues that power is decentralized and is found throughout society, operating on multiple levels. It does not emanate from a single authority or top-down structure but rather is pervasive and dispersed through everyday practices and interactions. Power is not exercised by one centralized authority figure, such as a king; on the contrary, it is found in small interactions that reinforce a structure of control. It is exerted through subtle and calculated mechanisms that shape behavior and organize individuals without relying on overt violence or terror. Foucault argues, "In short, this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege,' acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions—an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated."[1]

Foucault suggests a level of mutual participation in the power dynamic. He implies that those who are subjugated are not merely passive recipients of power but are active participants in the dynamic as well. "But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use."[2]

In a prison, this decentralized apparatus of power is visible in the everyday practices that govern the lives of inmates. For example, the tightness with which handcuffs are put on can be a micro-physical tactic used to remind prisoners of their subjugation and control over their bodies. A shower that runs hot for a limited duration serves as a form of discipline that governs bodily comfort. Such seemingly negligible measures serve as mechanisms for controlling behavior and reinforcing the power dynamics throughout the institution. In a prison, the body is constantly monitored and regulated through subtle forms of power rather than through overt punishment or violence. By being subject to these controls, prisoners actively participate in the system of power. With each repetition imposed on them, prisoners continually reinforce the legitimacy and effectiveness of the power structure.

The microphysics of power in a prison are arbitrary. In many cases, there is no inherent rationale behind the imposed rules. A prison rule that appears insignificant often exists as a signifier of power and control. For instance, a requirement to make a bed with the pillows three fingers apart does not simply indicate the expectation of a properly made bed but rather represents disciplined obedience and the enforcement of control. A prison, therefore, uses arbitrary rules as mechanisms to regulate and discipline prisoners. Foucault's framework is essential for analyzing this phenomenon because it highlights how these seemingly trivial practices serve a larger purpose: they instill discipline, normalize control, and reduce individuals to compliant subjects. In this context, arbitrary rules are not flaws in the system but, such regulations are intentional tools designed to maintain order and internalize subjugation among prisoners.

Through an analysis of prisons as represented in memoirs, literature, and film, one can see that prisons navigate the inherently arbitrary nature of their microphysics of power in different

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), 26.
[2] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25.

ways. Some prisons, operating outside public scrutiny, do not require a legitimizing narrative for their arbitrary actions, evident in works such as *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl and *Torture Camp on Paradise Street* by Stanislav Aseyev. While other prisons may have to construct narratives to justify arbitrary controls in order to present them as necessary or rational to the public, as illustrated in the Soviet labor camps depicted in *Kolyma Tales* by Varlam Shalamov and *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Furthermore, *The Mauritanian* by Mohamedou Ould Slahi demonstrates how, even when connected to ideals like justice and dignity, the prison system can use these principles as hyperreal veils, masking the arbitrary nature of control.

Prisons Unbound by Legitimacy

The arbitrary nature of the microphysics of power is exemplified by the way the torture camp in Donetsk was shown to run in *Torture Camp on Paradise Stree*t by Stanislav Aseyev. Much of the microphysics of the Donetsk People's Republic's (DPR) secret prison in the memoir were detached from any coherent system of rules or rationality. The performance of Soviet songs during acts of torture demonstrates the inherent absurdity—an act that, as Aseyev observes, highlights the irrational and grotesque nature of these microphysical mechanisms. Aseyev recognizes the seemingly irrational and arbitrary mechanisms at play in the torture camp:

> Neither politics nor other convictions have anything to do with it. There's nothing political in ordering several cellfuls of people to their feet and making them sing Soviet songs for hours while someone is being tortured across the hall. Why would anyone do that? So that the prisoners don't hear the screaming? So that they can't tell that someone just had an electrical current run through his body? That's absurd. As soon as any of us heard cell number one singing, it was clear to us that someone was about to be tortured.[3]

The singing of Soviet songs in Donetsk can be explored through a post-structuralist view of Saussurean semiotics, where the signifier can become detached from their original signifieds. In the context of prison, the singing is stripped of any coherent association with Soviet political ideology. Instead, it transforms into a signifier of impending torture. Thus, the singing of Soviet songs in this context exemplifies how the prison's microphysical mechanisms function to uphold its authority by manipulating signifiers. The DPR secret prison serves as a space that is not visible to the public eye or subject to external scrutiny, as it operates outside the reach of societal values and thus is not compelled to justify its practices or align with broader norms of justice or legitimacy.

