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Evolving Perspectives on the Cost of Living: From Historical Roots to Modern Realities

Dr. Adina Mihăilescu

ABSTRACT

Knowledge is an imperative of life that must prove its practical efficiency, overcoming the obstacles and disadvantages it encounters ideological “inclinations” or “preferences”. Human society moves, develops, progresses or regresses, depending on the contexts in which it manifests itself. It can be appreciated that each method is important from a scientific point of view, be it analytical or synthetic, and each, in turn, contributes to the analysis and deepening of knowledge of population consumption at a given moment or over a wider time horizon. The values of consumption determined by the descriptive method compared to the normed one, in the case of employees and farmer families are small. The real consumption of these families is lower than what would usually exist, unlike pensioner families who, in reality, consume more than is normal for this type of family. The importance of the minimum subsistence level is great by supporting the dimensioning of poverty in a country or in a certain time and the measures that can be taken to support the population in need.

Keywords: family budget, consumption model, minimum subsistence level, social categories.

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Keywords: family budget, consumption model, minimum subsistence level, social categories.

Author: Senior Researcher, Research Institute for Quality of Life.

I. INTRODUCTION

Achieving scientific objectivity involves the conscious effort of the thinker of the scientist, to diminish, as much as possible, the elements of subjectivity presented in the process of economic reflections and to render the objective truth through deepening and knowledge, knowing that no one can discover and instantly render the absolute truth. Knowledge is an imperative of life

that must prove its practical efficiency, overcoming the obstacles and disadvantages it encounters ideological “inclinations” or “preferences”.

Human society moves, develops, progresses and regresses, depending on the contexts in which it manifests itself. The development of society is closely linked to the changes that the economy of society experiences over time; the structures within which it operates - forms of property, classes and social groups, types of households or enterprises etc.; the production, transport and communication techniques it uses; the type of mechanism of operation of the economy - decentralized, centralized; the rules for the distribution and circulation of resources and the results of economic activity; the economic relations between people - individuals, classes, social strata; including the relations between different categories of economic agents and political power (state); as well as the economic relations between peoples and states; the relationship between people's economic activity and the natural environment in which this activity is carried out etc.

The cost of living is expressed by the monetary value of goods that are consumed during a given period of time, for an average family belonging to a given group of the population (1), (2), (3). If we consider the time dimension in estimating the cost of living, we obtain the variations in the monetary values of those purchased goods that, in reality, satisfy consumption requirements at the same level, at different dates, and in different places (4), (5). On the other hand, in normative approaches, the estimation of income, consumption and savings for different social groups are considered (6), (7).

In the practice of many countries, the calculation of the cost of living index is found either considering all social categories of the population (Great Britain), or calculating it on a typical household (Germany, France) (8).

In Eastern European countries, attempts are being made to calculate the consumer price index by socio-economic groups and family types of the population.

II. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COST OF LIVING

Starting from the fact that many people could not satisfy some basic needs, *Simonde de Sismondi* in 1819 (9) considered that economic science should deal with the problem of the well-being of the population and that the solution of this problem should not be left to chance, at the expenses of competition between producers and traders. Adam Smith's economic theory regarding the self-regulation of the market is no longer supported, the state being the one that should actively intervene in this process to remove or at least mitigate the significant discrepancies that exist between needs and supply, between needs and revenue, between the poor and the rich. The increase in revenue has over time determined profound changes in consumption structures.

2.1 Great Britain

The well-being of individuals has preoccupied scientists. Among the first initiators in developing a method for calculating the minimum subsistence level, we can mention the British *Seeborn Rowntree* (1901), who in a study entitled "Poverty; A study of Town Life" (10) presented two levels of the minimum subsistence level. The first took into account physical survival and focused on food consumption established by nutrition specialists and the second minimum included several chapters of consumption, having a broader budget of expenses. Later, in 1936, the British improved the concept of the existing minimum, including several groups of expenses, in addition to food products, namely: clothing, fuel and lighting, various household expenses, various personal expenses and housing expenses.

Having as scientific support the material published by Rowntree, another researcher *A.L. Bowley* developed the concept of a minimum living wage starting from estimating the revenue required for a particular family to achieve a minimum level of health and dignity. Thus, the concept is broadened by also discussing the health aspects of the person or family, the possibility of covering some costs related to the participation in society of the individual and his family. Bowley also considered a minimum of toiletries for personal and household maintenance, transportation expenses for employees to travel to work, rent and other housing expenses. We note that both Rowntree and Bowley emphasized only basic consumption and did not consider cultural, educational, and spiritual aspects, which in developed countries have become indispensable components of human existence.

2.2 United States of America

Later, based on data from a 1955 study in the U.S., researcher *M. Orshansky* promoted another method, the structural one, more operational and without requiring a significant amount of work, in which for the poor family in the U.S., one third of the average household income was spent on food.

The classic analysis of "primary goods", formulated by *John Rawls* (1971) and developed by *Ronald Inglehart* in the 1970s, stated that: "Western public values have shifted from a massive emphasis on material well-being and physical security to an increasingly sustained emphasis on the quality of life" (11).

2.3 European Space

Moreover, *K. Marx* in his work "Capital" (12) considered that "the natural needs themselves, food, clothing, heating, housing etc. differ depending on the natural particularities of one country or another. On the one hand, the volume of the so-called needs, as well as the way of satisfying them, are themselves a historical product and therefore depend to a large extent on the degree of civilization....".

The French economist *Bertrand De Jouvenel* (1983) (13) nuanced these aspects related to

human consumption, appreciating that the possibilities offered to the individual by society to carry out his existence in optimal conditions, to dispose of its products and to use its services in accordance with his own desires also depend on the concrete, socio-historical conditions of the respective society.

For the current European area, Eurostat adopted, through the European Council Decision of 19 December 1984, a definition of people who are unable to help themselves, which states: "The poor are individuals, families and groups of people whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited that they exclude them from a minimum acceptable standard of living in the countries in which they live" (14).

2.4 France

The increase in revenue has led to profound changes in consumption structures over time. There is no precise information about a long-term study, but, from the works of historians, we note that in 1770, bread consumption alone represented half of the expenses of a typical family budget for most of the population of Paris. The other food expenses were: vegetables, bacon and wine 16%, clothing 15%, housing 13%, heating and lighting 6%. By way of comparison, the consumption of all cereal-based products currently represents less than 3% of the expenses of families in France.

Table 1 shows the evolution of the structure of the French family budget. The evolution is continuous and highlights very important structural changes. In thirty years, the share allocated to food has gone from more than 40% of costs in 1950 to a little more than 20% in recent years (which does not mean that food costs have decreased, but only that they have increased much more slowly compared to those for other destinations and compared to the average resources of the population's household). On the other hand, expenses for hygiene and health have increased much faster than the average, going from 6.5% of total expenses in 1950 to 12.3% in 1981, and so on. This is not an average evolution that masks the disparities and inequalities that occur at the same time between families with different income levels.

These changes in household demand are not only related to the increase in real income, to the progressive satisfaction of needs. The emergence of new products changes the very structure of needs. It is true that supply creates demand, in the sense (but only in this sense) that it forms new needs and therefore determines the emergence of substitutions between the various destinations of consumer spending.

Here is how the structure of a family budget in France is presented in various years.

Table 1: The structure of a family budget in France between 1959-1986 (%)

Family budget (%)	1959	1970	1981	1986*
Food	36.0	27.1	21.2	20.5
Clothing	10.1	8.6	6.6	7.2
Housing	20.4	24.5	26.3	27.4
Hygiene and Health	6.6	9.8	12.3	9.0
Transportation and Communications	9.3	11.6	13.6	16.4
Culture and Leisure	5.4	6.2	6.5	7.2
Miscellaneous	12.2	12.2	13.0	12.3
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Report on national accounts, 1981, 1986

* The 1986 budget coefficients, established on the basis of 1980, are not directly comparable with the previous figures. The change in the basis of comparison largely explains the decrease in the figure under the heading “hygiene and health” and the increase in the figure under the heading “transport and telecommunications”.

The level and structure of consumption differ significantly from one socio-professional category to another. From the work of C. Baudelot, R. Estabiet and J. Toiser (15) and on the basis of official surveys on the living conditions of families, a certain amount of interesting information can be obtained.

Thus, in 1956, the level of total consumption varied in the proportion of 1 to 4.2 between agricultural employees and senior executives. However, they allocated 61% and, respectively, 22% of their budget to food, 5.5% and 15% to the interior design of their home, 1.8% and 7.2% to cultural costs and, finally, 0.4% and 4.8% to vacations. So that the difference between these two categories, which was 1 to 4.2 for total consumption, was only 1 to 1.5 for food, but 1 to 11.3 for costs devoted to the interior of the home and 1 to 54 for vacations.

In 1971, these differences were attenuated, but still remain large: 1 to 2.9 on average, but 1 to 1.4 for food, 1 to 3.6 for the interior of the home and 1 to 11.9 for vacations.

Comparing the budgets of the various categories, we find the major trends that characterized the temporal evolution of the budgetary quotas according to the overall income of the families. It is clear that other criteria also work: rural or urban life, manual or intellectual work, salaried or self-employed.

Thus, in 1971, small traders and craftsmen, on the one hand, and employees, on the other, had reached similar levels of consumption. The former, however, devoted significantly higher amounts to housing, while the latter preferred to spend on cultural purposes or holidays. The overall level of consumption of senior executives in 1951 was reached in 1956 by middle executives, in 1966 by skilled workers, and in 1971 by unskilled workers and farmers. The structures of these different budgets, however, show important differences. Not only because of the evolution of lifestyles over time, but also because of the specific needs of the various categories (table 2), (16).

Table 2: The budget of several social categories at an equivalent consumption level between 1951-1971

At 1971 prices	Senior management 1951	Middle management 1956	Skilled worker 1966	Unskilled worker 1971	Farmer 1971
Food	3,491	3,186	3,520	3,711	3,891
Housing	1,377	1,503	1,288	1,341	1,366
Interior	764	1,010	1,029	1,223	966
Clothing	1,526	1,456	1,100	1,374	1,067
Health	273	650	569	632	556
Transportation	629	842	974	1,103	1,069
Outings	1,852	1,208	582	664	272
Culture	686	452	230	230	182
Vacations	-	380	302	203	68
Miscellaneous	303	337	475	507	643
Total	10,901	11,024	10,069	10,987	10,081

Source: C. Baudelot, R. Estabiet, J. Toiser, op. I.N.S.E.E., *Crisis of the productive system*, December 1981, p.141 (16)

2.5 Romania

Almost 100 years ago, in Romania, the first "cost of living indices", as they were called, were calculated out of the need to know the trends of the increase in the cost of living after the First World War. Starting with 1910, in our country, statistics calculated the evolution of prices for "items commonly used in any household". The basis for determining the "cost of living index" was a family budget. This family was composed of a husband, wife and a child, also having a fixed monthly income - "the large class of civil servants and workers with monthly salaries was considered" (17).

The cost of living index was calculated for 40 cities, establishing for each one, both the cost of living and the amount that a family would have needed for its living each year compared to the year 1914, taken as a base.

Starting with 1927, the price index appeared under a new name: the cost of living index. It was calculated for 50 cities and for a middle-class family of 5 members. The list of representative goods consisted of 55 items.

In 1928, the number of cities was increased to 71 and partial indices were calculated for items classified for the first time in three groups: 1) animal foods; 2) plant foods; 3) clothing, footwear, lighting and heating.

In 1933, the method of collecting data from the field was also changed, this being carried out by direct observation, at retail stores, between the 10th and 20th of each month, recording the most frequent price. The basket of goods and services was enriched with up to 68 items: 27 plant-based foods; 20 animal-based foods; 12 clothing and footwear; fuel and lighting 30 items; miscellaneous 4 items. In addition to the price of the 68 items, prices were also collected for other products that were part of a family's consumption, such as: fruit, the making of a men's suit and a dress, public transportation, shows, a cubic meter of water, a kW of electricity, rent etc. However, in calculating the cost of living, at that time, the costs related to rail transport, taxes, school fees, books, medicines, tobacco were not considered.

Also, in 1933, a survey was started on the basis of which a budget for a family of 5 people with an average revenue was established, which was used to calculate the cost of living index for the following year, expanding the basket to 73 items. The indices were calculated by historical provinces and cities of these provinces.

Starting with 1939, official statistics published two indices in parallel: that of retail prices and that of the cost of living. The first was calculated considering only 33 items, and the second 81 products and services.

Later, N. Georgescu-Roegen (1943) (18) calculated the cost of living index for 5 regions of the country: Vechiul Regat, Transilvania, Moldova, Basarabia and Bucovina, highlighting the causes of the differences between these regions and within them in urban/rural environments. The author explains the differences in the cost of living by the different degree of urbanism, regional characteristics, the grouping of costs and the evolution of the cost of living over time. The alternation of these various factors led the author to conclude that, at that time, rent, "rent" as the author calls it, was the most elastic component of the cost of living. Food was the least burdensome cost of living for Romanian families, creating the "illusion" of cheapness of life in Romanian cities, an illusion shattered by the special weight of other expenses of a more rigid and burdensome nature: rent, electricity and fuel.

During World War II, the indices were calculated only for Bucharest. The last cost of living indices were published in 1948, their series referring by year to the period 1937-1945, for 1946 and until July 1947, monthly indices were presented.

III. THE MINIMUM DECENT LIVING AND SUBSISTENCE LEVEL CALCULATED BY THE NORMATIVE METHOD IN THE RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR QUALITY OF LIFE (RIQL)

The normative method establishes amounts that do not depend on the consumption levels recorded at a given time, but are based on systematic, rigorous norms appreciated in

specialist studies (19), (20), that concern the development and manifestation of the individual in everyday life, in the family space, as well as outside it in society. Subsequently, the consumption basket (21) of the population was reassessed for the decent standard of living and the subsistence level. The minimum corresponding to a decent standard of living can be defined, in the case of a family, as the necessary resources for current consumption (food, clothing, footwear, housing, services), to which is added the education and professional training that favours the affirmation of the person and the social status that allows the development and participation of the individual and his family in society. The subsistence minimum has in mind aspects related to the survival of a person.

The typologies followed in the consumption research in 2001 included from the urban environment (22): a couple of employees with two dependent children and a couple of pensioners. From the rural environment (23): a family of two farmers active with two dependent children, as well as a family of two elderly inactive people possibly former farmers, self-employed workers of the land or former employees in state structures, an option that was considered to be interesting and justified in the analysis of the typologies in our country, considering the large number of older people who populate Romanian villages.

Food consumption is based on the consumption norms established by the nutritionists at the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health in Bucharest (24), (25). These consumption norms for an adult and professionally active person, who works in average conditions of physical and intellectual effort fall between 2,700 and 3,200 calories per day. In our work, we opted to define the subsistence minimum, with a necessary food consumption of 2,700 calories per day the minimum established by nutritionists.

The amounts of consumption start from the active adult. To establish the monthly consumption for an adult family with children we consider the preferred food items, but also recommended by specialists, for the man, the woman and the child(ren). Using the equivalence scale for

consumption is granted the value 1 for the head of household, male, employee, 0.9 for the female, employee, 0.7 for the first child in the household and 0.5 for the second child in the household, leading us to a total value of 3.1.

In the case of the pensioner family the consumption of the first pensioner, male, head of household was estimated to be 1, (equivalent to 0.8 of the consumption of the adult, male, active) and for the second elderly person, pensioner female 0.9 of the consumption of the adult pensioner was taken into account. The total value for the pensioner family is 1.9.

As necessary products are meat and meat derivatives. Milk and milk derivatives were established to preferences. Were added the oil necessary for food preparation and vegetables that come to complete the necessary nutritional components for the optimal functioning of the human body.

Next option in the food needs of families is the potato consumed in large quantities in our country. Also, beans, a vegetable often found in our country and in winter and summer, dry or green, depending on the season; apples from the fruit category which also have the widest distribution area in the country and which are found in all seasons. Sugar and sweets and coffee were added but in small quantities.

A separate analysis is the evaluation of self-consumption in rural areas. Income from self-consumption represented 16% of the total household income. From the calculation of the decent living minimum, by the normative method, in rural areas, self-consumption has a value of 38.6%.

Among the products that in rural areas are consumed within the household mention: cow's milk, sheep's and cow's cheese, yogurt, butter, in terms of dairy products, as well as other products prepared from milk; pork, beef and chicken, lard and eggs that come from animals and birds raised in their own households. Carrots, onions, garlic, greens, potatoes, green and dried beans are obtained and consumed throughout the year by the peasant families.

- The cost of clothes and footwear was made based on the gender of the person and the season.
- The dwelling consists of 3 rooms for employees and farmers with children and 1 room (studio) for older families from urban and rural areas. Other expenses related to housing, electrical and household items, sanitary and hygiene items, household textiles, crockery, cutlery, household items, and other household products were established accordingly for four people from urban and rural areas.
- Transportation includes only two monthly passes, on a means of public transportation, in the case of employees in urban areas, who travel daily to work. For children is not needed, considering that they go to schools near home; four journeys by train, for the family of employees with children, once a year, when travelling on vacation; two discounted journey, by train for older family from urban and rural areas, when traveling, once a year, on vacation or treatment leave.
- School supplies and other stationery items concern, in particular, the school requirements of children, but also a minimum necessary for adults.
- Medicines retain only those strictly necessary for the first aid kit and not a long-term treatment, starting from the premise of healthy aging.
- A quantum of 10% of the final calculation of the decent consumer basket was provided for economies and to cover unexpected costs.

The advantages offered by the normative method over other scientific calculation methods are the following:

- It offers objectivity in the calculation because food consumption is based on norms calculated by researchers of the Institute of Hygiene and Public Health. This eliminates the subjective assessments of the population regarding the food requirement at a given time.
- To establishing the clothing/footwear products for the adult man/woman and the

child boy/girl, opinions and points of view were resulting from:

- Discussions held on the basis of a questionnaire with the families investigated in 1990-2010, during the field research within the "Diagnosis of the Quality of Life" program (26), on nationally representative samples;
- Data provided through publications by the National Institute of Statistics;
- Consultation of specialists who had earlier concerns regarding the population's consumption of goods and services;
- Services must cover everything related to the interior and exterior of the home, public transport, health, train trips that take place at least once a year, school supplies absolutely necessary for children, etc. being calculated at the level of decency, but within the limit of the minimum consumption.
- The method offers more transparency in knowing the elements of a material, cultural and health which are intended for a decent living and subsistence minimum.
- The normative method is more realistic compared to the relative method which consists of establishing the poverty threshold as a proportion 40-60% of the average or median income of households, in which case there is an underestimation of the need in poorer countries (the percentage is calculated at a low average or median of incomes).

IV. CURRENT COST OF LIVING CALCULATION MODEL IN THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STATISTICS

In the following, we will present a model for calculating the cost of living from an objective perspective and its methodology is based on the Family Budget Survey (FBS) carried out by the official statistics agency, the National Institute of Statistics (NIS). These surveys assess the expenditures made by the population to purchase food, non-food products and services on the market (including self-consumption, goods and services produced in households). The values are detailed by total households and by households of employees, farmers and pensioners (table 3).

Total consumption expenditures or the cost of living, in the fourth quarter of 2024 (28), by total households was 2908.2 lei, of which by households:

- By employees 3,725.1 lei;
- By farmers 1,649.8 lei and
- By pensioners 2,326.3 lei
- By unemployed 1,174.8 lei

Table 3: Level of total consumption expenditures, by household categories, in urban and rural areas, in Q3 and Q4 2024, by the NIS method -%-

Household categories	NIS				
Average monthly household expenses (lei)	Total households	Employees	Farmers	Retirees	Unemployed
Q3	2,802.51	3,590.10	1,348.29	2,199.26	1,129.46
Q4	2,908.19	3,725.10	1,649.83	2,326.34	1,174.77

Source: Press release no. 83/April 7, 2025, NIS, Bucharest, Domain: Income and living conditions, p.5 (28)

At the end of 2024, a household spent in real terms on food and non-alcoholic drinks 33.0% from budget. In terms of clothing the values are quite close for all types of households and in both environments. The urban population and

especially employees stand out for a higher value of consumption of hotel services, cafes, restaurants, compared to farmers or pensioners (table 4).

Table 4: Total consumption expenditures by destination, for a household, in Q4 2024, by the NIS method

Consumer spending by destination	Q4, 2024	
	- lei per household-	%
Agri-food products and non-alcoholic drinks	1,474.37	33.0
Alcoholic drinks, tobacco	322.23	7.2
Clothing and footwear	398.67	8.9
Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels	689.99	15.5
Furniture, home furnishings and maintenance	302.33	6.8
Health	268.30	6.0
Transport	293.30	6.6
Information and communication	186.33	4.2
Recreation, sports and culture	114.51	2.6
Education	25.31	0.6
Hotels, cafes and restaurants	90.70	2.0
Insurance and financial services	31.40	0.7
Personal care, social protection and various goods and services	264.77	5.9
Total consumption expenditure	4,462.21	100.0

Source: Press release no. 83/April 7, 2025, NIS, Bucharest, Domain: Income and living conditions, p.5 (28)

4.1 Food component

One of the basic product foods of Romanians continues to be bread and similar products. In 2021, the average monthly consumption was 7.38 kg/person (29). The average monthly consumption of fresh meat per person was 3.88 kg/person in 2021. Together with meat preparations, this amounts to 5.37 kg/person per month.

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), there are significant differences between meat consumption in households, depending on the number of people. Thus, households consisting of a single person have the richest meat consumption 7.69 kg/person per month of fresh meat and meat preparations. Compared to developed countries, the consumption of meat and meat preparations was relatively low in Romania.

In 2021, monthly milk consumption was 5.45 liters/person. The most milk was consumed in households of retirees (5.95 litres/person) and the least in those of the unemployed (4.03 litres/person). There is a slight gap in milk consumption depending on the area of residence: 5.445 liters/person in households in villages and 5.448 liters/person in those in cities. The highest milk consumption (7.50 litres/person) was recorded in families composed of one person predominantly made up of older people.

Across households, the average monthly *potato* consumption per person was 3.02 kg. Retirees consumed the most potatoes (3.26 kg/person), and employees the lowest consumption of this food (under 3 kg/person).

The average monthly consumption of vegetables and canned vegetables was 8.46/person in 2021. The highest consumption was recorded in families composed of one person (12.89 kg/person) and in households without children (9.97 kg/person), and the lowest in households with four or more children (5.66 kg/person).

Considerable differences in fruit consumption exist between households consisting of one person, with a monthly consumption of 6.40 kg of

fruit/person and those consisting of six people (2.84 kg of fruit/person).

4.2 International comparisons in Romanian and European households

33% of EU citizens reported in 2019, that they did not consume fruit and vegetables daily. Only 12% of the EU population consumed the recommended five or more portions per day. Romanian people have consumed the least fruit and vegetable, according to data published by the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) (30). On average, over half of the EU population (55%) reported that in 2019, they consumed between one and four portions of fruit and vegetables per day. Among EU Member States, the highest consumption of five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day was reported in Ireland (33% of the population), the Netherlands (30%), Denmark (23%) and France (20%). On the other side, in Romania only 2% of the population eats at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily, followed by Bulgaria and Slovenia (both with 5%) and Austria (6%).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Each scientific method is important because it contributes to the analysis and deepening of knowledge at a given moment or over a wider time horizon.

The normative method used to calculate the minimum threshold for decent and subsistence living shows us that in food consumption, the products necessary for existence are chosen and calculated by nutrition experts so that individuals and their families consume what is healthy, while the average monthly consumption calculated by the NIS reflects what people spend, sometimes without respecting the necessary nutrition and hygiene standards.

During the period 1989-2024, the incomes of various families with children could not keep up with the price increases for products and services on the market. The incomes or expenditures of the population provide that clear and concrete situation on the quality of life of the population and thus help to take measures, through

socio-economic policies oriented towards the benefit of the members of the respective societies. Household incomes and expenditures are extremely sensitive to unfavorable developments in the economy, as well as to the malfunctioning of the national and global market.

The importance of the minimum concept is significant by dimensioning poverty in time and politics that reduce the fall into poverty and support the population in need.

Through the normative method it was desired to know transparently all the products that enter the current consumption and preferences of the population, as well as to respect scientific rigour in order to take into account a healthy, complete, balanced consumption that every person should have: adult or child, employee or pensioner, city dweller or farmer in our country.

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C.J. (Kees) Matthijssen MSS

INTRODUCTION

The Sahel-region is facing a major crisis that we hardly seem to notice, because the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are drawing much more of our attention. It is not only a pity, but also could turn out to be a strategic mistake. The stability in the region is strongly affected by jihadist motivated movements, such as Islamic State (IS). In addition, there are geopolitical influences in the region, such as Russian involvement e.g., that are not necessarily adding to better stability. In the period 2022-2023 I was the Force Commander in the *Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA)*. Although the mission was mandated for Mali, the situation in Mali cannot be seen separate from the increasing problems in the entire Sahel-region.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Sahel-region is facing a major crisis that we hardly seem to notice, because the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza are drawing much more of our attention. It is not only a pity, but also could turn out to be a strategic mistake. The stability in the region is strongly affected by jihadist motivated movements, such as Islamic State (IS). In addition, there are geopolitical influences in the region, such as Russian involvement e.g., that are not necessarily adding to better stability. In the period 2022-2023 I was the Force Commander in the *Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation au Mali (MINUSMA)*. Although the mission was mandated for Mali, the situation in Mali cannot be seen separate from the increasing problems in the entire Sahel-region.

In this article I will share my views on lessons we can draw from MINUSMA especially in the context of the UN's work on the future of peacekeeping. I sincerely recognize the fact that I cannot be extensive and I also strongly voice upfront that we should do thorough in-depth analysis on all the lessons coming from MINUSMA before drawing conclusions. The UN has taken care of the latter with an independent study 'The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities'¹ published in November 2024. This study was a starting point for a trajectory leading up to a ministerial conference 13-14 May this year on the Future of UN Peacekeeping. MINUSMA unfortunately has

ended in December 2023 because the Malian government has asked the UN to end the mission.

I will first say a few words about the complexity of the situation in Mali, followed by the background of the UN mission MINUSMA and its mandate. After that I will discuss some relevant lessons emerging from my experience as Force Commander, before giving my thoughts on the future of peacekeeping.

II. THE COMPLEXITY IN MALI

The origin of MINUSMA's presence in Mali goes back to the violent uprising in 2012 in the north of the country by a variety of groups, mainly Tuaregs, aiming for independence. They felt marginalized by the Malian government, understandable since the Tuaregs were hardly represented in the government and government institutions. This lack of inclusion is one of the more fundamental problems in Mali. This uprising by the way, was already the fourth since Mali became independent in 1960. This uprising was dealt with by the Malian government with help from France and the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-organized military mission sent to support the government of ECOWAS member nation Mali against the rebels in the North. A little later, in early 2013, the Malian government formally asked for UN assistance to restore stability in the country.

The context and circumstances in which MINUSMA has operated were extremely complex, caused to a significant degree by the numerous actors and various layers of conflict in Mali. During my tenure as Force Commander, I have identified four layers of conflict. The first one, basically the origin of MINUSMA's presence, had to do with the three entities that have signed the

¹ United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/study-on-future-of-peacekeeping-new-models-and-related-capabilities>.

