

# THE RESULTS OF SCHOLARLY WORK

IN SOCIOLOGY, CRIMINOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

THE RESEARCH CONCEPT  
OF "MATRIX OF LIFE"

LEAVING BLACKS BEHIND  
IN BROOKLYN

RESEARCHING YOUTH SUBCULTURES:  
A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

MENTALITIES SHAPED  
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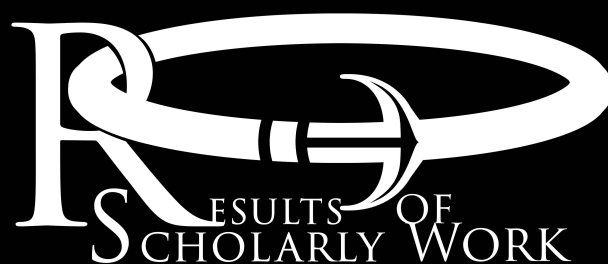
GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK  
AS A WAY OF LIFE

EVOLUTION OF CONVENTIONAL  
APOCALYPTIC CONCEPTS  
IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS









# AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN QUESTS

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RESULTS OF SCHOLARLY WORK  
IN SOCIOLOGY, CRIMINOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE»


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**I**t is no secret that many researchers, scientists and business people have repeatedly attempted to comprehend and describe the secret of achieving success, in other words to find the “formula of triumph”. These attempts were made by studying the biographies of various established personalities and historical figures. Often studies of this kind have boiled down to numbers, ratios, and dry statistics. However, to date there is no comprehensive answer to the question “How to achieve success and triumph in life”.

In this issue, readers will explore the research concept of the “Matrix of Life” and the phenomena of the Russian and American quests. This issue also delves into the narrative traditions of various cultures, the role of social networks in our lives is examined, and readers will gain knowledge about the historical and social processes contributing to racial inequality, using Brooklyn as a case study. The authors cover a range of other relevant topics in their latest articles.

*Best regards,  
Editorial Board*



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# THE RESEARCH CONCEPT OF “MATRIX OF LIFE”

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## ABSTRACT

This article represents the culmination of the author's scholarly, practical, and epistemological comprehension of the research concept known as the “matrix of religions,” which was initially presented in December 2020 at the Memory Institute by Dr. Oleg Maltsev, an academician of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and European Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and a Doctor of Philosophy. The article serves as a reflection of the scientific and practical analysis conducted on the heuristic model of the “matrix of religions.” This model has provided valuable insights into the sources and motivations underlying an individual's quest for their life path. The primary focus of this article is the formulation of the life quest, with specific attention to the categories of the “Russian and American quest.” The outcomes of this research endeavor are the heuristic models and frameworks that aid in comprehending the essence, distinct characteristics, and obstacles encountered by individuals embarking on a significant quest in the 21st century.

## Keywords

research concept, religion, culture, life quest

## INTRODUCTION AND PREVIOUS INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

Within the context of praxeological interdisciplinary investigations into the phenomena of the “Russian Quest” and the “American Quest,” and drawing

from an analysis of the factors contributing to the emergence of religions, the author of this study has formulated the research concept known as the “matrix of religions.” This research concept underwent testing during a research expedition to the Netherlands in December 2020, as well as within the framework of the International Scientific Symposium “Technology 2SAO” and the seminar “Secrets of Human Psyche,” both conducted at the Odessa Branch of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Karuna, 2021; “Symposium “2CAO Technology.” Secret Active Defense System,” 2021).

One of the fundamental outcomes of this scientific inquiry is the systematic representation of the research concept, specifically the heuristic model depicted on Figure 1. This heuristic model can also act as a research environment, generating a number of assumptions that push for further reflection on the elements of the model. From a methodological perspective, the research concept “matrix of religions” has proven to be the genesis of several subsequent concepts. The author of this article envisions its potential as a launching pad for future interdisciplinary research in fields such as philosophy (including the philosophy of religions), culturology, applied psychology (particularly fate-psychology), sociology, criminology, and more. This article provides an account of the scientific and practical analysis of the heuristic model “matrix of religions,” which has laid a qualitative foundation for the conceptualization of the sources and motivations behind an individual’s quest for their life path.

## METHODOLOGY

The “matrix” concept is explored across multiple disciplines, warranting an interdisciplinary approach for its analysis. Within mathematics and other scientific domains, the “matrix” concept holds significance as it serves to articulate data and address diverse problems. The methodology for comprehending and applying the “matrix” concept encompasses several key aspects:

A matrix, denoted by capital letters (e.g., A, B, C), is a data structure featuring rows and columns of elements, which can be numbers, symbols, etc., organized in a table. Matrices are identified by in-

dices denoting the specific row and column of an element. Operations involving matrices include addition, subtraction, scalar multiplication, matrix multiplication, transposition (interchanging rows and columns), determinant calculation, inversion, and various other procedures.

Employing these operations methodically facilitates the resolution of conceptual challenges. Matrices find widespread applications in diverse scientific and technological realms, including linear algebra, statistics, signal processing, computer graphics, machine learning, and beyond. Their utility extends to modeling diverse systems and tackling various tasks, such as data analysis, solving systems of equations, optimization, and more. Within computer science, matrices emerge as fundamental tools for representing and processing data, offering a convenient means to store and manipulate both numeric and symbolic information.

The general methodology for utilizing the “matrix” concept in science and technology centers around the examination of their properties, operations, and applications. Additionally, it involves the development of algorithms and programs dedicated to processing matrix data and solving problems that involve matrices.

In philosophy, methodology constitutes a framework of principles, approaches, and methods employed by philosophers to delve into philosophical issues and address philosophical problems. The philosophical methodology serves to establish guidelines and procedures, ensuring that philosophical analysis maintains consistency, logic, and objectivity. Philosophers adopt a critical approach to scrutinize and assess arguments, claims, and theories, aiming to comprehend the logical consistency, validity, and acceptability of philosophical stances. Logic stands out as a crucial tool in the philosopher’s toolkit, aiding in the establishment of rules and the resolution of argumentation problems. Logical analysis is instrumental in determining whether the evidence aligns with a particular philosophical position.

Philosophers can employ diverse research methods, including concept analysis, philosophical examination of language, historical analysis,



and experiments in moral or ethical issues, among others. The choice of method hinges on the specific philosophical question at hand and the philosopher's chosen approach. Metaphilosophy, or the philosophy of philosophy, delves into the study of philosophical methodology and the nature of philosophical questions. Metaphilosophical inquiries encompass aspects such as the nature of philosophical truth, the language of philosophy, methodological limitations, and other facets of philosophical research. Broadly, philosophy's methodology seeks to resolve philosophical questions and establish philosophical positions through logical analysis, dialogue, discussion, and the application of various research methods.

From a philosophical standpoint, matrix methodology can be explored within the realms of the philosophy of science, semiotics (the science of signs and symbols), and the philosophy of mathematics. Philosophers may perceive matrices as symbolic structures employed to represent diverse concepts, objects, or relationships. Matrices offer a means of describing information that enables philosophers to investigate how we organize and interpret the world. Philosophers can scrutinize matrices concerning their structure and order, delving into the study of symmetry, regularity, hierarchy, and how such structural elements influence the perception and understanding of information. Matrices can also be examined through the lens of mathematical philosophy, prompting philosophers to explore questions about the nature of mathematical objects like matrices and their connection to the real world.

Philosophers may delve into how matrices serve in the storage and communication of information, raising inquiries about the accuracy, reliability, and objectivity of the information derived from matrices. The study of matrices can extend to an examination of their influence on the language and symbolism through which philosophical concepts are expressed. Matrices function as tools to structure and model abstract ideas and concepts. Matrix philosophy contributes to understanding the essence of mathematical and symbolic structures and their impact on our perception and comprehension of the world. This field encompasses the investigation of fundamental questions concerning the nature of matrices and their philosophical implications.

Philosophers may explore the extent to which matrices hold authority in philosophical or cognitive contexts. Can matrices define or limit our understanding of the world, and if so, in what ways? Questions may arise regarding whether matrices can accurately reflect or model real objects or phenomena. This exploration may involve scrutinizing the correspondence between matrices and the real world and assessing how this correspondence influences our understanding of reality.

Philosophers can analyze the symbolic or metaphorical nature of the matrix within the realm of philosophy. A matrix can be employed to convey the concept of limitation or order, carrying significant philosophical implications. Philosophers may inquire into whether matrices serve as a method for constructing or interpreting reality. For instance, is our perception of the world akin to a bounded matrix, and how does this condition our philosophical understanding of the world?

The examination of the relationship between matrices and semiotics (the science of signs and symbols) becomes crucial. Philosophers can explore how matrices influence the creation and interpretation of symbols and signs, shedding light on their role in understanding semiotic systems. Some philosophers may delve into the historical shifts in the use of matrices within philosophy and culture, encompassing the study of diverse philosophical traditions and their connections to matrices. A philosophical analysis of matrices and their authority can unveil profound insights into the nature of philosophy, symbolism, and our comprehension of the world. Such an analysis proves beneficial for the development of philosophical concepts and the exploration of philosophical issues using matrices as a tool for analysis and expression.

Within the realm of the philosophy of religion, the concept of "matrix" assumes diverse meanings and symbols, contingent upon the specifics of a given religious tradition. Explorations of the "matrix" in religious contexts often distill to an analysis of the broader concept of "symbol." In various religious traditions, the matrix can embody different symbolic representations. For instance, in certain Pagan beliefs, the matrix might symbolize life and rebirth, often associated with the symbol of "Mother



Earth.” Here, the matrix is seen as a nurturing force that sustains and gives life to all earthly entities.

In some religious philosophies, the matrix can signify the order and harmony inherent in the universe, revealing itself through the structure and organization of existence. The matrix, in this context, may be perceived as an internal law governing all existence. Drawing from analytical psychology, as proposed by Carl Jung (1967), the matrix can take on an archetypal character, serving as a symbol associated with the feminine archetype. Within this framework, the matrix embodies qualities related to femininity, motherhood, and natural forces. These interpretations represent only a selection of the myriad possibilities for understanding the concept of “matrix” in a religious context. The specific interpretations can vary significantly based on the particular religious tradition and its doctrinal tenets.

## RESULTS

Contemporary scholars continue to engage in a complex and multifaceted discourse on religion, characterized by a rich diversity of views (Borchert, 2017; Coşgel et al., 2020; Pyszczyński & Landau, 2020; Whitehouse, 2019; Wortham, 2016). In particular, research interest has focused on the impact of religion on various aspects of life (Baron, 2020; Mathras et al., 2015; McDougall, 2020; McKay & Ross, 2021).

The inception of the subsequent conceptualization regarding the origins of religions was prompted by an epistemological question: “Is it plausible that all sixteen elements of the heuristic model emerged spontaneously? In simpler terms, could they have originated on their own, devoid of human intervention?”

While this heuristic model encapsulates a set of prerequisites for the emergence and development of various religions, the notion that these sixteen elements could spontaneously manifest lacks logical coherence. Several premises support this perspective. Firstly, the model constitutes a coherent system. Secondly, it possesses organization and includes sequences (as denoted by arrows within the model). Thirdly, natural systems (those not

influenced by human intervention) exhibit minimal distortions. Conversely, artificially created systems tend to exhibit a multitude of distortions. To illustrate, consider this example: Professor A creates a lecture and delivers it to students. Student B, who listens to the lecture, interprets it in their own manner (the first distortion). Student C, who missed the lecture, requests a summary from Student B. Student B conveys the lecture based on their level of comprehension (the second distortion). Naturally, the way Student B comprehends and conveys the information to the next link in the communication chain will significantly differ from the original source (the professor). This process leads to subsequent distortions, with the eighth recipient of the information ultimately receiving a message unrelated to the original topic.

Hence, revisiting the question of whether all sixteen elements of the heuristic model emerged spontaneously, utilizing the principle of distortion within the communication chain, we cannot afford to emphasize spontaneity or randomness as a significant factor. This is because, throughout history, from ancient times to the modern era, religions have undergone substantial and noteworthy transformations (Clarke & Beyer, 2009; Coşgel et al., 2018; Northmore-Ball & Evans, 2016). Even the most fundamentally rooted religions have experienced significant alterations. Therefore, observing the principle of distortion in action, we must conclude that we are dealing with a human-made system.

To further elucidate this perspective, let us consider the historical trajectory of the retransformation of the religious matrix. Initially, one individual held multiple roles, functioning as a ruler, a high priest, and a military leader. All three forms of power — mystical-religious, military, and civil — resided within this single figure. As history unfolded, new roles and figures emerged with the division of these branches of power (Maltsev, 2018). Consequently, other figures such as sovereigns, patriarchs, and military leaders entered the stage of dynamic human development. The question of why this transition occurred has been a topic of recurring inquiry within the scientific community. Today, a prevalent theory argues in favor of enhancing governance efficiency as a driving force behind this transition. The famous principle of “Divide et

Impera," meaning "divide and rule," also comes to mind. However, debates surrounding these theories persist to this day. Therefore, employing the logical approach of "counter-position," one may consider whether the emergence of these three pivotal roles is attributed to something more profound than mere "historical necessity."

At this stage of our conceptual exploration, let us rephrase the question: "How does culture differ from religion?" Despite the various terminological definitions of "culture" and "religion," we can derive several logical formulas that encapsulate the essence or semantic core of these concepts. Etymologically, we can trace the phenomenon "cult" at the heart of the word culture. In other words, we could formulate it as follows:

"Culture" = Civic Cult

This equation suggests that culture is akin to a civil religion or a secondary religion, often referred to as one's own religion. It represents the way an individual conceptualizes and applies their beliefs in life and activities within a specific social community. What is the purpose or goal of this

secondary religion? It revolves around the choices made in life and the approach to life itself, in other words, the civil cult. This formula also underscores a fundamental distinction between 'religion' and 'culture': the civil cult, or secondary religion (referred to as "one's own religion" in Sicily), does not involve intermediaries between God and humans. It can be considered a "religion without intermediaries."

In the context of analyzing the concepts of "Russian Quest" and "American Quest," it is appropriate to present an axiological formula for the question "what is life?" From a philosophical perspective, we could propose the conceptual formula "life is a game with death." Physiologically, for the construct of the "human being," life is marked by annual aging. However, to ensure that the definition can be further applied and based on the conceptual formula distinguishing culture from religion, as well as the study of the phenomena of the "Russian Quest" and "American Quest," the author suggests the following concept:

Life = Sum of Duels

In essence, life can be described as a collective series of individual confrontations (duels). Throughout life, in the course of the quest, whether American, Russian, or other forms, every action an individual takes can be regarded as a form of personal duel. In other words, "life = competition," including in a professional context.

For instance, imagine a carpenter sculpting a wooden figure. During this process, he is overcoming the resistance of the wood with his carving tools. This visualizes the duel between the carpenter's hands (the system applying force according to a design) and the wood (the material resisting this force). Let us consider another example: a bricklayer constructing a house. In this case, we are dealing with a complex system involving numerous confrontations, from physically overcoming the resistance of building materials to solving intellectual challenges or "duels." In other words, "life" can be seen as a collection of duels with the external environment, including conflicts related to organization, interactions with others, and internal struggles. Therefore, one can say that a person lives by engaging in

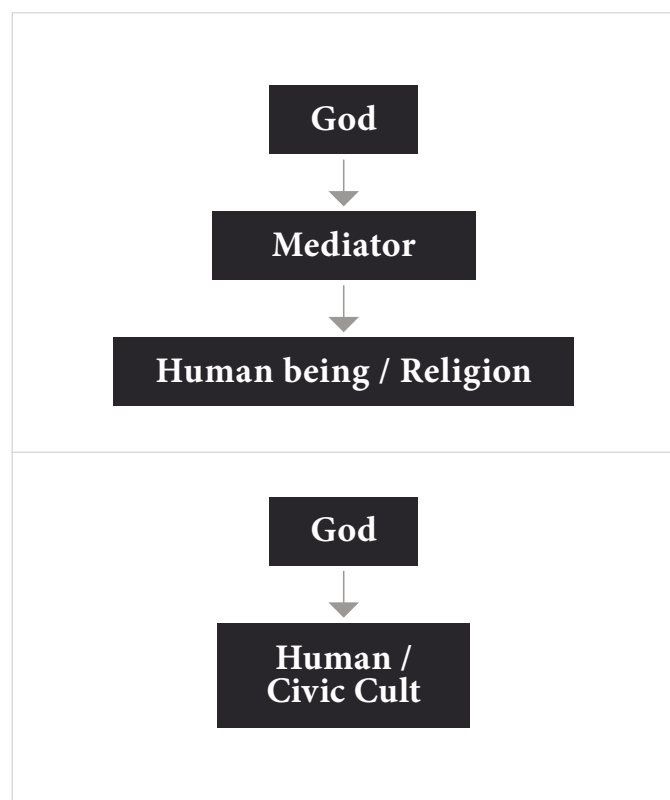


Figure 1. Two forms of religion

struggles with the external world, and it is crucial to remember that “woe to the vanquished.”

Over countless epochs and centuries of humanity’s interactions with the external environment, valuable knowledge and practical experience were accumulated. The collective wisdom derived from this universal experience is what we call “culture.” However, not all knowledge is passed down as a public good from one generation to another. Some knowledge remains secluded, implicit, hidden from the public eye, understood by only a select few, and so on. This category can be termed “mystery,” representing the totality of concealed and unshared knowledge.

In essence, these two categories, “culture” and “mystery,” represent two distinct forms that divide humanity into these two forms: those associated with “mystery” and those with “life.”

#### First Form / Mystery /:

- Cognitive function of the mind.
- Secret punishment.
- Physiology.
- Justice.

- Complex dogmatic doctrines (belonging to both categories).
- Programs (belonging to both categories).

#### Second Form / Life /:

- Representatives of phenomena.
- The desire of the powerful to defend.
- Dramaturgy.
- Paradoxes.
- Masks.
- Actors.
- The “kangaroo dance” (as a physical way of understanding the world).
- Complex dogmatic doctrines (belonging to both categories).
- Programs (belonging to both categories).

This proposed conceptual framework can be tested using elements from the research concept “matrix of religions,” as illustrated in the classification system below.

As we can observe from the comparison of elements in the heuristic model “matrix of religion” (using the comparative method), all elements are directly related to the first, second, or both forms

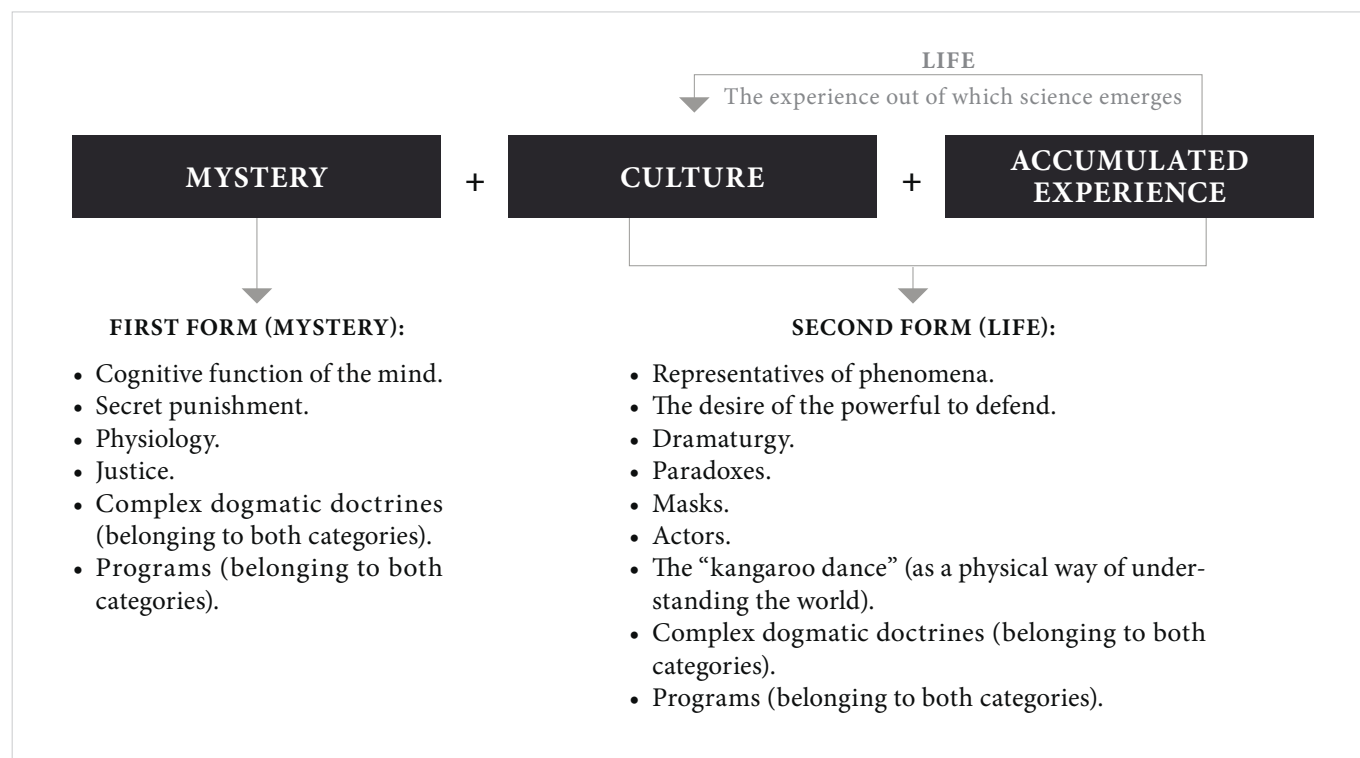


Figure 2. Classification system

(there are no superfluous elements unrelated to either form). Now, let us explore how these two forms differ from each other.

The key parameter: the source of origin. Culture arises from the sum of duels. It arises from experience, which also serves as a prerequisite for the qualitative understanding of that experience, its theorization, classification, technologization, and more, ultimately giving rise to science.

How does the form of "mystery" originate? What lies at its core? It is rooted in some transcendent form, which, in turn, finds expression in the subsequent retransformed form — religion. In essence, categories such as "mysticism" and "mystifications" are based on this form. Mystification is a certain sub-form that arises as a consequence of ignorance and misunderstanding by humans of the natural causes of events and phenomena. As is well known, humans tend to mystify what is unknown to them. In other words:

"Mystification = Contrivance"

If culture arises from the sum of duels (i.e., from real-life experiences), then secret knowledge originates from mystifications (and their subsequent understanding). However, mysticism, like a coin, also has a "flip side," which is a formula for knowledge. In such a case, knowledge must be made closed and inaccessible. We could even propose the conceptual hypothesis that science has "evolved" or "emerged" from culture. "Science should be refined as practical, useful experience accumulated over multiple generations" — Grigory Semyonovich Popov (1951). His research concept of the key skill of the era, as presented in the pages of the popular science magazine "Expedition," confirms the observations and inferences provided above (Maltsev, 2020).

Why does it appear logical and possible to advance the conceptual hypothesis that science is a product of culture? At the very least, there are still so-called "paradigms in science" even in the highly advanced post-industrial 21st century (Giesselmann, 2019). A detailed discussion of paradigms in science and a systematic approach to considering their role, scope, and significant influence are described in the

book "Mystery or Crime: Real Life and Economics" (Maltsev, 2021).

At this juncture, we will not delve into complex historical questions about "who created paradigms?" but we will consider some of the implications. Psychological, political, social, historical, cultural, and other paradigms have confined the entire "machine of science" (regardless of the discipline, be it mathematics or depth psychology) to modes of "intellectual activity." Consequently, the constructed image of science, which people perceive as science in the 21st century, is shaped by third-party approved and adjusted paradigms. Importantly, most paradigms are characterized by tacitness, as they are justified by "it is customary or not customary in the scientific world" without providing reasons.

The figure 2 above illustrates a symbolic model of what "paradigms in science" resemble. Essentially, these are a type of constriction, perceptual prisms that truncate and "trim" socially acceptable data fragments. Consequently, we can logically deduce the following: those who own and control the paradigms regulate the "course of victory" — whether in science or in life; the defeated are left to contend with only what was "trimmed" and honed by the dogmas and "edges" of the paradigms.