Similar to Aseyev's experience in the Donetsk camp, the concentration camps described in *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl operate with arbitrary rules that serve no rehabilitative or justified purpose. The camp does not align with the idea of a "prison" as a system of punishment or reform. It exists isolated from reflections of legitimacy and societal values. The Jewish people in the camp were not guilty of a crime. They are there simply because of their race, a fact that highlights the complete arbitrariness of the system. Victor Frankl describes the arbitrary nature of the rules within the concentration camp in the following quotation:

> There were shouted commands: "Detachment, forward march! Left-2-3-4! Left-2-3-4! Left-2-3-4! Left-2-3-4! First man about, left and left and left and left! Caps off!" … At the

[3] Stanislav Aseyev, *The Torture Camp on Paradise Street* (Harvard University Press 2023), 184.

> order "Caps off!" we passed the gate of the camp, and searchlights were trained upon us. Whoever did not march smartly got a kick.[4]

The soldiers' commands are enforced without justification, serving only to break the prisoners' will and emphasize their lack of agency. Frankl's depiction of the highly specific work routine, where prisoners are required to perform tasks with no purpose other than to maintain control, exposes the absurdity of the system.

State Prisons and the Need for Legitimacy

Unlike concentration camps and secret prisons, which operated without needing to legitimize their existence or practices, the Soviet GULAG system relied heavily on propaganda to justify its role within society. Concentration camps and secret torture camps are not designed to resemble "real prisons" and can function with arbitrary rules and practices, as they are neither advertising rehabilitation nor subject to public scrutiny. In contrast, the GULAG system, as a state institution, needed to present itself as purposeful and aligned with societal values. The USSR promoted a narrative of creating a "new Soviet man" by portraying the work projects and disciplinary measures within the GULAG as tools for rehabilitation. This propagandized image aimed to convince society that the GULAG was a legitimate institution. However, as depicted in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, much of the GULAG's internal operations were arbitrary. In the GULAG system, there was a disconnect between the presented narrative and the actual conditions. Specifically, Shukhov's reflections on the uncertainty of his release showcase the arbitrary nature of the GULAG, as his sentence is supposedly nearing an end:

> Shukhov sort of liked the way they pointed at him-the lucky guy nearly through with his sentence. But he didn't really believe it. Take the fellows who should've been let out in the war. They were all kept in till forty-six "till further notice." And then those with three years who'd gotten five more slapped on. They twisted the law any way they wanted. You finished a ten-year stretch and they gave you another one. Or if not, they still wouldn't let you go home![5]

Shukhov clings to his ten-year sentence as a symbol of hope and a tangible marker of eventual freedom. To him, this number carries profound personal meaning. However, within the GULAG system, the authorities can disregard the significance Shukhov assigns to it. They can arbitrarily extend or alter his sentence, transforming the ten years to a placeholder that can be altered at will. In the isolation of the GULAG, the length of his punishment has no rational justification or fixed meaning. The Soviet "prison" is inherently arbitrary, which allows Shukhov's ten-year sentence to be extended without justification, solely because those in power have the authority to do so. In the GULAG, the law is not a firm or unchanging standard but a malleable tool manipulated by the Soviet system.

The power of the legitimizing narratives promoted by the Soviet prison system is evident in the story "The Injector" from *Kolyma Tales* by Varlam Shalamov. The legitimizing narrative, which emphasizes rehabilitation and the creation of the "new Soviet man," is internalized even by minor authorities within the camp. In the story, a malfunctioning fuel injector is misunderstood to be a prisoner and is subsequently instructed by a GULAG official to be punished:

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[4] Victor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Beacon Press, 1947), 21.
[5] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (Bantam Books, 1981), 75.

> For refusing to work for five days and thus interfering with the production schedule, Convict Injector is to be placed under arrest for three days without permission to return to work and is to be transferred to a work gang with a penal regimen.[6]

"The Injector" reflects the entrenched belief that every problem within the prison must be addressed through control and discipline, all under the guise of rehabilitation. This mindset leads the authorities to instinctively resort to punitive measures rather than objectively analyzing the situation.

Therefore, there is a clash between the narrative projected by the Soviet system, which presents the prison as a center for ideological rehabilitation, and the lived experiences of the prisoners, who expose its arbitrary and oppressive nature. The legitimizing narrative does more than conceal arbitrariness. It redefines the GULAG for Soviet subjects, attempting to portray its power structures as legitimate. The result is a struggle over what constitutes the "real" prison: the propagandized simulacrum or the harsh, arbitrary reality experienced by those inside.