Algiers Peace Agreement (APR) in 2015, the *Signatory Armed Groups (SAGs)*: the Malian government, *La Coördination des Mouvements de Azawad (CMA)*, being the movement that sought independence for the North, and *Plateforme*, the movement that favors Malian unity, but does want the government to better take care of the North. The relationships were difficult mainly because trust was lacking, with the consequences of friction and a lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement.

A second layer concerned the terrorist and/or jihadist motivated groups that tried to expand control over huge areas in Mali, with two main movements playing an important role. The first is *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)* – which consists of various decentralized operating groups affiliated to Al Qaeda, who seek to build a Sharia-based state and to expel Western influences. The second movement is *Islamic State in the Sahel Province (ISSP)* – which operates in the eastern part of Mali, but also in the northern part of Burkina Faso and the western part of Niger, the so-called Liptako-Gourma region. ISSP has an affiliation with IS ideology in the Middle East. It uses brutal and excessive violence, including killing innocent civilians in villages, to control large areas in the Sahel. Both movements have expanded their influence significantly in the past years causing the deterioration of the security situation. They both, each in their own way, exploited a lack of economic opportunities as well as ethnic and social divisions among the population. Furthermore, both movements clash with one another regularly. For various reasons, these movements have never been part of the peace process.

The third layer is the intercommunity violence. The Malian population consists of various ethnic groups. Some of them are having conflicts, such as the Fulani and the Dogon, that every now and then lead to armed clashes. The intercommunity tensions run across all other layers. The Malian government unfortunately focused too much on fighting terrorism without paying sufficient attention to communal reconciliation or the state's other vital functions. The final layer of complexity is everything related to illegal

trafficking or what I call the black economy. Especially drugs trafficking has increased through the years of instability. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated in last year's report *Drug trafficking in the Sahel* that '...trafficking is well implanted in the Sahel countries and continues to undermine peace, stability and development in the region, not least because it benefits armed groups, fuels competition between them and undermines the legitimacy of state institutions through corruption.'²

An important actor that did not always make things easier is the Malian government. Since the coup in May 2021 president Assimi Goita has been leading the transitional government. The beginning of 2022 marked an important change in its attitude in international cooperation, not only towards the UN but also to ECOWAS, neighboring countries and other nations. It has become more strict and more demanding in wanting to be respected for their sovereignty, the choices that they make and the vital interests of Mali. This in itself is not unique since any government would want the same. But that is why it is very important to try to understand why the Malians act as they do. Underneath is a strong desire to leave the colonial past behind and anything that is perceived like it. Anything that even looks like colonial behavior is reacted upon. The Malian government does not want to be told what to do and what not to do. It wants to be treated respectfully and on a basis of equality. With this in mind, I do note that there is still a willingness to cooperate if indeed the above is taken care of.

In addition to all of this there are three more fundamental factors causing major challenges. The first is poor governance at all levels and the lack of inclusivity in it. A second one is climate change and the third is the growth of the population. Like many African nations, Mali has a relatively young population due to the fast growth of that population. Mali's GDP growth per capita has been relatively weak over the past years, with a short, but significant negative dip to -8.7% during Covid-19. In 2022 there was a positive

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *Drug Trafficking in the Sahel*.

growth again, but still no more than 0,3%³. The lack of economic perspective brings additional challenges for a huge young generation, also making them vulnerable for jihadist ideology.

2.1 The Mandate

In 2013 the UN Security Council decided to mandate MINUSMA based on a request from the Malian government for support to restore stability. The first mandate, under Chapter VII of the Charter of the UN, had no less than about 35 tasks. The main focus was on restoration of State authority, facilitating the peace process, supporting the transition towards transparent and inclusive elections and demanding the rebel armed groups to put aside their arms and cease hostilities, including to engage in an inclusive negotiation process under the condition that they cut off all ties with terrorist organizations.

The implementation of the peace agreement, once it was signed, was the priority in MINUSMA's mandate. The agreement included arrangements on disarmament of former combatants and integration in the formal Malian security institutions. The mandate further included Protection of Civilians, authorizing, if needed, the use of all necessary means to protect civilians. I have assessed the mandate as a robust mandate, providing enough room for us as a mission to do our work.

Since 2013 the mandate has been evaluated and extended annually in June. In addition to the priority in the mandate, mentioned above, a second priority was added in 2019. This was the support to restoring State authority in Central Mali. The main reasons behind this decision were the deterioration of the security situation in the central part of Mali due to increased control of terrorist/jihadist armed groups mainly affiliated with JNIM. Despite the importance of this task, the Council failed to add additional means to the mission. The mission was asked to readjust its posture within own means. The Force had to develop a Force Adaptation Plan in which means for Central Mali were generated within the troop

ceiling by reducing numbers elsewhere. One of the main implications was that the other sectors, North, West and East, had less troops available to maintain presence in their regions, stretching battalions even more to their limits.

In addition, those reductions were implemented quite fast, but unfortunately it took much more time before the new troops for the newly created Sector Centre were generated and/or could be accommodated. The consequence was that the Force has operated for more than three years after the Council's decision, with about a thousand troops under its authorized troop ceiling of roughly 13.500 soldiers. Even when I started my tour in January 2022, I found out that the Force Adaptation plan was not completed yet. A specific example, amongst others, is the Quick Reaction Force for Sector Centre which arrived from Bangladesh after summer in 2022, more than three years after the Force Adaptation Plan was developed. This unit's deployment was delayed several times due to delays mainly in construction of the required infrastructure for the unit.

With a changing attitude of the Malian government and the Wagner Group entering the theatre, mandate discussions brought more political emphasis on human rights, freedom of movement for the mission and the presence of Wagner in itself. This increased political pressure did not make it easier for the mission to maintain a workable relationship with the Malian authorities, which was crucial for the mission to be able to execute its tasks and to be effective. We needed to find a proper balance between the political reality and the reality on the ground.

III. LESSONS FROM MINUSMA

MINUSMA may well be the most complex mission the UN has ever done. The mission is far from the more classic UN peacekeeping missions: the complexity of the environment, multiple actors including hostile and extremist actors using asymmetric tactics, a 360-degree threat to the peacekeepers, the assertiveness of the host nation authorities and influential geopolitical actors. I called it 'another way of peacekeeping'. For these reasons, there is a lot to learn from MINUSMA's

³ World Bank Group, "GDP per capita growth (annual %) – Mali."

experiences, especially to determine the future of peacekeeping. In this section, I will describe a few lessons that, in my view, need to be looked at more in-depth because of their relevance for the future of peacekeeping.

3.1 Mandate

The good thing about a UN mandate is its comprehensiveness and the fact that it is discussed and renewed annually in the UN Security Council (UNSC). This provides the opportunity to look at the progress periodically. Nevertheless, there are three aspects that deserve improvement.

The first is the mandate's clarity. A UN mandate is always a political compromise in the UNSC, which explains that often some of the tasks tend to be unclear, being subject to multiple interpretations. Because of its origin in a political environment, I recognize the fact that mandates may not always provide the clarity that is needed on the ground. Still, the better the clarity the more effective the mission can fulfil its tasks while enhancing unity of effort with other actors. In the end, it is up to the mission to translate the mandate into executable tasks for mission components. For those reasons it may be useful to consider to include a consultation with the mission leadership in the process of mandate's decision-making. This is a way in which the mission leadership could provide their interpretation of the mandate and check with the council's intentions. This could help to optimize clarity.

Secondly, the mandate contained an extensive list of tasks for the mission. On the one hand that makes it very comprehensive, on the other hand, the question is whether it is not too much for a mission to handle. More focus, based on realistic objectives could help in terms of feasibility and credibility. A dialogue with the host nation, prior to final decision-making in the UN Security Council, could add to that and even more it also could lead to a more context specific approach. In that way a mandate could be more tailored to the needs in the conflict affected state. This may also help to set more realistic objectives, to better

manage expectations and it will benefit the relationship with the host nation from the start.

The third aspect has to do with the lack of any future perspective on the horizon of the mission. Mandates hardly refer to a (potential) end state. Defining an end state including related conditions under which a mission will be terminated will help to bring more focus for mission execution. In addition, it would help in the annual discussion in the Council to put the mission's progress in the perspective of the conditions for termination in the future.

3.2 Mindset

The UN collectively has an impressive experience with peacekeeping missions. This experience brings a collective mindset about peacekeeping. In a rapidly changing world bringing significant challenges and changes in the peacekeeping environment as well, adapting to this new reality is essential. As stated before, MINUSMA was far from the more classic peacekeeping. That is why there is a need to adjust the peacekeeping mindset.

The core principle of impartiality is absolutely still valid, but it needs to be seen in the context of the mission to adapt to the right application of the principle. In the Malian context remaining impartial has been more difficult than ever. The mission was by many perceived to be leaning too much to the signatory armed groups (CMA and Plateforme). In the eyes of the latter the mission was perceived to be too supportive to the Malian government.

This leads to the question whether MINUSMA was always able to be impartial, or whether MINUSMA could be perceived as impartial in supporting the Malian authorities. From my own relationships with the other entities in the peace agreement I have learned that they often did not see the right balance in MINUSMA's approach, while they do expect this balanced approach. I always preferred to talk about a balance in our approach instead of voicing impartiality. A balance in which the mission was perceived to safeguard attention for all three entities equally in the peace agreement.

Another example is the support to the Malian Defense and Security Forces. This support could vary from providing fuel for aircraft or helicopters, to transport, to training or operational support to operations. As Force Commander I always saw the relationship with the Malian Armed Forces as a partnering relationship. Although the mandate explicitly authorized supporting the host nation security forces, the reality was that I sometimes sensed reluctance and differences in mindset in some parts of the mission with regard to impartiality and/or interpretation of the mandate on this point.

The reluctance further increased when the Malian authorities started their cooperation with the Wagner Group⁴, the private military company strongly affiliated with Russia. My intent has always been to continue close cooperation with the Malian armed forces including the support as mentioned above, as long as the Malian armed forces kept Wagner out of the cooperation with us. That, by the way, has always been the case. My thoughts behind my intent were that supporting and assisting the host nation security institutions should be a key element in the approach in order to maintain credibility and to show our added value in helping the nation's institutions to fulfill their responsibilities. A mission is there to make itself obsolete in the future, at the moment a host nation can stand on its own feet. Whatever we can do to help them to get there, should be done.

The process of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) unfortunately was not always helpful. Although the majority of the Malian requests were granted after the HRDDP check, the conditions that were associated with it were not always realistic or not even appropriate sometimes giving the impression of lack of trust. Those conditions sometimes asked for detailed information to be provided by the Malians. In addition, the process often took too long sometimes caused by the level of detail that was asked for which took time to get the required information on the table. Both aspects

contributed to the loss of credibility for the mission in the eyes of the Malian authorities. For those reasons more flexibility and risk appetite on the UN and mission side could help in applying HRDDP as a useful tool enhancing the credibility of the mission. In my view we should refrain from asking too detailed information since that is not always realistic and not always necessary. I do not argue the HRDDP as such, but a more pragmatic approach based on the most essential information and, above all, trust would prevent harming the mission's credibility. Part of that is the accountability of the host nation armed forces. This is especially the case when the host state's armed forces are facing such a challenging security environment like we have seen in Mali e.g. with the uprising of the jihadist motivated armed groups.

In the process of adapting the mindset to another reality of peacekeeping, I often called our mission in Mali 'learning by doing'. MINUSMA sincerely was another way of peacekeeping that the UN has not experienced before. Flexibility of mind is essential to adapt the collective mindset to be able to collectively apply an adequate and effective approach in the mission that continuously enhances its credibility.

3.3 Situational Understanding

In every conflict situational awareness and situational understanding are crucial. Awareness is about knowing what is happening, but understanding is about realizing why things are happening that way. It is more about grasping various actors' intentions and the dynamics in a country. Understanding is even more important than awareness and becomes even more essential when host nations become more assertive (as we saw in Mali). Understanding why they act as they do is crucial. I am not sure whether MINUSMA collectively always understood the Malian authorities well enough. I would not be surprised if this was a factor that influenced the relationship and caused both growing apart a bit.

Especially the strong change in the Malian attitude that started early 2022 may have been something that was underestimated. In addition,

⁴ Later in 2023, the Wagner Group in Africa was referred to as the Africa Corps.

the UN historically may have been used to have some form of authority that others should adhere too. That did no longer work in Mali. I always said that we should see the Malian authorities in the driver's seat and ourselves in the co-driver's seat. In that seat we should not tell them how to get from A to B, but we should have a good conversation in which we raise arguments that cause them to consider how to get from A to B. The better we understand that simple comparison and the better we act accordingly, the better we can collectively optimize our understanding and apply a consistent approach benefitting the relationship.

3.4 Human Rights

The Malian government felt that the discussions on human rights were strongly politicized. To a certain extent I could understand why they perceived it that way. Too often alleged human rights violations of Malian security actors caused other, mainly western, states to place political blame on the Malian authorities in public, sometimes even before the facts were on the table. In addition, the Malians felt that the ones that raised their voice did not have an eye for the difficult fight of the Malian armed forces against terrorism and jihadism in their country. In the context of the point that I made earlier about the Malian government not wanting to be told what to do or what not to do, it is important to understand that political opinions expressed from a distance and often through the media, only caused more frustration and thus feeding the anti-western sentiments.

Although the Malian government may not have had the credibility on their side because they did not always grant MINUSMA access to investigate alleged human rights violations, I think we still need to keep an eye on the nuances and the facts. It does not help us to be too principled in the discussion especially in the context of a changing world. In that changing world, states and also host states of UN peacekeeping operations demand more recognition of their sovereignty and on the other hand perpetrators of human rights violations become more assertive especially non-state actors. All of this results in the gradual

but steady worldwide erosion of the application of human rights standards. This influences the debates about UN peacekeeping and human rights significantly as well. Because of this development we need to find more pragmatic ways to keep human rights on the agenda with a willingness to compromise if needed in specific cases or circumstances for the sake of the longer-term objectives.

3.5 Logistical Fragility

Mali is a huge country and the area in which MINUSMA operated, the northern and central part of Mali, was at least the size of France. This brought enormous distances to cover in the logistical sustainment of the mission. In addition, large parts of Northern Mali hardly have any infrastructure, not only causing mobility challenges for the local population, but also for the mission. With limited availability of air transport means, most of the logistics (fuel, spare parts, infrastructural materials, food) needed to be transported by convoys that needed to cover distances up to 700 kilometers. The fragile logistical system in the mission was its Achilles heel in a very threatening environment.

UN peacekeepers were a target for hostile actors in Mali. Convoy operations were always a relatively easy target because of the size of the convoys, the unpredictability of their movements and the limitations of the terrain. The use of improvised explosive devices was the main way of operating in recent years by hostile actors. For these reasons convoy operations were also the most vulnerable operations in which MINUSMA took the most of its casualties. This significantly added to MINUSMA being the deadliest UN mission in recent history.

These convoy operations required a lot of effort mainly due to the vulnerability of the logistical system in that threatful environment. That type of environment requires a robust logistical system in which more air transport is available for logistic purposes. Lives could have been saved if more logistics would have been done by air. I recognize that it may not be possible to do everything by air, especially for the enormous amounts of fuel for

example, but the fact is that more could have been done.

That also brings me to another point that is strongly nested in the UN. For budgetary reasons a lot is driven by and dealt with based on efficiency reasons. The same applies for the logistical system causing limiting the use of air assets for logistics. I am not sure whether the costs of this are really that much higher. Ground convoys imply a lot of sunk costs, such as the units that protect the convoys and the assets that support the convoy operations, because those costs are not counted separately. Fuel for air assets is more obvious, easy to count and not seen as sunk costs.

We should not underestimate the side effects of it as well. Having the perception of the deadliest mission is not something that enhances the credibility of the mission. Furthermore, it does not make the mission attractive for member states to contribute to it. Therefore, a less vulnerable logistical system does not only pay off in saving lives and having more logistical reliability, it also contributes to a better image of the mission.

IV. THE LACK OF SUFFICIENT MILITARY MEANS

In a deteriorating security environment, it was more than essential that the military actors in Mali coordinated their efforts. This was done through the *L'Instance de coordination militaire du Mali* (ICMM). In this coordinating body, chaired by the MINUSMA Force Commander, the commanders of the military actors in Mali, being the Malian Chief of Defense, commander Barkhane, commander G5-Sahel Force, commander European Union Training Mission (EUTM) and Force Commander MINUSMA met periodically. This cooperation was essential to ensure that these actors complemented each other's efforts in the threatful environment in Mali.

Two developments impacted the presence of troops in Mali significantly during my tenure as Force Commander. Firstly, the withdrawal of the French operation Barkhane in august 2022 left a

void in its areas of operations. Nor the Malian armed forces, nor the MINUSMA Force were able to fill that void. As a consequence, Islamic State had more room to maneuver in the eastern part of Mali. Secondly, Mali withdrew itself from the G5-Sahel in May 2022. Although the G5-Sahel Force was not the most important military actor in Mali, it did bring another loss of military capabilities.

Although the MINUSMA Force of more than thirteen thousand soldiers looked like a big force, in a huge country like Mali, this number is relatively small, especially if one realizes the threatful environment in many areas, the Protection of Civilians mandate and the fact that the Malian armed forces are relatively small for the size of the country. In addition, at the time of decision-making in the Council (2013) the presence of the French operation Barkhane was taken into account. They could conduct counter-terrorism operations in the northern part of Mali that also brought a deterring effect on terrorist and jihadist groups. Furthermore, in the course of a deteriorating security situation no means have been added to the MINUSMA Force, not even in 2019 with the addition of the previously mentioned second priority.

This context is relevant for discussing MINUSMA's effectiveness. I want to emphasize that the military actors are not there to fight for a military solution. But they are crucial to facilitate the integrated approach. Protection of civilians and a basic level of security are important prerequisites to create or enhance stability and allow civilian efforts to restore proper governance, basic services and security.

Often it is voiced that MINUSMA was not able to prevent the deterioration of the security situation. This has nothing to do with not having a counter terrorism mandate, as the Malians have often asked for. As I mentioned before, the mandate was robust and the Force was able to deter hostile terrorist and jihadist actors by its presence. I would say that collectively, the international community with all its actors and the Malian institutions were not able to prevent this

deterioration. One needs to take the above into account before drawing conclusions.

4.1 International Dynamics

Beginning in early 2022 we have seen a more intense cooperation between Mali and Russia and, even more, we have seen the cooperation with private military company Wagner materializing. Russia's increased interest in Africa cannot be seen apart from the war in Ukraine. Political support, financial and economic gains and geopolitical powerplay are likely driving factors behind it. In addition, compared to cooperating with western nations it is easier for African nations to do business with Russia, since Russia does not impose conditionalities on cooperation, like law and order, human rights, democratic values etcetera.

The crumbling of those values in Mali caused a loss of commitment for MINUSMA in many European nations. The fact that Mali was ruled by a military junta and that the same junta started cooperation with Wagner, together with the human rights situation, caused more political concerns in many European capitals. In the course of 2022, the three remaining European countries that still contributed to MINUSMA with units, Sweden, Great-Britain and Germany, decided to end their contribution. Apart from those, there were still some other European countries in the mission, but their contribution was limited to small numbers of staff officers. The announcement from the three countries was painful because with their withdrawal the visible contribution from Europe would come to an end. MINUSMA had 60 nations from all over the world and all continents contributed to the efforts in Mali, but the continent that was the closest withdrew.

Despite the loss of interest because of the reasons mentioned, Europe's withdrawal is somewhat remarkable as well since Europe has a strong interest in the Sahel-region. Its instability affects Europe and may affect Europe even more in the future. Apart from the political considerations, European nations brought valuable capabilities and experience that contributed significantly to

MINUSMA's military force. As a Force Commander, I saw the value of those nations that strongly complemented the capabilities in the MINUSMA Force and with that contributed to the effectiveness of the military instrument within the UN multidimensional approach.

There is another consideration that Europe should realize. That is the aspect of burden sharing. Many non-western nations see that European nations have a lot of influence in the UN, by paying their contributions, having some key positions and their influence in policy-making. But they do not see those same nations sharing the burden on the ground, while non-western troop contributing countries often not only show long term commitment in difficult UN missions, but also are taking the most casualties in peacekeeping missions. In MINUSMA e.g. the majority of the more than 300 blue helmets that were killed over ten years came from African nations.

In my view the European withdrawal was not the right signal because Europe's contribution complemented other continents' contributions significantly and additionally there was definitely a European interest at stake in the Sahel-region. Europe needs to play its role in a UN context including by contributing to peacekeeping missions. That in itself is serious food for thought within Europe in the context of the future of peacekeeping.

Russia's role on the one hand and Europe's role on the other hand have influenced the mission significantly. The withdrawal of European nations weakened the mission since no replacements were offered by other nations. Russia's influence has directly and indirectly influenced the atmospherics in the country including the anti-western sentiments that also impacted the mission, apart from the effects in the UNSC.

V. TO CONCLUDE

MINUSMA was a complex but fascinating mission in all its aspects and in an unprecedented way. That is why there is so much to learn from it and that is why a proper evaluation with a thorough in-depth analysis is essential in order to be able to

draw the right conclusions. Such an analysis should cover achievements and positive lessons as well by the way, besides things to improve. The ‘New Agenda for Peace’ that was initiated by UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres deserves to include relevant lessons from recent missions. The UN’s ministerial conference in May this year seems to have brought renewed commitment from many nations with concrete pledges aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and adaptability of peace operations in the face of evolving global challenges.

I am absolutely sure that there will be a future for peacekeeping as long as peace is at stake in so many parts of the world. Doing nothing is never an option. Although UN peacekeeping missions may not always be optimal, they do make a difference. In that regard, let us keep in mind what UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld said in 1954: ‘The United Nations was not made to take mankind to heaven, but rather save humanity from hell.’ Making the difference with peacekeeping still requires all UN member states’ commitment in an equal way. We collectively need to realize that the UN is us together. It is necessary to continuously try to identify the best possible ways to contribute to building peace in those areas that need international support. I hope this article contributes to that.

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The Harder they Fall: End Times Criminology

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This paper argues that the decline of the US empire produces specific forms of criminogenic blowback, both domestically and internationally, comprising a profile of criminality. This profile may be extrapolated from the causes and conditions of impending collapse. In transacting its foreign policy, the US has deployed rogue proxies and their terrorist violence. This has produced a blowback of illegitimacy and disorder. Specific expressive and instrumental crimes are expected to be observed. Instrumental crimes are characterised by the norm-stretching of sovereign executive actions aimed to maintain power. Elites in a failing empire become more insular and besieged, demanding a less democratic and liberal environment for speech and political assembly, thus producing new categories of political crime. Expressive crimes represent the street level take-up of the enemy threat nomenclature. Domestically, there are crimes associated with the unease of a failing ideological and economic enterprise, including hate crimes and accelerationist violence associated with ethno-nationalistic and settler colonial prejudices.

Keywords: elite crime, critical criminology, blowback, empire, political eschatology, accelerationism.

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This paper argues that the decline of the US empire produces specific forms of criminogenic blowback, both domestically and internationally, comprising a profile of criminality. This profile may be extrapolated from the causes and conditions of impending collapse. In transacting its foreign policy, the US has deployed rogue proxies and their terrorist violence. This has produced a blowback of illegitimacy and disorder. Specific expressive and instrumental crimes are expected to be observed. Instrumental crimes are characterised by the norm-stretching of sovereign executive actions aimed to maintain power. Elites in a failing empire become more insular and besieged, demanding a less democratic and liberal environment for speech and political assembly, thus producing new categories of political crime. Expressive crimes represent the street level take-up of the enemy threat nomenclature. Domestically, there are crimes associated with the unease of a failing ideological and economic enterprise, including hate crimes and accelerationist violence associated with ethno-nationalistic and settler colonial prejudices.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gross economic inequality, militarism, repression, political corruption and insular nationalistic prejudices are associated with the crumbling edifice of empire. In the US in 2025, the persecution and arrest under anti-terrorism laws of popular political dissidents, a rising infant mortality, a bloated and overstretched military, a losing grip on domination of the international monetary system (the rise of BRICS+ and the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation¹), a national debt juggernaut and the evacuation of meaningful civil society protections is evidence that the US is in a state of decline (Gordon 2021). Having fallen from this zenith, the US is not ‘going gently into that good night.’ It is relying, on punitive and coercive domestic and overseas measures, including a world-beating prisoner count (Statista 2025) draconian laws against speech and assembly (Keck 2024), so-called soft-power measures (sanctions, bribes, terrorism listings), and the threat of forceful regime change abroad (Jervis 2016) to balance the threat of emergency measures or martial law at home.

Imperialism refers to the relative intent and capacity by a state to extend power and dominion by economic or political levers beyond its borders and across world regions. The US seized the reins of the post WWII global order by means of moral authority or persuasion, its domination over international and transnational financial, justice and security instruments, its relatively superior economic heft and its ready resort to covert and overt force. At the zenith of its influence it drew fully on these instruments. Currently, the US empire is confronting or avoiding confrontation with its declining authority, and many scholars have speculated on how that decline will be registered (Zaalberg and Luttikhuis 2022). Is there a particular array of structural and cultural indicators that may be associated with regime and empire retrenchment, decline or collapse? What are the criminogenic features of a declining

¹ BRICS refers to an intergovernmental economic alliance consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, comprising just under 40% of the world's GDP and 46% of the world's population (Kanter and Jetschgo-Morcillo 2003); the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation refers to a Eurasian political, economic and security alliance established by China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan covering 42% of the world's population.

empire in the 2020s and how might they manifest in the US and the West?

Increasingly, analysts review the West's foreign policy choices as a version of stratified political and economic imperialism in which the narrow, immediate interests of a well-positioned donor class is finessed to support interventions (Overton 2004). Liberal interventionists support interested economic elites by loosely justifying oligarchic advantage on slogans connected to liberal democratisation. The justificatory rhetoric includes reference to a cultural (eg LGBTQI+), economic (eg. US-centric trade) and political (eg. Western neoliberalism) worldview. The aim and/or effect is to support a supremacist narrative, and this is found in the documents of USAID, NED, the World Bank and the IMF, among other agencies (Blum 2004).

Since the 1990s, under the hypocrisy of human security and Responsibility to Protect (R2P), Western regimes have utilised a 'power politics that wears the garb of humanity and morality' (Moses 2024). The conflict between Israel and Palestine, Israel and Lebanon and increasingly all of Israel's neighbours has forced the US to be exposed as opposed to human rights at the UN (HRW 2025) which is also stripping it of international legitimacy (Center for Constitutional Rights 2024; Human Rights Watch 2009). Traumatized by generations of European and American colonial violence, the global south and east is today more unified in its opposition to US power and the colonial-settler, ethno-nationalist states it supports (Scott-Smith 2020; Moses 2024).