Let us also consider a few observations of criminological nature. By examining the formula as a whole (see the Figure 4 below), what does this combination allow us to construct? When we apply criminological categories to it, we get the components that shape what's known as the "underbelly of society" (to use a figurative analogy) — in other words, the criminal system. Thus, the criminal system exhibits the same two forms as the forms of society previously discussed. Undoubtedly, the criminal system possesses its own secrets, traditions, a collection of subcultures, and even its unique "sum of duels." Every individual, while traversing one form of quest or another, at a certain juncture in the social crossroads makes a decision regarding which "side of the coin" of life they will embrace — either criminal or socially acceptable.

Consequently, through understanding the research concept, we arrive at two coherent systems,



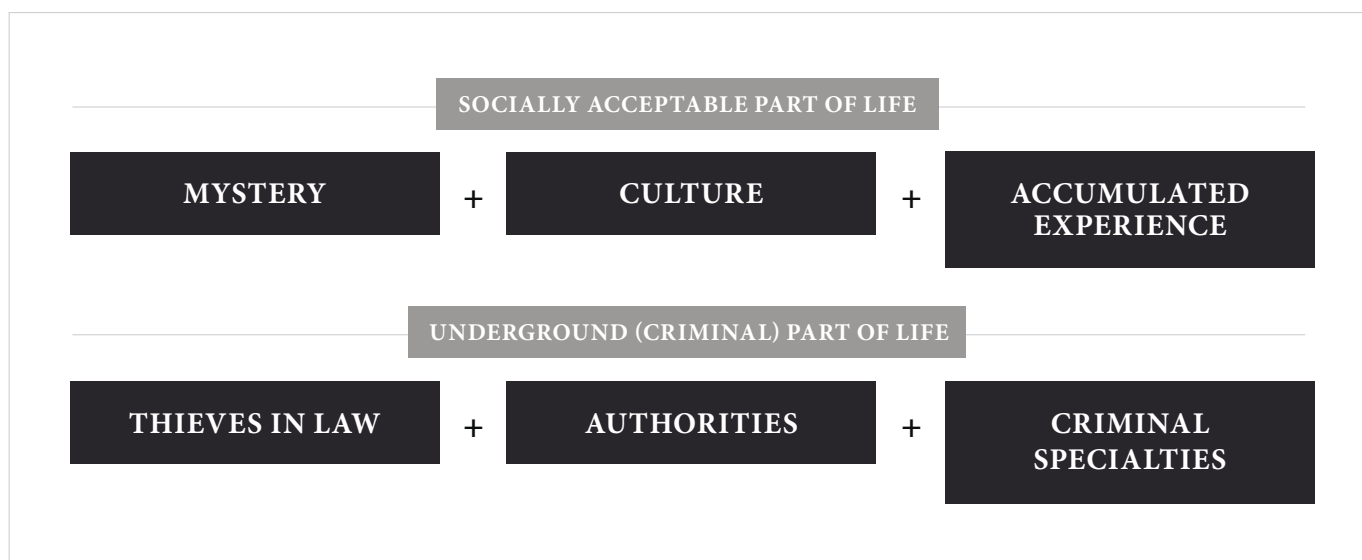


Figure 3. Social and criminal coherent systems

both based on a single, identical essence. Let us provisionally label them the “socially acceptable side of life” and the “underground” (criminal).

## DISCUSSION

When it comes to contemplating the consequences of choosing a social path within the quest, there are undoubtedly different viewpoints. In the American quest, the attitude toward the underground differs from that in the Russian (European) quest. There are certainly mental disparities as well. For example, within the Russian mentality, there exists a stereotype about the quality or standard of living and available benefits: “the criminal lives, while those on the other side struggle for survival and existence.” There are other traditions where the polarity of positive and negative differs. Nevertheless, fundamentally, these systems are structured in the same way:

1. There is some secret component (not for everyone).
2. There is a series of duels that shape experience.
3. There is a compilation of meaningful conclusions drawn from experience.

These three categories are inherent in both the underground (criminal) and the socially acceptable side of life. For instance, in the criminal world, there exists the same system of knowledge transmission

from generation to generation, which shapes the image of criminal science, criminal culture, and, in general, the cumulative experience of crimes committed. The difference lies in the fact that while in society people “battle” with the external environment, the underground “battles” with other people. Nevertheless, the criminal environment possesses its own science, traditions, and heroes. From the perspective of life success and performance indicators, criminal culture and subcultures have largely succeeded today. Criminal culture and subcultures have displaced components like “mystery” from the social landscape (both in the form of knowledge and speculation).

Criminal secret science, particularly the science of how to ensure one’s well-being, integrity, and invulnerability, has displaced the nearly transcendent secret that constitutes the socially acceptable “floor” of human life. It is worth noting that fabricated and fictitious religions and movements have been supplanted today (not only by criminal subcultures), and, in essence, our world today resembles a culture or subculture (Krase et al., 2021). And the component of “the sum of duels” has not disappeared; as a result, there are only two aspects left: life as the sum of battles and culture as a certain generalized traditional form of experience aimed at enabling a person to emerge victorious from a series of duels.

Based on the presented reasoning, one could conclude that knowledge about how to succeed in the sum of battles in criminal or social life is concentrated in the category “Culture,” specifically within the realm of “science.” However, this conclusion is not entirely accurate without considering the role of “paradigms.” It is important to recall that the substance subject to scientific comprehension and practice goes through the “cutters” of acceptable and permissible paradigms. Consequently, attitudes continue to shape what is socially acceptable knowledge. In the 21st century, the social form of science does not function as a fundamental and absolute source for addressing all issues.

This trend of dependence on attitudes (paradigms) cannot be attributed to the criminal world, as it operates beyond the confines of socially acceptable attitudes. Moreover, the criminal subculture itself is a secret category.

The term “life matrix” generally conveys the idea that life or reality can be conceptualized as a system organized according to certain principles or structures. This approach often employs the metaphor of a matrix to capture the relationships, interactions, and patterns that underlie life processes or the nature of reality. The usage of the term can be found in various fields of science, including

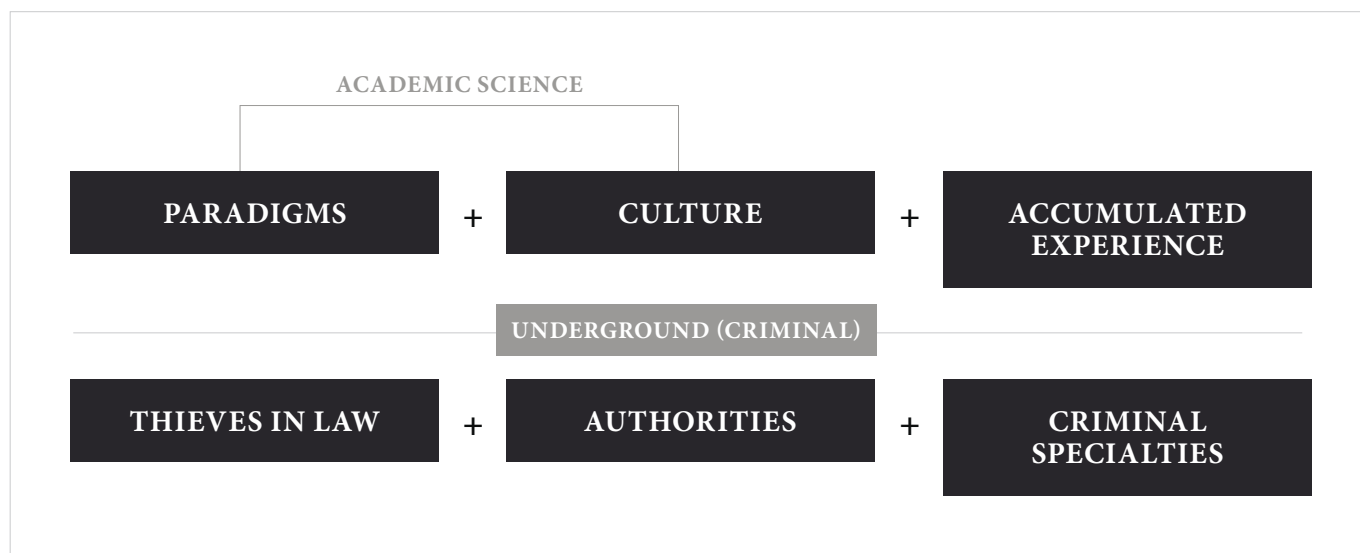


Figure 4. Attitudes shape what is socially acceptable knowledge

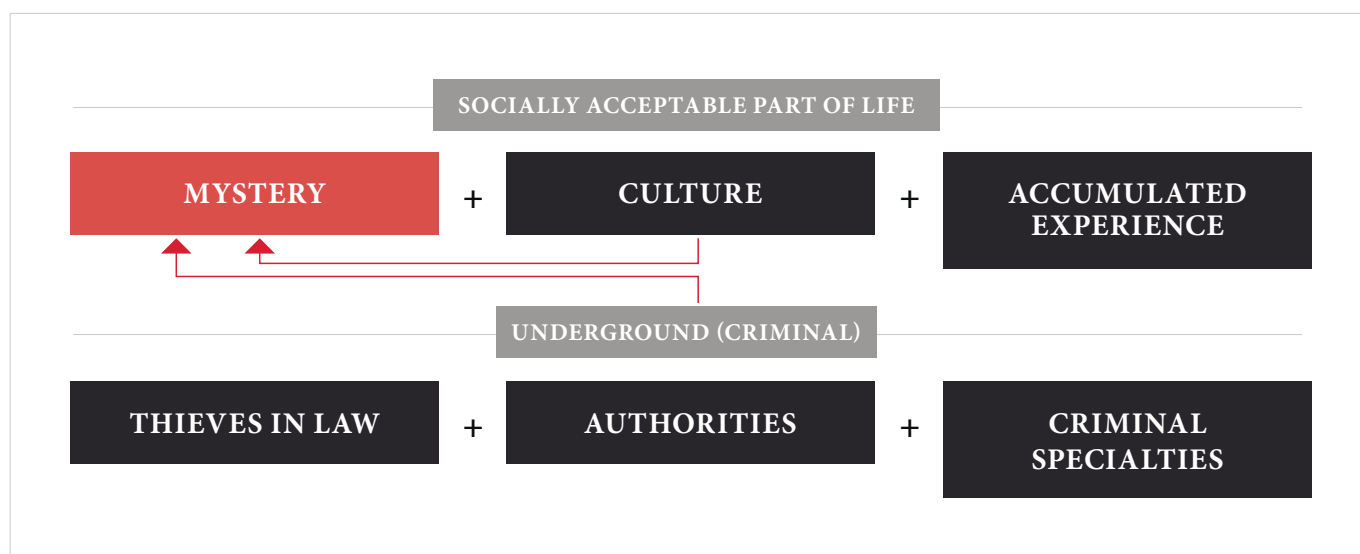


Figure 5. Criminal subculture is a secret category

philosophy, physics, biology, and other scientific disciplines, where researchers seek to unveil the fundamental principles or structures that form the foundation of life or reality.

The interpretation of the term can vary depending on the specific context and the author or researcher employing it. Here are a few potential ways to understand the term:

- **Interaction between Religions:** In this context, a matrix of religions could describe the common elements or areas of interaction between different religions, with a focus on shared moral or ethical principles.
- **Cultural and Historical Interaction:** The term may also denote the influence of religions on the cultural and historical aspects of societies and nations, creating a kind of “matrix” of cultural diversity.
- **Attempts at Syncretization:** “Life matrix” might indicate endeavors to establish a syncretic system that combines elements of different religions or doctrines.
- **Search for common ground:** The matrix of religions can also point to the search for common ground or ideas that are common to many religious traditions.

We can identify the following concepts:

1. **A philosophical concept:** The matrix of life may be an attempt to express the overall structure or basis of all life. It may include ideas about the interaction of all aspects of life and nature.
2. **Spiritual or religious interpretation:** Some faiths may use the term “matrix of life” to express the idea of a cosmic or divine order that encompasses all aspects of existence.
3. **Scientific approach:** In science, the term may be used to define a particular pattern or structure that is present in nature, biology, or evolution.
4. **Psychological aspect:** In psychology, the term can indicate the interaction of different elements in the formation of a personality or life path.
5. **Cultural interpretation:** Perhaps in the context of a culture or society, the “matrix of life” describes the general relationships and meaningful aspects that define life in that sociocultural context.

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of a “life matrix” may be unique to each author or researcher, and it may be defined in different ways depending on the context in which it is used.

## CONCLUSIONS

In essence, if we summarize the conceptualization of all the previously discussed categories and phenomena, we arrive at the following conclusions:

1. The sum of duels serves as a foundation and a source of daily challenges for individuals, compelling them to tap into the accumulated experience of previous generations.
2. This experience of previous generations should, for reasons of efficiency, be generalized within the domain of “culture.” However, in the 21st century, a systematic “science of victory” does not exist for various reasons.
3. The mystery aspect of knowledge, along with the mystifications that have taken its place, including its mystical component (the socially acceptable aspect), fails to provide modern individuals with answers to the questions and challenges they encounter in their daily lives and activities.
4. Both the socially acceptable side of life and the underground share an essentially identical structure, with three identical blocks being characteristic of both forms.
5. In the course of societal development, particularly during the postmodern phase, the mystery social component has been displaced, while elements such as “culture,” “subculture,” and the concept of the “sum of duels” have remained functional.
6. Today, the “sum of duels” is no longer directly associated with the concept of “culture” but is closely tied to the concept of “subculture.” Subculture, in turn, can be linked to the underground category, specifically, “criminal subculture.” Individuals face one of the most crucial decisions in their fateful quest — whether to choose the path of criminal subculture or another community.
7. Choosing “criminal subculture” offers the advantage of increased efficiency and the ability to

address life's challenges more effectively. Criminal subculture is specifically designed to impart and preserve the knowledge of how to navigate and succeed in the sum of duels.

8. Humanity's culture (the socially acceptable part of it), is hindered by numerous tacit attitudes and cannot adequately respond to the challenges of the current era or address the issues and tasks stemming from the sum of duels.
9. Human culture has undergone a transformation into what is now considered science, but this transformation, influenced by prevailing attitudes, has taken the form of "academic science." Consequently, culture as it once existed has effectively ceased to exist, supplanted by the attitudes that gave rise to academic science. While the concept of the "sum of duels," as a generator of life's challenges, remains a functional component, contemporary humanity, guided by 21st-century academic science, lacks the necessary knowledge, methodologies, logic, and even information to effectively address life's challenges.

Given the above, a fundamental question arises: "What should individuals do if the socially acceptable form of self-realization in solving life's challenges no longer provides the substance or source needed to navigate these challenges successfully?" To rephrase this question, "Is seeking out the criminal subculture the only viable option?"

These questions and life challenges are highly pertinent in today's world, significantly enriching and complicating the quest for one's fate. The search for purpose and life path compels individuals, in both the Russian and American quests, to seek answers even in places where, unfortunately, such answers have long been absent due to the influence of prevailing attitudes. These questions, along with the life challenges they represent, offer new and potentially promising avenues for future scientific conceptualization and applied research. These endeavors aim to shape value paradigms, develop instrumental approaches, and devise technological solutions that are increasingly vital in the dynamic landscape of the 21st century.

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# GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK AS A WAY OF LIFE FOR MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN A DIGITAL SOCIETY

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## ABSTRACT

The article explores Google and Facebook platforms as quite innovative companies that provide services and create many new products enjoyed by millions. Apart from providing services, advertisers know the details of users' lives and offer their services to them with extreme accuracy based on their social network profile. Facebook has created a number of innovations that track users on the Internet, constantly updating the window of life interests. At the same time, no one sees what happens to the data generated by all the "likes", how the social network's data mining mechanism works, and how our data and hobbies are identified.

The aim of the article is to conceptualize the activities of Google and Facebook platforms that provide a way of life for millions of people in the digital society. The subject of the study is Google and Facebook as a lifestyle of millions. The object of the study is the impact of digital society on the improvement of Google and Facebook through information and communication and information and communication technologies.

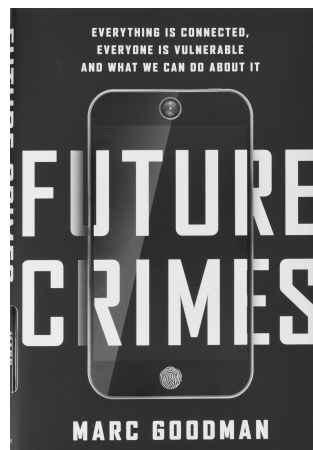
## Keywords

Google, Facebook, lifestyle, digital society

## INTRODUCTION

Social media has been criticized as a result of violating laws, including human privacy (Van Schaik et al., 2018), child safety (Biernesser et al., 2020), and the dissemination of speech that sows racial and social inequality (Chetty & Alathur, 2018). These campaigns are not the only ones using our personal data, the same applies to Twitter campaigns, Instagram, hundreds of other companies, so you should manage your data with care.

For the article, we rely on the research of Mark Goodman (2016), titled "Future Crimes: Everything Is Connected, Everyone Is Vulnerable and What We Can Do About It."



Goodman is widely recognized as a leading expert in the field of online counterterrorism, specializing in the exploration of corporate crimes related to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, nanotechnology, and virtual reality. Therefore, we draw lessons from Mark Goodman's work, particularly his recommendations on how to safely navigate information flows and technologies to avoid harm. A particularly informative and relevant contribution to this study comes from the interview of Oleg Maltsev and Elizabeth Haas Edersheim, titled "Insight into theory and business practice" (Centre for Criminology, 2021a).

Furthermore, we utilize articles by V. Voronkova et al. (2020, 2021), R. Andriukaitiene, V. Nikitenko et al. (2021), R. Oleksenko (2017), and O. Punchchenko to enrich the theoretical and practical aspects of our research. In terms of methodology, our approach involves systematic analysis, which serves as a framework for organizing and structuring the issues at hand. We employ rationality and explore alternative means to achieve our research goals. Additionally, we apply general philosophical methods such as analysis and synthesis, abstraction, generalization of scientific findings, comparison of research outcomes, correlations between elements of the digital society, construction of hypotheses, drawing inferences, and making generalizations. These methods contribute to a rational and objective research process, imbuing it with meaningful and content-rich insights.

Emerging platform leaders are reshaping their trajectories towards success by realigning their organizations with their unique values. They are advancing by implementing novel strategies, attracting fresh clientele, and establishing innovative business models that set new rules of the game, surpassing giants like Facebook and Google. These tech behemoths exported typically American values, characterized by self-centered consumerism and social disengagement, to the world. The automation and artificial intelligence they harnessed morphed into tools for manipulating ideas, creating the illusion of power while exacerbating democratic flaws. Attackers exploited



the full capabilities of Facebook and Google to disseminate misinformation and hate speech, aiming to sway citizens during elections. Through the Facebook and Google platforms, these attackers sought to undermine democracy, civil rights, privacy, civic well-being, and innovation. Regrettably, these platforms themselves bear significant responsibility for the extensive harm inflicted upon ordinary citizens.

In just a few years, Google has undergone a significant transformation. What started as a simple search engine has evolved into a powerhouse that millions of people turn to for various purposes. It has become the go-to platform for receiving instructions, managing schedules, maintaining address books, voicemail, making phone calls, watching videos, and indulging in entertainment while navigating the vast realm of the World Wide Web. Google's influence extends to the realm of applications, with billions of downloads, and it plays a central role in a multitude of tasks, from banking and cooking to organizing and preserving cherished memories, effectively shaping our understanding of ontology, society, and mentality.

The human connection



to the internet spans across various devices, including laptops, cell phones, iPads, and an array of other gadgets such as devices, cable boxes, game consoles, television receivers, and Apple TV digital media players. In this digital age, billions of individuals willingly share the most intimate aspects of their lives on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. These platforms grant access to what can be termed as “our personal social network,” encompassing both personal and business communications. Simultaneously, we actively engage with social media, sharing information about our aspirations, goals, and desires, while receiving updates from our friends, family, and colleagues (Voronkova et al., 2021).

## ARTICLE RELEVANCE

The significance of this research topic becomes evident when we consider that in the digital society, our identity is intricately tied to the technological facets of modern life, specifically the essential services of algorithmic culture on which we have grown increasingly dependent. Every day, millions of individuals spend over five hours online using their digital devices. These platforms document our lives, chronicling pivotal moments such as meetings, graduations, real estate transactions, the arrival of pets, marriages, divorces, births, and much more. Furthermore, social networks have demonstrated their potential to influence geopolitical events, as evidenced by various incidents in Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and around the world. Digital services can wield a dual-edged sword, serving both constructive and destructive purposes.

The allure of these digital tools is self-evident. Most of us dedicate our leisure time to scouring the internet for music, recipes, investment insights, news updates, guidance, business prospects, social interactions, and sports results (Houghton et al., 2020). Giants like Google, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok offer us valuable services such as email, news, video content, and a platform to share advertisements and photos, all seemingly for free. However, in return, we provide them with information about ourselves, fulfilling our needs in one way or another.

Today, Google has expanded its offerings to include itinerary services and the capability to track our physical movements, phone calls, voicemail messages through voice recognition and transcription, essentially monitoring our every action when we carry our smartphones with us. Despite assurances regarding privacy policies, these companies possess comprehensive and detailed profiles of our activities within their digital realms. In essence, an individual is not merely a customer of Google but also its product, as the company is committed to extracting the maximum amount of information from each of us. Google processes a staggering 24 petabytes of data daily, equivalent to 1 million gigabytes or thousands of terabytes, underlining the immense power derived from possessing such vast datasets. All of this underscores the formidable influence wielded by these platforms in their continuous pursuit of technological advancement and data acquisition.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study of Google and Facebook as social phenomena, representing the lifestyle of millions in the digital age, relies on the information method. This method has been evolved thanks to the digital society, characterized by high-tech features such as artificial intelligence, robotics, implanted technologies, new digital realities, pervasive computerization, the Internet of Things, the emergence of big data (BIG DATA), and the role of artificial intelligence in decision-making, as well as 3D production.

The novelty of this approach in studying Google and Facebook lies in the application of complexity theory, systemic analysis, synergetics, and structural-functional methodology. These components are employed to analyze the digital society. Structural-functional analysis helps us view the digital society as a complex, nonlinear social system with multiple subsystems that continually interact with the environment. The combination of synergetic and systemic methods allows us to explain the intricacies of the digital society.

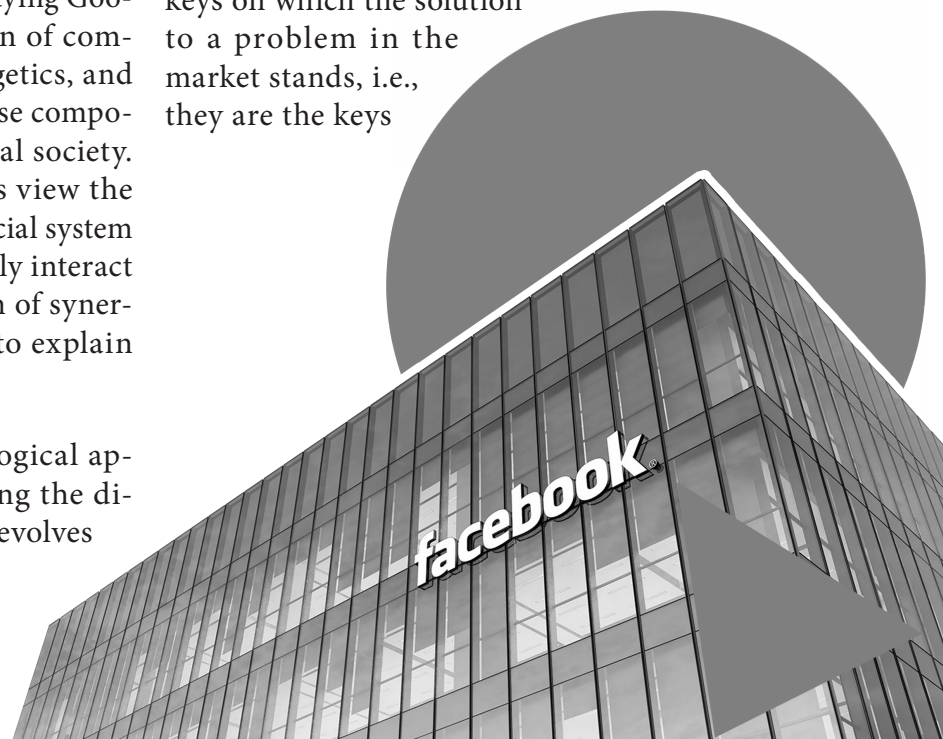
Anthropological and socio-axiological approaches are also integral to uncovering the dimensions of the digital society, which revolves

around individuals, education, knowledge, and human engagement in the society of knowledge and innovation (Christian & Griffiths, 2016).