US Legality and the Simulation of Justice

Another instance of the struggle over what constitutes the "real" prison can be seen in *The Mauritanian* by Mohamedou Ould Slahi. Slahi's experience at Guantanamo Bay highlights the real conditions of a US prison, where the inherently arbitrary nature of US laws and the legal systems is evident. While the US legal system is often portrayed as wholly legitimate, it too is subject to arbitrary changes. For example, when President Bush suspended *habeas corpus* for "national security" reasons, his action was reminiscent of the Soviet Union's justification for extending sentences or imposing punishment under the guise of ideological rehabilitation. Both systems have used messaging to legitimize their practices, in an attempt to mask the underlying arbitrariness and offer a narrative of purpose and order.

Guantanamo's existence as a legal "gray zone," outside the direct boundaries of U.S. law allowed the government to bypass legal protections and carry out operations that would be challenged within the continental United States. If the US legal system were truly just, as its ideals purport it to be, then its exercise of power would be consistent and universal rather than selectively applied based on territorial boundaries, which are ultimately arbitrary anyway. Does it truly matter that Guantanamo Bay is not on U.S. soil if it is still the United States government in charge? Even if Guantanamo Bay is not under the jurisdiction of United States law, are not the laws themselves an extension and extrapolation of the rationality and morality of the system? If the system circumvents the underpinnings of its own laws, it is effectively undermining its own morality and sense of justice, which weakens its claim to being just.

The hyperreal image of the US justice and prison system is strongly upheld, shaping not only the perceptions of its own citizens but also influencing how other countries view it. This idealized image, which emphasizes fairness, justice, and freedom, has a far-reaching impact. Slahi testifies to the strength of this hyperreal narrative in the following quotation:

> I trusted the American justice system too much, and shared that trust with the detainees from European countries. We all had an idea about how the democratic system works…The interrogation methods worsened considerably as time went by, and as you shall see, those responsible for GTMO broke all the principles upon which the U.S. was built and compromised every great principle such as Ben

[6] Varlam Shalamov, "The Injector" in *Kolyma Tales* (Penguin, 1994), 99.

Franklin's "They that give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."[7]

The clash between these two versions of reality is evident through Slahi's experience. Initially, Slahi placed his faith in the US justice system, a belief shared by European detainees who, like him, have internalized idealized portrayals of US democracy. The detainees' initial trust in the US justice system reflects the strong public image of US justice. However, this trust quickly faded as the detainees were subjected to brutal and inhumane interrogation tactics. As their conditions deteriorated, Slahi began to see a widening gap between the US ideals of justice and the harsh realities of his situation. This divide suggests that the values of justice and liberty promoted by the US may, at times, be nothing more than a constructed image to gain legitimacy and justify certain microphysics of power. Slahi's realization that the justice he believed in is malleable, flexible, and ultimately arbitrary raises the research question of whether these principles were ever truly real or were merely symbols bending to the same pressures found in any authoritarian system.

Attempts to legitimize arbitrary acts of power and control in the US are evident in the way film and media have historically represented African Americans. Propagandistic works such as *Birth of a Nation* played a role in constructing a mythology of Black criminality. Films such as *Birth of a Nation* and other media of the era created narratives that sought to justify the arbitrary arrests and mass imprisonment of Black individuals following the abolition of slavery. These narratives served to rationalize the disproportionate incarceration of Black men, which effectively replaced the labor force lost by the South with a system of forced labor under the guise of penal servitude.

Mythology that portrayed Black people as dangerous and animalistic helped justify mass arrests and forced labor under the penal system. By depicting Black people as people to be feared, the US prison system and media systems legitimized mass incarceration, presenting the prison as necessary to separate Black people from society. The so-called "legitimacy" in this context was not based on rationality or ethics but was instead constructed through media portrayals that created an exaggerated hyperreal image of African Americans. Over time, a false image became ingrained in public consciousness, reshaping social reality. As stereotypes spread and gained acceptance, significant portions of US society began to view African Americans as inherently criminal. As society was repeatedly presented with these portrayals, distorted beliefs became more deeply entrenched and legitimized, perpetuating a cycle that reinforced existing power dynamics. The use of a reductionist signifier to represent Black Americans demonstrates how language and semiotics can be manipulated to support legitimizing narratives. In this case, the signifier "Black people" became associated with the signified concept of a criminal that causes harm.