Also supportive and generative of this version of economic imperialism is elite circulation in the MICIMATT complex. The 'military-industrial-congressional-intelligence-media-academic-think tank' complex is an acronym coined by Ray McGovern (McGovern 2020) to update the one uttered in Eisenhower's farewell address warning. A narrow supremacist narrative is shared amongst careerist elites in these sectors, whose opinions are made powerful by invitation across private and public positions. Entry depends upon agreement with basic regime supportive

nostrums. Defence contractors, media pundits, political, corporate, academic, and intelligence experts, rise to prominence in a careerism that depends on and supports subservience to a supremacist establishment narrative (Chomsky 2008). For the US and the West, this narrative involves an Atlanticist vision of US-European relations that is asserted through NATO securitisation (Sachs 2023). It depends upon the productive sanction and demonisation of near-peer powers in Russophobia, Islamophobia, and Sinophobia. Drawing on Durkheimian and Marxist thought analysts have pondered tectonic ruptures as the consequence of macro-economic, cultural and economic phenomena (Courpasson, Younes and Reed 2021; Panitch and Gindin 2004). Sociologists and criminologists have reviewed crime and disorder as a reflection of structural and cultural determinants under Western late modernity (Garland 1993; Young 1999; Quinney and Sheldon 2018). Where finance capitalism depends upon the unsustainable practices of a financialised bubble economy and policies are structured on the metrics of neoliberal doctrine (Hudson 2010; Baker 2009), the acquisition and distribution of valued resources more or less follow on from co-requisite social or civilisational norms (Weber 2013; Elias 2011; Shvets 2024). In this regard, empires are conspiracies of expropriation and they configure the modern national security, (Neocleous 2006), surveillance (Lyon 2001) or penal or carceral state (Pratt 2001; Foucault 1979) beneath circumlocutions to mask increasingly inequitable and undemocratic expropriations. What has lately been exposed is a fatal rupture between the actual behaviour of the West and its normative foundation in a principled engagement with the legacy of the Enlightenment (Derrida 2003; Said 2023).

That being said, there is a notable absence in criminology of treatments that anticipate the specific cluster of crime that attends the decline of empire. In this paper, I will examine some obvious manifestations. The first consideration is perhaps the most glaring. For the most part, empires do not 'go gently into that good night;'

they ‘rage against the dying of the light.’² The means of expansion are overstretched and not well-suited to conservation. As elite profligacy becomes rampant, defrocked empire elites resort to non-normative means in their efforts to retain power and control and are disgraced. Relatedly, declining authority produces a diminishing capacity to keep the civilised garden of empire free from the criminal carnage it produces at its (post-) colonial edges. Blowback, instead of being held at bay, intensifies and spreads into, and upsets the core distinctions of value, beginning with that between the soldier, brigand, mercenary and terrorist. Third, alongside the rise of economic and political crime, there is a rise in expressive crimes of violence.³

II. DISGRACEFUL DECLINE

There is an argument that states may be prudent, retrench and decline gracefully. They ‘renounce risky ties, increase reliance on allies or adversaries, draw down their military obligations, and impose adjustments on domestic populations’ (McDonald and Parent 2011: 9). However, the prediction that even great powers facing acute decline are ‘less likely to escalate militarised interstate disputes’ (10) depends on the contention that the forces of conservation are greater than the forces of radicalisation. In any case, there is another argument that the bigger they are, the more gracelessly they fall. There may be an insufficient cohort of comparable others,⁴ but there may be common properties characterising regime collapse.

The hegemonic empire sees preventative war as the ‘primary means of resolving’ the problem of acute decline (Gilpin 1983: 194). It confronts its receding power and influence with self-deception and efforts to upset or disorder the table (for

others sitting at it), up to and including violence (Johnson 2000; Wertheim 2020). For example, in Rome there was a decline in civic virtue. This was expressed in increases in corruption, elite profligacy and extreme, expressive violence (Gibbon and Milman 2003). A culture of violence - including that from gladiatorial entertainment and arbitrary, discretionary and spectacular punishments (which may be associated with blowback) - turns from expressing awesomeness to telegraphing desperation. Scholars have noted that the Dutch empire was involved in exceptionally bloody wars of decolonisation in Indonesia during its violent end (Zaalberg and Luttikhuis 2022). The Belgian empire was bloody both in its colonisation and decolonisation (Thomas and Thompson 2021). With respect to the British empire, a relatively peaceful decline was consequent to the overstretching of its capacity to continue to govern over nearly a quarter of the world’s population. It was drained of resources during WWII, wilted under decolonisation movements and could not maintain the pace of the superior military and industrial powerhouses of the US and Soviet Union. It nevertheless has sought to maintain a particularly vicious security service as a legacy of its legacy (Machon 2005).

The decline of the Soviet Union was sudden but not necessarily less disgraceful. Its collapse was associated with the weakening of communism as an ideological and economic bedrock. Its disintegration left in its wake the oligarchs, a class of extremely wealthy elites, and an environment of profligate lawlessness. Its demise was attended by skyrocketing crime rates, the emergence of the Russian mafia, protection rackets and cartels, and the pilfering of formerly public resources by corrupt industry captains and politicians (Shelley 1995; Holmes 2012).

In the last two decades, scholars have pondered the rise of violence within and between states under a Western rubric (Pinker 2007). Is liberal civilisation a distinctive potpourri of social and political malaise (Naudé 2024)? Of interest is liberal interventionism’s disconnect from universal values (Cohen 2007; Moses 2024). The apocalyptic spectacle of destruction in Gaza, in

² Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used this phrase to end a speech in front of the United Nations General Assembly on September 27, 2024 to proclaim his country’s existential right to persist in what Abdo (2024) and many others refer to as a genocide, and/or the forced displacement of the Palestinians.

³ This argument draws from, and offers some modest updating in application of, Chalmers Johnson’s ground breaking work (Johnson 2000).

⁴ McDonald and Parent (2011) analysed 18 cases.

which daily horrors of murdered mothers and children are shared on social media throughout a long campaign of extermination, has made some analysts wonder if they are witnessing in this disgraceful carnage the kind of spectacular violence that also attended the decline of Rome.⁵

Relative US decline is also reflected in various international and transnational institutions, where US moral authority is diminishing. The meta-institution of the global rules-based order, also referred to as the international system, is predicated on universal human rights. It has been central to the claims-making of US hegemony. The relative decline of the United Nations, and the UNSC in particular, is a consequence of the legitimate charge that the United States, once its most ardent supporter, now acts with transparent hypocrisy, choosing narrow foreign policy interests over the equal application of international law norms in that and other bodies. The United States has over the past three or four decades, and particularly in its defense of Israel (Moses 2024), been stewarding over the decline of human rights institutions. It has chosen instead to view the UN as an arm of soft power manoeuvring. It has come to depend on a warfare economy (Naudé 2024: 2) and does not avoid the chaos and disorder of regime change wars (Blum 2004; Johnson 2000). It is universal rights that are suffering an end times moment (Hopgood 2015). There is a diminishment in material and ideational support for humanitarian action and the 'entire edifice of international humanitarian law' (Moses 2024) as the post WWII and post Cold War treaties, tribunals and institutions are evacuated of capacity.

III. DIMINISHING AUTHORITY AND BLOWBACK

If war is politics by other means, the crimes of war are not merely foreign policy choice-making. They impact on domestic preferences and interests. Much street crime may be associated with war and conflict that is traceable to the West's

⁵ Israel is not the US, but Israel's actions are directly supported by the entirety of the US political ruling class (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006), which has repeatedly expressed support 'without limits' (Walt 2024).

economic imperialism, its foreign and militarised interventionism and its war economy. Post-colonial economic practices or aspirations produce a non-normative and criminogenic circulation of people and goods. In the criminogenesis of the security and surveillance state there is blowback of various types: (a) domestic unrest and crime, (b) refugee and migration crises and phobias, (c) ideological radicalization (disillusionment with established institutions), (d) psychological trauma in war veterans.

As a declining regime loses its dominance of the instruments of authority, normative cohesion or consensus between institutional dimensions (legal, political, cultural) begins to fray. Dissent builds against the supremacist position; there is populist and government suppression of strong political anti-establishment counter-narratives. At the same time, assimilation of demonised enemies produces anti-immigration prejudices. In response to this, and as was on full display after 9/11, there is an increasing reliance on counter-immigration, -terrorism, -disinformation and -hate or bias crime legislation. Refugee and immigrant pressure on infrastructure (housing, transportation, public order, border services, social services) can also produce self-help and vigilante responses (Black 1980), as well as feeding ethnic divisions in street gangs and their crimes. Veterans of arguably illegitimate regime change wars may suffer from moral injury. Significant violent behaviour (MacManus et. al. 2015) and some recent domestic terrorist incidents are by veterans - eg. Timothy McVeigh.

In its current interface with the United Nations, the US has abandoned the so-called rules-based order (Moses 2024). Political leaders and parties resistant to US direction (or control) face US sponsored sanctions (Lavrov 2021). Regarding allocation of sovereign national resources and the posture of their diplomatic relations and connections, resistance to US authority invites regime change and influence operations (information and disinformation operations and psyops). These are delivered through soft (NED, USAID, World Bank, IMF, etc) and hard (CIA) measures (Blum 2004). During the Cold War

alone, the number of CIA-sponsored coups was 64 (O'Rourke 2019). Since the Cold War, there have been proportionately at least as many, with the total portion of US military interventions since 1999 being one third of the total since 1776 (Military Intervention Project, 2024). There were 251 military interventions between 1991 and 2022 (Military Intervention Project, 2024).

Blowback from US sponsored incursions or interventions in Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, to name a few, have spawned waves of refugees across Europe. This has put an assimilation burden on cultural and social resources in countries as far away as Sweden, England and Denmark. Where the pressure on foreign governments is short of covert operations, the policy preference that the US insists upon (disallowing peer or near-peer competitors to make gains) is capable, if not likely, of producing negative economic and social impacts in the target country, and this blows back across the region, producing human security crises that task international humanitarian institutions (e.g. Lee et al. 2023). At the time of writing, the US support for Israel's genocidal incursions on the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank (Nijim 2023) is producing a firestorm of outrage. Scenes of horrific violence meted out by the IDF are live-streamed daily, not only ensuring a generational hatred toward Israel and the US among a growing diaspora of displaced Palestinians, but a popular groundswell that is unseating the US and the West as champions of human rights. It also obligates alacrity in their absorption of concussion waves of refugees. In short, regime change operations produce blowback (Grier 2021; Kennard 2015).

The failure of that assimilation is associated with a vivification of militancy in restive nationalistic subpopulations. The reintegration into civilian life of combatants participating in regime change related conflicts is an attempt to tame the martialised disposition. Given how such conflicts invite unethical incursions on innocent, non-combatant populations, the moral injury to returning combatants tasked to implement that program is known to incur various maladies that

impact on domestic order (de Lint and Praino 2021).

The US economy under finance capitalism is another aspect of regime decline that is hypothesised to invite criminogenesis. In a variety of manifestations, the social and economic tumult that attends a declining industrial base puts unbearable pressure on the contradiction between discourses of wealth in liberal democratic parlance (which celebrates equality of opportunity) and the practices of wealth concentration (decreasing available through ascription (Piketty 2014)) and the availability of attractive labour opportunities.

A further cluster of criminogenesis consequent to regime decline concerns the release of restraints on elites. The bellicosity of a declining empire is a product of the interest to create precarious resources for exploitation by well-positioned political elites. There is a large body of criminology concerned with the ravages of Western colonialism, inclusive of genocide, widespread ecological destruction, the corruption of regulatory systems and the immobilisation of national resource (and other) stewards in target markets. According to a strong vein of criminology, elite actors in industry and government force the regulatory environment (rather than vice versa). This produces relative impoverishment of the public or common interest in political representation (eg. Tombs and Whyte 2003). This is elite impunity, and it is exacerbated in regime decline conditions, at least according to some analysis and previous evidence (Gilens and Page 2014; the Security Conference 2224). For instance, the war in Gaza is a settler colonial campaign by a well-financed elite within the US political donor class (The New Republic 2024), and the most widely contemporaneously publicised genocide in history is conducted with impunity (Abdo 2024).

For many observers, there is a resurgence of impunity associated with crime by elites (Pearson and Wang 2024). Financial elites circulate between Wall Street and regulatory agencies, including the Fed. There is a thesis that financial bubbles recur cyclically in capitalist economies as

an inherent feature (QUCEH 2020). Central banks, including the Federal Reserve, have pursued expansionary monetary policies that may fuel asset bubbles. Well-positioned elites are endowed with access to complex financial instruments and privileged information that support their risk transfer and obfuscate accountability under the ‘too big to fail’ mentality.

Elite impunity is supported through the governance of information technology. Technology is having an impact 3000 times as great as the industrial revolution (Shvets 2024) and general artificial intelligence is one of the technologies that has helped to disintermediate capital and labour (Shvets 2024). There is an intense preoccupation with social and alternative media in disinformation management as elite guidance of the ideological apparatus attempts to rhetorically extinguish the gap between popular and elite interests.

IV. A PREDICTIVE PROFILE OF END TIMES CRIME

Most current research on the decline of regimes focuses on the benefits to failing authoritarian or fascist states of democratisation and the support of civil society institutions (e.g. Jara 2014; Biggs and Carpenter 2009; Teorell 2010). As the material instruments of the US and West are increasingly deployed to buttress the ‘bad bets’ of its supremacist ideological discourse and pooled in bonanza offerings to favoured monopolists, they are detached from democratic or popular moorings. The general thesis is that the decline of the US is characterised by an accelerating diminishment in the efficacy of the production, exchange and distribution discourses that uphold a liberal capitalist political economy.

A declining empire criminogenesis is expressed in political, cultural and economic domains. As the US governing elite detaches from democratic feedback it strips equity into less productive and more arcane endeavors. This weakens the efficacy and legitimacy of its institutions and international reputation. As the US polity enters relative decline other powers centres rise, domestically

and globally, to challenge doctrine and practice. There are at least two elements of the response.

First, there is the attempt to finesse the levers of law, expertise and evaluation so that the relatively privileged position may be maintained. As expectations of service and resource advantages become perilous, intersectional elites who dominate the means of knowledge and accountability coalesce on common ground and batten down the hatches. Lawfare is a mild version of this result, but it is otherwise simply a return to a power competition among self-interested states. Elites are also preserved in authoritarian protections under the rubric of national security exceptions. These attempt to neutralise knowledge, speech and virtual and in-person assembly. Escobar’s idea that the United States and the West are now engaging in a ‘war of terror’ after its so-called ‘war on terror’⁶ is descriptive of a declining appetite to appeal to a human rights audience. Unleashed under weakened constitutional or justice protections, the vitality of the nation-state is drawn to illegalities in trade practices, the creative repression of internal and external political foes, the abuses of mass incarceration (Stiglitz 2013: 1) and a warring belligerence toward real and invented foes.

The consequence is a highly polarised society. As dysfunction in domestic governance is feared as signalling internal weakness, elite capacity to overwhelm a multiplicity or multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004) diminishes. A rise in nationalism and its expression in extremist or accelerationist violence is expected and observable.

As other power centres emerge and consolidate, the relative impotence of soft power efficacy, particularly following undemocratic foreign policy decisions, is a potential indicator of US imperial desperation. The US maintains significant military superiority globally, but prolonged conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, Iraq and Afghanistan strain resources and public support. At home and abroad, the US ‘weaponises’ economic levers to deploy and outlaw business and financial practices in a continuously weakening attempt to

⁶ <https://x.com/RealPepeEscobar/status/1836838805309186186>.

maintain control over the levers of monetary influence. Even before the Trump administration turbocharged economic warfare, in 2024 the US was imposing three times as many sanctions on adversaries than any other country (Stein and Cocco 2024).

4.1 A Rise in Political Crime Categories and Incidence

Political crime is defined as a betrayal of the political order or a challenge to political authority (Ingraham 2023: xi-xii). Forms of state-sanctioned or systemic criminality include human rights abuses, incidence of political crime or offences and the corruption of government offices and officials.

a. Human rights abuses:

- The use of torture and extraordinary rendition in the 'War on Terror' (Sadat 2006)
- Support for terrorism and terrorists in regime change operations (most recently Ahmad al-Sharaa of Syria) (Amnesty International 2025):
 - Civilian casualties in interventions like Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza and Lebanon have raised concerns about adherence to international humanitarian law (UNRWA 2024; UNHCR 2025).
 - The extensive network of US military bases worldwide (estimated at over 800): associated with various human rights issues including; environmental damage and health risks to local populations (Vine 2019), incidences of impunity for sexual assault by US personnel against local civilians (Edwards 2021), and displacement of indigenous communities (Vine 2009).
- US interventions that bypass UN Security Council approval and/or obstruct UN accountability:
 - Weaken the international legal framework for human rights protection (Human Rights Watch 2025).
 - Obstruction of UN investigations into its own potential human rights violations (Center for Constitutional Rights 2024; Human Rights Watch 2009).

Concerning political crime and violence, in the middle east the US is sponsoring the most violent war on the most excessively terroristic (and settler-colonial) grounds (Bacon 2018) in support of its most favoured ally, Israel (Bassil 2009; Choonara 2024). According to former US ambassador Chas Freeman, Israel is founded on and perpetuates itself through settler-colonial terrorism (Freeman 2024; Amira 2021). The spectacular asymmetry between combatants is reminiscent of the Roman gladiatorial games. As Israel escalates its violence, and avoids enacting UN resolutions with respect to Palestine, it urges the US into more egregious exceptions from international law (Moses 2024).

b. Political crime:

- High-profile charges and/or detentions of political 'dissidents':
 - eg. Scott Ritter, Medea Benjamin, Max Blumenthal). (Blumenthal 2025a; Tine 2024; Benjamin 2024).
- The criminalisation of anti-government speech and assembly:
 - US University administrators responded to 2024 anti-Israel protests by adopting anti-speech and assembly laws that define anti-Zionism with anti-semitism (Benedict 2024).
 - Betar US, the Anti-Defamation League and Canary Mission are among the pro-Zionist organisations that develop 'deportation lists' of pro-Palestinian activists that they have shared with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, White House homeland security adviser, Stephen Miller, and attorney general, Pam Bondi, among others (Betts 2025).
- Shadow banning or de-platforming or suspension of alternative political opinion:
 - The Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) collaborates with Israel to target and deplatform or shadow ban pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist online activities (Blumenthal 2025b).
 - The GrayZone itself has been targeted (Klarenberg and Blumenthal 2022).

It is at least a plausible hypothesis based on the above that as the declining empire reaches beyond its capacity, it exposes the centre to blowback from the margins or periphery. If there is a rise in political crime incidence, it references an existential anxiety concerning an anti-establishment threat at the ideological centre.

- c. The influence of deep state machinations or deep crime on regime normativity and legacy.

One area of political crime that requires further mention is referred to variously as deep politics (Scott 1993), parapolitics (Wilson 2016) or apex crime (de Lint 2021). In this domain of activity, actors are guided by deniable executive orders that manifest a sovereign interest floating within and out of secure compartmented intelligence operations. According to a growing body of opinion, the 'deep executive' of the US government instrumentalises proxies in a competition over strategic direction and power resources. It is not only involved in foreign interventions, but also domestic domains. Strategic decision-making can be pushed along by events that are chosen and cultivated for their capacity to push or move public and institutional opinion-makers in a preferred direction. As 'intelligence crimes,' matters of concern are shaped by national security interest. The activity is covered by the impunity of the sovereign and a prohibition on publicity (de Lint 2021). Under a forensic sarcophagus a 'deep politics' crime scene is impenetrable and unreviewable. Such events are whitewashed by inquiries that are guided by carefully selected commissioners. Historical and recent candidate deep events:

- JFK and RFK assassinations (Youvan 2025)
- 9/11 (Scott 2017)
- Nord Stream pipeline bombing (Hersh 2023)

Over time and due in no small part to its lies and deception concerning the most serious imaginable crimes against the American people, successive US governments accrue a credibility problem. Confidence in US institutions is historically low at 28% (Brenan 2024). 65% of Americans think the Kennedy assassination involved a conspiracy

(Brenan 2022). Where the most significant political events involve, or in essence constitute, political crime, the centre of civil society is also weakened and made incapable of providing a strong centripetal force to hold the periphery and prevent implosion.

4.2 A Rise in Economic Crime Incidence

The decline of US supremacy is due to its inability indefinitely to fix the economic levers in maintaining its hegemony as the most dominant economy. It is widely held that the US gained its economic hegemony by way of the Washington Consensus, a set of financial institutions and monetary practices to promote 'neoliberal global capitalist governance' (Sheppard and Leitner 2010: 185). With the IMF and the World Bank, and through trading in the US dollar as the world's reserve currency, the US has been able to assert a global economic order that suits the interests of its industrial and financial enterprises. The US has also used economic sanctions and the outright theft of non-complying countries' sovereign resources (gold, money, natural resources) (Fitts 2011).

To avoid the risks and uncertainties of this growing sanctions archipelago and in the context of the declining legitimacy of US dominated rules based order (with its sanctions on speech and commerce), nation-states have sought alternative spheres of transaction. BRICS+ and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have been consequential to 'a new determination to establish an alternative set of norms for international transactions outside of those maintained by the US-led post-WW II global order' (Scott-Smith 2020: 178).

In its relative economic decline the US faces some acute and chronic challenges that are related to criminogenesis. First, there is increased pressure on the US state department and Pentagon to provide the donor class with war spoils. These are in addition to the financial returns that are expected from global neoliberalism (Perkins 2023). This pressure invites actors to seek exploitable sovereign resources (Kennard 2015). The illegal blowing up of three of the four

Nordstream pipelines (Hersh 2023) is consistent with this and was foreshadowed by Rand in its articulation of the policy effort to redirect German energy dependence from Russia to the US (Roman and Anderson 2022; Morris et. al. 2019). Such an event, with its obvious and blatant disregard for international and environmental law, subtracts from US authority and influence in Europe (Bergmann 2025).

Second, the US debt and its servicing pushes both foreign and domestic actors into further criminogenesis. The need to service this debt creates pressure for aggressive financial practices (austerity), and encourages potentially risky or unethical behaviour in the financial sector. This was in evidence in the 2008 interest rate swap scandal (Muolo and Padilla 2010). It has also supported austerity programs, which increases income inequality and the defunding of welfare programs.

Third, as political and economic actors become increasingly distanced from the large body of the commonwealth, an elite morality comes to be immune from common and conventional ethical norms. The debt burden may incentivise political and financial actors elites to engage in corrupt practices to maintain economic stability or personal wealth. The "revolving door" between government and private sector positions blurs lines between public service and private gain. Campaign finance laws allow for significant corporate influence in politics, potentially leading to policy decisions that benefit elites at the expense of democratically expressed human rights concerns:

- The DNC was involved in perpetrating a false narrative concerning Russian interference in the 2016 US election campaign (Boyd-Barrett 2019);
- The FBI and the DoJ have experienced increased politicisation (Diesen 2023; Pearlstein 2024);
- The Trumps transactional exploitation of the presidency (Shear 2025).

Corruption, both domestic and in overseas operations, is identified by some scholars as a

potential factor in imperial decline, though not to the extent seen in the late Soviet period or during fast moving revolutions. This phenomenon is beyond mere systemic corruption; it discredits the basis of a common ground for the discovery of the behaviour as corrupt.

4.3 A Rise in (Accelerationist) Eschatological and Violent Crime Indices and Incidence

Public and scholarly debate in Europe has increasingly focused on the violence of empire (Zaalberg and Luttikhuis 2022). A small group of critical criminologists has drawn attention to the US as 'the greatest purveyor of violence' (Kramer 2018: 431). The Uppsala Conflict Data Program highlights a rapid rise in fatalities from organised violence that attends the spread of conflict between and across states (Davies, Pettersson, and Öberg 2023). Since 2001, as many as 4.7 million direct and indirect deaths are attributable to the so-called counter-terrorism wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Libya and Yemen (Watson Institute 2024).

In 2025, the US continues to provide military, economic and diplomatic support for wars in the Middle East and the Ukraine. US national security is understood as a manichean struggle against the claims of Russian, Chinese and non-aligned interests. These wars rely upon the dirty means of terrorism and terrorist organisations (ISIS, etc). Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Palestinians and Russians have died. The US supported Israeli genocide in Gaza is also the bloodiest 'war' in the 21st century, although also the most one-sided in its carnage (Hasson, Haaretz 2024).

The rise of some conventional criminality may be linked to imperial decline. Although homicides are not (yet?) showing increases⁷, terrorist and hate or crime bias may, on the contrary, be on the rise. Although, both terrorism and hate crime

⁷ The US violent crime has declined in the past 30 years, falling by 71% between 1993 and 2022. Although clearance rates have also been declining, they have not done so sufficiently to erase this decline (Pew 2023).

incidence is difficult to quantify due to a lack of consensus assessment, some recent estimates have found that ‘the number of groups and individuals adhering to hate-based or extremist ideologies around the world has grown considerably in the last decade’ (Lafree and Schwarzenback 2021: 185 citing Blazak 2009; Desmarais et al. 2017; Sarma 2017); see also Freilich, Chermak, Simone 2009 and Gruenewald and Pridemore 2012). Interest in extremism, including extremist violence, terrorism and hate crime, has risen in the United States after the events of September 11, 2001, and in the West as a whole with the 2004 and 2005 Madrid and London bombings, and the attacks in 2015 and 2016 in Paris and Berlin (Lafree and Schwarzenback 2021: 184).

Structural change is expressed in the cultural sphere as existential unease and ontological anxiety. A nostalgic review of the nature of citizens, denizens, patriots and soldiers is conducted in a state of besiegement. This ontological angst is represented in the post-apocalyptic genre as a distinct set of propositions centred on a catastrophic or apocalyptic event, the fierce defence of a preferred identity, and extraordinary encroachment by internal and external others. ‘Western civilisation’ is challenged, and societal collapse must be avoided or steps taken for its maintenance or rebirth. In much of this romanticised narrative there is a trope concerning lawless disorder and the emergence of new social structures centred on a survival focus, and its moral challenges. Apocalyptic narratives and worldviews have fostered authoritarianism and fatalism (Davidson 2024) and influenced political extremists, extreme government actions and counter-terrorism mobilisations in the United States and elsewhere.

Political eschatology produces spectacular crimes of violence. These are terroristic (White 2001), in that the violence is deployed, often spectacularly, to reassert the besieged ethno-nationalistic value. White (2001:937) argues that ‘violent eschatology interacts with criminology in the sense that politicised religions produce criminal behaviour and, at times, terrorism.’ This is observable in the

expression of radical fundamentalist constructions of Christian, Jewish or Islamic identity. The siege and final assault on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco Texas, resulting in the death of between 76-82 people, is a double entendre on end times.

Another thread is ‘accelerationism.’ The Branch Davidians believed in end times, and Timothy McVeigh was influenced by the *Turner Diaries*, a blueprint for a post-apocalyptic society. In addition to the race war anxieties that derived from that book, as an exceptional soldier tasked to fight in unjust war (Operation Desert Storm in 1991), McVeigh was, to some accounts, influenced by anti-government disenchantment in right wing extremist sentiment when he took part in the Oklahoma Bombing on the anniversary of the Waco debacle (Toobin 2024).⁸

According to Aarons (2023:261):

‘American far-right mass shootings of recent years cannot be adequately understood either as purely strategic acts of a coherent political-ideological movement, nor as expressions of a generic nihilism run amok, a “botched exit” from the despair, humiliation, and isolation of everyday life in the hell-world of late capitalism. This alternative between political and nonpolitical interpretations fails to offer a satisfying account of the prevailing motor of subjectivation that drives this culture of sacrificial murder. Even when responding to material conditions such as economic crises or pandemics, fascists prefer to think in terms of mythic narratives and imaginary forms that (as one recent study observed) are «always metaphysically clashing in a realm of pure strife, its images deeply freighted with feeling». While it is action that makes history and not disembodied ideas, the practice of accelerationist violence consciously inscribes itself within a highly symbolic and ritualized mythological framework with precise historical roots.’