Systemic analysis and synthesis play a pivotal role in dissecting Google and Facebook as social phenomena. System methodology offers a structured approach to managing complex, interconnected activities. It allows for the analysis of constituent components and their systematic integration. The essence of the system approach can be distilled into the following steps:

1. Defining goals and establishing their hierarchy.
2. Attaining these objectives at the lowest possible cost through a comparative analysis of alternative approaches and methods for achieving them, followed by the selection of the most suitable option.
3. Quantitative quantification of goals, rooted in a comprehensive evaluation of all possible developmental pathways for the digital society and its platforms (Voronkova, 2005).

We should concur with Oleg Maltsev in his statement that the work of analysts is to process all the necessary information and, at the first level, to provide a certain concept of further actions (Centre for Criminology, 2021c). The second level is informational, and here we collect all available and less available information. At the third level, it is important for us to have our apparatus, which is capable of creating the conditions we need in the market to realize what we have planned. In the classical version, these three levels are like three keys on which the solution to a problem in the market stands, i.e., they are the keys





to solving the equation (Centre for Criminology, 2021c). This study respects the coherent relationship between analysis and synthesis, inductive and deductive models, as well as the principle-postulate of truth validity, which evolves as the driving force and source of any evolution (Oleksenko, 2017).

## RESULTS

Our analysis has revealed that Google's initial objective was to organize the global information space, primarily by creating a superior search engine. However, as the computer world underwent a profound transformation towards the "cloud," this objective converged with the development of internet-based products and services funded by advertising revenues.

1. The study delves into the position and significance of the global information system. Undoubtedly, there are undeniable positive aspects to this technological evolution. Hence, the primary objective of this research was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the advantages and disadvantages associated with Facebook as a way of life for millions.
2. The study identifies the place and role of Facebook within the digital society. During its initial emergence, Facebook was perceived as a platform of global significance that had the potential to bring positive technological changes to the world. The expectation was that it would easily amass 100 million users, marking a remarkable success. However, little did anyone anticipate that such success could bring about consequences other than happiness.
3. The study scrutinizes the underlying values propagated on Facebook. In practice, Facebook has established and maintains a sophisticated structure built around a value system that increasingly clashes with the principles held by the users it serves.
4. The study reveals the technologies employed by Facebook. Among these techniques, persuasion plays a prominent role because there is a universal desire for validation from others. The "like" button has gained significance precisely due to our innate need for social approval, and

Facebook essentially deals in the currency of user attention.

### **1. The place and role of the global information system**

The positive aspects of this technological evolution are undeniable, so we decided to explore the pros and cons of Facebook as a way of life for millions. The mutual connectivity that the Internet provides through its fundamental architecture means that people around the world can now be brought together in society, ontology, and humanity like never before. While the benefits of the online world are well attested and often highlighted in the tech industry, there is a downside to this mutual connectedness. Every day, more and more people "connect" their daily lives to the global information network, which makes our lives easier and more efficient without stopping for a moment. But each of us has to ask ourselves: what does this really mean (Goodman, 2016).

At the same time, Facebook's internet platforms manipulate attention and harm millions of people, refusing to take responsibility for the consequences



of their actions. They resort to fictitious ways to profit from the most vulnerable parts of human psychology, collecting and using personal data, and developing business models without protecting citizens (Montgomery, 2015; Sørensen, 2016; Van Der Schyff et al., 2020). It leads to degradation and de-evolution. Network users should learn to be skeptical of their favorite products that harm humans, hold platforms accountable for the consequences of their decisions, and encourage lawmakers to regulate them to protect the public interest.

Indeed, technology is opening up the world and providing access to knowledge that was out of reach for previous generations. Technology has enabled humanity to accomplish incredible things, but all of this comes at a price. Technology, starting with television, is changing the way humans interact with the world, transforming active citizenship with ideas into passive consumption of content and conversations into communication in a digital environment. Information networks subtly transform us from citizens to consumers, as Facebook is primarily a business aimed at maximizing profits, managed by a single person (Gupta, 2018).

Facebook functions as a colossal artificial intelligence entity that wields influence across users' activities, spanning both political and non-political realms. It continually deepens its understanding of each user, while its tools evolve into formidable weapons. Some experts argue that new technologies themselves are neither inherently good nor bad; their impact depends on how people employ them. In the digital society, the line between the physical and digital worlds is fading, creating layers of concealed information imperceptible to the naked eye. However, with augmented reality glasses, a wealth of personalized and interactive hidden data becomes accessible. For instance, the 2.0 network introduced multimedia content, interactive advertising, and social networking. The convergence of fast 5G, augmented reality devices, countless sensors, and robust artificial intelligence now allows for the overlay of digital images onto the physical environment. Virtual reality (Kuai & Hao, 2019) immerses individuals in an artificially constructed continuum, achieved by immersing oneself in an inherent order and imagining one's presence in the information environment.

Certain companies provide a feature known as "visual search," transitioning users into a new matrix of audiovisual reality where they engage with like-minded individuals as well as affective artificial entities. In 2017, Google introduced Google Lens, a visual search engine capable of identifying purchasable items and deciphering the surrounding environment. The competition among companies has propelled information and communication technologies to new heights (O'Connor & McDermott, 1997).

By the close of 2018, the number of visual search engines had surpassed one billion. Today, reality itself evolves into a marketplace characterized by interdynamics and interevolution, generating objectively (materially) metabolized correlations and relationships. We are rapidly approaching a future in which artificial intelligence will conduct the majority of our shopping, continuously presenting us with products and services we did not even know we needed. These impending changes pose a significant threat to traditional advertisers while offering numerous advantages to consumers within the new information landscape of the global information system (O'Neil, 2016).

The rapid advancement of technology propels us forward on the path toward "computerized wealth and prosperity." Demonetization is already well underway, with affordable electricity ensuring clean water, and autonomous vehicles representing a cornerstone of clean and cost-effective transportation and housing.

The fusion of artificial intelligence, 5G connectivity, and augmented/virtual reality is shaping novel models (sub-models) of affordable education (Calvert & Abadia, 2020), healthcare (Javaid & Haleem, 2020), and personal development, constituting the innovative evolutionary framework of the digital society. Information and communication technologies are effectively contributing to making the world a better place.

## ***2. Facebook as a Potent Economic Force in the Digital Society***

During its inception, Facebook was seen as a global platform with the potential to use technology for



positive world-changing impacts. The expectation was that it would effortlessly amass 100 million users, heralding a resounding success. However, its founders likely did not anticipate the flip side of this success, which involved the development of influence and manipulation technologies. Facebook possessed two significant advantages over earlier social networks: it encouraged genuine identity and granted users control over their personal information.

From a business perspective, Facebook's initial public offering was an overwhelming success, driving an influx of users who engaged in computerized interactions, expanding horizons. For individuals, this platform deepened their emotional connections, perceptions, imaginings, and interpretations within the information models of the digital society. As a result of its public offering, Facebook experienced a substantial user boom, instilling investor confidence. Over approximately eight and a half years, Facebook evolved into a potent economic force, continually updating its algorithms and capitalizing on advertising. Since 2012, the integration of ads into the news feed enabled precise ad targeting, which

has continuously improved within the framework of an ever-evolving timeline.

Facebook facilitates personalization, interactivity, and the sharing of information among individuals, materializing these aspects through verbal-optical dialogues, along with computer-generated holograms, schemes, and polymodels. When 2.2 billion users click on links, share posts, and engage in commenting activities every month, with 1.47 billion of them doing so weekly, Facebook's artificial intelligence accumulates an extensive understanding of its users, surpassing their own comprehension. Although this information is securely stored, it remains potentially enticing to malicious actors, despite protective measures. Facebook's core business model revolves around providing access to this data for those willing to pay for it (Voronkova et al., 2021).

Platforms engage in fierce competition to captivate the "autonomous simulacrum" of users, which is addressed by artificial intelligence to curate content that elicits emotional responses. Facebook benefits significantly when an emotionally charged user becomes even more engaged with emotionally resonant content. With comprehensive knowledge about each user, Facebook has the capacity to purposefully mold the news feed to enhance emotional reactions within the "autonomous simulacrum." In postmodern society, humans configure themselves into virtual artifacts, grouping themselves into virtual communities, often comprising family, friends, and Facebook groups, functioning as digital counterparts of the reality we belong to.

Social networking enables us to expand our social circles, forming a remarkably diverse virtual community that mimics quasi-reality. The news feed allows us to surround ourselves with like-minded individuals. When we receive content from these like-minded connections, such as family, friends, or groups, our defenses tend to lower, contributing to the prevalence of misinformation on Facebook. Facebook offers the creation of groups spanning various interests, from hobbies and entertainment to sports teams, communities, religious congregations, celebrities, and a wide array of political affiliations. Facebook values these groups as they simplify advertising targeting, and malicious actors



exploit them for similar reasons, exploiting the illusions of sensory and emotional quasi-socialization (Nikitenko et al., 2021).

Research indicates that when individuals with a penchant for discourse engage in discussions on various issues, their viewpoints tend to become more radicalized. This phenomenon can erode the credibility of rational discourse and its connection to reality. Facebook often fosters the notion that it merely serves as a platform for others' actions and is not accountable for the actions of third parties. Moreover, in today's world, there are more mobile phones than there are people, and these devices have seamlessly integrated into our lives, supplanting cameras, computers, calculators, calendars, address books, radios, televisions, and gaming consoles. They constantly collect data about us, including our location, interactions, photos, preferences, and more, serving as a perpetual source of information. As a result, platforms like Google and Facebook have become an integral aspect of the digital lives of millions, shaping linguistic interpretations and creating illusory subject-objects within the virtual world that people immerse themselves in (Voronkova et al., 2020).

### **3. Values Promoted on Facebook**

In reality, Facebook has established and maintains a complex set of values that increasingly clash with user values. While Facebook claims that users have control over their experience, it is actually artificial intelligence, algorithms, and menus designed by its engineers that dictate every facet of the individual experience. The competition for attention among various media and technologies shapes an artificial culture and influences social behavior.

As analyses have shown, radical viewpoints tend to garner more attention from consumers, leading platforms to recommend content aligning with these views. Filter bubbles facilitate news feeds in effectively retaining consumers' attention. Unfortunately, once ensconced within these filter bubbles, individuals become more susceptible to echo chambers, isolation, and extremism, gravitating toward ideas and individuals they are comfortable with. The internet allows for the expression of even the most socially unacceptable ideas, amplifying

radical voices over moderate ones. Platforms with no boundaries can inadvertently encourage hate speech (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021), rendering this "cultural" sphere an immersive experience, drawing upon spatial and dimensional aspects of online interactions (Oleksenko, 2017).

Internet platforms often employ the rhetoric of free speech to justify their business practices, which can inadvertently fuel radicalism in various ways. This allows individuals to be drawn into this subject matter. Extremists frequently connect with one another, creating a semblance of legitimacy bridging the virtual and real-world societal realms. The protection of real-world stigmas takes the communication between extremists on online platforms to a more perilous level, and the platforms' algorithms can push users towards increasingly radical thinking. Filter bubbles prolong users' time on the site, thereby increasing revenue. Within these bubbles, users construct an alternative reality centered around shared values, whether political, religious, or otherwise, placing themselves within the fundamental contours of an "ontology inside out."

In the context of shaping the values promoted on Facebook, only the group's interests hold significance, and anything necessary for its growth is permitted. Consequently, such values often stand at odds with the foundations of democracy and are powerless against the longstanding evolution

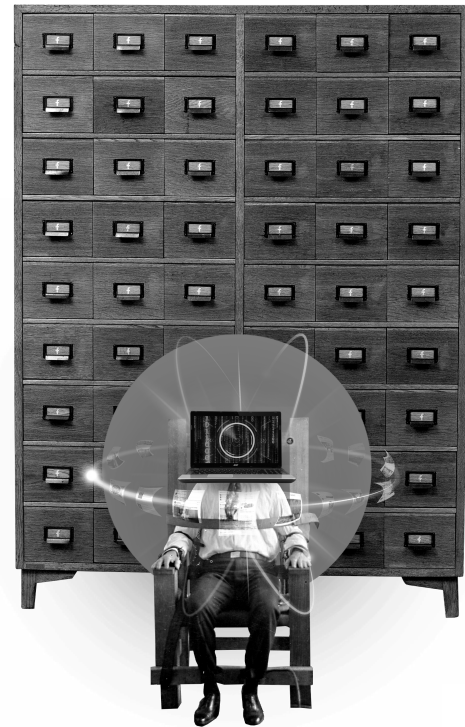


of societal taste bubbles. Facebook, as a virtual reality landscape today, serves as an ideal breeding ground for these ephemeral bubbles that eventually burst, leaving nothing behind. Those seeking to manipulate individuals within the sphere of shared sympathies can do so by simply infiltrating a group and deploying the right triggers, thereby easily capturing attention. Network users at times adopt the ideas offered by these platforms as their own, presenting them as something genuinely virtual, akin to a holographic representation of the informational landscape (O'Neil, 2016).

There exists an array of tools through which platforms influence the choices made by their users. Some of these tools pertain to the interface design of each platform's menu, news feed, or notifications. While Facebook platforms suggest that users are in control, this sense of control is an illusion, and maintaining this illusion is crucial to the success of any platform. Consequently, Facebook, despite the trust placed in it, operates in a particularly subtle manner. Additionally, development teams actively employ "hidden patterns" to achieve desired outcomes by persuading users to take specific actions. The primary purpose of Facebook's Terms of Service is to shield the company from legal liability.

Facebook also utilizes the concept of an "endless" news feed, which is like a bottomless bowl, keeping users engaged indefinitely. This continuous scrolling can lead to millions of people experiencing sleep deprivation as they watch videos, check Instagram, or browse Facebook. Notifications serve as another way for platforms to exploit the vulnerabilities of human psychology. Users are drawn in by a simple, low-cost action, but this action triggers a process for which they may end up paying more, and the true cost of this engagement is often unpredictable. Users often perceive these notifications as highly personal, overlooking the fact that they are automatically generated and not necessarily tailored to their individual preferences.

Google's Android operating system, offered for free to developers and users, allows the company to gather a wealth of data. Along with your mobile phone number, Android provides Google with network information, device location, call logs, contact lists, and access to various sensors



that can record movement, determine location, and even assess ambient conditions like temperature, humidity, and noise levels.

For instance, as early as 2013, Facebook reported having 945 million mobile monthly users, with 53% of its revenue coming from mobile advertising, amounting to billions of dollars (Goodman, 2016). This evolution not only led to a better user interface but also introduced new methods for collecting extensive data from users' mobile devices. Oleg Maltsev and Elizabeth Haas Edersheim point out that managing information services isn't solely about financial gains; it should also prioritize improving people's lives (Centre for Criminology, 2021b). Unfortunately, not everyone follows this approach, exacerbating the existing problems. In essence, the values promoted on Facebook depend on an individual's ontologically social activity and their creative contributions, while for Facebook, income generated from network usage acts as a symbol-paradigm of the well-being of rationally acceptable existences.

#### 4. Facebook's technologies

Facebook's technologies employ various persuasive techniques to tap into our innate desire for validation from others. The "like" button, for instance, has

gained significance because of our need for social approval, and Facebook thrives on user attention as its currency. Social approval is closely linked to reciprocity, with millions of users daily engaging in actions like sharing likes and friend requests, often unaware that these behaviors are actively encouraged by the platform. Notifications like a “friend” tag on a photo serve as powerful forms of recognition, setting off a cycle of reciprocity. The act of “adding people as friends” was a pivotal development for Facebook, as each tagged photo becomes a valuable source of data and metadata related to location, activities, and social connections, all of which can be used to tailor advertisements effectively.

Facebook’s online platform business solutions also incorporate less benevolent persuasion techniques. While platforms make significant efforts to increase user numbers, they often view users as a collective rather than individuals, and using these platforms inherently entails consenting to their rules. In such a situation, few individuals can resist the allure of these persuasion technologies, leaving us with only the option to minimize their impact or completely avoid them. Each facet of persuasion technology serves as a means to subtly manipulate the user.

## DISCUSSION

The issues associated with internet platforms on smartphones extend beyond addiction, as they contribute to the pollution of the public space by amplifying negative voices at the expense of positive ones. Facebook’s internet culture has historically championed free speech and autonomy, which worked well on a smaller scale. However, the developers of the World Wide Web failed to anticipate that on a global scale, this dynamic would shift to the detriment of public discourse. To address this, they have banned hate speech in the format of their service platform, thereby removing some legal liability.

Nevertheless, the dynamics of online platforms often favor those with malicious intent. Attackers can disseminate mischief, misinformation, and conspiracy theories on fringe websites where the most radical and sensational statements find a

home, contributing to the deterioration of public discourse. Simultaneously, there is a lack of regulation regarding non-violent speech, insufficient protection for users, and companies should proactively work to mitigate emotional contagion before it leads to significant harm. Companies should also assume social responsibility for the actions of their users. Notably, Facebook has recently been pushing for hundreds of millions of mobile app users to adopt its new “Photo Sync” feature, designed to automatically upload every photo taken by a phone to the social network’s servers.

Furthermore, Facebook wields a substantial impact on democracy, as technology no longer merely serves humanity but often impedes progress. Technological innovations employ various psychological techniques to capture user attention, and children are particularly vulnerable to these strategies. It is no surprise that today, children receive more medical diagnoses related to technology use (Chester et al., 2020). Internet platforms, video games, and deceptive messaging give rise to a range of issues that are more addictive than similar products two decades ago. People of all ages now devote an extensive portion of their active daily hours to internet platforms. Children and adolescents spend a lot of time watching screens, including smartphones, tablets, gaming consoles, TVs, and computers. On average, children ages 8-12 in the United States spend 4-6 hours a day watching or using screens, and teens spend up to 9 hours (The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2020).

Excessive media consumption is not a new concern, but social media apps on smartphones have elevated its impact (Mylonopoulos & Theoharakis, 2020). The convenience and immersive user experiences offered by smartphones allow app developers to replicate the addictive qualities of slot machines and video games, making apps significant attention monopolizers. Today’s smartphones and internet platforms must be approached with humane design principles to mitigate the potential harm they can cause (Brailovskaia et al., 2019; Sternberg et al., 2020).

Google, as one of the foremost global technology giants, exerts a profound impact on the digital landscape and the lives of millions. The key aspects of Google’s offerings include:



- *Search Engine.* Serving as the world's most popular search engine, Google is a primary information gateway for users exploring diverse topics, from recipes and scientific articles to local businesses and news.
- *Email.* Gmail, a leading email service, is a versatile tool used for messaging, professional correspondence, and managing personal and work-related emails.
- *Office Applications.* Google's suite of cloud-based office applications, comprising Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides, empowers users to effortlessly create, edit, and collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, and presentations.
- *Android.* Developed by Google, the Android operating system stands as the most widely adopted OS for mobile devices, serving the needs of millions of smartphone and tablet users.

Facebook, another prominent global technology giant, offers a range of features that deeply influence social connections and information sharing. The key aspects of Facebook's offerings encompass:

- *Social Connections.* As one of the largest social platforms globally, Facebook enables users to maintain connections with friends, family, and colleagues. It serves as a space for sharing messages, photos, and videos, fostering social interactions.
- *News and Information.* Facebook functions as a significant source of news and information, providing users with updates from various publications, organizations, and public figures.
- *Advertising and Marketing.* Offering a platform for targeted advertising and marketing, Facebook plays a crucial role as a tool for businesses and marketers to reach specific audiences effectively.
- *Virtual Communication.* Beyond its main platform, Facebook extends its reach through subsidiaries such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Oculus VR. These entities allow users to engage in virtual and augmented worlds, expanding the scope of communication and interaction.

Both Google and Facebook, as major players in the digital landscape, have encountered challenges related to data protection, privacy, and concerns about monopolistic practices. Their roles are pivotal

in shaping the digital ecosystem and influencing communication, information retrieval, and business operations. In the digital society, both companies wield significant influence, particularly in the following aspects:

### **1. Impact on the Digital Economy**

- *Digital Advertising and Marketing.* Google and Facebook play a pivotal role in the realm of digital advertising and marketing. Their platforms provide advertisers with the means to target specific audiences and optimize advertising campaigns, thereby influencing the monetization of online content and shaping the business models of numerous websites and apps.
- *Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.* Both giants actively engage in artificial intelligence and machine learning, contributing to technological advancements and innovation within the digital economy.

### **2. Data Control and Privacy**

- *Data Collection.* Google and Facebook amass substantial amounts of user data, prompting concerns and discussions about privacy and data security. Questions arise regarding how these companies utilize and safeguard users' personal information.
- *Blocked Access to Services.* In certain countries, instances have been reported of Google and Facebook blocking or restricting access to their services for political or regulatory reasons. Such actions fuel debates about the influence and control these companies wield over digital access.

### **3. Discussions about Monopoly and Antitrust Investigations**

Google and Facebook have been subject to investigations and discussions related to potential violations of antitrust laws in multiple countries. The concern stems from their dominant market positions, with questions raised about the impact on competition and consumer protection.

Both companies persist in their evolution and expansion, introducing new technologies and

services like artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and cloud computing. Their continued influence in the digital society remains a significant topic of debate, especially concerning issues of competition, regulatory oversight, and data security.

## CONCLUSIONS

In essence, Facebook's primary problem lies within Facebook itself. Back in 1998, Google's initial mission statement was "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and valuable." In contrast, Facebook articulated its mission as "Making the world more open and connected." Unfortunately, it has become clear that Facebook's mission statement is rather narrow in scope. Both companies have achieved substantial material success driven by their founders, but this success has spawned numerous unintended consequences for their users. Facebook and Google have effectively exported typically American values centered around self-centered consumerism and social disengagement. Automation and artificial intelligence, while providing the illusion of empowerment, have deepened the flaws within democracies, eroding citizens' critical thinking abilities.

Malicious actors have exploited Facebook and Google to disseminate misinformation, hate speech, and influence citizens during elections. Through these platforms, attackers have sought to undermine democracy, civil rights, privacy, civic well-being, and innovation. Paradoxically, the platforms themselves bear significant responsibility for the harm inflicted upon ordinary citizens. Democracy relies on the exchange of information, facts, and values. However, the economics of journalism have suffered, and the information marketplace has become oversaturated due to the influence of these platforms. Information and misinformation on Facebook often appear identical, with misinformation often garnering more attention and revenue, making it more appealing. Facebook's algorithms tend to favor extreme messages over neutral ones and conspiracy theories over facts. The platform's design is inherently vulnerable to abuse, as every action is governed by terms of service, and its primary focus is profit.

Facebook applies corporate standards that frequently align with the interests of the powerful, often at the expense of peaceful individuals' demands. During the 2016 presidential election, the rule of law was violated, highlighting a real threat to democracy. Facebook has faced allegations of manipulative artificial intelligence sharing user information with third-party companies, resulting in millions of leaked user profiles being exploited by malicious actors, thus compromising privacy and security.

Facebook indeed presents challenges to innovation by sometimes stifling the emergence of new ideas and technologies due to its dominant position in the social media landscape. Its size and influence can make it challenging for smaller, more innovative platforms to compete and gain traction. While Facebook may tout its ability to connect 2.2 billion people as a significant advantage, it has also given rise to the phenomenon of tribalism. This involves people forming groups based on territorial, cultural, religious, political, and other interests, often leading to polarization and antagonism towards those who do not share the same interests.

In today's digital landscape, Facebook has assumed a role that, in many ways, parallels the responsibilities of governments, especially concerning information dissemination and communication. However, unlike a democratically elected government, Facebook operates without being directly accountable to its users or the countries it affects. This raises questions about the platform's ethical and societal responsibilities and highlights the need for a reevaluation of its role and influence in the digital age.