Power, Not Knowledge or Morals, as the Architect of Legality

Within Foucault's power/knowledge schema, the concepts of right and wrong are shaped and dominated by those in power, reflecting their interests and reinforcing their control.[8] This process renders legal frameworks arbitrary. The US justice system exemplifies this dynamic, where laws and notions of legality serve as mere images of legitimacy and rationality, constructed to uphold the interests of the dominant group. Foucault's concept is demonstrated in Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, where Dr. King reflects on his encounters with

[7] Mohamedou Ould Slahi and Larry Siems, *The Mauritanian* (Back Bay Books 2021), 40.
[8] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Pantheon Books, 1980), 131.

segregationist forces in the South. King Jr. highlights the misuse of seemingly neutral laws to sustain systemic injustice in the following quotation:

> Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First-Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest… We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal."[9]

The concepts of "just" and "legal" are subjectively arbitrary, yet the powerful image of the US prison system often leads us to conflate legality with justice or rationality. Dr. King's juxtaposition of Hitler's legal framework with the illegality of aiding Jews serves as an example of how the categories of "legal" and "illegal" are arbitrary constructs shaped by power rather than reflections of inherent legitimacy. The enforcement of segregation laws reveals a clash between legality and the moral calls to break unjust laws. This tension highlights how legal systems can be used to mask arbitrary constructs while enforcing the microphysics of power and control.

Media, Simulation, and the Self-Referential Loop of Legitimacy

Using Foucault's microphysics of power as a theoretical framework, this research reveals that much of the operation within prison systems is inherently arbitrary. Despite this arbitrariness, certain mechanisms of control are perceived by society as more legitimate than others, even when both are equally arbitrary or absurd. This raises the question: why are some practices regarded as more legitimate, and what happens when society at large adopts a hyperreal notion of what a prison is? A significant contributor to the perceived legitimacy of prisons arises from societal familiarity and repeated exposure to specific forms of control. This familiarity is shaped by popular prison representations, such as Hollywood films, major literary works, and commercialized prison tours. These mediums influence societal expectations and reinforce particular ideas about the purpose and nature of incarceration.

Hollywood films often sensationalize and dramatize the microphysics of power in prison settings by emphasizing physical violence, dramatic confrontations, or stark displays of dominance in order to create compelling narratives. These portrayals often focus on predictable tropes, such as harsh wardens, prisoner uprisings, or oppressive labor scenes, which reduce the nuanced and often invisible mechanisms of power to overt and easily recognizable symbols. By foregrounding these dramatized aspects, films construct prison settings that align with common cultural stereotypes.

This process establishes a self-referential loop of simulation, where the representation of prison in Hollywood films becomes a "copy" divorced from the actual, nuanced realities of prison life. Following Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*,[10] these cinematic portrayals generate an understanding of prison that feels real to the audience but is, in fact, a distorted abstraction. Over time, this commodified image of incarceration influences societal perceptions, thus making the hyperreal version of prison indistinguishable from, or even

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[9] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* (Penguin Books, 2018), 4.

[10] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Semiotext(e), 1981).

more dominant than, the lived realities of prison systems. As a result, the public's understanding of prison becomes shaped by Hollywood's dramatized, marketable depictions.

The dramatization of the microphysics of power is evident in *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas, where the difference between the book and its 2002 film adaptation directed by Kevin Reynolds highlights the distorted depictions of the microphysics of power in Hollywood visual media. In the book, the subtle and internalized nature of power is conveyed through Dantès' mental and emotional struggles. These elements capture the more invisible aspects of power. However, in the film adaptation, there is a desire to visually represent power dynamics in a way that the audience can easily understand. One method used to achieve this is by dramatizing physical actions, such as the scene where Dantès is whipped in prison. This moment, which is not present in the book, is used to depict the direct, physical exertion of power.

Another form of representation that suffers from the dramatization of the microphysics of power is prison museums. In portraying the prison experience, a museum may choose to highlight the most widely recognized forms of microphysics of power that have gained notoriety over time. Common items, such as old handcuffs or the batons used by guards to strike prisoners, are examples of the microphysics of power that people recognize more. Though they are just as arbitrary and absurd as other forms of control, these items are familiar to the public through various media representations, and their use in the museum reinforces their recognition as symbols of power.

Commercial prison museums can be filtered through a commodified lens, much like Hollywood movies, where the goal is to entertain and attract visitors to generate revenue. This commercial pressure leads curators to focus more on exciting, dramatic items and events rather than the more subtle, everyday objects that were key forms of microphysics of power in the prison system. As a result, visitors may encounter an exaggerated version of the prison experience, where dramatic events like prison breaks are portrayed as common occurrences, while more mundane yet significant microphysics of power, like the poor quality of kitchen utensils, are overlooked. This commodified environment, designed to sell tickets, may lead individuals to believe that violent brawls or prison breaks are central to the prison experience rather than the more subtle systemic mechanisms of control.