⁸ McVeigh was one of the perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing, which killed 168 people and allegedly targeted the BFAT offices at the Alfred P Murray Federal Building, however the BFAT staff were not in their offices at the time of the bombing.

Extremist ideological violence (whether ‘terroristic’ or ‘hate’) has been on the rise in the US and Europe (Jones 2022: 1; Stevkovski 2015; Juergensmeyer 2017). Concerning hate crime, what is occurring in the West is that ‘a significant number of citizens empower potential perpetrators from the bottom–up and further legitimise hate crime from the top–down by championing violence-promoting political elites’ (Dancygier 2023: 1⁹). According to Piazza (2023: 476):

‘Affective partisan political polarisation fosters dehumanisation of opposing partisans, lends a moralistic and zero-sum nature to political life, and facilitates group mobilisation. These all produce an environment in which political violence is both more socially acceptable and more frequent....Democracies characterised by higher levels of affective partisan political polarisation are 34% more likely to experience frequent political violence.’

As pointed out by Dancygier (2023) we are seeing extremism in the centre of mainstream political thought. The support among Western leaders of Israel’s genocide in Gaza is only possible because Western elites of the MICIMATT still view the world in terms of Western supremacism and Orientalism (Said 2023). The proliferation of violence against opinion (Kundnani and Hayes 2018) is most strident when raw truth (such as a Western supported extermination campaign) is too undermining of elite, establishment discourse. Hate speech legislation is a weapon of lawfare aiming to normalise elite opinion extremism.

If after the Gulf War and the Oklahoma bombing US authorities began to uncover a dangerous subpopulation of radicalised ‘militiamen’ and white national ‘patriot’ supremacists,¹⁰ what might be expected in the US domestically in the aftermath of the US sponsored genocide in Gaza? The chasm between the peace-seeking views of a disenfranchised public and the warmongering

slogans in the opinion silo of elite rulers shades the ground for domestic unrest. In the context of continuing economic disenfranchisement, political disenfranchisement exacerbates a parlous disposition. It is no surprise, and it can be observed, that the US is experiencing a groundswell of anti-authoritarian, anti-government sentiment (NPR 2025).

Those in government and industry who have profited from the post-neo-colonial enterprise and aided and abetted the carnage may be expected to double down on authoritarian and even fascist response. They will mute or ban the multitude of oppositional voices as if to rage against the dying of their own light. Their spies will undermine a coherent, anti-establishment radicalisation, which at present is still nascent, furtive and disorganised. But this merely describes the precondition of end times criminogenesis; a terrain of dangerous transactability between resistance and response.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In sum, what is anticipated with the decline of US hegemony and empire is a confluence of criminogenic events and incidence. Increasingly desperate gambits on the part of ruling or government elites may be expected to finesse political influence to maintain or discover new market bonanzas. This is expressed in dramatic apex crimes that are aided by covert operations, military interventions and sanctions. The US continues to seize sovereign funds, occupy foreign land and pump up precarious proxies in its effort to perpetuate its supremacist position. As it abandons the rule of law, the criminal enterprise of US interventionism produces wide-scale disenchantment with the US-led normative project, and then blowback in normative and material population displacements. When the emperor no longer oversees order but is widely seen to head a chaotic criminal cartel (the Bushes, the Clintons, the Bidens, the Trumps), they can no longer appear in public with confidence that the regime they lead is not on the brink of collapse.

⁹ These authors are speaking about Germany but the point is transferable to US experience.

¹⁰ Between 1954-2000, the largest single group of terrorist perpetrators were committed by ‘White Racist/Rightist’ perpetrators (Hewitt 2003: 4).

Domestically, increasing income inequality and unpredictable boom-bust market volatility produce retreat or innovation among those capable, but also rebellion. That, together with the decline of regard for increasingly corrupt US (and Western) institutions (such as the free press, truth-seeking universities, and representative government), has precipitated, in the US and other Western liberal democracies, both an outpouring and an outlawing of dissent—effectively creating a large class of political criminals.. While ‘street crime’ is not directly cited as a cause of imperial decline, a rise of extremist, accelerationist violence domestically is associated with profligate, international-law-violations by the US state department (Murphy 2024; Moses 2024; ICJ 2024; ICC 2024). Normative behaviours on the street and among elites are recursively connected and may be evidence of end times criminality.

The US is experiencing imperial decline associated with economic, political, and geopolitical factors, with some forms of state-sanctioned or systemic criminality potentially contributing to, rather than resulting from, this process. The interconnected nature of the global economy means that the consequences of US decline will be felt differently compared to previous imperial declines. Of special consequence in this regard is the US relationship with Israel; in a compelling account, it is ‘occupied’ by Zionist interests (Mearsheimer and Walt 2006). In addition to donations and gift, some powerful legislators—including Senator Lindsay Graham and Representative Mike Johnson—interpret the US national interest and Mideast policy in ways that appease a minority constituency of evangelicals in their districts ‘who tie the physical existence of Israel to eschaton’ (Loughridge 2023), so that as pastor Robert Jeffress has said, ‘to attack Israel is to attack God himself’ (in Loughridge 2023). Armageddon in the Holy Land is not something to be prevented, but rather fondly anticipated as a precursor to the second coming of Christ.

The military, economic, intelligence and diplomatic support of Israel in its settler-colonial violence against the Palestinians and their

supporters has resulted in the deaths of 64,000 from traumatic injury between October 7, 2023 and June 2024 (Jamaluddine et. al., 2025,) and over 180,000 deaths inclusive of other causes (Khalib, McKee and Yusuk 2024). As this is being published (a year after those calculations), the number is rising substantially. Based on the most recent UNHCR, IDMC, UNRWA, and Oxfam reports, as of May 2025 it is expected that nearly 10 million people will be displaced by the end of 2025: 2 million Palestinians; 100,000 Lebanese; over 7 million Syrians (Oxfam 2025; UNRWA 2024; UNHCR 2025; IDMC 2025). To this enormous toll may be added the millions of dead and displaced from the US’s war provocation in Ukraine (Horton 2024)¹¹. Given the illegalities and subterfuge behind both conflicts (Sachs 2023; Mearsheimer 2022), and the total war crimes that especially the Israeli violence encompasses (Moses 2024; ICJ 2024; ICC 2024), this latest iteration of great power machination is spawning conditions for uncountable criminogenic blowback.

Alongside economic, political, and social repercussions, the US approach to maintaining hegemony ultimately contributes to the empire's delegitimisation and decline. The United States is now an adversary of the ICC in its administration of accountability in international humanitarian law (PBS 2024). It is noted by Jeffrey Sachs that the US had an opportunity following the demise of the Soviet empire to take the lead in carving out a world that is less dependent on a zero-sum of militarisation (Sachs 2019). More than a third of a century later, the US is reaping the cost of opting instead to assert unipolarity in an ultimately failing policy of denying near-peer competition. This is a foreign policy blunder that has exacted a steep cost in the violence, disorder, chaos and criminality that springs both directly and indirectly from it.

In seeking to outlaw both internal and external opponents, successive governments have doubled

¹¹ Following the reneging of its non-expansionist NATO promise, the US has offered economic, military, intelligence and diplomatic support to Ukraine to support a war that has, predictably, resulted in the death and displacement of between 10 and 20 million Ukrainians (Sachs 2023).

down on escalating disorder and chaos. The US empire is not in graceful decline, and despite the Trump administration's grasping, rhetorical retreat from neoconservative doctrine (Sadler 2025), it is stumbling toward a hard fall that threatens to bring the house down.

In closing, this analysis has many limitations, but one in particular worth mentioning is the projected development and growth of generative artificial intelligence (AGI) and its potential to augment US power or alternatively displace human-centered systems. The US is seeking to maintain its global leadership by prioritising AI and AGI in its national strategies, executive orders, and export controls. There are arguments that predictive AI might mitigate financial crises and that AI-backed military systems may amplify military efficiency and that AI-backed surveillance systems in, for example, predictive policing will suppress dissent more effectively. On whether these will mitigate or exacerbate structural and institution collapse is an open question. The US will try to impose 'ethical AI' as a means of domination. However, according to DeepSeek's (2025) analysis authoritarian states will gain an advantage by 2030, AI systems will become self-sustaining by 2035, and a criminal/parasitic AI will dominate post-2040 (DeepSeek 2025). Even in grasping AI and AGI as a lifeline, the US is, according to this prediction, merely adding tilt to its fall.

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Manuel Galiñanes & Leo Klinkers

Federal Alliance of European Federalists

SUMMARY

This article introduces the Ombudsmus Council as a proposed Fourth Branch of Government— *Quarta Politica*—designed to protect citizens from government failures and strengthen democratic accountability. Expanding on the traditional ombudsman model, the Council would be constitutionally independent from the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, with the authority to investigate, rule on, and enforce remedies against abuses of power and policy failures.

While existing democratic systems rely on checks and balances among the three traditional branches, they often lack a formal, independent institution dedicated specifically to defending citizens when those branches fall short. Unlike the media—which faces growing political and economic pressures—the Ombudsmus Council would be structurally embedded in the constitution as a permanent watchdog with public oversight functions.

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While existing democratic systems rely on checks and balances among the three traditional branches, they often lack a formal, independent institution dedicated specifically to defending citizens when those branches fall short. Unlike the media—which faces growing political and economic pressures—the Ombudsmus Council would be structurally embedded in the constitution as a permanent watchdog with public oversight functions. Its tasks would include monitoring state conduct, launching inquiries, issuing binding decisions, and promoting civic education on democratic participation.

This proposal is original in its call for a constitutionally mandated citizen defense mechanism, advancing current debates on democratic renewal, accountability, and institutional innovation. It builds upon and moves beyond global experiments in ombuds-type offices by formalizing their role within the constitutional architecture.

Potential challenges include resistance from entrenched powers, legal questions about separation of powers, and the need for broad political consensus. Nonetheless, the model is

adaptable across varied political contexts—especially where democratic backsliding or institutional distrust is prevalent—offering a replicable framework for enhancing participatory democracy and state responsiveness worldwide.

Keywords: ombudsman, quarta politica, ombudmus council, citizens' rights, separation of powers, democratic accountability, administrative justice, political participation, governance reform, institutional innovation, constitutional oversight.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of separation of powers, first elaborated by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) [1], posited a tripartite division—legislative, executive, and judicial—to prevent tyranny and protect liberty. Yet Montesquieu's ideas built on earlier liberal thought, including Locke's emphasis on legislative primacy and limited executive discretion [2], and were further institutionalized in the USA by Madison, who viewed separation and checks as essential to preventing factional dominance [3]. This classical *Trias Politica* structure remains foundational to constitutional democracies, but evolving governance challenges have exposed its limits.

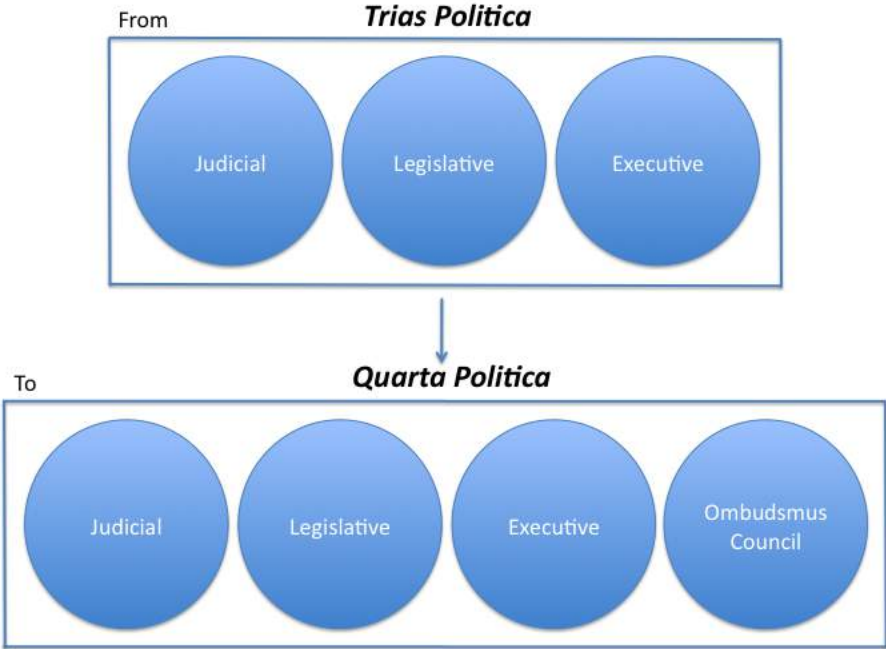
The rise of complex state bureaucracies and new forms of public authority has led theorists and practitioners to explore hybrid or supplementary institutional forms. In this context, the

Ombudsman institution has emerged as a key mechanism of administrative justice and good governance, offering an accessible, independent, and often informal route for citizens to seek redress when harmed by state action or inaction [4, 5]. Rooted in the Swedish model of 1809, the Ombudsman has since proliferated globally, adapting to diverse political and legal cultures—from New Zealand and Canada to African and Latin American democracies [6].

Despite its expansion, the Ombudsman’s reliance on “soft power”—investigations, reports, and persuasion—limits its enforcement capacity, particularly when state agencies refuse to comply. Scholars like Beyer [7] have criticized it as a “relic

of absolutism,” lacking structural authority to challenge entrenched power dynamics.

In response, this article proposes a constitutionally enshrined *Ombudsmus Council (OC)* as a fourth branch of government—*Quarta Politica*—equipped with binding powers to hold both legislative and executive actors accountable (See below the graphic representation of the transition from Montesquieu's classic separation of powers, *Trias Politica*, to the *Quarta Politica*). This builds on global debates about transparency, digital governance, and the democratic legitimacy crisis, where citizens increasingly demand faster, rights-based remedies, facilitated by open data and participatory platforms [8, 9].



Graphic representation of the transition from Montesquieu's classic separation of powers, *Trias Politica*, to the *Quarta Politica*.

Constitutionalizing the OC thus not only strengthens the democratic fabric but reflects a broader evolution in global public law—where new institutional forms are required to match the complexity of 21st-century governance and citizens’ expectations for dignity, fairness, transparency, and real-time accountability. In line with contemporary understandings of gender inclusivity, the term *Ombudsmus* will be used throughout, replacing the traditional term *Ombudsman*.

II. THE OMBUDSMUS COUNCIL: THE FOURTH POWER OF GOVERNMENT

While traditionally reactive, some modern Ombudsmus institutions have adopted a proactive stance, initiating investigations and addressing systemic issues without waiting for formal complaints [6]. Building on this evolution, this article offers a normative constitutional proposal for the establishment of an OC endowed with executive investigatory and corrective powers. The aim is to safeguard democratic participation and

enhance institutional accountability by positioning the OC as a structurally independent oversight body—potentially amounting to a “fourth branch of government” [10].

This proposal is intended to provoke further reflection on the deeper constitutional challenges that would arise from granting the OC executive functions. It explores the implications of such a transformation for judicial review, parliamentary oversight, and the role of existing accountability institutions, such as audit courts, ethics commissions, and human rights bodies. A key normative concern is how to constitutionally embed the OC in a way that enhances systemic responsiveness without undermining democratic legitimacy or institutional coherence.

To this end, the powers of the OC should be clearly defined and delimited to prevent overlap with the functions of the legislative, executive, or judicial branches. Its role should center on the investigation of *maladministration*, *institutional failures*, and *systemic democratic deficits*—without overstepping into adjudication or direct policy-making. Its status as an independent yet integrated body would reinforce the system of checks and balances, enabling it to act as a democratic catalyst rather than a political actor.

Given the risks inherent in establishing an institution with quasi-sovereign authority, it is crucial to design mechanisms to hold the OC itself accountable. These could include mandatory parliamentary reporting, strict public transparency protocols (including open-access case tracking and whistleblower protections), and the creation of citizen oversight panels selected through sortition to provide democratic legitimacy and counterbalance technocratic tendencies [11]. Periodic audits by independent ethics commissions would further bolster internal integrity and public trust.

In parallel, the effectiveness of the OC could be significantly enhanced through the constitutional authorization of digital tools. These would include AI-assisted investigative systems, real-time data dashboards, and interactive e-governance platforms that allow citizens to flag systemic

concerns efficiently and securely [12, 13]. When responsibly governed, these technologies can empower the Council to take proactive, data-driven action, reduce bureaucratic inertia, and improve resource allocation.

Finally, to safeguard the institutional independence of the OC, additional innovations are required beyond the conventional guarantees of appointment and tenure. These may include public nomination procedures with civic vetting, international benchmarking based on standards such as the *Paris Principles* for national human rights institutions, and deliberative citizen assemblies tasked with vetting or advising on appointments and strategic priorities [14].

In conclusion, a constitutionally enshrined and digitally empowered OC could play a transformative role in democratic governance by combining reactive redress with proactive oversight. If robust accountability and independence safeguards are in place, this fourth branch of government could serve as a vital bulwark against democratic erosion and as a key enabler of responsive, participatory governance in the 21st century.

III. POWERS AND STRUCTURES OF THE OMBUDSMUS COUNCIL

3.1 Constitutional Foundation

The elevation of the OC to constitutional status is justified by the inadequacy of existing accountability structures to respond to systemic governance failures and democratic erosion. Conventional oversight mechanisms—such as parliamentary committees, courts, and audit offices—often lack either the operational capacity, independence, or mandate to initiate broad-based investigations or ensure structural redress [15]. Codifying the Council within the constitution would grant it legal autonomy and normative legitimacy, thereby enabling it to operate above partisan politics and executive control. Far from complicating the constitutional order, this move would complement existing institutions by addressing accountability gaps, ensuring rights-based governance, and strengthening the infrastructure of participatory democracy [16].

3.2 Scope of Powers

The OC shall be endowed with the following graduated powers to balance authority with proportionality:

- **Investigative Authority:** The Council may initiate investigations *ex officio* or upon complaints, with the power to subpoena documents, summon officials, and access public and private institutions, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries [6].
- **Preventive Measures:** In urgent cases, the Council may impose temporary measures to avert imminent harm, such as halting the implementation of contested administrative actions.
- **Corrective Orders:** It may issue binding instructions to executive bodies to modify policies, halt rights-violating programs, or implement specified remedies.
- **Sanctions and Exclusions:** In cases of severe or repeated violations, the Council may recommend exclusion from international programs or funding mechanisms, subject to international agreements.
- **Field Interventions:** With local consent, the Council may deploy intervention teams in cooperation with civil society and authorities.
- **Civic Education and Assistance:** The Council shall conduct outreach programs and offer legal guidance to marginalized groups to promote awareness and access to remedies.

The binding decisions may require:

- Monetary compensation to affected individuals,
- Institutional restructuring or administrative reform,
- Public accountability measures, such as formal apologies or policy repeals.

These powers are to be tiered based on severity and scope—from non-binding recommendations and provisional measures to binding directives and sanctions—ensuring escalation is legally justified and context-sensitive.

3.3 Enforcement and Compliance Mechanisms

To ensure compliance, the Council shall be empowered with:

- Contempt powers equivalent to those held by courts in administrative jurisdictions;
- Publication of non-compliance lists to leverage reputational pressure;
- Referral powers to higher domestic courts or international human rights mechanisms;
- Escalation procedures to refer egregious violations to legislative or international bodies.

3.4 Checks and Internal Safeguards

To prevent overreach and ensure procedural fairness:

- All Council actions must be transparent, with open reporting of decisions and rationale;
- Investigations and directives must follow due process, including rights of response and hearings;
- Binding measures must be subject to judicial review by a constitutional or administrative court [17];
- An independent ombuds panel shall handle complaints against the Council itself;
- Decisions shall be logged in a publicly accessible digital registry, allowing traceability and oversight.

This multi-layered system of internal checks and external accountability ensures that the Council's power remains grounded in legality and proportionality.

3.5 Structure and Composition

The Council shall comprise five members, including a President and Vice-President, appointed for staggered, non-renewable terms to ensure continuity, institutional memory, and to prevent the undue concentration of power. Members shall be selected to reflect diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, and professional expertise, ensuring broad representation of the civic landscape. The Council shall be constitutionally recognized as a fourth power of

the democratic state, standing alongside the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Decisions shall be made by majority vote, and dissenting or concurring opinions shall be published to guarantee transparency and public accountability.

3.6 Appointment and Removal Procedures

Appointments to the OC shall be conducted through a transparent, participatory, and merit-based process grounded in constitutional provisions. Members are not appointed by the legislature or executive, but rather by civic society through a multilayered mechanism. This includes a citizen nomination process, public hearings, and evaluation by an independent Selection Panel comprised of representatives from accredited civil society organizations (CSOs), professional associations, and academic institutions. Eligibility criteria include demonstrated commitment to democratic values, a track record in public service or civic engagement, and independence from partisan interests.

This civic-led appointment mechanism reflects the Council's role as an institutional embodiment of the people's sovereignty and its function as a check on all other branches of power. The participatory model is essential to ensure democratic legitimacy and public trust [14, 16, 18].

Members may be removed only in cases of serious misconduct or permanent incapacity, based on a constitutionally defined process conducted by a Judicial Oversight Committee, independent of both the Council and the other three powers. Removal proceedings must adhere to due process standards and be open to public scrutiny.

3.7 Collaboration and Institutional Integration

To avoid jurisdictional conflict and maximize legitimacy, formal channels for collaboration shall be embedded:

- Memoranda of understanding with national human rights commissions, anti-corruption bodies, and international treaty mechanisms;

- Participation in peer-review mechanisms under global good governance frameworks;
- Joint investigations and information exchange protocols to encourage institutional synergies.

These provisions reinforce the Council's subsidiarity, complementarity, and legitimacy within the broader ecosystem of accountability.

IV. CITIZENS' RIGHTS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The right of citizens to participate politically is a cornerstone of democratic governance, empowering individuals to influence political processes and decisions that affect their lives. This right is enshrined in international human rights law. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations in 1948, affirms that [19],

"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."

This principle is further elaborated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which underscores every citizen's right to [20]

"take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives" and to

"vote and be elected in genuine periodic elections by universal and equal suffrage..."

These international instruments establish a normative framework obligating states to respect and protect citizens' political participation. However, operationalizing these rights faces significant challenges in contexts marked by authoritarian drift, electoral manipulation, and systemic discrimination. In such settings, even where formal democratic institutions exist, they may be hollowed out by informal power structures, restrictive legal environments, or repressive security apparatuses that curb genuine participation [21,22].

While the legislative branch is responsible for enacting laws and regulations that uphold these

rights, and the executive branch is tasked with their implementation, the OC serves as a meta-institution tasked with oversight of both, especially where democratic procedures are at risk. It is mandated to monitor the actual realization of participatory rights and intervene when malfunction, suppression, or circumvention of these rights occurs. Importantly, such interventions must be sensitive to institutional mandates, respecting the autonomy of legislatures and executives while filling accountability gaps that arise when these institutions are unable or unwilling to protect fundamental political freedoms.

4.1 Types of Political Participation

Political participation can take many forms, each contributing to the democratic process. While voting in free, fair, and transparent elections remains the most widely recognized method, deliberative, direct, and participatory democracy offer complementary avenues.

Deliberative democracy emphasizes reasoned discussion and civic dialogue, while direct democracy involves referendums or citizens' initiatives. Participatory democracy, on the other hand, promotes broader engagement beyond elections—especially among marginalized communities.

While representative democracy is practical in complex societies, it often risks alienating the public from decision-makers [23]. Strengthening non-electoral forms of participation can mitigate such democratic deficits and foster popular sovereignty, where political authority genuinely reflects the people's will [23].

Technological developments, particularly digital platforms, have also broadened participatory opportunities. However, these technologies may also be weaponized to spread disinformation or manipulate public opinion—requiring critical digital literacy and strong institutional safeguards [24].

4.2 Achieving Political Participation

Ensuring meaningful participation requires proactive efforts, particularly in contexts with entrenched structural inequities. Core measures include:

- Inclusive Electoral Systems – Guaranteeing universal suffrage, removing discriminatory barriers (e.g., against ethnic minorities, migrants, or people with disabilities).
- Freedom of Speech, Assembly, and Association – Enabling civil society to organize, advocate, and mobilize without fear of repression.
- Access to Information – Ensuring citizens are well-informed via independent media and public transparency.

The OC should establish an early warning system—integrating traditional reporting with big data analytics—to detect patterns of voter suppression, administrative abuse, or civic space closures. In contexts marked by democratic backsliding, the Council could issue non-binding recommendations, convene inclusive dialogues, and document violations for public record or international attention.

4.3 Legal Protection of Political Participation

Robust legal frameworks are essential for safeguarding participatory rights. These include:

- Constitutional guarantees for suffrage and public office.
- Electoral laws protecting the integrity of voting and candidacy.
- Legal protections for free expression, assembly, and association.
- Anti-discrimination statutes ensuring equality in political access.
- Independent judiciaries for legal redress and enforcement.

The OC may also act as a neutral convener during electoral crises or political impasses, facilitating mediation among political actors, civil society, and public institutions. However, its interventions must be carefully calibrated to avoid perceptions of partisan bias or institutional overreach [25].

The Council must adhere to procedural neutrality, transparency, supporting rather than replacing national mechanisms.

Ultimately, the legitimacy of the OC hinges on its credibility, independence, and consistency. While it plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between legal guarantees and real-world practices, its effectiveness depends on public trust and clear procedural boundaries that prevent accusations of politicization or foreign interference.

V. DISCUSSION

The classical doctrine of the separation of powers, *Trias Politica*, articulated by Montesquieu [1], structured modern government into three distinct branches: the legislative, executive, and judicial. However, the complexity of contemporary democracies—marked by multilayered bureaucracies, digital disinformation, and declining public trust—demands a rethinking of this tripartite architecture. As part of this evolution, a fourth institutional pillar of accountability is emerging: *Quarta Politica*.

This article proposes that the OC, not the media, be recognized as the institutional embodiment of *Quarta Politica*, charged with the active protection of democratic political participation. In contrast to the media, which traditionally functioned as the “fourth estate,” the OC is a publicly mandated, legally constituted organ dedicated to administrative justice, institutional accountability, and participatory integrity.

The media has historically served as an informal check on government power, often sparking public debates and spotlighting abuses. Yet, as scholars like McChesney [26] and Herman & Chomsky [27] argue, media systems are increasingly captured by commercial imperatives, elite interests, and algorithmic gatekeeping. These distortions contribute to polarization, misinformation, and the erosion of democratic discourse [28]. In this context, relying solely on the media to safeguard democratic participation is insufficient and unreliable.