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# MENTALITIES

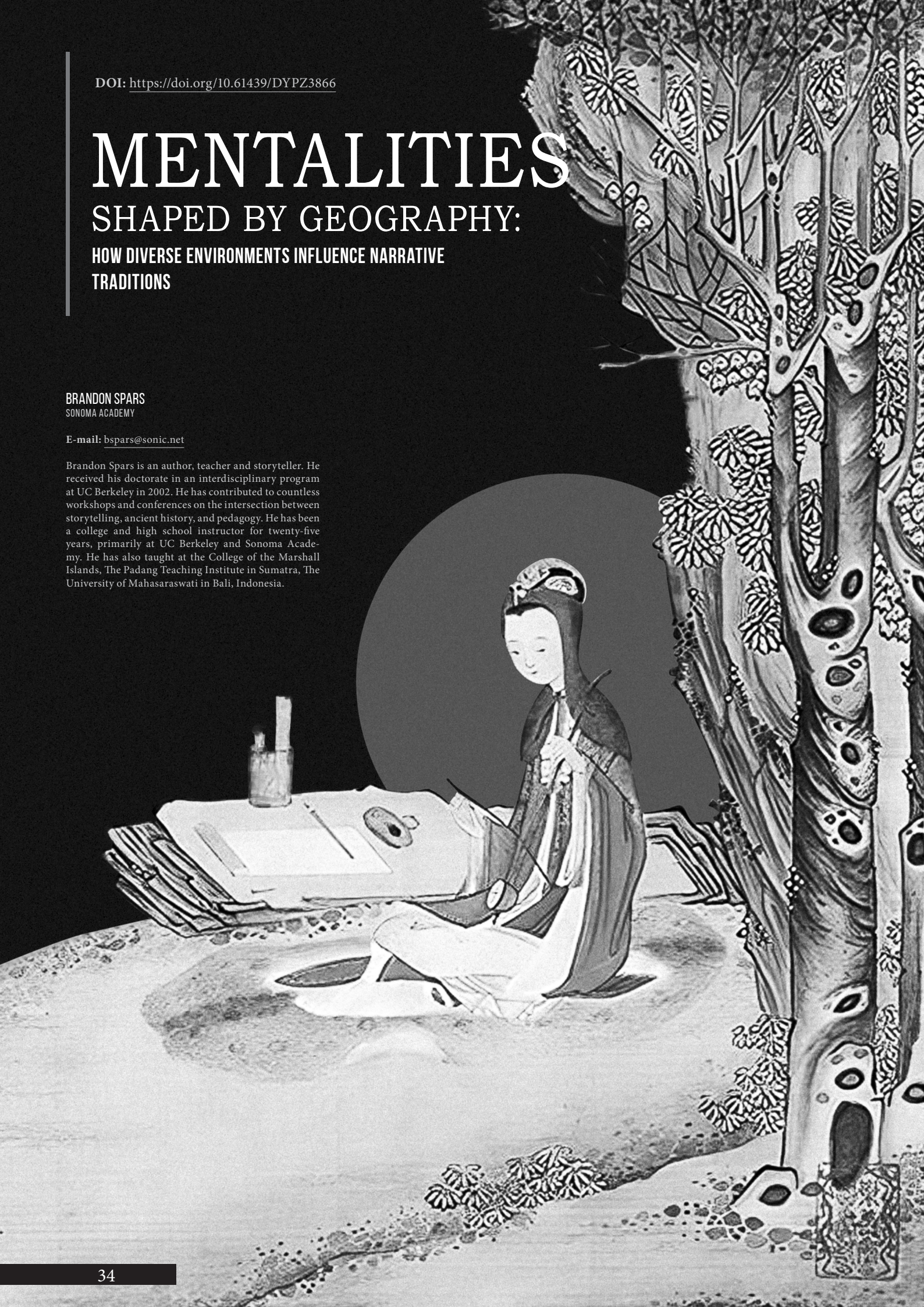
## SHAPED BY GEOGRAPHY:

### HOW DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS INFLUENCE NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The article explores the evolution of human mentalities through storytelling, tracing a shift in narrative focus from survival-oriented nomadic societies to settled agricultural communities. The author argues that this shift, around 11,000 BCE, led to a transformation in storytelling values, emphasizing personal desire and the institution of marriage over communal survival. Drawing on examples from various cultures, the paper examines how geographic factors influenced storytelling, culminating in the celebration of heroes and the preservation of domestic spheres in river valley civilizations. The author further explores the reorientation of storytelling in island cultures, emphasizing the purity of place over racial purity. The article concludes with a reflection on modern storytelling, linking it to the persistence of racist mentalities and the shaping of narratives around borders and racial boundaries.

## Keywords

storytelling evolution, cultural values, geographic influence, river valley epics, island culture, race, contemporary narratives

## INTRODUCTION

It has been widely published that humans' mentalities are characterized by our penchant to tell stories, that we think in stories, that we are "biologically wired for story," that we relate to one another through storytelling, and even further that it is our capacity to tell stories that actually defines us as human beings (Cron, 2012; Gottschall, 2013; Stoll, 2020). Stories play multiple roles in our lives ranging from casual reports of how we are doing, to more formal news reports, to the preservation of our past (history), our values (morals and ethics), and even to rehearsals for how to meet future challenges (Gottschall argues that our dreams are just this, narrative rehearsals for future challenges, exchanges, encounters, or even life-threatening situations).

As far back as the earliest epics, we find a constant preoccupation with love as being primary among our emotions even when fright and flight may have been most essential to our survival. Of-

ten counterposed to love were the demands of the community, which were much more in tune with the immediate needs of protection, safety, health, and continuity of the group. Most often, in early stories, we see the necessary sacrifice of personal desire for the more pressing needs of survival. In this paper, I will argue that a shift occurred in human development at approximately 11,000 BCE (Diamond, 1977) when humans settled and began sedentary lifestyles as farmers and ranchers. In narratives typical of river valleys where the first farming began, we see the rise of stories that actually celebrate personal desire and the institution of marriage as being of equal or greater importance than the survival of the community. The shift in the relative importance of desire is, I argue, ultimately linked to the production of food as it is determined by geography.

## METHOD

The methods employed in this study involves a multifaceted analysis of cultural narratives and their evolution, focusing on the impact of geographical factors on storytelling practices. Drawing on insights from diverse disciplines such as anthropology, literature, and history, the research examines the transition from nomadic to sedentary lifestyles around 11,000 BCE and its influence on narrative themes. Additionally, the study delves into the work of scholars like David Turner (1985) and Jared Diamond (1977), utilizing their perspectives on Aboriginal storytelling and the challenges faced by early farming societies and incorporates findings from my book "Setting a Plot" (Spars, 2018). The comparative analysis of river valley civilizations and island cultures serves as a framework to explore how geography shapes values, heroism, and societal structures in storytelling.

## STORYTELLING

Of course, it is impossible to know precisely what kinds of stories were told by nomadic hunting/gathering societies that followed herds of animals twenty thousand years ago, and so, in order to reconstruct this shift, I follow the work of David Turner (1985) on Aboriginal storytelling, who relates the challenges of survival in small hunter/gathering communities

to the necessity for the exchange of people between groups. Turner argues that members of small groups were necessarily traded with other hunter/gatherer groups in order to promote biodiversity within the group, which was constantly at risk of becoming inbred, and to strategically gain access to hunting/gathering territory which was transmitted with the individuals when they were exchanged. Turner's title "Life Before Genesis" is a reference to nomadic life before farming, which, from the perspective of early farming communities remained an irretrievable Edenic way of life, something permanently lost but eternally yearned for just as the Isrealites would mourn the expulsion of humans from life in close proximity to God in the Garden of Eden. Jared Diamond (1977), too, has pointed out that early farming societies had to work longer days, were malnourished, and often suffered from the diseases that they shared with their domesticated animals.

It is not necessary to see the early agricultural societies as more advanced or more sophisticated than those societies that continued hunting/gathering as a way of life. In many cases, hunter/gatherers were exposed to farming communities and deliberately chose their migratory lifestyles rather than becoming mired in one place. Both Jared Diamond (1977) and Tony Swain (1993) have written about some Aboriginal groups on the North Coast of Australia actually settling, farming, and then abandoning this more labor intensive and less healthy lifestyle for their traditional nomadic existences. Joseph Bruchac (2003), a storyteller and author, has often written and spoken about the misconception that sedentary life was more advanced than the nomadic lifestyle, or that history necessarily proceeded from nomadic hunting/gathering to sedentary farming. In my own work, I have traced how a sedentary lifestyle was a direct response to life in a certain kind of geography, which was not feasible in the deserts of Central Australia. When European ranchers did arrive in Australia and began to produce food that they were accustomed to, the environment quickly degenerated and became unlivable for anyone.

To argue that the stories of the Aboriginal People, who serve as modern examples of a nomadic lifestyle, certainly have not remained static or fixed for forty thousand years since the arrival of people on the continent of Australia. Tony Swain (1993) has examined how the encounters with Europeans generated an enormous upheaval, as indigenous Australians struggled to reorient themselves against an invasive threat. *The Wawalak Sisters* (for a summary of this epic see p. 196 in my book, *Setting a Plot*) is an oral epic that spans much of the continent, and was sung as a means to unify groups that had always been separate under the aegis of an All-Mother and All-Father and to locate them vis a vis the arrival of Indonesians in the North and Europeans in the South (Swain, 1993; Spars, 2018).

In *Setting a Plot* I treat less expansive and universal Songlines as expressions of group ethics that were necessary prior to the immediate threat of incarceration and genocide the indigenous people faced, which was similar to the fates of Native American people especially during the eighteenth century. Prior to reservations, the deliberate poisoning of water holes, the spread of smallpox and other diseases, the stories of nomadic people among many things celebrated motion and movement. *The Lizard Man* epic is no exception (Spars, 2018).

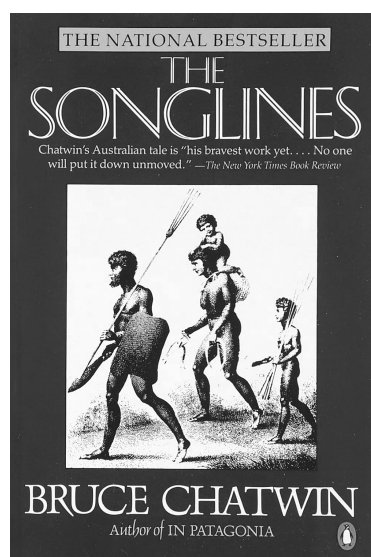


Figure 2. Cover of book "The Songlines" by Bruce Chatwin

In the plot (for a summary of this Songline epic see page 106–107 in Bruce Chatwin's book *The Songlines*), Lizard Man sends Lizard Woman to the Southern People to obtain fire (Chatwin, 1987). However, the Southerners do not allow her to return, and, in her place, send one of their women with a pot of fire. Lizard Man, who was extremely fond of his companion, is enraged, stomping his feet and howling in anger. Chatwin observes that Lizard Woman is in many ways the Songline version of Helen of Troy, who was abducted by Paris, thereby enraging Menelaus, King of Sparta and Helen's husband. The similarity, however, ends there. Our Lizard version of Menelaus, while heartbroken, jilted, and ashamed, does not go to battle against the Southerners. Instead, he withdraws from the conflict and returns the way he came with his new

companion, the Southern Woman. The arrival back at his point of emergence from the ground would find him much the same as at the beginning of the narrative, but for one difference. On the way home, he and Southern Woman devour several dingo pups that Lizard Man had noticed in the distance on his departing journey. While no reasons are made explicit for his decision to eat the dogs on his return, the boldness to leave his track and capture the puppies may be indicative of an important advantage that he had gained through his new alliance with the Southern woman — access to hunting/gathering territory he previously did not have when he set forth with Lizard Woman, whose access to land was identical to his own.

Lizard Man's broken-hearted outrage followed by his reluctant acceptance of Southern Woman places two human and societal values in tension with one another, ultimately resolving them in favor of the necessity for the exchange of people. Underlying the exchange is Lizard Man's resolve to have children with a woman who is not related to him, thereby increasing the chances of healthier offspring who do not suffer from diseases transmitted by recessive genes, but also the strategic collection of visas to new territories that are transmitted with the person of Southern Woman herself. The love and affection that Lizard Man felt for Lizard Woman becomes suppressed in favor of the health of the group, access to new territory, and the resulting ability to thrive.

Sedentary life and food surpluses resulted in specialization — the departure down the path toward technological advancement traced in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, especially the rise of larger populations, which, as Diamond (1977) argues, was one of the simplest means that farming communities were eventually able to overwhelm sparsely populated areas inhabited by hunter/gatherers. Stories like *Lizard Man* that may have once been told by those who were either cast from the Edenic life of nomadism or chose to adopt sedentary lifestyles, I argue, were transmuted to reflect the changes in values that village and city life required. Of course, militarism, bravery, and feats of physical prowess and strength are celebrated, but for the present purposes of this paper, I will simply focus on the change of importance that is afforded to personal

desire. We can simply look at the different response made by Menelaus from that of Lizard Man, whose similar positions were observed by Bruce Chatwin (1987), to advance our discussion without delving too deeply into other narratives that would have served this purpose, such as *The Ramayana* (ca. 800–300 B.C.E./2004), the story of Dinah in *Genesis* (*New American Bible*, 2002), or any of a number of stories about Chinese Princesses that were abducted by nomadic groups such as the Huns or Mongols (*Cai Wenji* is a classic example).

That Helen's face could launch a thousand ships has always been treated as a more poetic and literary motivation for a ten-year war that may have actually been about control of the trade route to the Black Sea. The parallel plot with national epics from other river valley civilizations such as *The Ramayana* (ca. 800–300 B.C.E./2004) of India, in which Rama wages a war against Ravana, King of Sri Lanka, who has abducted his wife, Sita, however, invites us to look beneath the simple exaltation of either Helen or Sita as being prizes worth going to war over, at the interplay between the values that are pitted against each other just as we did with *Lizard Man*. We might simply say that in the river valleys of Greece and India (and China and the

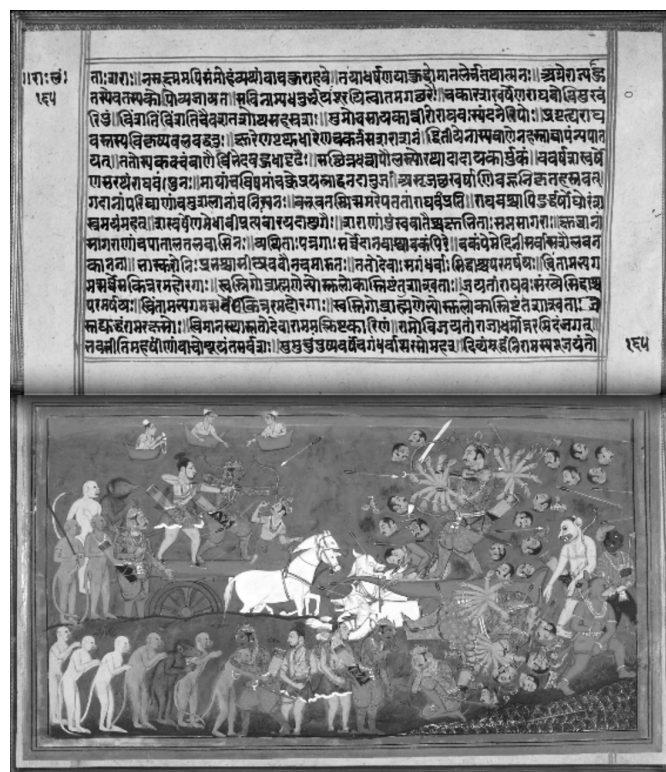


Figure 3. A manuscript from the Mewar Rāmāyana depicting Rāma slaying Rāvana



Fertile Crescent and Egypt, which share similar narratives) that a husband's love for his wife, and, in turn, his pride and honor, are values of the highest order that even trump the value of the lives of the thousands who die in the respective wars. However, that is not quite the case.

The coldness between Menelaus and Helen when Telemachus visits Sparta years after the Trojan War (and in turn Rama's seemingly heartless rejection of Sita after he has defeated Ravana) are indicative that something more than mere personal desire is being exalted when the Achaeans (and the Ikshvakus) are willing to risk everything to bring back Helen (and Sita). In Rama's case, when he is reunited with Sita, he tells her she is no longer fit to be his queen since she has been in the house of another man. In Helen's, Telemachus catches her on the stairs, distant, spurned, and repudiated by Menelaus and all of Greece, having been blamed for the loss of thousands of heroes' lives. The recovery of these iconic women (Helen and Sita) and their restoration to their original positions at the side of their husbands does not, therefore, seem to be the result.

The dramatic expansion of the integrity of one household, that of Menelaus or Rama respectively, to the honor and sovereignty of all the Achaeans or all the Ikshvakus, one of the most puzzling aspects of both epics when we consider that it is the reversal of any utilitarian consideration of either situation, contains the roots of what I believe to be, ultimately, what emerges as the highest value, and that is the preservation of the integrity of the domestic spheres of the home, the village, the city-state, the kingdom, and the country. The excessive outpouring of violence to bring back one person who has been abducted might be interpreted as a dramatic rejection of the earlier practice in which the exchange of people was necessary. Going to war to recover one person, and thereby cease any and all exchange with other people, might be symbolic of the independence from other groups that farming communities found when they settled and embarked down Diamond's path toward larger populations and technology (Diamond, 1977). Rather than celebrating the inter-dependence of all groups with one another as had been done in nomadic societies, the farming communities were celebrating the rise

of a distinct people, separate from all others. The agriculture and animal husbandry that had led these communities into their domestic sanctuaries from the wilderness had also created spaces in which a people, even a race, was distinct from all other groups, now deemed as foreign or alien. The very desire that motivated the selection of crops that were larger and sweeter, or animals that were compatible with humans (Pollan, 2002), combined with the desire that formed the basis for the domestic sphere of the home (the selection of a desirable spouse) was also producing firm, clear, and often visual boundaries (in the form of borders or even actual walls) at every scale: the home (the permanent dwelling of a husband and wife), the city-state (the walls of Uruk in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2750–2500 B.C.E./1985)), and even the country or kingdom (think of the Great Wall of China or the Pillars of Ashoka forming visual boundaries around the respective states).

The comparison between Lizard Man and Menelaus, which forms the core of this paper, also invites us to consider another aspect of storytelling and how it is shaped by geography. Menelaus, Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Achilles all form heroes of the Trojan War, to be sung about and celebrated for eternity. Heroes are common in Indian epics as well with Arjuna and Rama taking center stage of *The Mahabharata* (300 BC-400 CE/2010) and *The Ramayana* (ca. 800–300 B.C.E./2004) respectively. Indeed, quests are made, wars are won, ideals are upheld — they are models for what individuals should aspire to, and still are. Calling Lizard Man, the hero

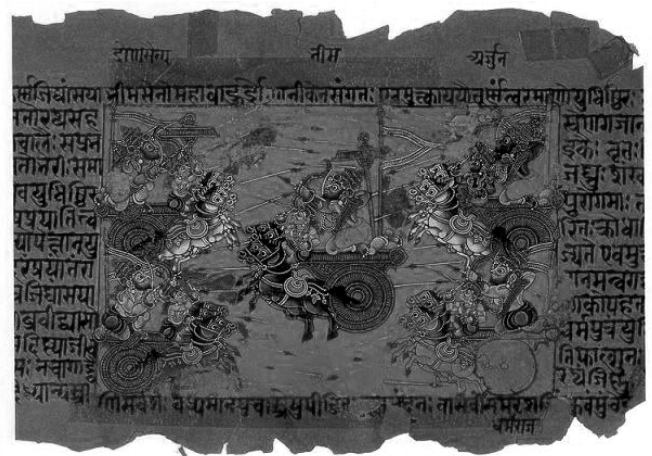


Figure 4. A manuscript illustration of the Battle of Kurukshetra, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, recorded in the Mahabharata Epic

of his eponymous epic does not sit quite as easily with the western audience, especially since Lizard Man does just the opposite of what we would expect the Greek or Indian hero to do: fight a large-scale war to win back his wife. We have seen, however, that to do so in the context of a nomadic lifestyle would fly in the face of the very values that are necessary for survival in the delicate and unforgiving landscape of the desert. We might, once again, ask the question, “Did geography influence storytellers so that it was the storytellers of river valleys that created what we generally call ‘heroes,’ but not those of deserts or islands?”

A brief account of river valley history would begin with the first sedentary life in approximately 11,000 BCE as mentioned above, launching the Neolithic Era. As previously discussed, the food surpluses that the sedentary communities enjoyed as a result of storable grains (the luck of geography) allowed specialization to take place. James Frazer (1922) and Joseph Campbell (1959, 1962) have written extensively about the earliest specialist in Neolithic villages — the Neolithic King. Students often find it surprising to learn that being the king wasn’t always what it means today. In fact, being the king in Neolithic villages meant one’s days were numbered until they were sacrificed through their “Sacred Marriage” to the Goddess. In Paleolithic times, the Goddess was mother of all, which implied that humans were siblings with plants and animals. Upon the advent of farming and ranching, however, humans’ relations to their animals changed from one based on kinship to one based on domesticity. The relationship to the Goddess changed as well, from seeing her as an All-Mother to relating to her through the domestic union between her and the Neolithic king. For millennia, kings were sacrificed over and over again with the harvests and with the seasonal slaughter of animals, whereupon with the planting of the new crop and the birth of the spring lambs, a new, young and vital king was installed, only to be sacrificed once again.

The first heroes were all kings, and, as I argue in *Setting a Plot*, they were some of the earliest kings to reject the sacred marriage (Spars, 2018). The climax of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2750–2500 B.C.E./1985) features the King of Uruk’s rejection of a marriage proposal from Ishtar, the Goddess. Later

heroes such as Theseus (King of Athens), Odysseus (King of Ithaca), and Rama (King of Ayodhya) all feature rejections of the Divine Feminine. *The Odyssey* may be read as a series of rejections beginning with Circe, the nymph with whom Odysseus shared a bed for a year, to Calypso, the goddess who held him prisoner for seven years, to Nausicaa, who serves as a surrogate for Athena. The puzzlingly chilling treatment of Sita by Rama after his victorious battle suddenly makes sense if we understand that these rejections of divine women are rehearsals of Gilgamesh’s original “epic no.” The rejection of “the Sacred Marriage” becomes even more integral to the definition of hero, at least in the earliest stages of heroism, than “the Hero’s Journey” as outlined by Campbell (1959, 1962).

Of course, it was river valley culture that was exported throughout the Pacific Ocean when in 4,000 BCE the Austronesian sailors departed from Taiwan on their outriggers laden with water (stored in Lapita pottery), pigs, and rice grains. These farmers would displace the original hunter/gatherers in the Philippines and Indonesia in 3,500 BCE and 2,500 BCE respectively. Jared Diamond (1977) argues that it was the advantages of farming (including population density and immunity to disease) that allowed the Austronesians to overwhelm all of the original inhabitants save very small and widely dispersed enclaves of people he refers to as Negritos.

Traditions and stories that were brought with these sailors undoubtedly underwent changes to suit the new demands of an island’s geography. In Indonesia’s preeminent indigenous epic, *The Calonarang*, we find the vestiges of the “Sacred Marriage” between the King of Daha, Airlangga, and a powerful sorceress, the Calon Arang, who serves as an example of the Divine Feminine demonized and dismissed by court power and religious authority. The Calon Arang demands that the King marry her daughter, Ratna Manggali, but the King refuses, in keeping with the river valley’s heroic tradition. Whereas in river valley narratives such as *the Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2750–2500 B.C.E./1985), there is a sacrificial substitution for the king, seen in the Bull of Heaven sent by the Goddess, which Gilgamesh and Enkidu quickly and easily slay. In the island narrative, however, the rejection of marriage is

replaced with a new and much more relevant problem to the island imagination. The Calon Arang unleashes a plague that pollutes the entire land, its crops, its animals, and its people. The problem of the integrity of the domestic sphere (and the idea of the purity of race) so central to the river valley storytellers is swapped out for the pressing threat to the purity of the island itself. The rice withers and rots into black cesspools; the skin on the cattle hands from their bones; corpses of children are eaten by dogs. This horrific vision is what happens when island cultures do not serve as proper custodians of their land. In *Setting a Plot* (Spars, 2018), I argue that while sacrifice, originally in the form of the “Sacred Marriage” but then modified to include substitutions of animals (or even soldiers through warfare), serves as the central cultural practice, cleansing rituals (*selamatan*) evolved to replace these sacrifices, dedicated to the various socio-spatial spheres of self (*bersih diri*), village (*bersih desa*), island (*Panca Wali Krama*), and even world (*Eka Dasa Rudra*).