The West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville was one of the most notorious and brutal prisons in the US during its operation from 1866 to 1995.[11] It became infamous for its history of prison violence, riots, and escape attempts. After its closure, the prison was repurposed for tours that emphasized ghost hauntings, executions, and other sensationalized stories. This transformation turned the penitentiary into a collection of clichés and tropes, creating a hyperreal version of its history that distorts public perception. In reality, the prison was not in a constant state of chaos, and this exaggerated portrayal overlooks the real suffering of inmates and the harsh conditions they endured. Law scholar Allen Mendenhall connects Jean Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal to the West Virginia Penitentiary in Moundsville, stating:

> Rather than discussing the harsh restrictions of prisoners, visitors will witness the reenactment of prison riots. Rather than discussing serious objections to capital punishment, visitors will scream when the ceiling to the Death House drops suddenly open, and the effigy of a prisoner plummets towards the ground and then snaps short, hanging suspended by a noose around its neck. All of the complicated

[11] Stephanie Grindley, "Destination West Virginia: The History and Mystery of the Moundsville Penitentiary," *WTRF*, 2021.

> features of the carceral machine will be commoditized and commercialized to satisfy public desires for a cheap thrill. The few visitors who come to observe what prison is "really" like will leave with a "corrected" (virtual) version of Moundsville's history.[12]

Instead of accurately representing the West Virginia Penitentiary and its microphysics of power, which would require focusing on the everyday monotony and psychologically oppressive nature of prison life, this crucial aspect of the prisoner's experience is omitted. Foucault argues that spectacular punishments and physical torture belong to a distant past, while modern prisons are designed to produce docile bodies and enforce psychological discipline. However, the hyperreal version of the West Virginia Penitentiary distorts this historical progression by emphasizing dramatic and sensationalized elements. This portrayal makes it seem as though public executions and physical punishments are the dominant forms of control, altering our understanding of the development of carceral systems. As a result, there is a possibility that these older, phased-out forms of punishment that focus on punishing the body could become re-legitimized if they are presented as modern. This conflict could occur because the hyperreal version of the prison is not being compared to any external reference or material. Consequently, there is no concrete framework that could challenge or counteract this constructed image.

The way hyperreal narratives of the prison experience—created by representations of the prison experience, such as in movies and museum tours—attempt to portray the microphysics of power in overt and obvious ways has consequences for how the public forms perceptions and clichés about prisons. This process is evident in the Stanford Prison Experiment, where the students were divided into roles as "guards" and "prisoners." These terms carry significant weight as signifiers, each conveying a different set of meanings or expectations for the students assuming these roles. The experiment aimed to study the effects of playing the role of a "guard" or "prisoner" in the context of a simulation of a prison environment.

The results of the Stanford Prison Experiment often serve as evidence of how raw power dynamics can arise when one group is given unchecked power over the other. However, this common interpretation overlooks the fact that the subjects were given labels. When individuals are assigned a label, such as "prisoner" or "guard," they are no longer acting organically. They are simply playing a role or performing. The "guards," who received minimal instructions had to rely on outside portrayals of guards. Representations of prisons that subjects were likely familiar with were Hollywood films or commodified museum tours. The reliance on these external portrayals led them to act in ways that reflected a more overt display of power rather than the subtle, internalized power dynamics that occur in real prison systems.

The experiment becomes a reflection of the hyperreal media depiction of prisons—a simulation of a simulation. The subjects involved resorted to clichéd examples of microphysics of power as methods of control because they were already familiar with them. The widespread use and recognition of certain microphysics of power in the media made them more accessible to the subjects acting as guards and prisoners. However, commonly portrayed acts such as making prisoners do push-ups, while being examples of the microphysics of power, are no more meaningful or necessary than other arbitrary forms of control that are not typically portrayed or highlighted in representations of prisons.

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[12] Allen Mendenhall, "Moundsville Penitentiary – Model and Symptom of Hyperreality," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies* 6, no. 1 (2009): 2–3.

Conclusion

Reductionist portrayals of the use of power in prisons fail to capture the full complexity of the carceral system. Prisons construct legitimizing narratives through propaganda to conceal their arbitrary microphysics of power, while the commodified media reinforce these narratives through repetition. Both institutions contribute to the creation of a hyperreal prison, where constructed images obscure the reality of incarceration. Within this hyperreality, the concept of the "prison" becomes a grand floating signifier, composed of handpicked representations of microphysics of power. This distortion reshapes public perception, making it difficult to engage with the true nature of prison discipline and control.

However, this distortion is not merely an abstract intellectual concern, it carries real-world consequences. The hyperreal prison, sustained by media portrayals and state narratives, shapes public attitudes, policies, and legal structures. The selective legitimization of certain forms of power allows systemic injustices to persist under the guise of order and rehabilitation. As Jean Baudrillard suggests, the simulation does not simply distort reality, it replaces it.[13]

[13] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

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