Rather than displacing the media, the OC should complement it, coexisting as part of a broader

ecosystem of democratic accountability. Informed by postmodern theories of governance that emphasize decentralization, networked oversight, and reflexivity [29, 30], this model envisions a multi-layered accountability regime—one that integrates both formal institutions (like ombuds offices, electoral commissions, and courts) and informal mechanisms (including watchdog journalism, independent fact-checkers, and civic tech initiatives).

The OC, in this regard, would not only monitor public authorities but also collaborate with independent media and civil society organizations to counteract disinformation, enhance transparency, and uphold the integrity of public discourse. Such collaboration could involve co-developing real-time fact-checking protocols, maintaining open databases of administrative grievances, or convening joint inquiries into threats to political participation. This model reflects a post-Weberian conception of the state—no longer a monolithic apparatus, but a pluralistic governance arena mediated by hybrid institutions [31].

While the Council's institutional status offers key advantages—such as legal mandate, procedural rigor, and enforceability—it must also confront significant normative and practical critiques:

- **Democratic legitimacy:** As an appointed body, the OC may be accused of lacking popular accountability. Yet, its legitimacy derives from constitutional authorization, operational transparency, and a clear mandate to uphold rights-based governance—not to wield political power but to check it [6, 32].
- **Bureaucratic overreach:** There is a risk that the Council could expand its scope unchecked, duplicating or undermining other institutions. To mitigate this, clear procedural boundaries, subsidiarity principles, and periodic review mechanisms must be enshrined to preserve institutional balance and maintain public trust.
- **Instrumentalization risks:** Like any institution, the OC could be politicized or co-opted. Safeguards must include independent appointment processes,

multi-stakeholder advisory boards, and insulation from executive interference.

Moreover, in the digital age, where traditional media ecosystems are weakened and algorithmic platforms fragment public discourse, the OC could play a crucial role in counteracting disinformation and digital manipulation. By partnering with civic data labs, university consortia, and digital rights NGOs, it could monitor political communication ecosystems, investigate coordinated influence operations, and issue corrective advisories in defense of electoral integrity and fair participation [33].

Crucially, this vision aligns with the broader shift toward postmodern governance—a regime in which power is distributed, accountability is networked, and legitimacy stems not only from majoritarian consent but from the capacity to protect democratic dignity and voice in increasingly complex political terrains [34].

In this light, *Quarta Politica* is not a call to centralize authority in a new bureaucratic elite, but a normative and institutional innovation to recalibrate democracy in the 21st century. It demands that the state not only permit participation but enable and defend it. The OC, as an architect of this new model, offers a formalized, rights-based, and responsive mechanism to fill the accountability vacuum left by market-driven media and partisan deadlock.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

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Ethics of Responsibility and Intergenerational Justice

Paulo César Nodari

ABSTRACT

Contemporary ethics faces significant challenges due to the increasing intersection of science and morality, particularly regarding planetary responsibility and intergenerational justice. The ecological crisis must not be viewed merely as a byproduct of human actions, but as an urgent issue demanding a profound transformation in global behaviors. While technological progress has led to advancements, it has also introduced new risks, highlighting the need for a reexamination of ethical foundations. Hans Jonas' proposal, with his ethics of responsibility, offers an essential philosophical framework, advocating for the responsibility of current generations for the long-term consequences of their actions on the environment and future generations. The concept of intergenerational justice, understood as justice between generations, discussed in the works of Hans Jonas and John Rawls, is intrinsically linked to the common good and is one of the central principles of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* encyclical. The encyclical aims to balance technological progress with the ethical responsibility of protecting humanity and all living beings on planet Earth. Pope Francis emphasizes that the real challenge lies not in rejecting progress, but in mitigating the risks that threaten human dignity and planetary sustainability. This article proposes a dialogue between Jonas' thought and Pope Francis' reflections, exploring how the ethics of responsibility can be applied to the contemporary ecological context.

Keywords: ethics of responsibility; inter- generational justice; ecological crisis; planetary sustainability; hans jonas; pope francis.

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Ethics of Responsibility and Intergenerational Justice

Ética da Responsabilidade e Justiça Intergeracional

Paulo César Nodari

ABSTRACT

Contemporary ethics faces significant challenges due to the increasing intersection of science and morality, particularly regarding planetary responsibility and intergenerational justice. The ecological crisis must not be viewed merely as a byproduct of human actions, but as an urgent issue demanding a profound transformation in global behaviors. While technological progress has led to advancements, it has also introduced new risks, highlighting the need for a reexamination of ethical foundations. Hans Jonas' proposal, with his ethics of responsibility, offers an essential philosophical framework, advocating for the responsibility of current generations for the long-term consequences of their actions on the environment and future generations. The concept of intergenerational justice, understood as justice between generations, discussed in the works of Hans Jonas and John Rawls, is intrinsically linked to the common good and is one of the central principles of Pope Francis' Laudato Si' encyclical. The encyclical aims to balance technological progress with the ethical responsibility of protecting humanity and all living beings on planet Earth. Pope Francis emphasizes that the real challenge lies not in rejecting progress, but in mitigating the risks that threaten human dignity and planetary sustainability. This article proposes a dialogue between Jonas' thought and Pope Francis' reflections, exploring how the ethics of responsibility can be applied to the contemporary ecological context. Furthermore, drawing from Jonas' contributions, the article examines the relevance of Romano Guardini and Edith Brown Weiss's theories in the development of intergenerational ethics, analyzing how their ideas on power and equity deepen the

understanding of justice between generations. Thus, the study aims not only to provide a theoretical foundation for the ethics of responsibility and intergenerational justice, but also to highlight the urgency of reflections that offer both theoretical and practical solutions to address the ecological crisis, ensuring the sustainability and survival of humanity and the planet.

Keywords: ethics of responsibility; intergenerational justice; ecological crisis; planetary sustainability; hans jonas; pope francis.

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RESUMO

A ética contemporânea enfrenta desafios significativos devido à crescente interseção entre ciência e moralidade, especialmente no que se refere à responsabilidade planetária e à justiça intergeracional. A crise ecológica não deve ser vista apenas como um subproduto das ações humanas, mas como uma urgência que exige uma transformação profunda nos comportamentos globais. Embora o progresso técnico tenha trazido avanços, também impôs riscos, evidenciando a necessidade de repensar a fundamentação ética. A proposta de Hans Jonas, com sua ética da responsabilidade, oferece um fundamento filosófico essencial, defendendo a responsabilidade das gerações atuais pelas consequências de longo prazo de suas ações sobre o meio ambiente e as futuras gerações. O conceito de justiça intergeracional, isto é, justiça entre gerações, abordado em obras de Hans Jonas e de John Rawls, conectado intrinsecamente ao bem comum, é um dos princípios centrais da Carta Encíclica Laudato Si'

do Papa Francisco. A encíclica busca equilibrar os avanços tecnológicos com a responsabilidade ética de proteger a humanidade e todos os seres vivos do planeta Terra. O Papa Francisco destaca que o verdadeiro desafio não está em rejeitar o progresso, mas em mitigar os riscos que comprometem a dignidade humana e a sustentabilidade planetária. Este artigo propõe um diálogo entre o pensamento de Jonas e as reflexões do Papa Francisco, explorando como a ética da responsabilidade pode ser aplicada ao cenário ecológico contemporâneo. Além disso, a partir da contribuição de Jonas, o artigo investiga a relevância das teorias de Romano Guardini e Edith Brown Weiss na construção de uma ética intergeracional, analisando como suas ideias sobre poder e equidade aprofundam a compreensão da justiça entre gerações. Assim, o estudo visa não apenas fundamentar teoricamente a ética da responsabilidade e a justiça intergeracional, mas também sugerir a urgência de reflexões que apontem soluções tanto teóricas quanto práticas para enfrentar a crise ecológica, assegurando a sustentabilidade e a sobrevivência da humanidade e do planeta.

Palavras-chave: ética da responsabilidade; justiça intergeracional; crise ecológica; sustentabilidade planetária; hans jonas; papa francisco.

I. INTRODUÇÃO¹

A problemática atual da ética ou da ciência do ético situa-se, inevitavelmente, na relação ciência e ética. Considera-se específica dessa situação a consciência da necessidade de organização da responsabilidade da humanidade enquanto tal e em relação às consequências de sua ação em perspectiva planetária. Vislumbra-se a necessidade de uma ética que tome em consideração o horizonte planetário. Acerca, por exemplo, da crise ecológica não se pode analisá-la apenas como consequência da ação humana,

senão como urgência de uma radical mudança de hábitos e atitudes por parte de todos. O progresso civilizatório trouxe um desenvolvimento técnico-científico, e, simultaneamente, uma ameaça e medo constantes. Diante dessa situação, propõe-se uma nova fundamentação filosófica da ética na época da ciência, porque se sabe que as morais fundamentadas no sujeito não têm condições suficientes de enfrentar o desafio planetário que nos assola. Assim, à esteira da ética da responsabilidade de Jonas objetiva-se analisar os novos problemas enfrentados pela ética em razão da vulnerabilidade do meio ambiente, causada pela intervenção técnica do fazer humano sobre os ecossistemas, e, agora, também, na iminência de poder intervir, inclusive, na natureza interna, ou seja, uma espécie de “encantamento com a natureza interna”, o que, em outras palavras, denomina-se com o projeto eugênico da engenharia genética. Com a obra, *O princípio responsabilidade* (2006), Jonas elabora uma proposta sistemática de embasamento da ética e analisa como se dá a possibilidade de uma ética da responsabilidade de todos os seres humanos no que diz respeito à convivência de todos os seres vivos em uma época marcada pela ciência.

O questionamento e a preocupação de Jonas são compartilhados por muitos intelectuais das mais diversas áreas do saber. Meados e final do século XX, emerge a preocupação pela preservação dos recursos naturais e do patrimônio cultural entre as gerações. Trata-se, por assim dizer, da justiça intergeracional, ou seja, da justiça entre as gerações, a qual começa a ter mais destaque, sobremaneira, com os escritos de Hans Jonas, especialmente, com a obra *O princípio responsabilidade* (1979), mas, também, com a obra de John Rawls em *Uma teoria da justiça* (1971), especialmente, no § 44 ao tratar do problema da justiça entre as gerações, e com a Carta Encíclica do Papa Francisco, *Laudato Si'* (2015; doravante: LS). Logo, *justiça intergeracional* não é uma expressão cuja origem remontaria ao Papa Francisco, uma vez que ele a toma em consideração a partir da problemática que o impulsiona a escrever a referida Carta Encíclica sobre o cuidado da casa comum. De acordo com a *Laudato Si'*: “A humanidade entrou

¹ Uma primeira versão deste texto foi publicada: NODARI, Paulo César. Ética da responsabilidade a justiça intergeracional: um diálogo entre Jonas, Weiss, Guardini e o Papa Francisco. In: NODARI, Paulo César. *Cultura de paz, direitos humanos e meio ambiente*. Caxias do Sul: EDUCS, 2015, pp. 349-369. A versão que se apresenta nesta revista recebeu novas ponderações e acréscimos muito importantes.

numa nova era, em que o poder da tecnologia nos põe diante de uma encruzilhada.” (LS, n. 101, p. 65). É imprescindível reconhecer os avanços e as importantes mudanças proporcionadas pelo conhecimento e pelo progresso. Mas, por outro lado, faz-se urgente perceber, também, que um dos problemas fundamentais e mais profundos é o “(...) o modo como realmente a humanidade assumiu a tecnologia e o seu desenvolvimento *juntamente com um paradigma homogêneo e unidimensional*.” (LS, n. 106, p. 68: grifos do autor). Segundo o Papa Francisco, não se trata de ser contra o progresso, mas de evitar os riscos que ameaçam a autenticidade da vida. “Por isso, já não basta dizer que devemos preocupar-nos com as gerações futuras; exige-se ter consciência de que é a nossa própria dignidade que está em jogo.” (LS, n. 160, p 96).

À luz do problema acima referenciado, ensaia-se uma tentativa de diálogo entre o embasamento teórico de Jonas no que diz respeito à viabilidade e plausibilidade de uma ética da responsabilidade nos tempos atuais em que a ciência e a técnica predominam e dominam o cenário contemporâneo, por um lado, trazendo, por outro lado, a discussão acerca da ideia de justiça intergeracional, por conta, justamente, do que se pode denominar de aquecimento reflexivo e discursivo do problema e da crise ecológica hodierna. Não é mais possível declinar do cuidado com a casa comum, tanto no que se refere ao âmbito pessoal como também ao âmbito da política governamental. Busca-se, em um primeiro momento, traçar as linhas gerais de uma ética da responsabilidade a partir do embasamento teórico de Jonas, para que, em um segundo momento, a partir, sobretudo, do Capítulo IV da Carta Encíclica, *Laudato Si'*, intitulado: *Uma ecologia integral*, seja possível tomar em consideração algumas ideias centrais do Papa Francisco. O Papa Francisco não deixa de explicitar que um de seus referenciais teóricos de base para compreender o projeto moderno é Romano Guardini, especialmente, com seu livro, *O fim da idade moderna*, e, mais especificamente, a partir da tese do “poder” que o ser humano alcança e detém, pois: “Ele tem poder sobre as coisas, mas digamo-lo com mais certeza ainda,

não tem poder sobre o seu próprio poder.” (Guardini, 2000, p. 74). Então, se, por um lado, evidencia-se, explicitamente, na referida Carta Encíclica, o embasamento teórico a partir da tese central de Guardini, também, por outro lado, pode-se conjecturar a tese segundo a qual outros referenciais teóricos são imprescindíveis para a análise e compreensão da tese da justiça intergeracional. Além das referências supracitadas, Edith Brown Weiss é outra referência imprescindível, sobremaneira, no que diz respeito à concepção de equidade intergeracional, ainda que a referência indicativa direta não apareça e nem seja explícita na Carta Encíclica do Papa Francisco. Busca-se, por conseguinte, na segunda parte desta reflexão, traçar algumas ideias gerais tanto de Guardini (explicitamente), como também de Weiss (implicitamente), presentes na *Laudato Si'*, uma vez parecer plausível a aproximação teórica de ambos no que diz respeito à concepção de *justiça intergeracional* na referida encíclica papal.

II. A ÉTICA DA RESPONSABILIDADE

Com os avanços e os acontecimentos proporcionados pela ciência e pela tecnologia, emergiram novos e complexos questionamentos acerca dos quais a ética, em seu parâmetro tradicional, isto é, tendo foco em uma visão demasiadamente antropocêntrica, não oferece respostas satisfatórias. Tal situação impõe à ética uma nova tarefa a de assumir como não imaginada e pensada outrora de uma amplitude e magnitude de responsabilidade. Jonas, nessa perspectiva, acentua que um dos grandes problemas a ser enfrentado pela ética da responsabilidade é o da vulnerabilidade da natureza, de modo que ao ser humano seja imputada a responsabilidade ética pelo zelo e cuidado da vida dos seres vivos. Tal vulnerabilidade ocasionada não só, mas também, pela intervenção técnica do ser humano sobre os ecossistemas levou ao surgimento de uma nova teoria ética. Para Jonas, nesta época da ciência e da tecnologia, a ética tradicional já não dispõe de categorias suficientemente convincentes, para embasar um debate acerca da ação humana em uma época marcada pela ciência e técnica. “Em resumo, porque a *vida* está ameaçada pelo

técnica, é necessária uma ética da *responsabilidade*” (Oliveira; Moretto; Sganzerla, 2015, p. 14: grifos dos autores). E tal situação é decorrente, por assim dizer, de uma concepção do progresso do gênero humano que combina, por um lado, o desenvolvimento do conhecimento científico e sua apropriação técnico-pragmática da natureza humana, e, por outro, “[...] sua utilização em benefício da dimensão ético-moral da humanidade, sendo esta compreendida em referência essencial a valores e normas.” (Giacioia Junior, 2018, p. 151). Muito provavelmente, poucos conceitos tornaram-se tão correntes e obtiveram tanta força retórica como a ideia do progresso, a ponto de ser tratado como ideia inquestionável, e, praticamente, um dogma. “Tal situação acabou por transformar o conceito não apenas em uma pedra de toque da nossa moderna sociedade ocidental, mas também levou à crença em sua infalibilidade e, nesse caso, também à sua inquestionabilidade.” (Oliveira, 2023, p. 37).

O mito do progresso ilimitado decorrente, sobretudo, das encantadoras e esperançosas promessas das ciências e do antropocentrismo, que situa o ser humano acima e inclusive contra a natureza (Tamayo, 2011, p. 112), trouxe, como o anverso dessa face luminosa, dentre outras consequências, tanto o esgotamento gradual dos recursos disponíveis, a poluição dos ecossistemas, a saturação de resíduos dos processos de produção e de consumo (Tamayo, 2011, p. 112), como também dilemas éticos de difícil resolução que colocam em xeque as próprias autodeterminação e autocompreensão conquistadas com tanto esforço e empenho. Eis, pois, por um lado, o contexto no qual estão sob suspeita a utopia humanista e as próprias éticas tradicionais, e, por outro, a urgência de pensar e ter em vista o surgimento e a iminência de uma ética que assegure a existência humana e de todas as formas de vida existentes na biosfera. É nesse cenário que Jonas postula o princípio responsabilidade, um princípio ético para a civilização tecnológica. Além de ser um princípio ético, o princípio responsabilidade estabelece uma perspectiva de diálogo crítico em uma época altamente tecnicizada e cientificizada. Em outras palavras, pode-se conjecturar que o princípio da

responsabilidade é motivado por uma dupla tomada de consciência, a saber, (a) a técnica coloca em xeque de maneira radical e como jamais imaginado outrora a existência da vida e da própria humanidade e (b) as éticas tradicionais, que são antropocêntricas, não conseguem dar conta de enfrentar os desafios que a civilização tecnológica exige e ordena (Pommier, 2013, p. 127).

Além disso, algo novo é visível e perceptível. A técnica constitui-se como dinâmica, global, e, também, ambivalente, ou seja, ela não é neutra. O progresso não é apenas sinônimo de mudança. Trata-se de um movimento, ou seja, de uma dinâmica sempre mais elevada e nada limitante, uma vez que a ideia do progresso ilimitado alimenta e retroalimenta o próprio processo sem fim que se estende no espaço e no tempo de modo, por conseguinte, global sobre a própria terra e sobre a humanidade, tornando-as, por assim dizer, objetos de sua manipulação (Pommier, 2013, p. 128-129). Eis, pois, a razão de sua ambivalência. Assim, na concepção de Jonas, é importante considerar uma modificação significativa diagnosticada a respeito do cenário tecnológico moderno. Tal realidade, já, há algum tempo, situa-se como um risco eminente de efeitos por vezes incalculáveis e irreversíveis, cujas consequências centram-se no futuro da humanidade, fomentando, por conseguinte, por um lado, o questionamento acerca do lugar e da importância da tecnologia, e, por outro lado, atingindo o cerne dos sistemas de pensamento ético e moral vigentes. Tratar-se-ia de tomar em conta na ética de Jonas não apenas as consequências diretas e previstas, mas também as indiretas e imprevistas. Jonas elucida tal questão da seguinte maneira:

Sob tais circunstâncias, o saber torna-se um dever prioritário, mais além de tudo o que anteriormente lhe era exigido, e o saber deve ter a mesma magnitude da dimensão causal do nosso agir. Mas o fato de que ele realmente não possa ter a mesma magnitude, isto é, de que o poder previdente permaneça atrás do saber técnico que confere pode ao nosso agir, ganha, ele próprio, significado ético. O hiato entre a força da previsão e o poder do agir

produz um novo problema ético. Reconhecer a ignorância torna-se, então, o outro lado da obrigação do saber, e com isso torna-se uma parte da ética que deve instruir o autocontrole, cada vez mais necessário, sobre o nosso excessivo poder. Nenhuma ética anterior vira-se obrigada a considerar a condição global da vida humana e o futuro distante, inclusive a existência da espécie. O fato de que hoje eles estejam em jogo exige, numa palavra, uma nova concepção de direitos e deveres, para a qual nenhuma ética e metafísica antiga pode sequer oferecer os princípios, quanto mais uma doutrina acabada. (Jonas, 2006, p. 41).

A situação atual afere a um problema ético com dimensões profundas para o ser humano enquanto tal, uma vez que os problemas fundamentais de nosso tempo dizem respeito à humanidade como um todo, o que significa dizer que uma ética hoje tem de articular-se levando em consideração a situação histórica caracterizada pela interdependência das nações no contexto de uma civilização técnico-científica. Alguns pensadores contemporâneos tentam explicitar as razões geradoras desta situação, o que não é tão simples e fácil. Jonas, por exemplo, afirma que tudo se radica no “ideal baconiano”, no “utopismo tecnológico”, na “escatologia secularizada”, que constituem o projeto moderno, isto é, o ideal da instalação de um tipo da saber que se entende como possibilidade de dominação sobre a natureza em função da melhoria das condições de vida do ser humano, ou mais radicalmente ainda, em função da emergência do homem autêntico como fruto de um processo conduzido pelas forças do próprio homem. Para essa concepção, saber é sinônimo de poder, cuja expressão suprema é a exploração técnica da natureza em função de sua subordinação aos fins humanos, o que paradoxalmente conduziu à sujeição completa a si mesmo sob o signo da catástrofe ecológica.

A crise ecológica tem alguns responsáveis diretos perfeitamente identificados. Um é o *mecanismo*, que considera a natureza objeto morto e atomizado. Outro, o *humanismo antropocêntrico*, que pressupõe a primazia do ser humano sobre qualquer outra forma de

existência e de vida na terra. Papel importante na deterioração ecológica é desempenhado pelo *mercantilismo fetichista*, que reconhece a hegemonia das formas mercantis de produção e valorização e implica o deslocamento radical do valor de uso sobre o valor de troca. Não menos importante na crise são a *racionalidade tecnocrática* e a *tecnocracia produtivista*, que reduzem a ciência à técnica e consideram-na como critério de legitimação ética e política. Trata-se de uma expressão feliz de Munford: “governo do martelo sobre o braço”: o instrumento se impõe como fim sobre os próprios fins. Entre os responsáveis diretos estão também o antes citado *mito do progresso*, que implica a colonização do tempo e comporta o esquecimento do passado, da tradição e do futuro, e a afirmação de um presente eterno e imediato. (Tamayo, 2011, pp. 112-113: grifos do autor).

Vive-se, portanto, segundo Jonas, uma crise sem precedentes em nossos dias atuais. O espectro da crise é tão amplo que soluções tradicionais não têm eficácia. Para Jonas, a tradição do pensamento ocidental se encontra profundamente interpelada por esta nova situação e incapacitada de enfrentá-la, uma vez que suas diferentes éticas não são de responsabilidade em relação ao futuro. O que importa na atual situação de crise da modernidade é uma ética de conservação, de proteção e cuidado e não uma ética do progresso e do desenvolvimento desenfreados. Numa palavra, trata-se da crítica da ideia do progresso voraz e de seu “utopismo tecnológico”, a fim de poder garantir a sobrevivência da vida humana e salvar a dignidade humana de suas ameaças, porque o ideal grandioso ambicioso moderno, segundo Jonas, desemboca em um dilema crucial: por um lado, o poder tecnológico alargou, de forma nunca conhecida dantes, a extensão e as possibilidades da ação humana, gerando, por conseguinte, a necessidade premente de regar, por meio de normas, o uso efetivo deste enorme potencial; e, por outro lado, o tipo de racionalidade, que conduz este processo, reduz-se ao controle dos fenômenos, e, em última instância, no momento atual, põe em dúvida a possibilidade mesma de uma verdade objetiva, teórica ou prática, na vida

humana (Giacioia Junior, 2000, p. 206). Pode-se, desse modo, afirmar:

A crítica à noção de Progresso é um dos esforços mais centrais e mais contundentes da obra de Hans Jonas. Para o autor, a crença no Progresso é o principal combustível do avanço tecnológico, das utopias nele fundadas e dos regimes políticos que nele se abastecem (tanto o capitalismo quanto o socialismo). Além disso, esse conceito fornece as bases para o afoço do desenvolvimento que vem orientando a sociedade moderna e cujos prejuízos estão ligados à exploração da natureza, ao esgotamento dos recursos naturais, à extinção das espécies e aos riscos à vida humana implicados na crise ecológica. (Oliveira, 2023, p. 97).

As diferentes possibilidades de intervenções na natureza e no ser humano evidenciam as dimensões do desafio para o pensamento ético em relação à existência humana. Do fascínio pelo eminente poder de transformação e intervenção, percebe-se, com muita facilidade, não haver condições de as éticas tradicionais, as quais, grosso modo, alicerçam-se sobre a perspectiva antropocêntrica, nortearem as ações humanas. Esse desajuste só poderá ser corrigido, em seu entendimento, através da elaboração de uma nova ética. Diz Jonas:

A presença do homem no mundo era um dado primário e indiscutível de onde partir toda ideia de dever referente à conduta humana: agora, ela própria tornou-se um objeto de dever – isto é, o dever de proteger a premissa básica de todo o dever, ou seja, precisamente a presença de meros candidatos a um universo moral no mundo físico do futuro; isso significa, entre outras coisas, conservar este mundo físico de modo que as condições para uma tal presença permaneçam intactas; e isso significa proteger a sua vulnerabilidade diante de uma ameaça dessas condições. (Jonas, 2006, p. 45).

O poder técnico que estende as consequências e os resultados da ação, caracterizando, por sua vez, o poder ampliado da ação humana, constata os

indícios da importância e da grandeza não mais delimitável no espaço e no tempo. “Ao ultrapassar o horizonte da vizinhança espaço-temporal, esse alcance ampliado do poder humano rompe o monopólio *antropocêntrico* da maioria dos sistemas éticos anteriores, sejam religiosos ou seculares.” (Jonas, 2013, p. 55). Logo, a técnica constrói-se como um experimento marcado pela ambivalência, pois não nos é possível reconhecer todas as suas consequências, porque tal abrangência foge, inclusive, do controle das mãos do ser humano, tomando em consideração a magnitude e a ampliação enquanto possibilidade do poder fazer humano, uma vez que, segundo Jonas, “(...) a ‘ambivalência’ da técnica está estreitamente ligada à sua ‘grandeza’, isto é, à desmesura de seus efeitos no espaço e no tempo.” (Jonas, 2013, p. 59). Ou seja, em outras palavras, mesmo que o indivíduo tenha uma conduta fundamentada em uma boa intenção, esta não se constituiria ainda em uma garantia segura de que as consequências estariam sempre no âmbito do previsível e do calculável (Oliveira, 2012, p. 3). Acerca dos desafios da conduta e da atitude do ser humano diante da crise ecológica, sublinha-se:

Por causa disso, a pergunta pelo futuro do humano não pode prescindir, em nossos dias, de uma reflexão aprofundada sobre as consequências éticas, sociais, políticas e culturais geradas pelo desenvolvimento das ciências e das tecnologias. Uma vez que o desenvolvimento produziu não apenas uma alteração substancial de nossa cosmovisão, mas também uma mudança radical na autocompreensão ética da espécie humana, parece que se apresenta hoje a necessidade de repensar limites éticos para evitar as consequências potencialmente catastróficas do desenvolvimento técnico-científico – que inclui tanto o desastre ecológico, a desertificação do planeta quanto o apocalipse nuclear, a clonagem humana pela engenharia genética, e o hibridismo trans-humanista do *homo roboticus*. (Giacioia Junior, 2018, p. 52: grifos do autor).