Notions of racial purity, nascent in the early river valley epics, are, therefore, reoriented to the purity of place. Another epic story titled *Sida Karya*, this one particular to Bali, relates the arrival of a haggard traveler (Ida Sangkhya) to the gates of Pura Besakih, the Mother Temple of Bali, where King Waturenggong is attending a cleansing ceremony. When the traveler demands to be allowed in, the guards drive him away, feeling certain that the ceremony is no place for a foreigner, and a beggar at that! Dewa Gunung, the God of Mount Agung, however, immediately punishes King Waturenggong and his people by unleashing demonic forces that immediately destroy the productive atmosphere of the ritual. Offerings rot before they are consecrated; dance performers argue; the temple is damaged by these polluted and corrupted forces. Once again, the threat to the integrity of the domestic sphere posed by the foreigner is replaced with a much more significant and immediate problem — the pollution and corruption of the island’s limited resources. King Waturenggong, rather than fighting the demons in any heroic manner, prays to Dewa Gunung and learns the key to restoring peace and prosperity—locating Ida Sangkhya and seating this foreign man right at the center of the cleansing ritual. Rather

than spurned, shunned, or driven away, foreign-ness is to be welcomed and embraced.

## CONCLUSION

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine other kinds of geographies, their histories, and the impact this has had on the mentality of the respective peoples as storytellers. The discourse concludes by briefly alluding to modern storytelling and highlighting the persistent potential for racism within the family of nation-states comprising the world. As the current political situation in the United States and in other countries around the world, we are witnessing the persistence or even an upsurge of racist mentalities that seek to apply the concrete borders of the state to the abstract boundaries of different peoples as defined by race. The reproductive spheres of the white households, immediately following the 2020 Census in the United States, were presented as being under attack and in danger of disappearing against the growing numbers of Black and Brown households, causing Tucker Carlson, the conservative news commentator, to ask the question, “Where did all the white people go?” (Levy et al., 2021). The constant perpetuation of the narrative that the American borders are under a siege from the South reinforces the fearful mentality of white Americans that their race is being overwhelmed by the invasive “Brownness” that is flowing through a porous border. Fear of “Brownness” and “Blackness” is a story that is told constantly in the conservative media, and is at the heart of the current debate around the ultimate story in America, how U.S. History should be taught in high school, whether or not Critical Race Theory should be part of the curriculum. Interestingly, while the debate is about the boundaries between the United States and Mexico, and between white and Black or Brown, the real boundary that is emerging, perhaps bigger and more insurmountable than the American border with Mexico, is the political divide that is growing between white nationalists and the rest of American society. America finds itself more divided than it has ever been since the Civil War.



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# EVOLUTION

## OF CONVENTIONAL APOCALYPTIC CONCEPTS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

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### ABSTRACT

This joint contribution from two Ukrainian scholars, Prof. Vitaliy Dokash and Prof. Liudmyla Fylypovych, draws on Prof. Dokash's extensive expertise in eschatological studies within Christianity and Prof. Fylypovych's sociological analysis of contemporary religiosity. The article addresses the enduring scholarly interest in classical religious themes, particularly those related to the concept of Judgment Day. Additionally, it examines the relevance of this topic in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, considering the profound implications for humanity's survival after a global catastrophe.



As the authors explore the potential consequences of the pandemic, framing COVID-19 as a multifaceted apocalypse — social, economic, political, and informational — they question whether religion can maintain its role as a social regulator in the post-apocalyptic era. The analysis delves into the Bible, specifically the book of Revelation, adapting its insights to the challenges posed by the pandemic. The article also investigates whether modern religious teachings offer novel perspectives and interpretations of existing apocalyptic scenarios in response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic.

### Keywords

eschatology, judgment day, Christianity, apocalypse, pandemic

## INTRODUCTION

People always wanted to foresee their futures and it is even more vigorous during game-changing periods of history. In the periods as such, people come up with incredible ideas framed by various religious teachings and sources. In the periods as such, people come up with incredible ideas framed by various religious teachings and sources. In the tradition of Abrahamic religions, it is about foresight, prediction, and prophecies relate not only to the believers but also entire humanity. It is symptomatic that in times of aggravation of social, environmental, spiritual crises and other upheavals, there are more and more of various predictions about the fate of the world and the near-collapse. Characteristically, these eschatological motives accompany history at all times and are always justified dogmatically by prophetic signs. The actualization or strengthening of eschatological modes occurs when beliefs become abstract for people and the system of values corresponding to the epoch stops serving equally as the spiritual space is over-secularized.

As of today, the foundation of predominantly religious literature, esoteric content is already established. It is supplemented continuously by modern interpretations of sources or fantasies, works of art, movies, “scientific” predictions about the apocalypse and the Last Judgment. By referring to

natural (earthquakes, floods, droughts, bad ecology) and social (hunger, diseases, epidemics, violence, terrorism, wars) cataclysms, old and new prophets foreshadow the near end of the civilization, which should be replaced by another divine one which will return humanity to paradise. Different messianic and eschatological theories and concepts (the doctrine of the end of the earthly existence of humanity and man) emerge undulatingly.

Some of the prophecies are incredibly skittish, disturbing but some are full of hope for a rebirth of a new life and the expectation of not only a better but a blissful future. As it turned out, religious movements, remaining optimistic in contrast to rational and pragmatic secular people, publish information with two trends:

1. Exaltation of the original purity, blissful fullness of existence that preceded history which preceded and should be returned to.
2. On the other hand, new opportunities are put forth that will appear in the coming, “updated” history after the end of this civilization by the principles of linear development.

It is worth recalling that theological dogmas in any Christian religion are closely related to the expectation of eschatological events, the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, which should open the ideal dimension of existence for humankind. The traditional Christian consciousness is apocalyptic and brightly eschatological. The aforementioned might explain the relatively peaceful attitude of Christians, consciously neglecting emergencies, current pandemic as well, as they believe that apocalypse is inevitable and they know what kind of apocalypse it will be.

At the same time, Christians are cheerful generally and optimistic, because they believe in the Kingdom of God, that they would be saved after their physical death. However, there are no more than a third convinced Christians as such. Polls conducted by Ukrainian and foreign sociologists, explain a certain indifference of Christians to the future of the world. They do not want to think about it either because they do not know the Bible, or because they fear prophecies, therefore they ignore the information. They consciously or unconsciously

oppose the end regularly read in the Bible, and not only in the Revelation of John. Religious environment develops specifically for those type of people the doctrines that either postpone this end or present eschatology in an engaging fashion. These include, first of all, various Millennial theories (the Millennial Kingdom). This also includes a large number of theological doctrines, which even in the XX century attempted to explain eschatology and prove that it was fulfilled by the first coming of Jesus Christ (Dokash, 2007).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly thriving in the context of modernizing the mythological eschatological subjects of the Bible and making them more attractive by means of modernized language. As representatives of the present eschatological current in Christianity, they uniformly communicate eschatology as a teaching about the end of the world. Modern interpreters of the Apocalypse attempt to eliminate archaic apocalyptic layers from biblical texts and introduce ideas of moral and social optimism.

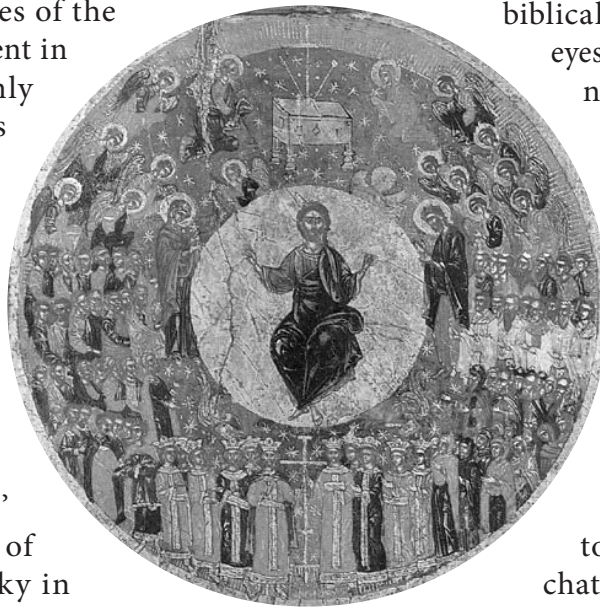
Jehovah's Witnesses' perspective about the end of the world is the most tricky in understanding the modernization of biblical prophecies. A large number of their pamphlets about the Last Day or the coming of Jesus Christ include explicit questions such as "What are the events awaiting us? How will our King protect us before and during Armageddon? How do we prepare for future events?" Jehovah's Witnesses are certain that those events will take place soon, thus various natural and social disasters are not unusual for them (*Kinec svitu*, n.d.). They are convinced that everything is already defined in the Bible, one should read between the lines to understand those prophecies. Before the beginning of the all-embracing disaster, they believe, peace and security will be declared — which is done by various international organizations, in particular by the UN. This will be the first manifest sign of the subsequent inescapable

events, among which is an assault against the true religion, that Witnesses consider themselves to be part of (*New American Bible*, 2002, Revelations 17:16). For this reason, they are so resilient to the persecution that they are experiencing, for example, in Russia. The heavenly phenomena will notify of Armageddon (*New American Bible*, 2002, Matthew 24:29), which can be observed already today. The expected trial over sheep and goats (*New American Bible*, 2002, Matthew 25: 31–33), the attack of Gog from the land of Magog (*New American Bible*, 2002, Ezekiel 38: 2.11, 15) will precede the gathering of the remains of the anointed (*New American Bible*, 2002, Matthew 24:31), that is, Jehovah's Witnesses. At the end of the great struggle, Jehovah will send his King to protect all his faithful pastors (*New American Bible*, 2002, Ezekiel 38:18). This

biblical scenario unfolds before the eyes of the modern generation, but not all people are able to read and understand it. Jehovah's Witnesses became more vigorous in their preaching activities to warn people of the coming events.

## METHODS

This research employs a multidisciplinary approach to explore contemporary eschatological perspectives within Christian communities, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on religious literature, survey data, and sociological analysis, the study investigates how different Christian denominations interpret and respond to apocalyptic themes. The data collection involves a thorough examination of religious texts, including interpretations from the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses. Additionally, surveys conducted by Ukrainian and foreign sociologists are analyzed to gauge believers' attitudes towards the end of the world. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the impact of the pandemic on contemporary religious perspectives concerning the end of the world.





## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The enduring anticipation of apocalyptic events is not a recent phenomenon. The concept of the world's end has been ingrained in various religions, undergoing a complex evolutionary journey expressed in diverse forms across historical periods. Christianity, in particular, has strategically engaged with these themes to attract new followers. Whether advocating for radical transformation through the complete dismantling of the existing order or endorsing an evolutionary approach via societal moralization, Christianity has sustained its historical significance. Eschatological teachings have adapted to address the challenges of different eras, yet their fundamental tenets persist, serving to perpetuate the apocalyptic fervor among believers. Modern confessional eschatology seeks arguments to justify apocalypse and protect basic doctrinal principles, but it does not succeed entirely, because the ideas of the end of the world, despite the objective factors of the environmental, social or political crisis, are not very popular among Christians. This is evidenced by opinion surveys, which, although did not directly pose the question "Do you believe in the end of the world?", had some components of traditional eschatological ideas. In particular, Ukrainian sociologists asked if Ukrainians believe in life after death, in paradise without going into details of Christian eschatology. A devoted Christian must believe in the end of the world, in the second coming of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Christians know little about the end of the world, which indicates their level of belief and knowledge of Christian faith.

Thus, according to the data cited by the Ukrainian sociologist of religion M. Parashchevin (2008), 31% of Christian respondents denied the existence of life after death, 29% do not believe in the existence of paradise, 30% — hell, 25% — reject religious miracles. So, only a third of Christians surveyed believe or have an idea of the end of the world that binds to Armageddon. The most consistent and religious here were Greek Catholics. Exactly half of them declared faith in these elements of Christian doctrine and only 2% do not believe in any of them. But among the Orthodox, 29% declared the corresponding faith, with 18% of those who do not believe in any of these things. Thus, 62% of Greek

Catholics and 41% of Orthodox believe in the after-life, 76% of Greek Catholics and 42% of Orthodox believe in the existence of paradise, 73% of Greek Catholics and 41% of Orthodox Christians believe in the existence of paradise, 48% of Orthodox Christians and 48% of Orthodox. Greek Catholics are, so to speak, more canonical than Orthodox. The latter are more prone to shallow understanding, and therefore the free interpretation of the basics of the faith (Parashchevin, 2008).

Recent interest in apocalyptic events was stirred up by the event that was expected in 2012: the end of the Mayan calendar. It turned out that almost 15% of the inhabitants of our planet believe that the end of the world will happen in their lifetime, 10% believe that it could have happened in 2012 (Ipsos Global Public Affairs, 2012).

Mass surveys were conducted on this issue in 2012. For example, Ipsos Global Public Affairs (2012) specifically surveyed 16,262 people from 20 countries. The percentage of those who believe in the imminent end of the world varies greatly, from 6% in France to 22% in Turkey and the US, in South Africa and Argentina the percentage is slightly less. Only 7% of Belgians and 8% of British fear that the end of the world will come during their lifetime. One in ten people in the world stated that they were alarmed about the possibility of doomsday in 2012. The largest number of such people were in Russia and Poland and the least in the UK. Interestingly, uneducated and people with low income as well as those under 35 are more likely to believe in the apocalypse (Belous, 2012).

Surveys were conducted in Ukrainian as well, 86.9% of Ukrainians did not believe in the end of the world on December 21, 2012 (Centr "Socialnyj monitoring," 2012). The end of the world did matter more to the residents of the North and the East of the country; most of the residents of those regions believed in one way or another that December 21 was a landmark event. Also, a high percentage of those who are positive about the doomsdays are residents of Kyiv. Residents of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea differ from other regions, they struggled with an answer. The older were the respondents, the more likely they were to believe in the end of the world. For example, 4.6% of young people

responded positively and 10.5% of people over 60 years old. Furthermore, women (9.7%) believe more in the onset of the “last day” than men (4.4%).

Among non-believers, 6% have at least some belief that there will be the end of the world. The survey shows that among those who are determined about their spiritual choice and religious denomination 7% believe in the end of the world. Accordingly, statistically, there is no much difference between the two categories. Describing their attitude to the information about the apocalypse on December 21, 2012, the vast majority of respondents were very skeptical about the reality of such a threat: 78% of

respondents agreed that it was “empty talk” and “senseless gossip”; 77.2% agree that rumors spread to make people buy different goods and prepare for a “black day”. 77.9% relate the active dissemination of information about the end of the world with an attempt to divert attention from really important things and social problems, to switch attention (Centr “Socialnyj monitoring,” 2012).

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced many areas of human endeavor (Hiscott et al., 2020; see also De Amorim & De Andrade Guerra, 2020; Krishnamurthy, 2020; Nabity-Grover et al., 2020; Sarkis et al., 2020; Zenker & Köck, 2020). It



objectively modernized traditional apocalyptic. The thought of the end of the world as one of the central themes in the Bible is similarly discussed in Orthodoxy. The priest Vasily Fazan states: “Yes, we know that there will be an end of the world from the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church, and it will come during the second coming of Christ and the Last Judgment. Then all people will appear before God to answer for their lives. The righteous will enter a blissful eternity with God, sinners will go to eternal torment. The earth and everything on it will be on fire, and there will be a new sky and a new earth” (Pruglo, 2012).

Unlike Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Orthodox do not associate the end of the world with natural causes, including astronomical or epidemiological phenomena. According to them, the end of the world will come as a result of the degradation of mankind, committing the worst sins, lawlessness, spiritual and moral impoverishment. That is why they are skeptical about guidance on how to survive the end of the world as it will come to all and everything. But “No one knows about the day and hour, only My Father,” said Jesus Christ. The Orthodox think that those who live with God shall not fear natural disasters, epidemics, evil deeds of people, nor death itself and the end of the world: “If God is with me, who is against me?”

Modern man is intrigued to find out what is hidden behind the concepts of “end of the world,” “last judgment,” “apocalypse,” “Armageddon” to get prepared for it. It turned out that the consciousness of the modern Christian, not to mention the non-believer has lost the original understanding of the end of the world. Very few people see it in religious attire; common representations are technologicalized, visualized by various fantastic series, lopsided, gloomy (Dokash, 2013; Bardin, 2017). General pessimism as such has never been inherent to Christianity. Modern interpretations of the end of the world are surprisingly rationalized and even pragmatic. The traditional meaning of the apocalypse is lost, the biblical notions of the end of the world are desacralized. The apocalypse is declared to be exclusively man-made, it changes the original meaning: the end of the world is retribution for the sinfulness of man, for the neglect of God, for the failure to fulfill his commandments.

Therefore, the world is waiting for new eschatological predictions, which logically fit into traditional Christian doctrines, not changing their essence, but only renewing traditional forms. The analysis of the Bible books, shows that the traditional Christian consciousness is through apocalyptic, brightly eschatological, because it is oriented towards the otherworld and life after death. In general, Christians are relatively calm about the dangers of the virus, because they, unlike non-believers who have no extensive religious knowledge of the end of the world, optimistically believe in the Kingdom of God and in their salvation.

Among all Christians, only representatives the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jehovah’s Witnesses literally perceive the end of the world. As representatives of the actual eschatological current in Christianity, they constantly remind their followers of eschatology as a teaching about the end of the world. Today, they are actively using the circumstances to prove that their beliefs are right. Modern interpreters of the Apocalypse attempt to eliminate archaic apocalyptic layers from biblical texts and introduce ideas of moral and social optimism. They modernize the mythological eschatological subjects of the Bible and making them more attractive by means of modernized language, technology, visualization.

## CONCLUSION

Modern confessional eschatology seeks arguments to justify apocalyptic ideas and protect basic doctrinal principles. But it does not fully succeed, because the ideas of the end of the world are not very popular even among Christians. According to opinion polls, just over half of Christians profess some components of traditional eschatological ideas. Even less are burdened by fears about the end of the world. The vast majority of people—up to 70% are skeptical of these prophecies, and the rest change the traditional understanding of the end of the world, which is gradually desacralized. But this does not mean that Christianity will lose its role as the social regulator of society, as it has experienced many pandemics and catastrophes while maintaining itself as a religious system that is able to set the meanings of human existence in any conditions.



The current COVID-19 pandemic renewed eschatological fears and expectations of humanity and it should be investigated further with a focus on the condition of modern religiosity in terms of people's beliefs in the end of the world.

This research illuminates a nuanced landscape of contemporary eschatological beliefs within Christian communities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The opinion surveys reveal a diverse range of perspectives, with a substantial portion of Christians displaying skepticism towards traditional apocalyptic notions. While some denominations, notably the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Jehovah's Witnesses, actively reinforce eschatological teachings, the majority of Christians exhibit a pragmatic and rationalized outlook on the end of the world. The modernization of apocalyptic themes through technological mediums emerges as a notable trend, challenging traditional interpretations. Despite varied individual beliefs, Christianity continues to play a major role, adapting its meanings to navigate the uncertainties of pandemics and catastrophes. This article underscores the resilience of religious systems in shaping human perspectives on existence, even in the face of unprecedented global challenges. Further exploration of these evolving dynamics is essential for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary religiosity.

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# LEAVING BLACKS

BEHIND IN BROOKLYN

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## ABSTRACT

The Borough of Brooklyn, New York has evolved over the past half-millennium from a sparsely settled, lush woodland, to a bustling super-diverse, post-industrial city of almost three million residents. This essay looks at the experiences of those who, over that long period of time, have made their homes in this territory. The first Brooklynites, of course were Native Americans such as members of the Canarsie tribe, but since then there has been a virtual Roman Fountain of migrants and immigrants from every corner of the nation and the globe. This enormous population movement can easily be characterized as a series of what classical urban ecologists such called “invasions and successions” (Park, et al., 1925). Unfortunately, as a consequence of conflicts and competitions over Brooklyn spaces and resources, there has been an unequal, and inequitable, distribution of public goods to “winners” and “losers.” Here we will address that, periodically troubled, history from a “distributive social justice” perspective, with a special focus on those of African descent (Rawls & Kelly, 2003). that will also be prefaced by the United Nations “17 Sustainable Development Goals” (United Nations, 2022).

## Keywords

social justice, sustainable development, urban ecology, race, ethnicity, migration

## INTRODUCTION

### *The Inequitable Distribution of Public Goods in New York City*

Even though inequality is a global problem, it cannot be understood as such. As with other social problems, it is necessary to look more closely at the more and less contexts in which it takes place such as Brooklyn, New York. “Global citizens” exist merely as theoretical terms in contrast to the flesh and blood people for whom the term refers. Because of conflicts and competitions over the centuries among and between groups who have come to Brooklyn, there has been an unequal distribution of both public and private goods. “Public goods” are

commodities or services provided by government that generally have been paid for through public taxation. They are offered for the benefit all members of that society, and many are often provided for free (Fernando, 2021). Examples of public goods include law enforcement, national defense, public safety, access to clean air and drinking water, and services such as recreation, education, and health. Governments at all levels in the United States — Federal, State, and Municipal—provide a wide variety of such public goods. Brooklynites have been lucky in that both New York State and New York City, having a more progressive political tradition, have offered its residents more in the way of public goods than most other states.

Although we believe that everyone has an equal right to the city, it is clear that there continues to be a need today for a comprehensive urban policy that is balanced and equitable. For example, a citywide critical evaluation of the Bloomberg mayoral administration (2002–2013) was taken by political sociologist John Mollenkopf and Councilman from Brooklyn Brad Lander (Mollenkopf & Lander, 2013). The study showed that the Mayor had little concern for the broad increase in inequality, “... seeing it as the inevitable consequence of the prosperity of the city’s top earners, who pay a disproportionate share of local taxes.” Despite some success in stimulating economic growth, incomes for the poorest workers rose only slightly (pp. 5–6). They also noted that Bloomberg’s centralized, data-driven, approach to governance largely ignored opinions of local residents and activists. “Purported economic benefits were used to justify many land use and economic development decisions (with the important exception of the many downzonings granted to mostly-white outer-borough communities), policing, and education (where community input has been almost entirely tokenized)” (p. 6). It should be noted that, Bloomberg’s Mayoral successor, Bill DeBlasio, used the notion of the “Tale of Two Cities” as his campaign platform to criticize the former administration’s innovations which focused on homogenizing the city away from diverse races, ethnicities, and social classes (Bagli, 2016). However, despite the well-meaning slogan, the unequal distribution of public goods continued, and in some cases were exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic. What follows is a discussion of some



of the many ways by which inequities are demonstrated in Brooklyn with a special focus on Black Brooklynites who until the present day have been the least recognized and/or compensated for their contribution. Over the centuries, among migrant groups, Blacks consistently have gained the least and lost the most. They have been in Brooklyn the longest and, cumulatively, have made the greatest contributions to the prosperity of the borough. If we were to ask what it is that is owed them for their contributions, the answer would be a great deal. Why, then have they not received their fair share.

## METHODS. DISTRIBUTIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE

This article conducts a thorough literature review and utilizes methods involving the analysis of changes in population numbers, encompassing both overall figures and those specific to various racial groups, throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Additionally, the study incorporates observation and field studies conducted in New York neighborhoods

spanning five decades and selective review of five centuries of Brooklyn history. The overarching objective is to comprehend the correlation between race, poverty, and gentrification by employing this multifaceted, population-focused approach.

Some view inequality as “natural” and therefore are not stimulated to act. Others reject them as inevitable consequences, are moved to act. As do many other scholar activists and urban social scientists today, I believe these essentially Neoliberal and classic urban ecological responses can be contested as issues of social justice. For me questions such as “Who has a right to the city?”, “What is urban justice?”, and “What is a just city?” require an affirmative response. Although a full discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this chapter, a few comments in reference to the distributive social justice principles of John Rawls and especially those in regard to urban territory of David Harvey (1973) are a necessary foundation for the readers’ understanding of this point of view. For a society to be called “just” it must guarantee its members equal access to the liberties, rights, and opportunities it



Figure 1. 86th St. Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Jerome Krase

can offer and simultaneously to care for the least advantaged. This depends however on the acceptance of the idea of a social contract freely entered into by its members to which Rawls believed free rational people would ascribe. The principles of justice in the contract “specify the basic rights and duties to be assigned by the main political and social institutions, and they regulate the division of benefits arising from social cooperation and allot the burdens necessary to sustain it” (Rawls & Kelly, 2003, p. 7).