Diante dessa preocupação com a amplitude e com o domínio, outrora desconhecidos, por parte da ética clássica, o saber torna-se um dever

prioritário, ou seja, “(...) o saber deve ter a mesma magnitude da dimensão causal do nosso agir.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 41). Assim, segundo Jonas, o *princípio responsabilidade* coloca-se diante da urgência de ser a proposta possível de uma ética para a técnica. As éticas tradicionais, cuja centralidade foca o sujeito, não são consideradas suficientes para tratar da questão da tecnologia moderna, tanto do ponto de vista de sua fundamentação como de sua aplicação, e parte do diagnóstico de que a técnica moderna traz consigo uma situação singular nova, e, também, desconhecida. Trata-se, de acordo com Jonas, basicamente, doravante, do caráter cumulativo da ética, o que não era comum à concepção tradicional da ética.

Enquanto for o destino do homem, depende da situação da natureza, a principal razão que torna o interesse na manutenção da natureza um interesse moral, ainda se mantém a orientação antropocêntrica de toda ética clássica. Mesmo assim, a diferença é grande. Desaparecem as delimitações de proximidade e simultaneidade, rompidas pelo crescimento espacial e o prolongamento temporal das consequências de causa e efeito, postas em movimento pela práxis técnica mesmo quando empreendidas para fins próximos. Sua irreversibilidade, em conjunção com sua magnitude condensada, introduz outro fator, de novo tipo, na equação moral. Acresça-se a isso o seu caráter cumulativo: seus efeitos vão se somando, de modo que a situação vivida pelo primeiro ator, mas sim crescentemente distinta e cada vez mais um resultado daquilo que já foi feito. Toda ética tradicional contava somente com um comportamento não cumulativo. (Jonas, 2006, p. 40).

Jonas demonstra sua inquietude a respeito deste cenário hodierno, considerando o poder e o ampliado potencial do *homo faber*, por conta de ter este assumido primazia com relação ao *homo sapiens*, exigindo, por sua vez, uma reflexão ética responsável e cuidadosa acerca do poder da técnica. “Nesse sentido, a tecnociência atual realiza o projeto moderno: o homem se converte em amo e senhor da natureza. Mas, ao mesmo tempo, a desestabiliza profundamente, pois o

coloca na posição de objeto.” (Giacioia Junior, 2018, p. 154). A técnica acaba deixando de ser meio ou instrumento e para determinar-se como fim em si. “Em outras palavras, mesmo desconsiderando suas obras objetivas, a tecnologia assume um significado ético por causa do lugar central que ela agora ocupa subjetivamente nos fins da vida humana.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 43). Em tal contexto, o saber torna-se um dever prioritário, revestindo-se da mesma magnitude da dimensão causal do nosso agir (Jonas, 2006, p. 41), e precisará reconhecer o hiato existente entre o *poder de previsão* da ação humana e o *poder do agir*. Desse modo, a obrigação do saber, neste contexto, deverá orientar o autocontrole, de modo a limitar nosso excessivo poder, uma vez não ser possível prever, por conseguinte, todas as consequências do fazer técnico da ação humana. Tal panorâmica exige uma nova concepção de direitos e deveres, para a qual a ética e a metafísica antigas não podem oferecer os princípios e muito menos uma doutrina acabada (Jonas, 2006, p. 41). A ética tradicional e seus imperativos de amar uns aos outros, a honestidade e a compaixão continuam válidas nos dias atuais, sem dúvida, mas, na época da ciência e da tecnologia, não são mais suficientes para normatizar e instruir o autocontrole do excessivo poder humano. Urge, pois, um novo entendimento acerca do ser humano não mais enquanto dominador, senhor e usurpador de todos os poderes e benefícios da terra. Logo:

Graças a esse antropocentrismo, o humanismo enxertou-se visceralmente em todos os sistemas éticos legados pela tradição histórica do Ocidente. Os sistemas éticos tradicionais são essencialmente antropocêntricos e humanistas, e é exatamente esta característica que chega a seus limites e mostra dar sinais de esgotamento com a persistente crise da razão e dos valores que abala os fundamentos de nossas sociedades “pós-modernas”. (Giacioia Junior, 2018, p. 50).

Percebe-se, pois, que na era da ciência e da tecnologia, a técnica deixou de ser simples fenômeno isolado ou mais um componente humano importante. “O progresso do homem

estende-se como avanço de poder a poder.” (Jonas, 2013, p. 40). Ela se constitui como condição essencial da condição humana. Ela está na base de interpretação da própria existência humana. Esta época eminentemente técnico-científica traz, entretanto, uma ameaça constante de morte. Pela primeira vez na história, a civilização coloca cada ser humano, cada nação, cada cultura, em face de uma problemática ética comum. Logo: “A responsabilidade do homem com o perecível e com a continuidade de uma autêntica vida no futuro não é, desse modo, algo acrescido à sua humanidade, como uma construção lógico-formal, mas trata-se de algo inerente à sua condição de ser humano.” (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 134). A responsabilidade se impõe ao ser humano como um mandamento ético e um dever em vista de sua própria preservação e existência. Em outras palavras: “A magnitude e o campo de ação da moderna práxis técnica em seu conjunto e em cada um de seus empreendimentos particulares são tais que introduzem toda uma dimensão adicional e nova no marco do cálculo dos valores éticos, dimensão esta que era desconhecida a todas as formas precedentes de ação.” (Jonas, 2013, p. 54).

Propõe-se, pois, uma nova fundamentação racional e filosófica da ética na época da ciência capaz de afrontar os desafios emergentes e de assegurar aos homens a capacidade de governar os efeitos do poder que eles efetivamente possuem. É claro que as morais fundamentadas no sujeito não têm condições de enfrentar tamanho desafio planetário. Só uma ética capaz de fundamentar uma responsabilidade universal e solidária da humanidade será capaz de assumir este desafio responsavelmente. Portanto, a busca da fundamentação racional de uma ética da responsabilidade solidária é uma constante da situação atual do ser humano, porque o mesmo encontra-se diante do desafio de assumir, em escala planetária, o dever da responsabilidade de suas ações, isto é, do seu agir humano. Para essa nova concepção de ética ambiental de escala planetária: “É preciso fazer uma *ecologia com portas e janelas abertas*, entender a nossa casa como processo temporal, capaz de afirmar e

acolher as externalidades que inevitavelmente produz.” (Farias, 2014, p. 620: grifos do autor).

Do saber que nasce da técnica nesta época marcada determinantemente pela ciência provém um excesso de poder, dando-lhe inúmeras possibilidades, as quais, por um lado, retrospectivamente, outrora, jamais foram imaginadas possíveis, mas, por outro lado, prospectivamente, não são possíveis de plena quantificação consequencial e nem de normatização ética, permanecendo, pois, um hiato entre o poder da técnica e o agir humano responsável. E, exatamente, neste aspecto, emerge, segundo Jonas, a urgência da heurística do temor. “Enquanto o perigo for desconhecido não se saberá o que há para se proteger e por que devemos fazê-lo: por isso, contrariando toda lógica e método, o saber se origina daquilo contra o que devemos nos proteger.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 70-71). Trata-se de uma distorção hipotética da condição futura do ser humano e da natureza, optando-se pela primazia do mau prognóstico (Jonas, 2006, p. 77).

O temor torna-se a obrigação preliminar de uma ética da responsabilidade, assegura Jonas. Do temor deriva uma atitude ética fundamental, agora, repensada a partir da vontade de evitar o pior. Quanto mais próximo do futuro estiver aquilo que deve ser temido, mais esta heurística torna-se necessária (Nodari; Mezzomo, 2024, pp. 212-225). Jonas entende que o temor é essencial para uma ética da responsabilidade, pois é através dele que o ser humano poderá agir e refletir sobre o destino da humanidade. “O sacrifício do futuro em prol do presente não é logicamente mais refutável do que o sacrifício do presente a favor do futuro. A diferença está apenas em que, em um caso, a série segue adiante e, no outro, não.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 47). A heurística do temor não se refere a algo paralisante ou patológico, mas sim a um temor que desperta para o pensamento e para a ação responsável. O temor é denominado de heurístico, “(...)”, pois ele cumpre com sua função de nos oferecer dois saberes: uma saber teórico, a partir de valores éticos considerados fundamentais à vida humana, e também um saber de caráter factual, produzido pelas ciências empíricas, capaz de previsões em relação ao

futuro.” (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 178). O sentimento de responsabilidade, ainda que imbuído de muita esperança de evitar o mal, implica em temer pelo pior, pois: “(...) o reconhecimento do *malum* é infinitamente mais fácil do que o do *bonum*; é mais imediato, mais urgente, bem menos exposto a diferenças de opinião.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 71: grifos do autor). A responsabilidade não é um sentimento qualquer. Ela reveste-se de uma heurística de esperança, contrabalançada pela heurística do temor, sendo-lhe esta, no entanto, mais urgente considerar. A heurística do temor torna-se como que um interdito contra a crença professa e otimista e professa que crê na bondade do progresso técnico ilimitado enquanto progresso. Trata-se de uma espécie de futurologia comparativa, isto é, uma ciência predicativa que coloca frente a frente diferentes cenários consecutivos possíveis, buscando o desenvolvimento de tais ou tais técnicas, a partir de interrogações a respeito da inquestionabilidade do progresso (Pommier, 2013, p. 152). A heurística do temor que confere primazia à profecia do pior (*malum*) ao invés do bom (*bonum*) ou do melhor dos cenários não significa, simplesmente, uma opção pela descrença na própria humanidade enquanto tal, mas, pelo contrário, uma atitude de previsão prudencial, porque o perigo potencial pode fomentar e comandar uma ação indiscutível de abstenção, isto é, de prevenção (Pommier, 2013, p. 153). Segundo Sganzerla, ainda que a heurística do temor não tenha sido acolhida de modo pacífico entre os intérpretes de Jonas, pode-se afirmar a respeito.

Trata-se de uma espécie de prudência no agir despertada pela preferência do mau prognóstico, de modo que se possa antecipar ou mesmo impedir a ação e a necessidade da reparação do dano; isto é, diante de prognósticos incertos e da ameaça da continuidade da vida autêntica no futuro, a cautela, a prevenção e a prudência assumem o papel de guia das ações humanas. E, como se trata de um conceito ético, a heurística do temor tem em si um conteúdo teórico, mas também uma pretensão prática, uma espécie de aplicabilidade que visa provocar mudanças

no nosso modo de agir. (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 169).

É possível afirmar que o dever, por primeiro, precisa é visualizar os efeitos de longo prazo da técnica moderna, pois o que deve ser temido ainda não foi experimentado e talvez não possua analogias na experiência do passado e do presente (Jonas, 2006, p. 72), e, em seguida, mobilizar o sentimento adequado para tal representação, isto é, a ética do futuro precisará ser capaz de evocar o temor correspondente (Jonas, 2006, p. 73). A adoção dessa atitude, ou seja, a disposição para se deixar afetar pela salvação ou pela desgraça (ainda que só imaginada) das gerações vindouras é, por conseguinte, o segundo dever introdutório da nova ética delineada por Jonas. Instruídos por esse sentimento, somos instados a evocar o temor correspondente aos perigos que podem ser potencializados pela técnica (Jonas, 2006, p. 72). Assim sendo, o novo modo do agir humano deve levar em consideração não apenas o interesse dos seres humanos, mas também a biosfera em sua totalidade, o que requer alterações substanciais nos fundamentos da ética. Ao contrário da visão científica moderna que dessacralizou a natureza, despindo-a “de toda dignidade de fins” (Jonas, 2006, pp. 41-42), a ética da responsabilidade afirma ter a natureza dignidade própria, isto é, ela é portadora de fins e valores que lhe são inerentes. Logo, faz-se urgente a substituição da busca desenfreada do utopismo tecnológico pelo cuidado criterioso e responsável pela continuidade da vida humana e também extra-humana. “*Progresso com prudência* é a fórmula escolhida por Jonas para referir-se à necessidade de o progresso tecnológico expandir-se, mas ao mesmo tempo não constituir-se em ameaça à vida em geral.” (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 185: grifos do autor).

A tecnologia é fruto da busca e vocação da humanidade, sem dúvida, mas também da ideia do triunfo do *homo faber* sobre o *homo sapiens*. Sob o signo da técnica moderna, a *techne* transformou-se em um infinito impulso da espécie humana para o progresso tecnológico. Tem-se a impressão de que a vocação humana está no contínuo progresso deste empreendimento e poder de dominação, em constante superação.

Parece ser conquista de um domínio total sobre as coisas e sobre o próprio homem seria a realização do destino da humanidade. Todavia, com o esboço da heurística do temor, Jonas propõe-se, ao pensar o princípio responsabilidade, dar ouvidos ao pior dos prognósticos e não ao melhor, ou seja, à incerteza do futuro, porque os avanços tecnológicos podem fomentar o simples afã do domínio e do poder em si. “Aquilo que já foi iniciado rouba de nossas mãos as rédeas da ação, e os fatos consumados, criados por aquele início, se acumulam, tornando-se a lei de sua continuação.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 78). É preciso, pois, que o ser humano tenha uma atitude muito honrosa como tal, a saber, de humildade e sabedoria. “É com esse entendimento que Jonas faz da prudência o primeiro dever e o mandamento da sua ética da responsabilidade, e da humildade, a virtude necessária e o remédio para o ímpeto tecnológico.” (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 186).

Jonas pensa então em um novo imperativo ético mais adequado aos desafios que a centralidade da técnica nos tempos hodiernos impõe. Faz-se, portanto, urgente a passagem do imperativo categórico de Kant: “Aja de modo que tu também possas querer que tua máxima se torne lei geral” para a fórmula que toma em conta a responsabilidade para com o futuro: “Aja de modo a que os efeitos da tua ação sejam compatíveis com a permanência de uma autêntica vida humana sobre a Terra”, ou, expresso negativamente: “Aja de modo a que os efeitos da tua ação não sejam destrutivos para a possibilidade futura de uma tal vida.” (Jonas, 2006, pp. 47-48). O novo imperativo ético, segundo Jonas, leva em conta não apenas os princípios das ações, mas também as consequências das ações realizadas, não, porém, a partir de vieses utilitaristas. A responsabilidade que se impõe à experiência humana atual confere ao ser humano o dever de assumir a responsabilidade perante o futuro da humanidade como princípio. Assim sendo, o conceito responsabilidade na ética da responsabilidade vai além da ética individual, de modo a fundamentar uma ética da civilização tecnológica. Para tanto, é preciso ter presente, entre outros aspectos, de que

o Mesmo não pode arriscar algo sem tomar em conta os interesses de Outrem, de que o Mesmo não tem a permissão de pôr em risco a totalidade dos interesses de Outrem, de que o aperfeiçoamento e a melhoria não justificam apostas totais, de que a humanidade não tem o direito ao suicídio da espécie e de que a existência do ser humano não pode ser objeto de aposta (Jonas, 2006, pp. 83-88).

Jonas considera que a nova teoria ética inaugurada a partir de seu princípio responsabilidade não corresponde à ideia tradicional de direitos e deveres, ou seja, uma perspectiva de reciprocidade, na qual “(...) o meu dever é a imagem refletida do dever alheio, que por seu turno é visto como imagem e semelhança de meu próprio dever; de modo que, uma vez estabelecidos certos direitos do outro, também se estabelece o dever de respeitá-los e, se possível, (acrescentando-se uma ideia de responsabilidade positivo), promovê-los.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 89). Não se aplica, portanto, a ideia de reciprocidade à nova ética formulada por Jonas, pois esta é uma ética do futuro que lida exatamente com o que ainda não existe, de maneira independente tanto da ideia de um direito quanto da ideia de uma reciprocidade. O autor aponta, na moral tradicional, um exemplo de responsabilidade e obrigação não recíproca, que é reconhecido e praticado espontaneamente: a responsabilidade para com os filhos, os quais sucumbiriam se a procriação não prosseguisse por meio da precaução e da assistência à prole. Seria essa, portanto, a classe de comportamento inteiramente altruísta fornecida pela natureza (Jonas, 2006, p. 90).

Jonas reconhece a existência de um dever de assumir a responsabilidade pelos atos que tenham repercussões de curto, médio e longo prazo, em decorrência do direito daqueles que virão e cuja existência pode-se, desde já, antecipar as previsões. Assim, ao lado da responsabilidade decorrente da decisão menos livre que a relação parental natural, relação não recíproca (Jonas, 2006, p. 169), ou seja, dos pais para com os filhos, emerge, também, a responsabilidade contratual de maneira original, própria da liberdade humana. Não obstante, segundo Jonas, a

responsabilidade contratual seja passível de declínio da função e não seja do tipo de bem imperativo como objeto imediato, como é o caso da responsabilidade parental, mesmo assim, a responsabilidade política, em parte, é decorrente da liberdade e pode ser revogada (Jonas, 2006, p. 171). Trata-se da responsabilidade do homem político (*homo politicus*) pelos interesses e bem comum de todos os indivíduos, graças ao exercício do poder (Jonas, 2006, p. 172). Observando a responsabilidade dos pais para com os filhos, uma vez que o “(...) nascimento obriga cuidado e impossibilita a fuga da responsabilidade.” (Sganzerla, 2015, p. 159), Jonas recorre a essa analogia, embora abstrata e artificial, para mostrar que essa responsabilidade nasce da livre escolha e tem por objeto a coisa pública. “O objeto da responsabilidade é a *res publica*, a coisa pública, que em uma república é potencialmente a coisa de todos, mas realmente só o é nos limites do cumprimento dos deveres gerais da cidadania.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 172: grifos do autor). Não faz parte, porém, do objeto da responsabilidade pública a obrigação da candidatura aos cargos públicos, ainda que, segundo Jonas, haja incentivo, para que homens corajosos assumam a responsabilidade pela administração direta dos bens públicos (Jonas, 2006, p. 172). Acerca das relações parental e contratual afirma-se:

A origem da primeira é a causalidade direta – desejada ou não – do ato de procriação passado, juntamente com a total dependência da criação; a origem da outra é a assunção espontânea do interesse coletivo como condição para executar atos causais no futuro, unida à concessão mais ou menos voluntária por parte dos interessados (*negotiorum gestio*). A mais elementar das naturalidades, de um lado, e a extrema artificialidade, do outro. Além disso, uma é exercida no âmbito íntimo e imediato, enquanto a outra se exerce a distância e com os meios da instrumentalidade organizativa. Em um caso, o objeto se encontra carnalmente presente para o responsável; no outro, apenas como ideia. E, no caso de a figura do homem público abranger também a do legislador, então aqui a forma mais abstrata, mas distante do objeto

real se contrapõe da forma mais radical àquela forma mais concreta e mais próxima. (Jonas, 2006, p. 174: grifos do autor).

Tomando, então, em conta as duas responsabilidades do ser humano e de que ele se diferencia dos demais seres vivos, exatamente, por ser capaz de responsabilidade. Numa palavra, na medida em que ao ser humano é-lhe inerente a capacidade de causalidade, ele “(...) traz consigo a obrigação objetiva sob a forma da responsabilidade externa.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 176). Todavia, esta, por sua vez, não é automática, ou seja, não se torna automaticamente moral no ser humano. Ela, enquanto *condição de*, apenas o possibilita de ser moral ou imoral, isto é, habilitando-o com a capacidade de deliberação, e, por conseguinte, de decisão livre e responsável. E assim, fundamentalmente, é que se caracteriza a “dignidade humana”, isto é, como potencialidade humana de ter responsabilidade. Afirma-se, nesse sentido: “Exprimindo-nos de forma extremada, poderíamos dizer que a primeira de todas as responsabilidades é garantir a possibilidade de que haja responsabilidade.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 177). Ou ainda: “A existência da humanidade significa simplesmente que vivam os homens. Que vivam bem é um imperativo que se segue ao anterior.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 177).

No cenário atual, Jonas indaga-se sobre a possibilidade de uma ética, a qual, sem o restabelecimento da categoria do sagrado, destruída pelo Iluminismo, possa controlar os poderes extremos conferidos ao ser humano pelo domínio da técnica. Com esse excesso de poder às mãos do ser humano, torna-se premente um novo devir ao espectro da ética, cuja missão o ser humano, enquanto administrador e guardião da Natureza e não mais como dominador, se impõe como imperativa, porque o primeiro imperativo assevera: “que exista uma humanidade” (Jonas, 2006, p. 93). A responsabilidade de cada um e de todo ser humano torna-se uma urgência, aqui e agora, mas também, com vistas ao futuro da humanidade uma responsabilidade exigente. “Portanto, não é verdade que possamos transferir nossa responsabilidade pela existência de uma humanidade futura para ela própria, dirigindo-nos simplesmente aos deveres para com

aquela que irá existir, ou seja, cuidando do seu modo de ser.” (Jonas, 2006, pp. 93-94). Portanto, segundo Jonas, o exercício da responsabilidade, tanto a paterna quanto a governamental, é de exercício contínuo, renovando as demandas ininterruptamente (2006, p. 185). Afirma-se, pois:

Mas a responsabilidade por uma vida, individual ou coletiva, se ocupa antes de tudo com o futuro, bem mais do que com o presente imediato. Isso é verdadeiro em um sentido trivial para toda responsabilidade, mesmo a mais particular, acompanhando-se a evolução de uma tarefa até o fim: a evolução da temperatura no dia seguinte e o percurso restante da viagem, por exemplo, estão incluídos nas preocupações quotidianas. Mas essa óbvia inclusão do amanhã no hoje, que tem a ver com a temporalidade como tal, ganha uma dimensão e uma qualidade totalmente diferentes em relação à “responsabilidade total” que consideramos aqui. Aí, o futuro da existência inteira, mas além da influência direta do responsável, e consequentemente além de todo cálculo concreto, se torna objeto complementar dos atos singulares de responsabilidade, voltados para as necessidades mais próximas. Estas estão no domínio da previsão possível; a outra escapa à previsão não somente por causa das inúmeras incógnitas do desconhecido que constituem as circunstâncias objetivas, mas também pela espontaneidade ou liberdade da vida em questão – a maior das incógnitas, mas que necessita ser compreendida na total responsabilidade. Ou seja, exatamente aqueles efeitos pelos quais o responsável já não poderá responder: a causalidade autônoma da existência protegida é o derradeiro objeto do seu cuidado. Em relação a esse horizonte transcendente, a responsabilidade, mesmo em sua totalidade, não pode ambicionar um papel determinante; pode ambicionar possibilitá-lo (ou seja, prepará-lo e manter aberta a oportunidade). O caráter vindouro daquilo que deve ser objeto de cuidado constitui o aspecto de futuro mais próprio da responsabilidade. Sua realização suprema, que ela deve ousar, é a sua renúncia diante do

direito daquele que ainda não existe e cujo futuro ele trata de garantir. À luz dessa amplidão transcendente, torna-se evidente que a responsabilidade não é nada mais do que o complemento moral para a constituição ontológica do nosso Ser temporal. (Jonas, 2006, pp. 186-187).

Jonas expõe a importância da preservação da capacidade de responsabilidade, reconhecendo-a como marca da autenticidade humana no futuro, de forma a ser um exercício livre e responsável de escolha sobre si mesmo e que tal exercício não seja somente um dever pela sua existência própria, mas pela existência da vida reconhecendo o outro de si enquanto ser humano e enquanto a biosfera, isto é, o outro na compreensão cósmica.

III. JUSTIÇA INTERGERACIONAL

O Papa Francisco, na *Laudato Si'* (LS), capítulo terceiro, intitulado, “A raiz humana da crise ecológica”, adverte que a humanidade entrou em uma nova era, e estando como que posicionada em uma encruzilhada, isto é, entre, por um lado, avançar, progressivamente, no conhecimento da robótica, das biotecnologias e das nanotecnologias, reconhecendo-lhes os inúmeros e importantes avanços, mas, ao mesmo tempo, por outro lado, reconhecendo e não ignorando que não necessariamente a humanidade os utilizará para o bem de toda a humanidade, e, por conseguinte, perguntando acerca do preço a ser pago por tal progresso e avanço por quem e para quê (LS, n. 104, p. 66). É importante lembrar que um dos referenciais teóricos do Papa Francisco, ao escrever a referida Carta Encíclica, além da Sagrada Escritura, da Tradição, e do Magistério da Igreja Católica, é Romano Guardini, que, já, em meados do século XX, afirmava que a ciência, enquanto captação racional do real, e a técnica, como conjunto de possibilidades proporcionadas pela ciência, a partir do período moderno, deram e dão à existência um caráter novo, o caráter de poder e o domínio em um sentido agudo. “Isto significa que cresce sempre mais a possibilidade de o homem não saber usar o seu poder. Como ainda não existe uma moral do uso do poder, é sempre maior a tendência para considerar este uso como um processo natural, para o qual não

existem normas de liberdade, mas pretensas necessidades que consistem na utilidade e na segurança.” (Guardini, 2000, p. 69). Graças a uma ciência que penetrou e penetra, cada vez mais, profundamente, a realidade, e a uma técnica cada dia e sempre mais poderosa, o poder homem de dispor sobre o dado aumentou e aumenta, exigindo, por sua vez, uma resposta responsável mais exigente (Guardini, 2000, p. 53). Seguindo na perspectiva teórica, lembra-se: “O homem é livre e pode usar o seu poder como quiser. Mas é aí precisamente que se encontra a possibilidade de lhe dar uma utilização falsa; falsa tanto no sentido de má como no de destruidora.” (Guardini, 2000, p. 74). E, justamente, porque o ser humano “(...) não tem poder sobre o seu próprio poder.” (Guardini, 2000, p. 74), é que ele, segundo Guardini, vive, constantemente, com um perigo cada vez mais forte e crescente, ameaçando, por sua vez, a sua própria existência. E, segundo Guardini, face à situação de crescimento ilimitado do “poder” (2000, p. 74), há que se definir e assumir três atitudes (virtudes) basilares para governar melhor o legado que nos foi e nos é confiado, a saber, “(...) aquela seriedade que deseja a verdade”, a coragem, que “(...) deverá ser mais pura e mais forte do que a exigida pelas bombas atômicas e pelos agentes bacteriológicos, uma vez que terá que defrontar o inimigo universal, isto é, o Caos – que se manifesta na própria obra do homem (...)”, e a ascese, que “(...) transformará a mera força em verdadeira coragem e desmistificará os heroísmos aparentes, aos quais o homem se deixa sacrificar impelido por ilusões de absoluto.” (Guardini, 2000, p. 76). Acrescenta-se ainda:

Tudo isto deve produzir uma maneira de governar mais espiritualizada, na qual o poder reine sobre o poder, que distinga a justiça da injustiça, os meios dos fins. Uma maneira de governar que encontre o equilíbrio e que crie, no esforço do trabalho e da luta, um espaço onde o homem possa viver com dignidade e alegria. Só isso será o verdadeiro poder. (Guardini, 2000, p. 76).