Harvey (1973) refers to Rawls in his discussion of eight principles of territorial distributive justice to address the uneven distribution of urban resources and rights. From these he chose three in the following order — need, contribution to the common good, and merit — that “are sufficiently comprehensive to subsume many of the issues which could legitimately be raised under the other headings” (pp. 100–101). However, he cautions that the concept of territorial distributive justice is not all-inclusive but a principle for resolving conflicting claims — “a just distribution, justly arrived at” (Harvey, 1973; see also Olander, 2015).

Most germane is Harvey’s most important principle of “Need — Individuals have rights to equal levels of benefit which means that there is an unequal allocation according to need” (Harvey, 1973, p. 100). In this work we have clearly shown that poor and working-class residents in general and Nonwhites of virtually every income level in Brooklyn have been unfairly treated by public and private agencies as to their right to remain in their homes and neighborhoods. This is especially unfair given that in many cases it was their individual and collective efforts that were responsible for the survival of these places during the crises that threatened the health of the entire city.

Furthermore, as to the “Right to the City,” Lars Frers and Lars Meier (2007), argue that the word “right” has many meanings which must be adjusted as local and historical contexts, and must pay attention to the right to practice diversity within it. With specific reference to immigrants, Marcello Balbo (2009) sees the right to the city as “a series of legitimate claims to the necessary conditions of a satisfying, dignified and secure existence in cities



Figure 2. Construction Workers In Front Of Junior's Restaurant and Cocktail Lounge II. Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Jerome Krase



by both individual citizens and social groups” or “the right of all citizens to access the benefits the city has to offer, based on the principles of solidarity, freedom, equity, dignity and social justice” (p. 12).

Although they are somewhat utopian, the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals are viewed by many as a blueprint to follow for building a better and more sustainable future for everyone. In brief, among the most relevant goals for this chapter are calls to end Poverty and Reduced Inequalities. The guiding principle for all 17 Goals is “Leaving no one behind.” From the Introduction to the Declaration of the Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor

our to reach the furthest behind first. (United Nations, n.d.)

It is easy to see how these principles might apply to second and third world countries, but what about the USA, and especially Brooklyn, where, unfortunately, it is also clear that the benefits of Sustainable Development are not equally shared among all segments of society. Although all cannot be discussed here, the most relevant for this chapter, are the Ten Targets for Sustainable Development Goal 11, building “Sustainable Cities and Communities,” such as ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and enhancing inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management. Of equal importance is Goal 16’s promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies and providing access to justice for all to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels (United Nations, n.d.).



*Figure 3. Clothes Hanging on a Line Between Buildings. Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Jerome Krase*



## BROOKLYN: 500 YEARS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE

The first human Brooklynites were Native Americans who called themselves the Lenape, which means “the People.” The Lenape included the Noyack and the Canarsee tribes who planted corn and tobacco and fished in nearby waters. Brooklyn was the seasonal home of the Canarsie, but their lands and wealth were expropriated by fraud and violence during Dutch and then British colonization. The Dutch first settled in Manhattan in the early 1600s, and began to buy land across the river in Brooklyn 1636. By the 1680s the native people had lost all claims to the rolling, heavily forested landscape. The Dutch founded five villages: Bushwick, Brooklyn, Flatbush, Flatlands, and New Utrecht. Gravesend, a sixth village, was founded in 1643 by Lady Deborah Moody, an Englishwoman who was fleeing religious persecution in England and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The British captured the Dutch territory in 1674, and gathered the six villages into Kings County, part of the crown colony of New York. A census

taken in 1698 counted 2,017 people in Kings County. About half of these early settlers were Dutch. The others came from Germany, England, France, and Scandinavia, and included a large number of black slaves brought from Africa. Slavery flourished in these rich farmlands during the 18th century. Since initial invasions of Europeans in the 16th and 17th Centuries, there has been a trickle, that became a torrent in the 19th and 20th Centuries, of migrants and immigrants from every corner of the nation and the globe. Of especial importance for the making of modern Brooklyn, are African Americans, most of whom first came to Dutch New Amsterdam and British New York as slaves five-hundred years ago. It must be noted that African slavery increased and became harsher under British rule. Although New York State passed a Gradual Emancipation act in 1799 that freed those born after July 4, 1799, but they continued to be indentured until they were young adults. In 1817 a new law passed that freed slaves born before 1799, but not until July 4, 1827 (Courts, 2018). Just before the Revolutionary War, slaves composed nearly one third of the population



*Figure 4. People Walking on the Sidewalk Near Bove Travel & Exchange.  
18th Ave between 63rd St. and 64th St. in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, New York. Photo by Jerome Krase*

of Kings County. Even before legal slavery ended in New York, a small number of free Blacks had settled in Brooklyn, and over time their settlements, such as Weeksville, grew and, within the limitations of racial discrimination, even prospered. Schools, associations and businesses were established within the confines of their own small, racially segregated, communities. They also contributed greatly to anti-slavery movements and the Underground Railroad.

The increasingly dense urbanization of Brooklyn began in the northern and western areas that were closest to Manhattan, and moved mostly in southern and easterly directions. This was the major pattern for the growth, decline, and current rejuvenation of the borough, and in almost every period Black Brooklynites gained the least and lost the most. As New York City flourished, so did Brooklyn as commuters, immigrants, and commerce traveled across the river from Manhattan. Development first took place along the waterfront and gradually spread toward the interior. At the turn of the 19th century, the first large-scale immigration began with Irish immigrants and when the Erie Canal was finished and connected to Brooklyn in 1825, the local economy exploded. By 1860, the City of Brooklyn, with more than 200,00 residents, was America's third-largest city and expanded rapidly southward toward semi-rural areas as Irish and German immigrants poured in. When the Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883 it brought more people into Brooklyn from Manhattan. By 1880, Brooklyn had become a major national manufacturing center in need of workers. Work, though not always safe or healthy, was widely available in booming maritime businesses, gas refineries, metal works, and all sorts of sweatshops. Later in the decade, came a huge wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe, including Russian Jews, Italians, and Poles, along with a mixture of Scandinavians. The City of Brooklyn annexed the originally independent five towns, and itself was annexed by New York City in 1898. At the turn of the 20th century, Brooklyn's

population was 1,166,582, almost a third of which were foreign-born. In 1900, the Black population of 18,367 remained in a small number of settlements in Central Brooklyn.

The early years of the 20th century saw a vast expansion in the population from 1,634,351 in 1910 to 2,018,356 in 1920. During the same period Brooklyn's Black population grew from 22,708 to 31,912 as the urbanization of Brooklyn intensified with new bridges, trolley lines, elevated railroads, and subway lines drawing people and commerce away from the shorelines. By 1930 Brooklyn's population exploded by almost a million souls to 2,560,400, and as part of the "Great Migration," of Blacks from southern states, the borough's Black population more than doubled to 68,921. And for the first time, more than half were not Brooklyn-born. However, Black's residential confinement to Central Brooklyn continued as they became the majority in downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights (Connolly, 1977; Woodsworth, 2016). The growth of the borough continued more slowly into 1940 and 1950 with 2,698,285 and 2,738,175 respectively. During the same time, the Black population almost doubled again from 107,263 to 208,478. Unfortunately for them, after World War 2 ended, Brooklyn's economic engines that fostered upward mobility for legions of prior im/migrants stalled. For example, factories move to cheaper, non-union locations and the busy ports became less so as huge container ships off-loaded across New York Harbor in modern New Jersey ports. A major Brooklyn economic icon, the Brooklyn Navy Yard, was shuttered in 1966.

Each historical period resulted in differential gains and losses for newcomers, as well as old-timers, in New York City. As we will read in what follows, the period from 1950 to 1970 was the most crucial for Black Brooklynites. All poor and working-class im/migrants suffered discrimination in housing, employment, as well as electoral politics. Many were forced to live in unhealthy neighborhoods,

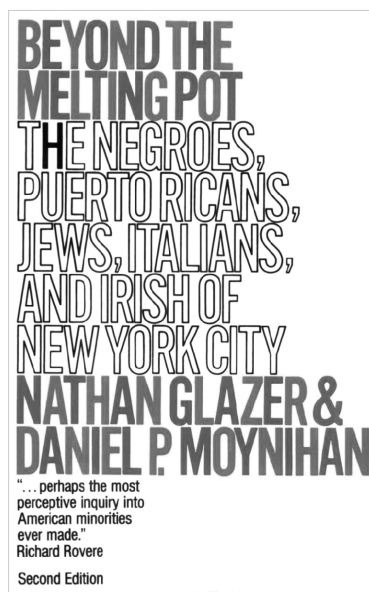


Figure 5. Cover of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's book "Beyond the Melting Pot"



work in underpaid jobs and in unsafe working conditions. Most were also denied patronage opportunities in public employment. For the Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City, much of this was detailed in Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1963) highly influential, and widely criticized, *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Despite his misplaced optimism that Blacks would achieve, as did the others, in only another decade or two, it was still a good chronicle of wide-spread discrimination. As others, such as Elijah Anderson (2000), would later argue, racism was a much more difficult bias than religion and ethnicity to overcome.

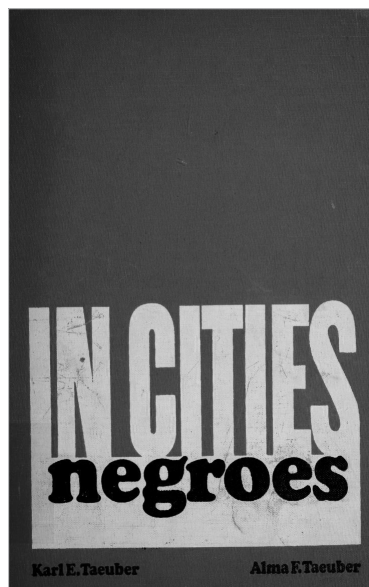


Figure 6. Cover of book “Negroes in Cities” by and Alma F. Taeuber and Taeuber, Karl E.

in the loss of well-paying jobs and outflow of capital New York City

As argued by Themis Chronopoulos (2020), racial discrimination and especially *de facto* residential segregation had, until the 1980s, confined most African Americans primarily to what he calls “Black Brooklyn” in Central and Eastern Brooklyn. He cited Craig Steven Wilder (2000) who showed how and why between 1930 and 1953, “...a vast black ghetto stretched across Brooklyn and was becoming the largest concentration of its kind” (p. 177). According to Wilder, the federal government’s New Deal’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC), created to avoid further

From 1950 to 1980 Brooklyn’s total population decreased, primarily due to working and Middle-class White flight. The easy availability of government-sponsored (FHA) housing loans for new construction outside of the central city, and the building of highways to the suburbs helped hundreds of thousands of white middle-class residents to flee deteriorating Brooklyn neighborhoods, as well as the real and imagined influx of Blacks, for the neighboring boroughs of Queens, Staten Island, or the suburbs of Long Island’s Nassau County, and New Jersey. Blacks and other People of Color moved into these abandoned spaces; especially in crumbling northern and central Brooklyn neighborhoods. Residential landlords decreased services, as they and homeowners couldn’t get loans for maintenance and improvements. Central and Eastern Brooklyn also suffered from a plague of arson as capital flight and disinvestment increased. de-industrialization resulted

foreclosures and bank failures, contributed to this ghettoization. Bending to real estate and financial industry interests, it graded and then drew color-coded maps (Hillier, 2003). Race, played an important role in this coding, and the lowest graded areas in Brooklyn, usually the most-Black, were colored red. On the 1938 map, almost all of Central and Eastern Brooklyn was thus “relined” (Badger, 2017). Redlined neighborhoods were generally excluded from mortgage market and properties within those boundaries were devalued. Redlining, in one form or another, continued until the 1980s.

It is not difficult to understand how predicting a bleak future for American cities in the 1960s because of the influx of POC contributed to the self-fulfilling prophecy of urban decay. As might be expected, a primary element of this racist formula was the equation of nonwhite habitation with urban deterioration. At the time, it was commonly believed that the people who invaded city neighborhoods tend to be of lower socioeconomic status than those they replace. However, there a large array of data disputed that belief. Some of the most interesting contradictory data concerning the social status of traditional black invaders was provided by Taeuber and Taeuber (1969) in *Negroes in Cities*:

1950	2,738,175	208,478
1960	2,627,319	371,405
1970	2,606,012	656,194
1980	2,230,936	722,316

Table 1. Brooklyn, New York. Total and Black Population 1950–1980  
Note. Data gathered from the US Censuses of Population and Housing (n.d.). 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020.

Turning to the characteristics of Negroes living in Invasion Tracts and



Negro Areas in the six Northern and border cities, two general observations may be made: (1) Negroes in invasion tracts are of higher educational and occupational status, are more likely to be homeowners, and less likely to be crowded than Negro Areas. Movement into previously all-white areas is clearly led by high-status Negroes. (2) Negroes in invasion tracts are often of higher educational status and more likely to be homeowners than whites in these tracts, both before and after invasion. Not only are high-status Negroes the first to enter all-white neighborhoods but owner-occupancy is apparently a major avenue of entry into the new neighborhood. (p. 163)

Also, major case study of residential succession by Northwood and Barth (1965) found that “Negro Pioneers,” especially in the first wave of invaders, tend to be of higher socioeconomic status than their white neighbors. The first blacks into a white neighborhood have higher hurdles placed in their way than for incoming whites. Blacks will pay higher prices for homes, and, in general, be “more selected” and “acceptable” to dominant whites in the area. Despite the turmoil of the 1970s and early 1980s, Blacks continued to developed community institutions that were instrumental in the survival and later revival of Brooklyn. Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, fraternal associations, political clubs, arts, and cultural associations, for example Bedford Stuyvesant Beautification Association — Save Our Magnolia Tree Earth Center, Weeksville other organizations from the making of modern Brooklyn (Manoni, 1973). It must also be noted that in this period Black Brooklyn produced leaders in many fields such as Shirley Chisolm, Spike Lee, Kimberly Denise Jones (Lil’ Kim) and Louis Gossett Jr.

## DECLINING BROOKLYN

Independent of racial bias and stereotyping, was the fact that crime and arson rates soared in minority neighborhoods in the 1960s and 1970s. An often neglected aspect of these problems, which

were universally blamed on the victims, were other culprits. For example, John Barracato who served as a firefighter, fire investigator, and deputy chief fire marshal with the New York City Fire Department from 1960 to 1976 noted that “landlords who saw a bleak future for their investments in Brownsville were hiring torches to burn their buildings for insurance” (Barracato & Michelmores, 1976, p. 18; see also Stevens, 1971).

Similarly, in reference to the rising crime rates in Black Brooklyn. In *The Knapp Commission Report* presented to Mayor John V. Lindsay in 1972, evidence was given of widespread New York City Police Department corruption centered in minority communities such as the south Bronx, Harlem and Brooklyn (Knapp Commission, 1973). In these neighborhoods, police officers were directly and indirectly involved in narcotics trafficking, illegal gambling, prostitution, and illegal bottle clubs as well as protecting contractors who were violating city safety and other construction ordinances. Most germane for crime in Black Brooklyn was The Thirteenth Division in Brooklyn, which was the subject of a major anti-corruption investigation.

In May, 1972, after the Commission’s hearings, Kings County District Attorney Eugene Gold announced the indictment of virtually an entire division plain-clothes squad in Brooklyn, which collected payments from gamblers without interruption during the Commission’s public hearings in precisely the same fashion being described by Commission witnesses. The indictments and related departmental charges involved a total of thirty-six current and former plain-clothesmen, twenty-four of whom were indicted. According to Mr. Gold, at one time twenty-four of twenty-five plain-clothesmen in the division were on the pad. (Knapp Commission, 1973, p. 76)

Unfortunately, the police corruption problem in Black Brooklyn did not fade away. As reported in *The New York Post* (2015):

Brooklyn’s 77th Precinct in Bedford-Stuyvesant was like the Wild West.

Cops on the beat were known to steal money from the dead, pocket confiscated cash from drug busts, and pilfer crime scenes for anything left behind by burglars. And when takes off crime scenes weren't enough, the unit created crime scenes of their own. The radio signal "Buddy Bob" was used to gather all parties interested in going on a "raid," which included anything from breaking into a smoke shop after hours to busting down the doors of drug dealers' dens solely to steal any cash on hand. In May 1986, Internal Affairs caught Officer Henry Winter in a pickup truck with cocaine and strong-armed him into informing on his fellow cops. The resulting tapes and testimony were used to indict 13 officers and have another 90 relocated in an attempt to purge the precinct's toxic culture.

It must also be noted that the Knapp commission's star witness, Frank Serpico began his undercover campaign against vice racketeering in the Brooklyn North's 81st Precinct.

This period was also punctuated by urban riots in many major cities such as New York and Los Angeles (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). For Brooklynites, it was the sizzling summer of 1977 Blackout that had the greatest impact. The power failure led to widespread rioting, looting, and arson in predominantly black neighborhoods. Several blocks of the main Broadway shopping district in Bushwick were torched and a third of the remaining stores closed immediately. More than 40% of Bushwick's commercial and retail operations went out of business within a year (Malanga, 2008; Curvin & Porter, 1979).

The nadir for the city in 1975 coincided with the Mayoralty of Abraham Beame and the New York City Fiscal Crisis that forced a virtual bankruptcy on the demoralized citizenry. New York State's Municipal Assistance Corporation took over the City's financial affairs until 2008. The financial future of the city looked so bleak that Beame's Housing and Development Administrator, Robert Starr, suggested that rather than cutting city-wide services,

a "Planned Shrinkage" policy be implemented. The neighborhoods to be cut off from city services to save money were populated primarily by non-whites in The Bronx and Brooklyn. According to Joseph P. Fried (1976) in many Brooklyn neighborhoods increasing urban blight was correlated with the inflow of minorities, especially African Americans. One source of hostility to these new invaders are more racially militant blacks. Today there are complaints about the displacement of Blacks due to gentrification, but it had a parallel in the 1960s and 1970s. An interesting analysis and description of the "negro removal" process is provided by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward:

Other federal programs, such as urban renewal, were turned against blacks; renewal projects were undertaken in most big cities to deal with the black invasion through 'slum clearance,' by reclaiming land taken by the expanding ghettos and restoring it to 'higher economic' use (i.e., to uses that would keep whites, and businesses in the central city)...

...seventy percent of the families thus uprooted were black... But with local blacks becoming more disorderly and more demanding in the early 1960s, local government began to make some concessions. Urban renewal provides one example. By the 1960s, black protests were mounting against 'Negro Removal' in the guise of 'slum clearance.' (Piven & Cloward, 1971, pp. 241-42)

What we currently refer to as 'displacement' was also taking place at the time, although in much more limited way, in the 1970s. According to a report of the National Urban Coalition in 1978, if you are elderly poor, or working class and live in an area undergoing rehabilitation, or in a suddenly fashionable neighborhood, you are a prime candidate for displacement by well-to-do suburbanites longing for the city life they left behind. The Coalition's study of forty-four cities showed that over half of the rehabilitated neighborhoods had higher minority populations before rehabilitation began (AP 1978). Many of the most respected urbanologists of the time strongly criticized these misnomered urban

“renewal,” and related programs (Frieden & Morris, 1968; Gans, 1968; Greer, 1965; Lupo et al., 1971; Norwood, 1974; Piven & Cloward, 1971; Bellush & Hausknecht, 1974).

As early as 1940, more than 90,000 out of almost 110,000 Blacks in Brooklyn lived in a small redlined portion of Black Brooklyn. This geographical concentration of Blacks continued and became more pronounced as large numbers of Southern Blacks moved to Black Brooklyn and whites moved out. It should be noted here, that at the time there was also large influx of Afro-Caribbeans. The segregation of Blacks in Brooklyn increased as Whites moved away from them and relatedly increasingly undesirable neighborhoods to “better” parts of Brooklyn, the suburbs, or suburban fringe neighborhoods in Queens and Staten Island. Whites also engaged various practices of “neighborhood defense” against Blacks and other People of Color (Chronopoulos, 2020; DeSena, 2005; Krase, 1982). These mechanisms of de facto segregation were facilitated by real estate agents and landlords who employed a range of more and less obvious tactics deny apartment rentals or housing sales to nonwhites.

As already noted as to redlining, financial institutions denied business and housing loans to minorities seeking opportunities in white areas. Those who managed entrée to white neighborhoods residents were often verbally and physically harassed. In some cases, they were attacked in schools or public spaces, and were harassed by police because they were frequenting white neighborhoods. According to Chronopoulos (2020):

In a general sense, neighborhood defense was an effort to maintain the racial exclusivity of white neighborhoods during a period of political mobilizations by African Americans demanding equality. It resulted in the hoarding of benefits and resources by white populations through the denunciation of Black advancement and the embrace of political entrepreneurs from the right. (p. 560)

Citing Joel Schwartz (1993), Chronopoulos (2020) also argued that public policies, such as slum clearance and the building of public housing projects also

contributed to the racial segregation of neighborhoods. According to Schwartz (1993), under Moses, subsidized housing projects had racial overtones as they accepted only White or Black tenants, depending on where they were built. Almost totally Black, Brownsville became one of many minority neighborhoods in New York to be neglected and suffer from the maldistribution of municipal services (Chronopoulos, 2020).

There were also some unanticipated consequences of liberal policies in the 1960s which was framed by civil rights movements, during which “restrictive” covenants and “neighborhood preservation” groups were stigmatized by liberal-minded publics and political authorities. The effect was the elimination of both real and imagined racial discrimination. Subsequently many city neighborhoods, previously defended by social class hurdles, were quickly integrated, and white middle class flight from the city accelerated. According to Thabit, East New York turned from White to Black in only six years because about 200 real estate firms resorted to blockbusting: “‘Ripe’ blocks were flooded with scare literature; brokers and speculators paraded black families up and down the streets to frighten whites into selling (Thabit, 2003; see also Krase, 1982). However, Williamsburg and Greenpoint in North Brooklyn, remained white because of neighborhood defense (DeSena, 2005; Chronopoulos, 2020).

It appears that only after a variable “Tipping Point” is reached does an area seem to take a general socioeconomic downturn. To most scientists the tipping point is a simple proportion of non-whites to total population in the area, after which the area slowly or rapidly becomes essentially all non-white (Wolf, 1967; Deutsch & Collins, 1951). There are other aspects of residential change in the inner city that require more intensive study. For example, a slow rate of home sales in an area can still coincide with a high rate of ethnic change. Often non-white invaders are the only prospective buyers, and whites the only sellers, of neighborhood property. Many residential Brooklyn blocks had rather “normal” turnover rates in the 1960s; approximately four percent per year, but due to racial steering by white and black real estate agents during a ten-year period they shifted from being predominately white to being predominately black.



During the two-term Mayoralty of John Lindsay (1966–1973), the NYC Planning Commission several different experiments in Decentralized Government followed: Little City Halls, Urban Action Task Forces, the Neighborhood Action Program, and the Office of Neighborhood Government. These efforts stimulated the growth, perhaps even the proliferation of local community and neighborhood associations in Brooklyn. However, since in the eyes of the general public most of these government programs were associated with neighborhood deterioration there was considerable opposition to being included in such designated “poverty” areas organizations. In the 1970s minority and changing neighborhoods were the focus of much attention by government agencies as evidenced in Central Brooklyn Model Cities, the Office of Neighborhood Government in Crown Heights, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Community School District. In the 1970s and 1980s local groups in central Brooklyn aggressively competed for the limited number of various Federal “Poverty Area” designations in order to be eligible for increased funding opportunities and programs.

In 1977, the NYC Human Rights Commission heard testimony concerning attempts to organize local residents specifically around the issue of redlining. The New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG) released the results of a study detailing the lending practices of seven Brooklyn banks charging that “the entire borough of Brooklyn is redlined.”