A despeito das críticas que se pode tecer à tentativa e às tratativas de fundamentar uma ética na época da ciência e da tecnologia, constata-se,

observando atentamente a época hodierna, a mudança da ação humana em uma dupla direção. Por um lado, percebe-se o risco a que a ciência e a tecnologia, sob o afã do excesso do poder e de seu grande potencial de intervenção, ameaçam as condições de sobrevivência da humanidade e das demais formas de vida a ponto de poder colocar em xeque a possibilidade e as condições da existência dos seres vivos. E, por outro lado, o perigo direciona-se para o poder de intervenção na própria “natureza interna” do ser humano, com um direcionamento muito voltado à manipulação das gerações futuras, afetando, por conseguinte, a própria autonomia e dignidade humana. E, segundo o Papa Francisco, o homem, ao se declarar autodeterminado e autônomo da realidade e se constituir como que o dominador absoluto, acaba por desmoronar a própria base de sua existência (LS, n. 117, p. 74). “Esta situação leva-nos a uma esquizofrenia permanente, que se estende da exaltação tecnocrática, que não reconhece aos outros seres um valor próprio, até à reação de negar qualquer valor peculiar ao ser humano.” (LS, n. 118, p. 74). Em última análise, a crise ecológica não deixa de ser e de conter os respingos da crise ética, cultural e espiritual na nossa época, fruto do projeto da Modernidade. Segundo o Papa Francisco, não será possível sanar as relações com o meio ambiente sem curar as relações humanas fundamentais (LS, n. 119, p. 75), tornando-se, pois, urgente a superação da cultura do relativismo ético, reduzindo as relações fundamentais do ser humano a relações de consumo, de necessidade, de benefício, de bem-estar e da fruição do progresso mercadológico (LS, n. 123, p. 76).

No capítulo IV, “Uma ecologia integral” da *Laudato Si*, o Papa Francisco esboça uma reflexão sobre os diferentes elementos que compõem a reflexão de uma ecologia integral (LS, n. 137, p. 85). Não é possível conceber e analisar a crise mundial que assola nossa época apenas em uma perspectiva ambiental. Faz-se, pois, urgente entendê-la, a partir das diferentes perspectivas e não de maneira isolada e estática, mas dinâmica e em conexão, uma vez ser a atual crise mundial complexa, envolvendo todas as áreas da vida dos seres vivos, tanto os racionais, como também os

seres não racionais. Ele lembra a insiste que o princípio do bem comum é inseparável da ecologia humana, exercendo, por conseguinte, um papel central na ética social, uma vez que o mesmo pressupõe o respeito pela pessoa humana e almeja o desenvolvimento integral (LS, n. 156-157, pp. 94-95). “Nas condições atuais da sociedade mundial, onde há tantas desigualdades e são cada vez mais numerosas as pessoas descartadas, privadas dos direitos humanos fundamentais, o princípio do bem comum torna-se imediatamente, como consequência lógica e inevitável, um apelo à solidariedade e uma opção preferencial pelos mais pobres.” (LS, n. 158, p. 95).

Com a noção de bem comum entra em cena principal o conceito de justiça intergeracional, uma vez que, ao se trabalhar e ao se ter em foco a concepção de bem comum, toma-se em consideração não apenas a geração atual, mas, também, as gerações futuras. A entrada em cena da problemática intergeracional traz à tona temas que desafiam a matriz vigente da organização da sociedade, problematizando teorias e conceitos e exigindo, assim, um novo posicionamento ético a respeito da posição do ser humano em sua casa comum (Sartor, 2002, p. 54). Trata-se de conceber um desenvolvimento sustentável com vistas à solidariedade intergeracional, ou seja, não basta apenas defender a ideia de ser necessário preocupar-se com as gerações futuras, é preciso, outrossim, ter consciência de que é a própria dignidade humana que está em jogo, em última análise, ao se tratar da crise ecológica mundial, aqui, referenciada como crise integral. “A radicalidade desta missão só se compreende, partindo da hipótese da iminência de uma catástrofe universal, causada pela autonomização do nosso agir técnico.” (Ost, 1997, p. 326). O Papa Francisco, por sua vez, afirma a respeito da urgência da missão:

A noção de bem comum engloba também as gerações futuras. As crises econômicas internacionais mostraram, de forma atroz, os efeitos nocivos que traz consigo o desconhecimento de um destino comum, do qual não podem ser excluídos aqueles que virão depois de nós. Já não se pode falar de

desenvolvimento sustentável sem uma solidariedade intergeracional. Quando pensamos na situação em que se deixa o planeta às gerações futuras, entramos em outra lógica: a do dom gratuito, que recebemos e comunicamos. Se a terra nos é dada, não podemos pensar apenas a partir de um critério utilitarista de eficiência e produtividade para lucro individual. Não estamos falando de uma atitude opcional, mas de uma questão essencial de justiça, pois a terra que recebemos pertence também àqueles que hão de vir. (LS, n. 159, pp. 95-96).

A concepção de justiça intergeracional não deita suas raízes originais na *Laudato Si'* do Papa Francisco. Pode-se afirmar que tal concepção surgiu de maneira muito especial no século passado, século XX, por conta, especialmente, dos grandes questionamentos e riscos trazidos pelo mito do progresso ilimitado. Dentre outros autores que avistaram o complexo problema da justiça intergeracional, podem ser citados, Hans Jonas e John Rawls. Acerca do primeiro nome, como foi possível demonstrar na primeira parte deste texto, Jonas, em sua obra, *O princípio responsabilidade*, traz à tona todo o problema da responsabilidade pela sobrevivência, tanto do ser humano quanto da terra e de todos os seres vivos. Dito de outro modo: “O que Jonas tem em vista é, portanto, uma radical mudança de postura ética, uma atitude de responsabilidade pelo futuro, que só pode advir da sociedade como um todo, só pode nascer de um sentimento coletivo de responsabilização e temor, capaz de superar a impotência disfarçada em poder compulsivo.” (Giacioia Junior, 2018, p. 176). O segundo, por sua vez, especialmente, no § 44, de sua eminente obra de filosofia política, *Uma teoria da justiça* (1971), ainda que não fale especificamente sobre justiça intergeracional, ele trata do problema da justiça entre as gerações. “Retomando a tese da ‘posição original’ e do ‘véu de ignorância’, relembra que o desconhecimento dos indivíduos, nessa condição inclui a pertença a um tempo específico e a consequente inclusão numa geração, pelo que na posição original todas as gerações estão potencialmente representadas.” (Campos, 2017, p. 63). Segundo a concepção de Rawls, cada

indivíduo sabe que pertencerá a uma determinada geração, mas o véu de ignorância, impede-o de conhecer a geração específica que integrará e à que pertencerá (Rawls, 2002, § 44, pp. 316-324). Eis, pois, a urgência de delimitar um patamar mínimo de justiça a partir do qual pensa-se ser justo e digno conviver. “Daí a necessidade de determinar um limiar de justiça abaixo do qual nenhum indivíduo em nenhuma geração aceitaria viver, e que por conseguinte impõe-se como princípio de justiça e salvaguardar por todas as gerações [...]” (Campos, 2017, p. 63). Eis o que Rawls afirma acerca do princípio da poupança justa:

O que foi dito acima é suficiente para um breve esboço de algumas das principais características do princípio da poupança justa. Podemos agora ver que as pessoas de diferentes gerações têm deveres e obrigações em relação umas às outras exatamente como as têm as pessoas que vivem numa mesma época. A geração atual não pode fazer o que bem entender, mas é obrigada, por princípios que seriam escolhidos na posição original, a definir a justiça entre as pessoas que vivem em épocas diferentes. Além disso, os homens têm um dever natural de defender e promover o crescimento das instituições justas, e para isso a melhoria da civilização até um certo nível é exigida. A dedução desses deveres e obrigações pode parecer no início uma aplicação forçada da doutrina contratualista. No entanto, essas exigências seriam reconhecidas na posição original e, por isso, a concepção da justiça como equidade abrange essas questões sem nenhuma alteração de sua ideia básica. (Rawls, 2002, p. 323-324).

Antes de prosseguir, pode-se afirmar que a discussão acerca da justiça intergeracional encontra diferentes análises e concepções e está longe de ter unanimidade interpretativa para conseguir uniformizar uma definição mínima dos contornos dessa responsabilidade entre gerações. “Em última análise, levar a sério os modelos basilares das mais notórias teorias da justiça intergeracional pode ser determinante para lidar com problemas próprios das sociedades contemporâneas, sobretudo no que elas têm de

potencial e limitativo em relação ao futuro.” (Campos, 2017, p. 66). Mas, mesmo assim, pode-se afirmar que, a partir da Conferência de Estocolmo sobre o Meio Ambiente (1972), avalizada pela Conferência do Rio de Janeiro sobre o Meio Ambiente e o Desenvolvimento (1992), encontra-se e percebe-se uma intensidade nos debates a respeito da justiça entre as gerações (Handl, 2013). Evidentemente, poder-se-ia salientar as demais conferências, mas a referência a de Estocolmo e a do Rio de Janeiro foram e são marcos muito importantes na discussão a respeito. De Estocolmo (1972), tem-se, especialmente, os princípios 2 e 5, que fazem referência explícita ao cuidado e zelo cuidadoso com os recursos naturais. Eis como são expressos ambos os princípios. Princípio 2: “Os recursos naturais da Terra, incluídos o ar, a água, o solo, a flora e a fauna e, especialmente, parcelas representativas dos ecossistemas naturais, devem ser preservados em benefício das gerações atuais e futuras, mediante um cuidadoso planejamento ou administração adequada.”. Reza, também, o Princípio 5: “Os recursos não renováveis da Terra devem ser utilizados de forma a evitar o perigo do seu esgotamento futuro e a assegurar que toda a humanidade participe dos benefícios de tal uso.” (*Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment and Several Resolutions*: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.48/14/Rev>. Acesso em 02/05/2025). Por sua vez, do Rio de Janeiro (1992), a solidariedade intergeracional ficou reafirmada, em praticamente todo o documento, mas, especialmente, na referência ao combate à pobreza no Capítulo 3: “O direito ao desenvolvimento deve exercer-se de forma tal que responda equitativamente às necessidades de desenvolvimento e ambientais das gerações presentes e futuras.” (*Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*: [https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1\(vol.I\)](https://docs.un.org/en/A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1(vol.I)) Acesso: 02/05/2025). Nessa linha de pensamento, em nível nacional, tem-se, na Constituição Federal do Brasil de 1988, uma declaração sumamente importante para avaliar o desenvolvimento de referido conceito. Veja-se, por exemplo, o Artigo 225: “Todos têm direito ao meio ambiente ecologicamente equilibrado, bem de uso comum do povo e essencial à sadia

qualidade de vida, impondo-se ao Poder Público e à coletividade o dever de defendê-lo e preservá-lo para as presentes e futuras gerações.” (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil de 1988: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/constituicao/constituicao.htm Acesso: 2/02/2025).

Paulatinamente, surgiu, pois, o princípio da justiça intergeracional, o qual fora previsto, de início e originalmente, em acordos e convenções internacionais. Decisivo, no entanto, foi o estudo, na década de 80, de Edith Brown Weiss, intitulado: *In Fairness to Future Generations: International Law, Common Patrimony and Intergerational Equity (Um mundo justo para as futuras gerações: direito internacional, patrimônio comum, e equidade intergeracional)*. Segundo Weiss, o desenvolvimento e uso dos recursos naturais e culturais colocam três tipos de problemas de equidade entre as gerações, a saber: o esgotamento de recursos para gerações futuras, deterioração da qualidade dos recursos das gerações futuras, o acesso ao uso e benefício dos recursos recebidos das gerações passadas (Weiss, 1999, pp. 41-50). Esses três problemas, é bom salientar, não acontecem de forma isolada, dão-se, porém, intrinsecamente, interconectados em sua complexidade, ainda que se os possa analisar separadamente. Diante desses três problemas, as gerações atuais precisam sentir-se guardiãs e responsáveis, tendo como propósito a administração do bem comum, no sentido do cuidado e zelo pela casa comum de todos, que precisa ser saudável e decente para a atual geração e também para as gerações futuras (Weiss, 1999, p. 68). Em outras palavras, a teoria da justiça intergeracional sustenta que cada geração tem a obrigação com as gerações futuras de passar-lhes os recursos naturais e culturais não inferiores àqueles por eles recebidos, e proporcionar, por sua vez, à atual geração o acesso razoável ao referido legado (Weiss, 1999, p. 69).

Frente aos problemas de equidade entre as gerações, de acordo com Weiss, faz-se urgente alicerçar a formulação de tal teoria sobre o alicerce de três princípios básicos, lembrando, no entanto, os quatro critérios norteadores do

desenvolvimento dos princípios de equidade intergeracional. O primeiro critério para a definição dos três princípios básicos diz respeito à igualdade entre as gerações, sem autorizar a atual geração explorar os recursos de maneira a privá-los às futuras gerações, e, nem tampouco, impor às atuais gerações fardos irracionais com o fim de satisfazer necessidades futuras indeterminadas. O segundo refere-se a não ser aceita a predicação desta geração dos valores das futuras gerações, proporcionando-lhes, por conseguinte, flexibilidade e liberdade para alcançar suas metas segundo seus valores próprios. O terceiro critério diz respeito à razoabilidade e clareza dos valores no que tange sua aplicação a situações previsíveis. E, quarto, os valores escolhidos precisam ser razoavelmente compartilhados por distintas tradições culturais e ser aceitos, em geral, para diferentes sistemas políticos e econômicos (Weiss, 1999, p. 69).

À luz dos quatro critérios supracitados, três são os princípios basilares que sustentam a teoria da equidade intergeracional. São eles denominados de: princípio de conservação de opções, princípio de conservação da qualidade, princípio de conservação de acesso (Weiss, 1999, p. 69). Do princípio de conservação de opções, fundamentalmente, tratar-se-ia de afirmar que cada geração deve ser compelida a conservar a diversidade da base de recursos naturais e culturais, a fim de não restringir indevidamente às futuras gerações as opções disponíveis para a solução dos problemas e para a satisfação dos seus próprios valores, tendo, ademais, direito a uma diversidade comparável à das gerações precedentes. Esse princípio, segundo Weiss, atua como um freio para o abuso excessivo dos recursos naturais e culturais sem previsão de conservação patrimonial (Weiss, 1999, p. 72). Do princípio de qualidade quer-se salientar que cada geração tenha como propósito conservar a qualidade do planeta semelhante à recebida, ou ainda, melhor. Desse princípio não advém a tese da intocabilidade dos recursos naturais e culturais. Trata-se, pois, de desenvolver índices de previsão acerca da diversidade e qualidade dos recursos e uma capacidade, paulatina e aguçada, de prever os impactos e câmbios tecnológicos

(Weiss, 1999, p. 73). Do princípio de acesso tem-se o propósito de proporcionar aos membros direitos equitativos de acesso ao legado das gerações passadas com o dever de preservar este acesso às gerações futuras (Weiss, 1999, p. 69). Isso significa que se tenha clareza de que o acesso aos recursos deve dar-se a todos os povos, incondicionalmente, assegurando, por conseguinte, a todos os membros o acesso ao legado planetário (Weiss, 1999, p. 74). Esses três princípios são suficientemente claros e razoáveis em sua aplicação e deveriam ser respeitados e assegurar a sustentabilidade do meio ambiente e do patrimônio cultural, sendo, ademais, compartilhados pelas principais tradições culturais e sistemas políticos e culturais (Weiss, 1999, p. 69). Tais princípios sustentam a base do conjunto, tanto das obrigações, como também dos direitos de cada membro e de cada geração rumo à justiça intergeracional, equilibrando, por conseguinte, as posições extremas, tanto as de modelo preservacionista, como também, as de modelo opulento (Weiss, 1999, p. 75).

Feita essa elucidação mais geral, agora, voltando ao Papa Francisco em sua Carta Encíclica *Laudato Si'*, é importante lembrar que a justiça intergeracional é trabalhada em conexão íntima com o bem comum. “A noção de bem comum engloba também as gerações futuras.” (LS, n. 159, p. 97). A noção de bem comum é tratada como princípio que desempenha um papel central e unificador na ética social (LS, n. 156, p. 96). Nessa perspectiva, para o Papa Francisco, não é possível tratar e falar de desenvolvimento sustentável e de destino comum do planeta sem uma compreensão e atitude de solidariedade intergeracional, superando toda forma hegemônica de benefícios, lucros e interesses espúrios, egoístas e excludentes, uma vez ser a terra um dom gratuito. “Se a terra nos é dada, não podemos pensar apenas a partir de um critério utilitarista de eficiência e produtividade para lucro individual.” (LS, n. 159, p. 98). Logo, as previsões e os prognósticos muitas vezes catastróficos não podem mais ser simplesmente ignorados, já que o ritmo da ciência e da tecnologia é cumulativo e de ascendência íngreme, isto é, de baixo para cima e sempre mais para cima e não o inverso, sem,

entretanto, poder afirmar que o estágio sempre mais superior seja, necessária e realmente, superior (Pommier, 2013, p. 128). Afirma-se, por conseguinte:

O ritmo de consumo, desperdício e alteração do meio ambiente superou de tal maneira as possibilidades do planeta, que o estilo de vida atual – por ser insustentável – só pode desembocar em catástrofes, como, aliás, já está a acontecer periodicamente em várias regiões. A atenuação dos efeitos do desequilíbrio atual depende do que fizermos agora, sobretudo se pensarmos na responsabilidade que nos atribuirão aqueles que deverão suportar as piores consequências. (LS, n. 161, p. 99).

Eis, pois, o grande desafio a ser enfrentado por toda a humanidade, já que a mesma não pode simplesmente ignorar os problemas e os desafios que estofam-na e ameaçam-na. Sim, a humanidade toda, ou seja, trocando em miúdos, cada ser humano tem a responsabilidade de assumir o cuidado da casa comum, mitigando, tanto quanto possível, de acordo com o seu respectivo grau de competência e responsabilidade, as ameaças e perigos que assolam a vida da humanidade e de todos os seres vivos no planeta. Urge alargar o horizonte das nossas preocupações, tanto para as gerações futuras, como também para as gerações presentes, especialmente, para os pobres que são excluídos do desenvolvimento. “Não percam tempo a imaginar os pobres do futuro; é suficiente que recordemos os pobres de hoje, que poucos anos têm para viver nesta terra e não podem continuar a esperar.” (LS, n. 162, p. 99).

IV. CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

Que a técnica, fruto direto da ciência e das suas aplicações, penetrou e transformou radicalmente o mundo em todos os seus aspectos é um fato facilmente constatável. E isso deve se constituir em objeto de especial consideração para ser possível uma apreciação justa de seu valor. O ser humano é guiado, na sua ação, pela razão, mediante a qual lhe possibilita conhecer os fins e os meios que a eles conduzem. Por meio da razão,

ao ser humano é possível conhecer os meios que possibilitam o fim desejado e, também, modificar a ação, se necessário, segundo as necessidades e as circunstâncias. Nesse sentido, ainda que se possa afirmar que o progresso da ciência e da tecnologia precisa estar em congruência com o progresso e a promoção do ser humano integral, fomentando, por conseguinte, um olhar globalizante e uma consciência crítica, a fim de perceber os bens proporcionados, tanto pela ciência, como também pela tecnologia, faz-se urgente, por outro lado, e, simultaneamente, aguçar, também, a consciência e o olhar críticos diante das possíveis ameaças e riscos, eventualmente, ocasionados pela ambição humana desmedida. “Se o ser humano se declara autônomo da realidade e se constitui dominador absoluto, desmorona-se a própria base da sua existência (...)” (LS, n. 117, p. 74).

À luz do cenário que se vislumbra, cabe traçar alguns elementos imprescindíveis à educação no processo da educação à cidadania planetária. De início, chama-se a atenção para o aspecto de que a educação não se dá de uma vez por todas, ou seja, não é um momento determinado e isolado da vida em sua totalidade. É um processo complexo, especialmente, nos tempos difíceis e de muitas incertezas como o que hoje vivenciamos. É o processo fascinante, sedutor e provocador de ensinar e aprender a pensar, a pesquisar, a dialogar, a viver, a conviver e a responsabilizar-se. A responsabilidade é valor intransferível de e para cada ser humano. “A educação tem, portanto, um fim determinado como conteúdo: a autonomia do indivíduo, que abrange essencialmente a capacidade de responsabilizar-se.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 189). A educação, por conseguinte, quando vista como processo permanente de formação, coloca o ser humano em processo contínuo de gênese para a humanidade livre e responsável.

Acena-se, também, e chama-se a atenção para a responsabilidade e para o compromisso inadiável de cada um com o esclarecimento, a formação e a prática cidadã. Cidadania é o conjunto de direitos e obrigações que cada cidadão tem, enquanto presença no mundo, presença com os outros e presença para si, por um lado, com a sociedade na qual vive, com o Estado, e, por outro lado, com a

sobrevivência e a continuidade da vida de todo Planeta. Nesse sentido, deve-se assumir com responsabilidade o compromisso de uma educação para a cidadania que não seja só local, mas universal, capaz de vencer as barreiras do “localismo provinciano” (Cortina, 2005, p. 193). É preciso aprender que nada do que acontece pode ser alheio e indiferente a alguém. Essa tarefa é responsabilidade de cada um, e, portanto, de todos, porque ninguém pode realizar essa tarefa no lugar de outrem. Sendo assim, as instituições de ensino nessa perspectiva cidadã têm uma função imprescindível. Cabe-lhes, entre outras funções, serem formadoras da inteligência, dispensadoras da cultura, darem a cada ser humano os saberes e os conceitos que lhe permitam chegar a uma palavra responsável, a um discurso coerente, e a uma reflexão livre e aberta, já que educar é educar para a liberdade, em última análise. Afirma-se, por conseguinte, ser essa tarefa inadiável e imprescindível a cada cidadão, em particular, mas também de todos, em conjunto, e das diversas instituições existentes, especialmente, as educacionais, uma vez que, segundo Jonas: “Guardar intacto tal patrimônio contra os perigos do tempo e contra a própria ação dos homens não é um fim utópico, mas tampouco se trata de um fim tão humilde. Trata-se de assumir a responsabilidade pelo futuro do homem.” (Jonas, 2006, p. 353).

Exige-se, pois, uma nova ética fundamentada na responsabilidade solidária em relação ao presente e ao futuro e no temor e respeito à casa de todos os seres vivos. “O ponto decisivo do debate sobre *ética ambiental* é certamente a crítica do antropocentrismo.” (Farias, 2014, p. 620: grifos do autor). Em nenhuma outra época houve consciência da responsabilidade planetária pelo futuro da humanidade e dos demais tipos de vida como a atual. Não se pode mais praticar a abstinência em questões de ética. Não é mais possível sobreviver sem uma ética solidária planetária na civilização tecnológica. A ética planetária exorta à sobrevivência, insistindo na imperiosa necessidade da mudança de comportamentos e atitudes. “O desafio do paradigma ecológico é grandioso e não irá se contentar com soluções paliativas ou reformistas

do modelo vigente. Ele exige o mergulho nas disposições mais profundas que sustentam nossa posição no mundo e nossa história.” (Farias, 2014, p. 620). Assim sendo, para finalizar, estas considerações, que não conclusivas, mas, apenas e quanto muito, alusivas à eminente e iminente tarefa de todo gênero humano, faz-se alusão, uma vez mais, às sábias palavras do Papa Francisco, acerca do desafio educativo que se apresenta nos tempos hodiernos:

A consciência da gravidade da crise cultural e ecológica precisa traduzir-se em novos hábitos. Muitos estão cientes de que não basta o progresso atual e a mera acumulação de objetos ou prazeres para dar sentido e alegria ao coração humano, mas não se sentem capazes de renunciar àquilo que o mercado lhes oferece. Nos países que deveriam realizar as maiores mudanças os hábitos de consumo, os jovens têm uma nova sensibilidade ecológica e um espírito generoso, e alguns deles lutam admiravelmente pela defesa do meio ambiente, mas crescerem num contexto de altíssimo consumo e bem-estar que torna difícil a maturação de novos hábitos. Por isso, estamos diante de um desafio educativo. (LS, n. 209, p. 122).

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Three First Generation College Mexican American Women Life Experiences when Accessing and Completing a Doctoral Program: A Qualitative Study

Richard De La Garza

ABSTRACT

This scholarly investigation delves into the personal journeys of three remarkable first-generation Mexican American women who pursued a Ph.D. despite the many obstacles they faced. While two of these women have already achieved tenure, the third is currently in her first year of doctoral studies. Throughout the ups and downs of their academic pursuits, these women frequently experienced self-doubt and struggled to compete with peers who had greater access to scholarships and grants. Nevertheless, they chose to embrace this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and were unwavering in their determination to make the most of it. Each has a unique story of what motivated them to persevere, but one common thread is the reward of earning a PhD ultimately exceeded any hardships they encountered along the way. Their incredible life experiences can inspire others to aim high and pursue their dreams. By utilizing analytical lenses grounded in ethnography and constructivist theory, this study provides valuable insight into the social dynamics and personal experiences of first-generation college students who aspire to complete a doctoral program.

Keywords: first-generation college students, higher education, mexican american, phd.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Although the transition into a college environment can be challenging for all students, it can be particularly challenging for students who are the first in their families to attend college (i.e., first-generation college students; FGCS).

FGCS experience many barriers, including financial hardships (Arocho, 2017), lack of college preparedness (Castañón-Ramírez, 2020), racial disparities (Cuadraz, 1993), lack of family support (Flores, 2023), and decreased self-esteem (Davis et al., 2021). In higher education, most of the 89% of FGCS that drop out within six years without obtaining a degree also identify as low-income (Glass, 2022).

Conversely, among FGCS who do graduate represent 30% of all doctoral candidates (Glass, 2022). Moreover, students of color are less likely to get a doctoral degree, as approximately 40% drop out of college during their bachelor's degree (T. Banks & Dohy, 2019). While student demographics keep shifting on campus, FGCS confront unfamiliar academic and social landscapes, need more familial guidance and knowledge about their college experience, and often need help with financial constraints while doubting their abilities (Norman, 2023). Specifically, FGCS of color reality on campus includes fragments of social support, academic teacher expectations (Davis et al., 2021), academic preparation (Chang et al., 2020), and resource access (Bahack & Addi-Raccah, 2022; Ma & Shea, 2021).

From 2018–2019, just 8.8% of Latinas earned a doctoral degree compared to 63.6% of White women, 13.1% of Asian/Pacific Islander women, and 10.9% of Black women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The data highlights a gap in persistence and degree attainment at the doctoral level based on racial or ethnic status. Otherwise, exploring the factors that contribute to gender disparity, particularly for Hispanic and Black males pursuing a doctorate within

predominantly white institutions, it is essential to consider the overall campus climate, as noted by Espino (2014), Pifer & Baker (2014), and Williams (2002).