Like BRIC, NYPIRG believes that the issue must be addressed on the community level as well as in the broader arena of government agencies and legislatures, and in the fall of 1976 they began organizing around the redlining issue in East Flatbush and Prospect-Lefferts-Gardens. Borrowing techniques used successfully in Chicago, community residents have been meeting with bank presidents and presenting their demands for mortgage loans in their community. Some successes have already been noted and efforts are now underway to enlist the cooperation of local residents in a movement to withdraw deposits from non-cooperating

banks. This effort, which is now being publicized as the “Bank on Brooklyn” campaign, is receiving considerable attention in the press and will undoubtedly be watched closely by bankers and other community groups.” (Paul & Baker, 1977, pp. 86–87)

In 1968, the Federal Civil rights Act was passed and Title VIII of the Act was the first comprehensive federal open housing law. It banned discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in the sale, lease, and financing of housing, and in the furnishing of real estate brokerage services. It resulted in numerous public and voluntary organizations seeking to enforce its mandate. Fair housing was a major concern of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) of New York City’s Commission on Human Rights. The goal of their housing unit was providing minorities with housing option in areas from which they were excluded as well as preventing brokers from steering whites away from integrated neighborhoods. Organizations and Activists acted as fair housing “checkers” or “testers.”

In the 1970s however a broad spectrum of civic, business and political forces were working with increased vigor to reverse the decline. They joined together in a number of coalitions and succeeded in reversing the borough’s fortunes. By the power of their own will and inspired leadership they mobilized resources and a stream of public and private investment began to flow to Brooklyn. They set in motion an economic, cultural, and civic flowering of modern Brooklyn that accelerated in the 1990s and continues to this day. For example, local activists joined in the fight against the related real estate practices such as “block-busting” and “racial steering.” “Blockbusting and panic peddling are real estate practices in which brokers encourage owners to list their homes for sale by exploiting fears of racial change within their neighborhood” (Heiman, 1986, p. 1145) As a result Black Brooklyn neighborhood associations became a party to a 1977 “anti-solicitation” order by the then New York State Secretary of State Mario M. Cuomo. It should be noted that under the leadership of Eleanor Holmes Norton, The New York City Commission on Human Rights had also ordered non-solicitation orders in aggrieved neighborhoods. Although there were

several successful challenges to specific provisions of the New York State order, the order did bring needed close attention to these damaging practices, as well as restrictive legislation resulting from it, and for a time they lessened.

The order stated in part:

...that all licensed real estate brokers and salespersons are hereby restricted and shall cease and desist from soliciting listings of properties for sale and for purchase in any manner including but not limited to solicitation by means of letters, postcards, telephone calls, door-to-door canvassing, window signs, billboards, advertisement by handbills or news publications in the counties of Kings and Queens, except that brokers and salespersons may solicit listings of properties for sale and for purchase in newspapers of general circulation. That all solicitation be and is hereby prohibited until further notice (Heiman, 1986; Mehlhorn, 1998).

## NEW YORK CITY'S SECOND FISCAL CRISIS

Commenting on a Center for an Urban Future study, *New York in the World*, by Glenn von Nostitz (2011), Patrick McGeehan (2011) wrote:

Arguably, New York has benefited more and suffered more from globalization than any other state in the nation,' Garrick Utley, the president of the institute and a former television journalist, said. 'New York is sort of a macro-microcosm of the nation, facing the challenges of the global economy. The state has lost more manufacturing jobs in the last 40 years than any other big state, including Michigan, though Michigan has suffered more since 2000, the report found. Within New York State, manufacturing has disappeared fastest in New York City, leaving few options for the rising tide of immigrants needing to support their families.

The effect on the relative affluence of residents of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx was stark: The report stated that the median income for individuals in each borough, as a percentage of the nation's median income, fell significantly from 1970 to 2008 (Von Nostitz 2011). Public discourse about the crisis proliferated in American public discourse. For example, since 2008, the *New York Times* published more than 1,000 articles about foreclosures and the mortgage crisis. Veteran city journalist Sam Roberts (2010) summarized data from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS showed that, adjusting for inflation, New Yorkers' median household income declined between 2006 and 2009 from \$48,631 to \$48,355. City home values registered the sharpest declines, to \$517,000 in 2009 from \$557,300 in 2007. In the same period, the population dependent on food stamps rose to 17.2 percent from 13.3 percent in 2007 although the poverty rate remained unchanged (18.7 percent). In 2008, the City's own more sophisticated measure of poverty classified 22 percent of New Yorkers as poor. Since 2007, the income gap in the city appeared to have widened somewhat as the proportion of people who were making \$200,000 or more and those earning less than \$10,000, adjusting for inflation, rose from 5.9 percent to 6.5 percent and from 11.1 percent to 11.5 percent respectively (Roberts, 2010).

## SUBPRIME MORTGAGES AND FORECLOSURES

Sassen (2009) argued that the securitizing of mortgages created a new channel for extracting household income, bundling it up with other types of debt and selling it off to financial investors. Extending this concept to modest-income households opens up a global potential market comprising billions of households. These mortgages were often marketed to households that lacked the capacity to meet the monthly mortgage payments without full disclosure as to the risks and possible changes in interest rates. In this way, household savings could be extracted. This was evident in the local-level data showing that African-Americans and low-income neighborhoods had a disproportionately higher incidence of subprime mortgages in all mortgages from 2000 to 2007. She cited extreme differences between Manhattan and other New York City boroughs: In 2006

less than 1 percent of mortgages sold to Manhattan home-buyers were subprime compared to 27.4 percent in the Bronx.

During the same period, there was also a sharp rate of growth of subprime mortgages in all boroughs except Manhattan. A further breakdown by neighborhoods (Community Districts [CDs]) showed that the 10 worst-hit neighborhoods were poor, and in them between 34 percent and 47 percent of mortgages were subprime. Controlling for race a similar pattern was evident, as whites, with far higher average income than all the other groups in New York City, were far less likely to have subprime mortgages than all other groups, reaching 9.1 percent in 2006 compared with 13.6 percent of Asians, 28.6 percent of Hispanics and 40.7 percent of blacks (Sassen, 2009). All of the top 10 CDs with the highest rates of subprime lending in 2006 were well-known nonwhite minority areas; five were in Brooklyn.

One of the most striking effects of the current crisis was manifest in home loan foreclosures. According to Michael Powell and Jane Roberts, mortgage foreclosure rates in the region were highest in areas with high minority populations (Powell & Roberts, 2009; see also Bloch & Roberts, 2010). As expected, the distribution of foreclosures is not random, but covaries with poverty and race. In Brooklyn, for example, the CDs hit hardest were 3 Bedford-Stuyvesant (12 percent White), 4 Bushwick (24 percent White), and 5 East New York (18 percent White). Median Household Income in these CDs for 2005–07 fell between \$28,000 and \$32,000. (In comparison, the median household income for New York City as a whole was \$47,581.) The proportion of the population receiving income support (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid) in these Brooklyn areas varied between 44 percent and one-half. In the areas least affected, such as CD2 Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene (50 percent White), CD6 Park Slope, Carroll Gardens (68 percent White), CD10 Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights (74 percent White), 15 Sheepshead Bay (77 percent White) and CD18 Canarsie, Flatlands (32 percent White) the median household income is substantially higher, ranging from around \$46,000 to more than \$77,000, with income assistance between 15 percent and one-third

(ACS Population by Race, 5-Year Average 2005–09 Census). The foreclosure data for Bedford Stuyvesant and Bushwick in Brooklyn was startling, especially in the area north of Broadway in Bushwick (CD4) and between Atlantic and Gates Avenues in Bedford Stuyvesant (CD3).

The New York City Department of Housing Preservation (HPD) and Development invited developers and local organizations to submit applications for the funding of proposals to acquire and redevelop foreclosed, abandoned, or vacant properties in Census tracts most affected by foreclosures. The program uses stimulus funds from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to prevent further declines in neighborhoods most severely impacted by foreclosures. Of the 20 neighborhoods Targeted by the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP1) 3 were in the remains of Black Brooklyn and most of the others were where Black Brooklyn residents had moved such as Flatlands/Canarsie, and East Flatbush.

During the crisis, New York City Consumer Affairs Commissioner, Jonathan Mintz, announced an expansion of the City's Financial Empowerment Centers (Sarlin & Lootens, 2010). The centers provide free homeownership and foreclosure prevention counseling. There are 20 Financial Empowerment Center locations, including three new ones in the Garment District and Lower East Side, in Manhattan, and Melrose, in the Bronx. As might be expected, given the uneven effects of the recession in New York City, these three as well as those in the complete list of Help Centers, are all located in the previously identified problem areas for New York City's Neighborhood Stabilization Program. Distressed neighborhoods such as these tend to have clusters of anti-poverty services and businesses catering to basic needs at low cost.

## POLITICAL DISEMPOWERMENT

Economic prosperity and housing, although significant, were not the only public goods Black Brooklynites were systematically deprived of. Black institutions and organizations, especially those with electoral political potential suffered greatly during the 20th century from discrimination in the form of



gerrymandering as well access to registration and voting. So much so that The Federal Voting Rights Act, usually associated with racial discrimination in the Deep South, applied to Brooklyn's Congressional Districts. According to Doug Muzzio (2021):

The law was a culmination of the black civil rights movement and a cornerstone of Lyndon Johnson's great society. With it, the federal government would finally fulfill the promise of the Fifteenth Amendment, enabling blacks to exercise the franchise unhindered by exclusionary devices such as literacy tests, white primaries, poll taxes and grandfather clauses. The law prevented states from enforcing discriminatory tactics aimed at preventing blacks' fair opportunities to participate in the voting process.

Currently, the law covers Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia; of California, Florida, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Dakota—and Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx.

As a result of a suit brought under the Voting Rights Act in 1967, Black Brooklyn, which was cut up among several, mostly white Congressional Districts, was rearranged to create one that enabled Afro-Caribbean New York State Assemblywomen Shirley Chisholm to win in 1968. The act was amended in 1970 to include jurisdictions that had literacy tests, and in which less than 50 percent of the voting age population was registered or voted in the 1968 presidential election. In July 1970, the Attorney General found that New York State maintained a test or a device that adversely affected minority voting participation. In March 1971, U. S. Bureau of the Census found that fewer than 50 percent of voting age residents were registered in Bronx, Kings, and New York counties. Together these determinations required the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan to become “covered” jurisdictions subject to pre-clearance (Doug Muzzio, 2021; see also Brooks, 2013). For a closer look at ethnic and racial politics in Brooklyn see Howell (2018), Krase and LaCerra (1992).

## IMMOBILITY: RACE, POVERTY

According to Sheller and Urry (2006), although the significance of mobility in analyses of spatiality and spatial restructuring has been recognized by many social scientists, they continue not to fully ‘... recognize how the spatialities of social life presuppose, and frequently involve conflict over, both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, event to event’ (p. 6). Ethnic population maps of Brooklyn since the 1920s show the remarkable immobility of Black, Jewish, and Italian enclaves. Today most of New York's Ultra-Orthodox, Jews ironically, reside in Wirth's ‘voluntary’ ghettos of various degrees, whereas most Blacks occupy rather “involuntary” ones (Wirth, 1928). The immobility of Orthodox Jews is primarily due to regulations that tie them to local religious leaders and institutions. For Blacks limited residential mobility is due in large part to discrimination. Brooklyn's dwindling Italian American population remains tied to historically important immigrant enclaves, and is therefore voluntary. Beyond race and ethnicity, poverty increases the immobility of these already immobile racial and ethnic groups (Krase 2016).

The Community Service Society mapped poverty in New York City and found that poverty and low incomes, unemployment, subsidized housing, emergency rent assistance, Housing Court actions, emergency feeding sites, disconnected youth, and low educational attainment, were all highly concentrated in Upper Manhattan, the South Bronx, and Central Brooklyn. They concluded, ‘New Yorkers are living with the effects of poverty in every part of New York City, but the experience of poverty remains closely tied to place. Half of the city's 1.4 million poor people live in neighborhoods where the poverty rate is at least 24.8 percent (compared to a citywide rate of 19.2 percent), and one-quarter live in neighborhoods where the rate is at least 34.1 percent’ (Community Service Society & United Way, 2008). Not unsurprisingly, Bloch and Roberts (2010) reported mortgage foreclosure rates were highest in areas with high minority populations. In Brooklyn, the Community Districts (CDs) hit hardest were Bedford-Stuyvesant (12% White), Bushwick (24% White), and East New York (18% White). Mortgage foreclosures add to neighborhood stress because abandoned and boarded up buildings

become signifiers of poverty, which stigmatizes the surrounding area.

## IMMOBILITY: STOP AND FRISK

According to Tesfahuney “Differential mobility empowerments reflect structures and hierarchies of power and position by race, gender, age and class, ranging from the local to the global” (Tesfahuney, 1998, p. 501; see also Massey, 1994). Places and technologies that enhance the mobility of some can do so while at the same time they decrease the mobility of others, especially as they try to cross borders (Timothy, 2001). Therefore, it is not surprising to discover that race and poverty-induced immobility produce other patterns and concentrations such as for crime and arrests. If authorities wish to make arrests, the geography of race and class is metaphorically like shooting fish in barrel. Gelman et al. (2007), Fagan and Kiss looked at claims of racial bias against the New York City Police Department’s ‘Stop-and-Frisk’ Policy. Blacks and Hispanics represented 51% and 33% of the stops but were only 26% and 24% of the New York City population. Most important for mobility issues, they found evidence of stops:

... that are best explained as ‘racial incongruity’ stops: high rates of minority stops in predominantly white precincts. Indeed, being ‘out of place’ is often a trigger for suspicion ... Racial incongruity stops are most prominent in racially homogeneous areas. For example, we observed high stop rates of African-Americans in the predominantly white 19th Precinct, a sign of race-based selection of citizens for police interdiction. We also observed high stop rates for whites in several precincts in the Bronx, especially for drug crimes, most likely evidence that white drug buyers were entering predominantly minority neighborhoods where street drug markets are common. (Gelman et al., 2007, p. 816)

A map created by the Center on Race, Crime and Justice, John Jay College of Criminal Justice showed of the Precincts with more than 55,000 stops 2003–

2008, 4 of the 8 were in the remains of Black Brooklyn, 73 Ocean Hill Brownsville, East New York 75, Crown Heights 77, Bedford Stuyvesant 79 (Jones-Brown, 2010). Unfortunately, a more recent study showed that discrimination in stops and frisks has continued (Bekiempis, 2017).

## STOPPED HERE EDUCATION REDLINING

According to *A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City* (Holzman, 2012), the long-term and continuing problems of meeting the needs of poor nonwhite students in Community School District 17 are the result of a New York City-wide pattern of “Educational Redlining” (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). The main conclusion of this Schott Foundation for Public Education report is that New York City’s public schools’ student’s educational outcomes and opportunity to learn are more a product of where they live than their own abilities.

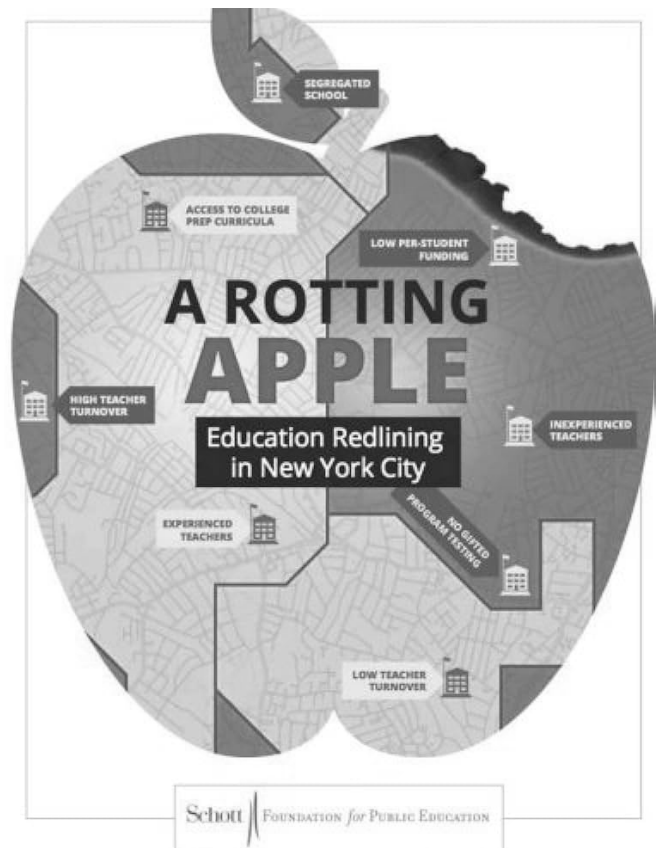


Figure 7. Cover of book “A Rotting Apple: Education Redlining in New York City” by Dr. Michael H. Holzman

Primarily because of New York City policies and practices that result in an inequitable distribution of educational resources and intensify the impact of poverty, children who are poor, Black and Hispanic have far less of an opportunity to learn the skills needed to succeed on state and federal assessments. They are also much less likely to have an opportunity to be identified for Gifted and Talented programs, to attend selective high schools or to obtain diplomas qualifying them for college or a good job. High-performing schools, on the other hand, tend to be located in economically advantaged areas. (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012)

New York's school system is considered among the most racially and socioeconomically segregated in America. The most recent iteration of educational racial inequity was raised in reference to public Specialized High Schools and educational enrichment programs. A lawsuit by civil rights attorneys and student plaintiffs in State Supreme Court in Manhattan was filed to fundamental change how New York City's public school students are admitted into selective schools. It argues that the city's school system has replicated and worsened racial inequality by sorting children into different academic tracks as early as kindergarten, and has therefore denied many of its roughly one million students of their right to a sound, basic education. Defendants include the New York State Governor, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, and the incoming school's chancellor Meisha Porter (Shapiro, 2021).

## THE GENTRIFICATION OF BLACK BROOKLYN

Adding the latest insult to injury has been the displacement of Black residents and businesses by the Gentrification of what was left of Black Brooklyn, parts of which had been gentrified by Blacks themselves. According to Chronopoulos Black gentrification was apparent in the 1970s with the growth of the middle class. Due to limited choices Middle-class Blacks Facing moved to low-income, mostly minority areas in Northwest Black Brooklyn and

eventually southward and eastward in the borough. The final decade of the 20th century witnessed a revival in Brooklyn's fortunes. Crime ebbed during the 1990s, and neighborhoods in Black Brooklyn, like Bedford Stuyvesant, Bushwick, Fort Greene, and Clinton Hill began to spring back to life as the outflow of capital in the city reversed. The displacement and gentrification in North Brooklyn was also pioneered by a new generation of artists, fleeing from the high rents in Manhattan in northern Williamsburg, and Greenpoint (Zukin, 1987; Lees, 2003).

A seemingly benign form of gentrification in the 1970s was "The Brownstone Revival Movement" that was part of the national "Back to City" movement. The movement aimed to recreate and preserve traditional urban middle-class residential values in the face of urban decline noted earlier in this chapter. Since a much smaller proportion of Blacks were in the higher classes, and gentrification is primarily an upper middle class invasion process, Blacks became the losers in the competition for these increasingly desirable spaces. It should be noted that Black Brooklyn always had many positive qualities such as historically valuable housing stock and ease of transportation to Manhattan, but, like Harlem, was stigmatized by its Black occupation. It is obvious, therefore, that the their "ethnic cleansing" would become an important part of the process of "upscaling" (Chronopoulos, 2020; Krase, 1977).

Two of the most influential were the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference (BBC) and the city-wide New York Brownstone Revival Committee (BRC) in their "Back-to-the-City" movement activities. Founded in 1968, ironically, the organization had campaigned against mortgage red-lining and got some banks to offer mortgages for brownstones in Black Brooklyn. From 1973 to 1986, BRC co-sponsored with the Brooklyn Brownstone Conference the annual Brooklyn Brownstone Fair that resulted in the gentrification of many Black Brooklyn neighborhoods and the displacement of Black residents.

Unfortunately, this activism against urban deterioration changed to the celebration of what Neil Smith (1998) would call urban neighborhood "revanchism" which "blends revenge with reaction" (p. 1). In general urban revanchism has been



viewed as: “reaction against the successes of social democracy, the welfare state and socially responsible urban policy during the middle half of the twentieth century, and revenge against the malefactors held responsible for urban decay and the supposed ‘theft’ of the city” (Jou et al., 2016, p. 563).

In Northwest Black Brooklyn, Whites became the numerical majority after 2013 (Chronopoulos, 2020) Just as the increases in housing costs in Manhattan brought white gentrifiers to North Brooklyn in the 1980s, as they subsequently increased in super-gentrifying Williamsburg in the 1990s, first-wave gentrifiers and newcomers ventured further south into Central Brooklyn and Crown Heights. A 2019 study by Kristen Lewis and Sarah Burd-Sharps found:

The five neighborhoods with the largest increase in White residents accompanied by a decrease in residents of another racial or ethnic group were all found in Brooklyn — Bedford-Stuyvesant, Williamsburg, Clinton Hill, Park Slope and Gowanus, and Crown Heights North. Between 2000 and 2010, these neighborhoods all saw an increase of between 6,700 and 15,600 White residents, paired with a simultaneous decrease in Black residents (Bedford-Stuyvesant, Crown Heights North), Latino residents (Williamsburg), or both (Clinton Hill, Park Slope and Gowanus). (Lewis & Burd-Sharps 2019; see also Vo, 2020; Richardson et al., 2020)

It must be also noted that between 1990 and 2020 as the total population of Brooklyn increased by 347,788, the Black population decreased by 38,622.

1990	2,300,664	872,305
2000	2,465,326	898,350
2010	2,552,911	860,083
2020	2,648,452	833,683 estimate 2019

**Table 2.** Brooklyn, New York. Total and Black Population 1990–2020  
*Note.* Data gathered from the US Censuses of Population and Housing (n.d.) 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020.

## CONCLUSION

It would take several volumes to discuss the many other examples of racial inequities in Brooklyn previously discussed in this chapter, such as housing evictions (Chen, 2021), environmental racism (Gould & Lewis, 2017), food deserts (Ky, 2014), and access to COVID-19 testing and treatment. (Pereira et al., 2021; Krase & DeSena, in press) Employing a distributive social justice perspective, prefaced by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2022), this essay has focused on the most salient outcomes of the conflicts and competitions over Brooklyn spaces and resources as they have impacted Brooklynites of African descent. To conclude this chapter, I restate the guiding principle for all 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals — “Leaving no one behind,” and ask whether Black Brooklynites have received their fair share of public goods over their half-millennium of involuntary and voluntary residence in the borough. Considering even the limited evidence presented here, the answer is clearly “No.” In the 1970s “Critical Race Theory” was developed by lawyers, legal scholars, and activists who saw that the progress and momentum made during the Civil Rights Era (1950s and 60s) had either slowed and in some cases ended (Omi & Winant, 1994). The theory provides an understanding of how race is not only socially constructed but how those constructions are institutionalized and negatively impact different minority groups at different times (Delgado, 2001). As demonstrated in this essay about Black Brooklyn, the negative impacts are numerous and obvious. As all my work is pragmatic in orientation, I hope this essay will motivate positive changes. In conclusion, I look forward to seeing in the future what would a socially just Brooklyn, or any other city around the globe, would look like.

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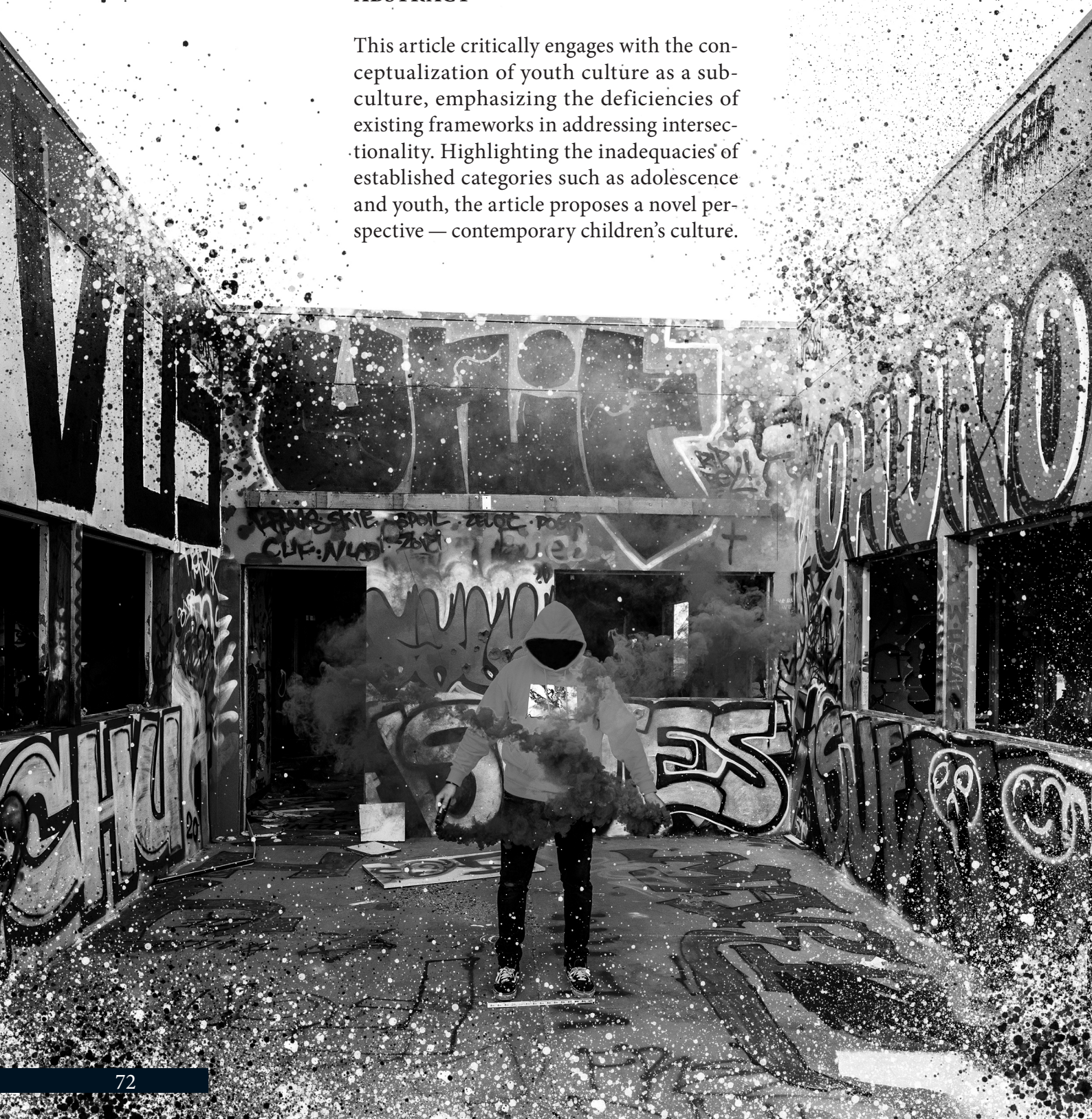
Steve Gennaro is a critical theorist, a youth rights activist, and a playologist. Professor in the Humanities department at York University (Canada). He explores the intersections of media, technology, psychology, and youth identity. He is one of the founding faculty for the Children, Childhood, and Youth Studies Program at York University in Toronto, Canada, where he has taught for nearly two decades. He was named to the Child Rights Academic Network in 2021 and appointed to the European Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in 2022. He currently works with Canada Soccer to help develop and deliver coaching training and licensing to ensure that every child always has the right to play.

# RESEARCHING YOUTH SUBCULTURES: A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

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## ABSTRACT

This article critically engages with the conceptualization of youth culture as a subculture, emphasizing the deficiencies of existing frameworks in addressing intersectionality. Highlighting the inadequacies of established categories such as adolescence and youth, the article proposes a novel perspective — contemporary children's culture.





The author argues for an interdisciplinary, rights-based approach that places the child at the center, challenging traditional research paradigms and advocating for the active involvement of young people in the research process. The framework presented comprises three voices: institutional voices about children, institutional voices for children, and children's own voices. By looking into each, the article contributes to advancing research methodologies in the study of youth culture.

### Keywords

youth culture, subculture, intersectionality, rights-based research, contemporary children's culture

## INTRODUCTION

For Dick Hebdige, in his seminal 1979 *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, what makes something a subculture is its opposition to dominant structures of powers, its existence inside of the core while occupying the margins, and its opposition and active defiance through fashion, art, music, etc. to social norms and dominant ideologies from the periphery. Hebdige (1979) himself, and many of those to use his theories since, have long subdivided youth into a series of smaller subcultures, but childhood or youth itself is a universal category that is by its very existence — abinary and oppositional term to adulthood and therefore the lives of young people, the representations of these lives, and the inherent power imbalance that structures their lives necessitate a recognition of *youth culture* as subcultural a priori<sup>1</sup>. A glaring omission from Hebdige's work are acknowledgements of intersectionality and how observing subcultures without a lens for gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, and age (among other social variables) obfuscates the depth of inequity in power relations. And since subcultures exist

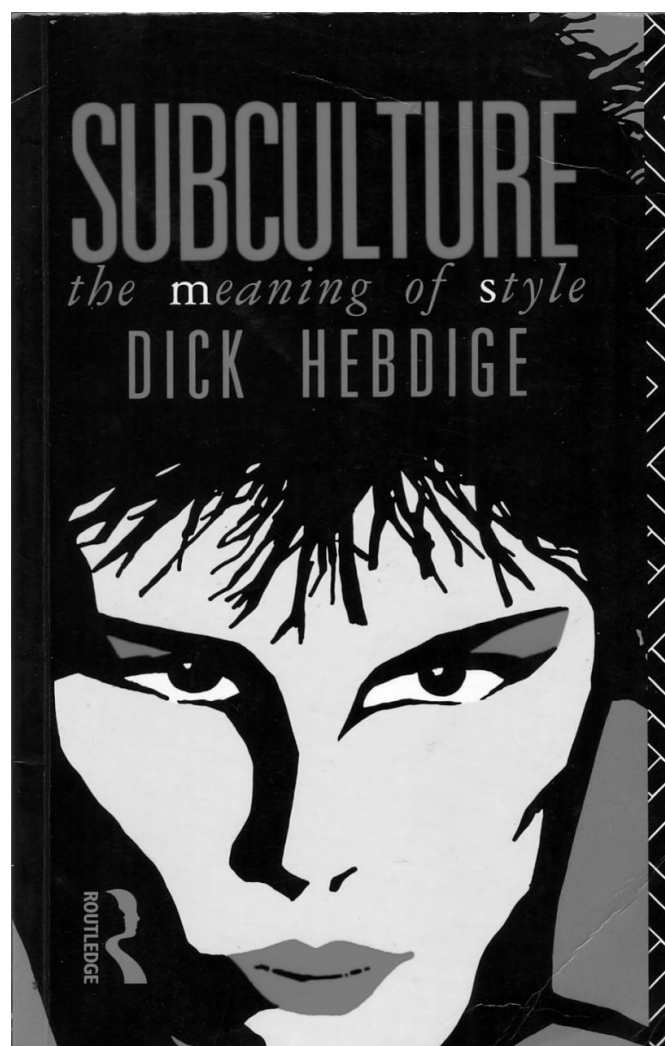


Figure 1. Cover of book "Subculture: The Meaning of Style" by Dick Hebdige

primarily as a response to unequal power relations, as an organic channel of feedback to ideology, intersectionality as a research method cannot be overstressed. The same is true for any universalization of childhood, youth, or other category of classification.<sup>2</sup> If we begin from the premise that youth can be viewed as a subculture, what problems are immediately presented to us as researchers who wish to observe youth culture?

- 1 For a clearer breakdown of the classification of childhood into subcategories see *Selling Youth: How Market Research at The J. Walter Thompson Company Framed what it meant to be a Child (and an Adult) in 20th Century America* (Gennaro, 2010c).
- 2 To address this gap in Hebdige's work and more recent work on subcultures, see Gildart et al. (2020). "The contributors to this volume assess the main theoretical trends behind Hebdige's work, critically engaging with their value and how they orient a researcher or student of subculture, and also look at some absences in Hebdige's original account of subculture, such as gender and ethnicity."

## PROBLEMS OF CHOOSING A RESEARCH PATH IN STUDYING YOUTH AS A SUBCULTURE

The most obvious problem that arises from adults conducting research with children, is that as adult researchers we are immediately outsiders to youth culture and this limits our ability to hear youth voices (Gennaro, 2008). Hearing youth voices requires access to contemporary children's culture. But what is contemporary children's culture? I would argue that contemporary children's culture is the subculture of youth.

No actual definition of contemporary children's culture actually exists. Dr. Carole Carpenter coined the term when she first conceived of the idea of a Children's Studies as a degree option at York University around the turn of the millennium (C. Carpenter, Personal Interview, 10 September 2008). Since then, within the Children, Childhood and Youth Program at York University we now use the term to refer to a very particular moment in time and space, giving that moment structure, and its inhabitants a voice. As the phenomenon gathered steam, it became clear that "contemporary" need not be recent; that we can explore the characteristics of that moment and then make comparisons to where else it shows up across different times, spaces or places along a historical trajectory. Taking a holistic approach in terms of relative disciplines, contemporary children's culture is the exploration of children's real lives, at the present moment, in a very particular geographic space (noting that this space can also be virtual), while at the same time recognizing the real impact of the social construction of childhood on the lives of young people. In a mainstream dominated by adult narratives with respect to "who" and "what" children are or can be, contemporary children's culture provides youth-centric spaces and/or voices.

Forever located within existing adult culture, youth culture is largely deemed beholden to its older, more dominant counterpart — even in formative ways. Exploring stories that young peo-

ple engage with provides us a sense of the cultural literacy, media literacy, and social literacy of young people's lives distinct from adult proclivities. All three of these literacies are vital to understanding contemporary children's culture, in tandem with an exploration of what I deemed back in 2008 to be (Gennaro, 2010a): the three voices of CCC (contemporary children's culture):

1. Institutional voices, such as governments and NGOs (and how they talk about children).
2. Media texts (and how these institutional ideas are explained to children).
3. Children's own voices (what children themselves have to say about their own lives).

I will return to these voices and explain in more detail later. However, what is important to note is that contemporary children's culture — or youth as subculture — exists at the nexus of these voices, as well as at the cross-over point between the real lived experiences of children and the social construction of childhood.

As researchers, we must overcome the problem of only hearing adult dominated voices and not accessing children's own voices. Hearing the voices of young people requires research methodologies where the focus is on young people as subjects and not as objects. This of course is in directly opposition to a century plus worth of researching young people in disciplines such as adolescent psychology. Adolescence was deemed by psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall and Sigmund Freud to be a time of turbulence, where competing selves needed to be re-organized, where a young person came of age, and where competing sexual urges needed to be controlled in order to function properly in society.<sup>3</sup> With this, adolescence became defined as a period of destabilization and adolescents became categorized as individuals in need of guidance. By this very definition, the subjectivity of young people is removed and replaced with an objectivity where adults dictate norms, expectations, behaviors, practices, and ideals that are deemed acceptable in any given social moment.

3 A full description of the history of youth and adolescence as a series of commercial, medical, and media discourse can be found in *Selling Youth* (Gennaro, 2010).

The classification of young people's lives into distinct categories further objectifies the lives of youth. Although terms such as adolescent, child, teenager, and youth have been used in academic disciplines, corporate plans, and medical fields to refer more directly to a category of individuals who have a specific set of attributes and functions, The United Nations defined children in its 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* as anyone under the age of 18 (UN General Assembly, 1989).

The categories of age and development that such terms associate with childhood are social constructions that have become so widely used and represented that they have become what Stuart Hall (1973) would call "naturalized codes."<sup>4</sup> Following Louis Althusser's ideas of "obviousnesses" and Antonio Gramsci's explanation of how ideology is most dangerous when it becomes invisible, such that it is seen as normal, silly, or stupid, Hall (1973) uses the term "naturalized codes" to refer to the representation of an ideology that has become so widespread in our culture that we no longer process and analyze the symbol and instead simply

accept it at face value (Althusser, 1970; Gramsci, 1929). Under this schema, terms like adolescent, teenager, child, and youth all represent an implicit ideology that has become so normalized that we no longer see the dangers inherent in them, structures of power they contain, and the ways in which they not only colonize children but deny them any access to channels of power. What I have written about on several occasions is that each of these categories, adolescence, teenager, youth, child, etc. are mirror reflections of the fears and anxieties of adults in a society, reflected in discourses about childhood and it is the hopes, dreams, and desires of adults in a society that are reflected too (Gennaro, 2010b).

Childhood is a social construction however discourse and representations of youth have real consequences in society. Adolescence is a category of discrimination in that a person's age and life positioning immediately reveal a whole category of subjective beliefs or stereotypes in the same way that a person's gender immediately implies a whole set of power relations. Although childhood is different from other social variables because it



<sup>4</sup> See also David Morley (2019) *Essential Essays*.



is a temporary space, the extension of this temporal space to a lifelong process is precisely the objective of the culture industries in the marketing discourse of perpetual adolescence (Gennaro, 2005). Traditionally, research in this field has tended to be on children rather than with children, again, removing the subjectivity of young people from the very research process. Added to this has been an emphasis to conduct this research through “adult eyes” and therefore impacted by the nostalgia of a “rear view mirror” understanding of young people’s lives (Gennaro, 2008). As a result, adolescence, youth, and childhood become socially constructed categories of distinction where relationships of power, domination, and inequality are continually contested. This process makes youth a subculture, and is why a rights-based approach to research with young people is required.

### What is a rights-based approach?

A rights-based approach is a framework that seeks to place the child and the “Rights of the Child” as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the center of all interactions with young people. In much the same way the Article 3 of the UNCRC, referred to as “the best interest principle,” articulates the need for adults to support young people by acting with their best interest whenever possible, a rights-based approach extends beyond this to ensure that as adult allies we act with an anti-oppressive, anti-racist, child-centered, and intersectional frameworks when working with young people.

In 2010 I published an article “Globalization, History, Theory, and Writing” for the Society of the History of Childhood and Youth, which asked scholars of childhood and youth to consider how the forces of globalization have impacted our understanding of young people’s identities, and their experiences as family members, students, workers, consumers, activists, vulnerable bodies, and citizens (Gennaro, 2010a). Drawing on the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s first chapter “Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory” from her groundbreaking text *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, I argued that any research on the lives of children must take a rights-based approach, which attempts to contextualize children’s lives in a global framework of power, economics, and culture framed and dominated by Western Imperialism (Smith, 1999). In order to participate in any research with young people requires adults to take a rights-based approach and to use the “most adult status.” This “most adult status” was in direct contrast to popular research methodology in the field at the time, which encouraged researchers to take the “least adult status.” The goal of the least adult status was to balance uneven power dynamics by removing one’s self as the adult researcher and their bias from the research process. In contrast however, a rights-based approach does not remove the adult, unequal power relations, or bias from the research process. Instead, a rights-based approach pushes social relations and inequity directly to the forefront, acknowledges it, and then actively works to overcome these obstacles to ensure the child, the

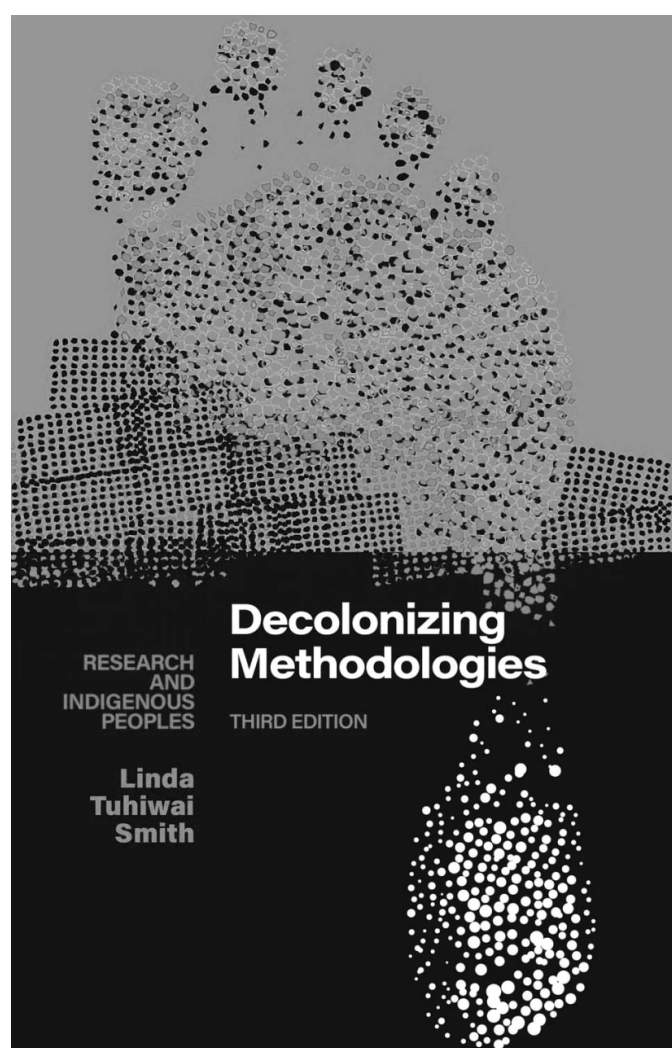


Figure 2. Cover of book “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples” by Linda Tuhiwai Smith

child's voice, and the child's rights permeate the ideological apparatus that too often silences youth voices.

## METHOD

This research employs a multifaceted approach to investigate youth subcultures within the framework of a rights-based perspective. Utilizing a blend of qualitative methods, including interviews, participant observations, and content analysis of cultural artifacts, the study aims to capture the nuanced expressions and experiences of diverse youth communities. Additionally, a critical analysis of institutional discourses, media representations, and children's own narratives contributes to a comprehensive understanding of youth subcultures. This methodological triangulation ensures a robust exploration of the complexities inherent in the lives, identities, and expressions of young people, aligning with the overarching objective of promoting a rights-focused lens in youth studies.

A rights-based approach is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of children's lives globally and stands as a reminder that exploring young peoples' lives requires a working through the three different voices of CCC.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Institutional voices about children (IVACs)

- Describe who children are at any given social moment.
- Primarily occupy institutional spaces of government, education, health care or other social organizations.
- They order and classify.
- They describe what the social roles or functions of children are (including what social spaces children can or cannot occupy and the rules for participation in these spaces) at any given social moment.
- Young peoples' voices are largely absent from IVACS.

### 2. Institutional voices for children (IVFCs)

- Take the institutional ideas about children and tell them or explain them to young people.
- Primarily occupy popular culture.
- They are didactic in nature.
- Whether it be books, television, social media, movies, literature, or video games, they are the conduit through which INSTITUTIONAL IDEAS are disseminated to children.
- These do not define children's lives, instead they are how the world and their roles in it are explained to young people.
- Contested children's voices can sometimes be present here.

### 3. Children's Own Voices (COVs)

- When children take up the ideas of INSTITUTIONAL VOICES, they participate in their social world.
- The voices of young people are play based and largely dependent on media. Play is the actual rituals, practices, and actions, where young people engage with popular culture and media to name their world and in doing so speak back to the dominant.
- As a result, play is always by its very nature subversive.
- In digital spaces, this includes texting, apps, games, social media. It is through play that the actions of young people agree with or contest ideologies about their realities.

A rights-based approach requires adults and young people to work together as co-constructors to ensure that children's voices are also heard and that the research does more than perpetuate social norms and imbalances of power that dominate institutional voices for and about children. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith (1999) notes how research with indigenous communities posits a number of insider/outsider issues for research. Tuhiwai Smith argues that research is not simply an innocent and academic pursuit but always a reflection of the social and political ideologies of the institutions (and

<sup>5</sup> The ideas below are further explored in the forthcoming co-edited collection: *Young People and Social Media: Contemporary Children's Culture in Digital Space(s)* (Gennaro & Miller, 2021).

individuals) who design, request, support, fund, oversee, participate in, and ultimately publish the research project. This is why a rights-based approach is necessary. We can't erase the barriers of distinction and the social expectations and myths that accompany these. Therefore, as researchers, we must acknowledge them, make them overtly known, and work to create a space of dialogue in spite of difference that acknowledges the inequity of power, and the imbalance of representation versus reality, instead of working through a research paradigm that seeks to hide these in the pursuit of a more "truthful" or "expressive" research environment. Insiders are just that — those with direct access to the community or subculture as active members. Outsiders, like all adults who research with young people, remain always on the outside. This is why we must take "the most adult status" and work as allies to co-construct the research process with young people when exploring youth subcultures.

So what does a rights-based approach look like? Again, drawing on the wisdom of Tuhiwai Smith, here are the questions she suggests belong at the beginning of any research design for projects with Indigenous Peoples — all of these belong at the beginning of any research with young people for it to be rights-based:

- Whose research is it?
- Who owns it?
- Whose interests does it serve?
- Who will benefit from it?
- Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
- Who will carry it out?
- Who will write it up?
- How will its results be disseminated?

## CONCLUSION

Rights based approach requires co-constructing research with young people, ensuring their active participation and representation. Researchers should critically examine the ownership, interests, and beneficiaries of the research, emphasizing transparency and equity. We need to hear children's voices. We need to conduct research with young people not on young people. We need to have research that

make visible the imbalances of power and power dynamics. We need a rights-based approach for researching youth subculture.

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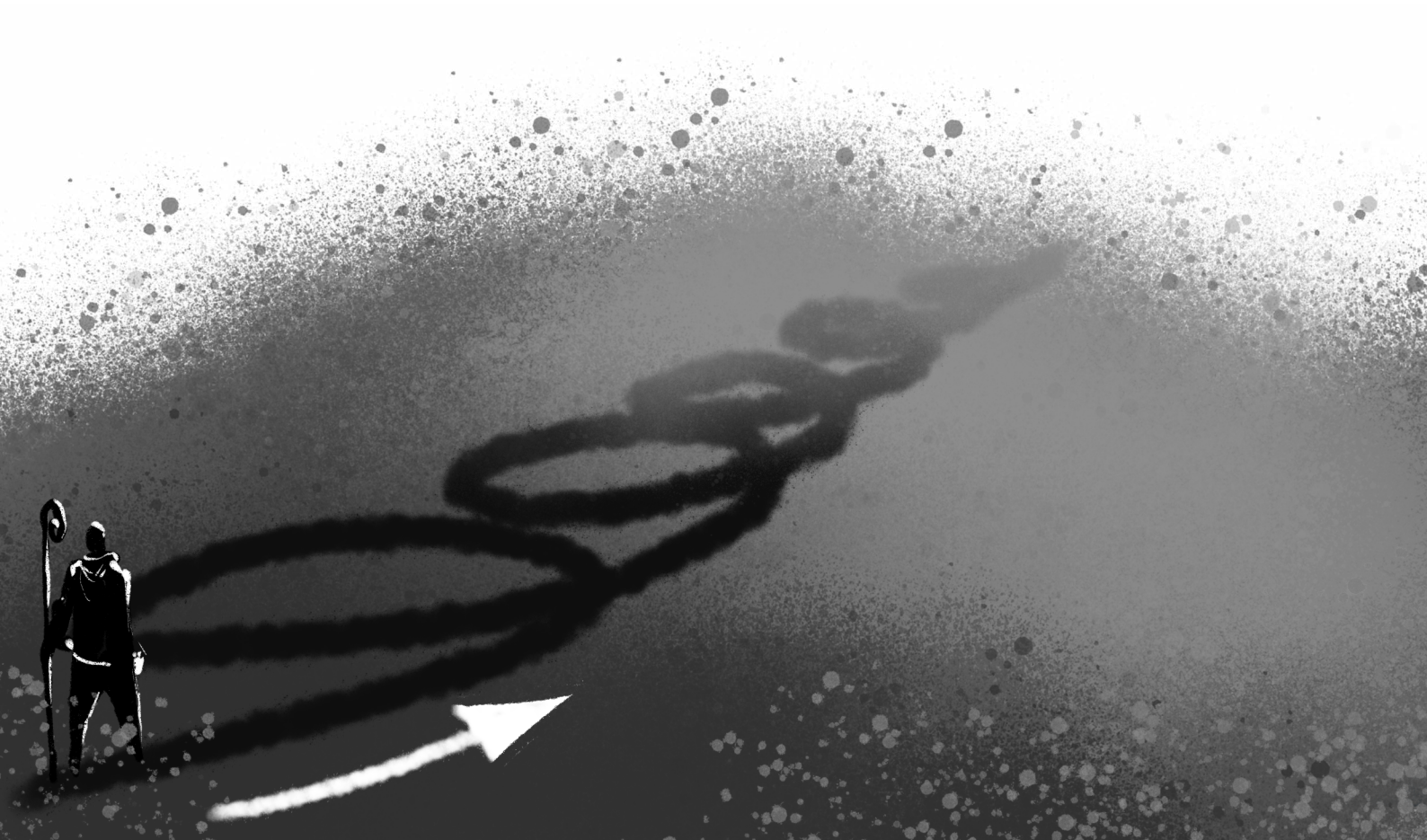
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