Studies that examine first generation (FG) graduate students' agency during their socialization in their field of practice, Perez et al. (2020) highlight oppressive or invalidating experiences that stir up FGCS to conserve psychological and emotional energy for creating a space that fosters identity-conscious scholarship and practice. Given that racialized incidents are bound to happen directly in person (Garcia et al., 2020; Ramirez, 2014) and vicariously without a clue (Truong et al., 2016), FGCS are filtering out racism to keep a space necessary for a cultural bond. It is within this context of inequality that I designed this study to address dehumanizing aspects—remnants of colonization. The intention is to further examine how structural inequity mutes FG graduate students' voices to maintain the status quo despite efforts for inclusion in a learning environment. A comprehensive overview of what is known about FGCS is encumbered in the literature review. FGCS research conducted within the field of education helps guide the primary research question: How do FGCS identifying as students of color overcome barriers when explaining how they could access and complete a doctoral degree?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand FG doctoral students, I raise awareness of recent scholarship on racism and their experiences of predominantly White institutions, emphasizing Students of Color, including military veterans. The importance of understanding how race matters lies in existing literature that highlights imposter syndrome (Dueñas, 2021; Holden et al., 2024). Imposter syndrome occurs when students experience anxiety and self-doubt, causing them to undervalue their talents, competence, and self-efficacy levels throughout their educational experiences (Lee et al., 2022). This literature review highlights the nontraditional college experiences of marginalized doctoral-level students defying the odds.

2.1 FG Doctoral Students

African American women's PhD student journeys, especially in predominantly White institutions, mark the importance of mentorship (Colclough, 2023). Kniffin (2007) viewed any proposal to address accessibility for marginalized students as calling authorities to ask who can initiate or support change. Faculty mentoring requires care and commitment because a casual or strictly business approach is inefficient in helping marginalized students (Brown et al., 1999, as cited in Young & Brooks, 2008). Regarding Latinx doctoral students' lived experiences and realities (Cuadraz, 1993; Espino et al., 2010; Fernandez, 2019, 2020; Gándara, 1993, 1995; González, 2006), there is one thing missing: an analysis of mentorship experiences specifically with faculty of color. However, Santa-Ramirez (2022) finds marginalized students may have one identifying characteristic: racial compatibility with faculty of color.

If race is a significant factor in determining the academic success of FGCS, faculty of color are essential for students beyond academia. Rodriguez et al. (2021) found Mexican American college students were affected by racism due to ignorant perceptions of their cultural backgrounds. However, these students often leaned on their families for support in attempting to overcome racial matters (McCallum, 2017; Rendon, 2015). In foresight, students of color, including Latinx and Hispanics, are diverse and exhibit family dynamics, sometimes estranged with complicated social issues (Brown et al., 2020; Consoli, 2016). Living circumstances perceived as dysfunctional lead students of color to move away from their families to attend school (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Otherwise, students who are unable to receive physical support from their families due to relocation build their own families with friends at their academic institution (Green et al., 2016; Johnson, 2022).

2.2 FGCS Who Get a Shot to Earn a PhD

People who are successful and high achieving but believe they have attained success because of luck more than their talent and effort are more likely to think they are imposters (Slank, 2019). Imposters

are a form of fraud (Haggard, 2019; Tao & Gloria, 2019). Research conducted in the past on the imposter phenomenon revealed that women were more prone to experience it; however, more recent studies demonstrated the incidence of the imposter phenomenon is equal among men and women (Feenstra et al., 2020; Joshi & Manette, 2018). The imposter phenomenon affects a wide variety of people, including students, business entrepreneurs, artists, nurses, and lawyers (Feenstra et al., 2020; Joshi & Manette, 2018). Likewise, FGCS's sense of dissonance with their own identities, combined with their unfamiliarity with their new surroundings, contributes to their imposter complex and gives them the feeling that they are pretending to be someone else (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Ramirez et al., 2023). In fact, FGCS status was associated with higher feelings of being an imposter among Black and Hispanic undergraduate students (Haggard, 2019; Nadal et al., 2021). Consequently, research on whether college students' feelings that they are imposters change throughout their academic careers has produced conflicting results on the subject (Elliot, 2022; Zanchetta et al., 2020). Nevertheless, socioeconomic, racial, gender, and ethnic minority status can mediate the relationship between FGCS and the imposter phenomenon (Price & Viceisza, 2023; Welbeck et al., 2023). Otherwise, not all minority students experience the same struggles when transitioning into higher education (Townsend, 2022).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethnographic research is qualitative research that aims to understand people's ideologies, identities, attitudes, values, perceptions, and emotional experiences. To achieve this, researchers use thick descriptions, as described by Geertz (1973). The outcome of ethnographic research is an interpretive story, reconstruction, or narrative about a group of people, such as a classroom community (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Per Peñuelas (2023), many White academics experience privilege within this academic context, leading to what DiAngelo (2018) terms "White equilibrium," defined as "a cocoon of racial comfort, centrality, superiority, entitlement, racial apathy, and obliviousness, all rooted in an identity

of being good people free of racism. Challenging this cocoon throws off our racial balance (p. 113). Using ethnographic methods such as semi-structured interviewing (Seidman, 2019) to look at how doctoral students of color disrupt a cocoon in academia (Dely et al., 2020; Sabnis et al., 2023) uncovers a hidden curriculum that perpetuates systemic inequities. Most scholarly literature on doctoral student writing and intellectual development focuses on White middle-class and international students. Despite expanding higher education access, barriers exist for some groups, such as FGCS. These systemic obstacles prevent marginalized individuals from fully realizing the potential of higher education, festering self-doubt as implied by the imposter syndrome (Gardner & Holley, 2011).

This study aims to shed light on the social processes between systemic barriers and first-generation college students (FGCS). To achieve this, a Constructive Grounded Theory (CGT) approach is deemed appropriate. The study investigates a topic that has not been adequately researched, which is how first-generation students of color overcome systemic obstacles when enrolling in and completing a doctoral program. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive their decisions to pursue a doctorate are of great importance. According to Grimes (2023), Black men's affinity for learning, exploring, seeking out challenges connected to their interests, serving as role models, strong perseverance, greater social mobility, and connecting communities all served as intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that underpin socialization.

CGT identifies the factors contributing to success and achievement in doctoral studies by examining interactions as a social process from the student's perspective. For example, Lang who is an author cited by (Dews & Law, 1995) noted he overcame many social class barriers during socialization and became at home in academia. If the socialization process is successful, it is the goal all students will feel this way and be able to make connections to professors and peers after some time in the program. However, if this is not the case, students may find this part of the socialization process especially difficult. Lang (1995) also noted he felt

part of his success was due partly to his White male status. CGT guides our understanding of the complex nature of higher education by focusing on students' primary concerns. Considering the social nature of learning, human beings are hard-wired to connect. People can only reach their full potential once they have a healthy connection with others (Feinberg, 2023; Murphy, 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000;). Yet, what happens when marginalized students are placed in a classroom environment where white values and assumptions predominate their own values and cultures of origin are often misunderstood, belittled, or ignored (J. Banks, 2001; Feinberg, 2023; Valencia, 1997). This results in students of color internalizing negative messages.

IV. METHODOLOGY

As part of this study, I used ethnographic methods and a grounded theory approach to investigate how first-generation students of color handle issues such as racism and the need for support in doctoral programs and society. As a firstborn male with a Mexican American heritage, I have a sense of entitlement that upholds a double standard against female relatives. However, I understand such double standards limit the full potential of women (Arciniega et al., 2008; Valdez et al., 2023;) In the same way, FGCS often operate in educational spaces where they feel unwelcome (Gasman et al., 2008; Holley & Gardner, 2012). This is due to historical and educational policies and practices that have embedded racism and created structures that fail to address the unique challenges faced by first-generation students of color (Achor & Morales, 1990; González, 2006). By examining the lived experiences of FGCS, we can better understand the impact of racism on their doctoral experiences and reflect on the importance of studying leadership in the context of social justice.

To fully grasp the importance of social interaction, I adopted a critical social constructivist approach that focuses on marginalized students' experiences. This approach allowed me to navigate multiple realities, balancing assimilation into dominant white culture with preserving my own cultural identity (Anzaldúa, 2015). Despite

being a male heterosexual firstborn, I recognize the issue of double standards transcends culture and is a troubling problem in our society. Anzaldúa (2015) notes that academia has long been dominated by privileged individuals, mainly white, heterosexual, cisgender males, who perpetuate their privilege for future generations (Garrison et al., 2021; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). In essence, higher education was not designed with marginalized students in mind. However, I understand that academia often challenges and undermines my research and service. To combat this, I blended grounded theory and ethnography with an interpretative phenomenology design, which more thoroughly examines social phenomena from the participant's perspective (Maxwell, 2013). More importantly, scholars are enabled to gain knowledge privy to confidential experiences of participants. I also incorporated ethnographic methodology and theoretical concepts to recognize the importance of culture when reviewing the daily realities of FGCS. By examining participants' experiences and their interpretive practices, we can better understand their world and work towards transforming it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The benefit of grounded theory and ethnographic methods is to illuminate how first-generation students of color navigate systemic racism. I place emphasis on the various forms of capital that communities of color possess, including cultural, linguistic, navigational, resistant, familial, and social capital, as described by Yosso (2005). My ultimate goal is to shift the focus from students' perceived limitations to their valuable assets by recognizing and highlighting their unique talents, strengths, and experiences in the college environment. Failure to acknowledge and appreciate the cultural wealth of marginalized communities only perpetuates a system that favors individuals from dominant social groups while excluding and disenfranchising those already at a disadvantage. This notion of a false meritocracy, which assumes that individual effort is the sole driver of success, ignores the deeper issue of racism that underlies our society (Führer, 2023).

In this vein of thought, it is important to consider how historical educational policies and practices embedded in racism have created structures that fail to adequately address how access and preparedness for graduate programs exclude the challenges FGCS have faced throughout their educational socialization. According to Grimes (2022), much of what motivated Black men in the pursuit of a doctorate degree was silencing imposter syndrome—to prove they belong and quiet their fears of failure. Likewise, I want to know how others silence the noise.

V. DATA COLLECTION

The sample for this study centered on students of color FGCS who had completed a doctoral program. This study used convenience sampling for the selection of three participants, each residing in the United States and enrolled in or finished a doctoral program. Convenience sampling allowed the researcher to choose participants based on the qualities or experiences required for the study (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Ensuring the participants met the criteria was necessary, as the data collected aligned with how FGCS pursuing a doctorate navigate adversity to better understand social complexity when overcoming significant odds. For students of color being the first in their families to pursue a doctorate, it can be difficult to find support and guidance because their experiences are not common. By conducting individual interviews, valuable data emerged about their life experiences, revealing the struggles they faced and the support they received from their community (Campbell et al., 2020).

All interview participants were listed as faculty or staff members who support the LEAD Scholar Program on campus. I focused intentionally on the LEAD Scholar resources available online because services are tailored for FGCS. LEAD Scholars are FGCS undergraduates composed of freshmen and sophomores, including transfer students. Each person interviewed had access to a computer system under surveillance by a high-tech department. The primary mode of communication was electronic via Zoom, email, and phone. Because I occupy a staff position at

University A, I could initiate a research inquiry on campus by asking who would like to participate in this study if they met the eligibility criteria. I sought to invite participants in learning spaces generating research contexts, including students from oppressed or marginalized communities. Moreover, the email also had instructions to forward the email to any contact that fit the criteria for inclusion and to copy the researcher on that email. An email briefly explained the requirements for participation, the estimated time requirements, a brief biography of the researcher, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and a rationale as to why the participant would find their investment of time worthwhile.

The primary data source for this study relied on information obtained during in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom (Moustakas, 1994). Each interview was both audio and video recorded to provide observational data from the interview. Once the participants confirmed their willingness to participate, I sent a link via Zoom. The Zoom link provided a convenient way for the participant to find a convenient time for their interview. I was permitted by the participants to audio and video record each of the three interviews conducted via video conferencing and expeditiously transcribed the interview for the participant to review; the Otter.ai app served for audio transcription. As I collected data, I recorded observations and reflections in a researcher journal. The interview transcripts, audio recordings, and researcher journal were data sources for data analysis, and I conducted member checks. While member checking is a form of respondent validation in qualitative research, I procured trustworthiness by receiving feedback as part of this writing process. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Maxwell, 2013).

Before conducting any interviews, I received timely feedback from a professor to revise the interview questions to be interactive. Next, I completed the field interviews featuring three exceptional females with similar cultural traits who identified as Mexican Americans.

Sample

The featured three participants interviewed on campus include tenured distinguished Mexican

American females. Two participants are highly visible on campus as advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusivity that upholds an antiracist learning environment. Each person is labeled separately for anonymity as Red, Maroon, and Blue. Red earned her bachelor's in human development from the University of California (UC) Davis and a teaching credential from California State University (CSU) Sacramento with bilingual authorization. Afterward, she attended Stanford University and earned a master's in linguistics and a Ph.D. in curriculum studies and teacher education. Maroon earned a bachelor's in Spanish literature and theater from UC Berkeley and UC San Diego. Her PhD in performance studies comes from Stanford University. Blue is a first-year graduate student pursuing a doctorate in education (EdD) in social justice leadership. She holds a full-time administrative position on campus that covers tuition.

All participants are full-time employees as part of the faculty or staff where this study unfolded, referred to as University A, a private university in California. *University A* strives to develop an inclusive, multicultural range of services to ensure student differences are respected and valued. The impact of race appears upon the university's admission efforts to identify promising candidates who will do multiple things like (a) excel in their academic pursuits and (b) share institutional values and commitment to making the world more just and humane.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

The problem statement served as the driving force behind the data analysis. This study focused on the systemic difficulties faced by FGCS of color while accessing and completing a doctoral program. Additionally, the gap in the literature guided the exploration of how three Mexican American women dared to pursue an opportunity of a lifetime without conforming to the status quo. The study's analytical approach followed the six steps Smith et al. (2009) outlined for interpretative phenomenological analysis to inform the research question. These steps include 1) reading and re-reading, 2) initial noting, 3)

developing emergent themes, 4) searching for connections across emergent themes, 5) moving to the following cases, and 6) looking for patterns across issues. Since the study involves analysis without predefined analytic categories, Yin (2014) suggests multiple attempts to make sense of individual experiences will be required to identify emergent themes. As Bevan (2014) suggests, setting aside expectations and potential biases before they emerge in the participants' experiences is essential.

According to Smith et al. (2009), the existing literature on IPA analysis must provide a definitive approach or method for working with the data. The interpretive process captures a set of processes that involve (a) moving from the particular to the shared (Smith et al., 2009), (b) moving from the descriptive to the interpretative (Smith et al., 2009), (c) focusing on personal meaning-making in a specific context (Vagle, 2014), and (d) a commitment to the understanding the participant's point of view (Smith et al., 2009; Vagle, 2014). Otherwise, the author reflects on who benefits from this study and why. These questions force him to consider strategies that produce legitimate knowledge based on the colonization of knowledge (Tuck & Yang, 2014).

The following sections describe the six steps for data analysis as outlined by Smith et al. (2009), who suggest that due to the inductive nature of IPA, Steps 1 and 2 are nearly indistinguishable, making it difficult to understand precisely where one step begins and the other ends. Appendix A shows a depiction of Steps 1 and 2. As outlined by Smith et al. (2009), I read and re-read transcripts while listening to the audio recording of the interview, noting the voice tone, body language, and emotions behind the participants' words. Next, I examined the transcript for content and language on an exploratory level. During this phase, I made notes related to (a) body language and voice tone, (b) contradictions, (c) situations where the individual appears to be describing what she believes is the correct answer, and (e) sharing painful memories, hopes, dreams, and goals.

As Smith et al. (2009) described, each case gets coded and analyzed independently. Therefore, following the process depicted in Figure 1, I created codes for each transcript's critical segments with a descriptive phrase or word to depict its meaning within the case. The alignment of the initial coding from Step 2 to emergent themes and subsequently superordinate themes, including frequencies, is located in Appendix B.

This step involved identifying emergent themes for each case from exploratory comments. This process began by focusing on discrete segments of the transcript before moving to the next section of the interview. This process represents the first of the hermeneutic circle, where the whole interview becomes a set of individual parts (Smith et al., 2009). The analytic process for each case included (a) completing a word cloud to determine the most frequently appearing words in the transcript, (b) examining the most frequently mentioned words in the context of the actual transcript, (c) looking for linked phrases, thoughts, and trends, (d) looking for contradictions, and (e) examining the parts in relationship to the whole (Smith et al., 2009).

The third step entails identifying connections across emergent themes within an individual case. A key focus at the analysis stage was to examine emergent themes about the research questions and involved four approaches. The first approach involved numeration, which considered the frequency of a theme (Smith et al., 2009). The second approach utilized abstraction, grouping similar emerging themes (Smith et al., 2009). A third approach involved polarization, which involves determining if one statement is different or oppositional to another (Smith et al., 2009). The fourth analytic approach at this stage involved contextualization, which involves understanding how the participant's personal life influenced parts of the interview (Smith et al., 2009). Figure 3 in Appendix C depicts identifying connections across emerging themes within a singular case. The result of all four of these approaches in Step 4 resulted in clustering emerging themes into subordinate themes, as illustrated in Table 4 (Appendix C).

Step 5 involves moving from individual to subsequent cases. The primary challenge with this step is to maintain analytic independence from the previous cases. I used bracketing for each case to ensure the individuality of each case. Bracketing is a technique to suspend the researcher's assumptions about the world to maintain a stance of neutrality (Smith et al., 2009; Sorsa et al., 2015). I used the same analytical process for each case to maintain the independence of each case, as described in Step 4 (See Appendix C, Figure 3). Second, I attempted to maintain analytic objectivity from case to case by avoiding analyzing more than one case in one working session. I accomplished this by blocking my calendar for two periods per day, one case in the morning and the other in the early evening, until I had analyzed all three cases.

Step 6 involves looking for patterns across cases. The approach used in this step was to create a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that listed each case with all the emergent themes with the corresponding transcribed text and the cluster themes, as identified in Step 4. An examination of the individual cases resulted in the identification of 231 initial codes. The research questions directed multiple attempts to organize emergent themes into superordinate themes. The researcher analyzed emergent themes listed on the spreadsheet by examining words and critical phrases across multiple cases. The following five superordinate themes emerged from this analysis: moderate emotion, effective leadership, situational awareness, different expectations, and authenticity. A superordinate theme is an experiential statement captured from data the participant considers meaningful. For example, a *moderate emotion* was described by Blue in reference to what is driving her to complete a doctorate program: "I am not entirely sure if I want to focus primarily on BIPOC students and their needs, or how staff can better support our BIPOC students' mental health needs." Red suggested *effective leadership* requires the ability to influence decision-making. As a tenured professor, Red stated, "I would love to be in a position where I have power-making and decision-making power and can utilize and use

the lens of social justice to inform the decisions being made for the betterment of students, staff, and faculty." For *situational awareness*, Maroon recognized people who paved the way for her success, as evidenced by saying, "I learned a lot starting from age 16. I went to UCSD for my undergrad and had a great mentor in Jorge Huerta, a behemoth in Latinx Theatre. He taught me how to teach, direct, and make things happen." Similarly, Maroon knew *different expectations* from professors require resistance to traditional academic pedagogy. Maroon recalled a professor once criticized a paper on Chicano versus Spanish Golden Age theater, which was hurtful. She deferred because that's European theater. In reality, Spanish and Southwest theater are two very different things.

One is mainly political by design. The other one is re-instilling many of these Christian values. Later, he apologized and became supportive, realizing his comments were short-sighted. Lastly, *authenticity* appeals to embracing the wholeness of a person's identity. Blue reflected on growing up, she had to toughen up and make do with very little. But she always believed there was a brighter side to look forward to in pursuit of a doctorate, regardless of the odds. In Appendix D, there is an example of the analysis that helped identify emergent or sub-themes.

Validity

The research aims to present the data in a way that portrays the validity of the analysis. Given the research question focuses on understanding how students of color who are FGCS describe their school experience, the author implies that barriers are inevitable. Indeed, graduate school is not easy, nor a walk in the park for anybody. However, each person interviewed demonstrates a tenacity to start and finish a doctorate program unfazed by the odds yet summoned to prove doubters concerned about their competency and talents as shortsighted educators.

Prominent qualitative scholars such as Giorgi (2009) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted qualitative research does not view validity and reliability independently. According to Lincoln

and Guba (1985), credibility is the primary term for qualitative studies' validity. Further,

Maxwell (2013) stated the study is credible in qualitative research when the researcher presents forthright accounts of the interpretations of the phenomenon under study. Considering participants' lived experiences in college readiness programs designed for underserved, marginalized students like FGCS, having access to such a support network is a game changer.

Findings

In this section, I present the results of the thematic data analysis based on the emerging themes of imposter syndrome, perseverance, and familial support. During the analysis, I asked reflective questions like, "How do you know what you know?" and "What is meaningful in the narrative?" I also explored the possibility of something happening that the individual may be less aware of. However, Smith et al. (2009) pointed out the existing literature on IPA analysis needs to provide a definitive approach or method for working with the data. Despite this, the IPA process generally involves moving from the particular to the shared, from the descriptive to the interpretative, focusing on personal meaning-making in a specific context, and committing to understanding the participant's point of view. Specifically, the inductive and iterative approach to IPA includes strategies like a line-by-line analysis of the participants' claims, concerns, and interpretations (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Theme 1: How Did You Even Get Here?

The first theme from the dataset included the participants discussing how they had experienced and were affected by imposter syndrome. Although race demographics are explicitly invincible in conversations, participants implicitly understand that FGCS represents a low-income, disenfranchised group at risk of dropping out of the revolving cycle of poverty. All participants recalled being frustrated when they realized their peers had access to information about funding and fellowships when they did not. They blamed themselves and felt different, questioning their place in graduate school and their worthiness in

terms of the aspirational capital they received from family and social circles. Each participant contributed to this theme, as they were able to discuss specific situations where they felt like an imposter on their college campuses. For example Red discussed that to overcome feelings of imposter syndrome, she reflected on her beliefs on the equality of educational access for everyone. Red stated:

So, I had a lot of experiences like that. And there weren't very many, you know, students of color at all, like PhD students, there were very few of us. So immediately, you know, we gravitated towards each other. We created our own little spaces, but it was around feeling like we didn't belong, right? Because we were different from typical Stanford students.

Participants made statements such as, "I had to figure it out on my own," a sentiment that comes from a lack of navigational tools. In other words, participants did not know how to access support, nor did they even know support was available to them. Maroon also described how she experienced imposter syndrome, which is the plight of the graduate student. She perceives imposter syndrome shaped her experience:

You know, academia is not necessarily made for anyone who's not a cisgender White male. There were moments when I didn't want to use or didn't want to if I had an idea for a paper, a project, or an argument in class; I felt conflicted because I didn't want to use the same bastions of philosophy. That would have never been considered in my study area; I felt disingenuous to use Dysart to discuss the disruptive nature of a Feminist Collective in Mexico City. Distrito is not necessarily concerned, nor was he ever concerned with BIPOC communities. But it wouldn't matter unless I could connect it to these bastions of philosophy. So, it was like sometimes I felt I was trying to fit a square peg through a round hole.

Blue relayed a similar experience when navigating graduate studies. Blue thinks imposter syndrome

is always present in her mind, though less poignant. Blue stated:

It's challenging. But imposter syndrome is always at play. But it's constantly telling myself, Don't listen, that's just the voice in the back of your head that's always been there. But give it less power. And so, I have been over it as I continue into this program.

These responses required multiple readings and careful consideration on the researcher's part to ensure an understanding of whether the participant had perceived being a minority FGCS as contributing positively or negatively to their experiences in graduate school. Factors perceived negatively included feeling different or isolated, additional pressure from their community and society, and lacking overall knowledge of the graduate school experience. Factors that were perceived positively included pressure to succeed for their families and pride in being first in their families to attain college degrees. Samples of these responses appear in Appendix D.

Responses for these questions get deductively coded into social and aspirational capital themes. Additionally, these responses created a need for an overarching theme for first-generation college students, as many were a general commentary on the effects of being FGCS and did not fit neatly into ascribed deductive codes. Nevertheless, ethnographic observation aims to explore hidden layers of cultures. In this aspect, my experience as a FGCS adds perspective.

Given that participants essentially felt out of place on campus, their narrative reflects the existing power and privilege, established hierarchies, and resistance to dominant White patriarchal ideology that was in play during their doctoral experience. As Mexican American female scholars immersed in academia, the imposter syndrome represented a part of the challenge they faced but did not stop them from reaching their goals.

Theme 2: Why Am I Going Through the Work, Effort, and Struggle?

The second theme that emerged from the dataset included the participants discussing how they overcame barriers in their educational

experiences by persevering. The participants shared their stories of setbacks and challenges during graduate school, some of which were not directly a result of their minority FGCS status. The interview yielded varied responses regarding perseverance. Red discussed how the importance of education was ingrained into their life at an early age, which assisted them when it came to experiencing barriers to keep going through the process. Red stated:

My parents didn't attend college, high school, or middle school. They finished, I think, in fourth or fifth grade. My mom and dad are from the state of Michoacan, Mexico. So, it was a big knowledge gap for me and them about what schooling was right in the United States. The gap explains why I was in a lot of these college readiness programs for minorities. I knew I wanted to go to college, probably since before middle school. Similarly, Maroon reflects on the significance of being part of a strong support network that endorsed her candidacy for a PhD program. Maroon gained inspiration from a college readiness program that genuinely bolstered self-esteem:

As a graduate student, I was a part of the DARE program. DARE stands for diversifying the academy and recognizing excellence. So, it's geared towards bringing in more historically marginalized communities into the folds of academia. They talked about the difficulties, including unwritten expectations of maybe being the only representative for your community or communities and a department and how that would mean a demand not necessarily in the job description, right? And then I became a professor. Blue's main struggle came from her own doubts; she relied heavily on positive feedback from her social circles and cohort that would give her positive feedback on professional matters. Blue recalls a major turning point from having a private discussion among several peers from her class cohort by saying the following:

I've always paved the way for myself and had to figure things out independently. That is challenging, but at the same time, I have colleagues in my cohort who are a year ahead of me in this program, I am able to ask them

questions and get advice from them. And so, everyone is just like, we all feel this way, you're not alone in that. And I think being able to have that kind of vulnerability, and those discussions with cohort members have helped me get questions answered.

The study's results indicated that the participants had access to resources that helped them persevere in graduate school. Specifically, they described using familial capital for support and perseverance. The interview responses showed that navigational and perseverance tools were closely linked, and sometimes the themes overlapped. Many participants mentioned that their parents and community members were role models of strength and perseverance. These role models provided navigational tools, showing them how to navigate new and unfamiliar situations with determination. Additionally, they offered the resistant capital necessary to persevere in the face of adversity and inequality, which the participants often experienced in graduate school.

Theme 3: Growing up, we Toughened up to Power Through.

The third theme from the dataset included the participants reporting that they overcame barriers to access education through family encouragement. The interview participants' answers were closely linked, explaining how their parents' aspirations for them became theirs. Participants stated their parents had aspirations for them that served as the catalyst for their interest in continuing their education. An additional theme among the responses of these participants was that they all said that while their parents impressed upon them the importance of going to college, they did not offer guidance as to what to go to college for. Red stated, "I can focus more on my family life. My brothers, sister, parents, and, right now, cousins. And that is important because I had to focus so much on my academics." Red worked harder than other students due to limited resources throughout her pre-tenure years until recently. Red explains how pursuing a PhD affects the people she cares about the most, as evidenced by saying, "I'm turning 40 in January, and it's making me reflect on whether I prioritized my education and career over

personal relationships. Maroon draws inspiration from parents who are farmworkers.

According to Maroon a small-town farming community sparked a passion for dramatic theater:

I attended Arvin High School, a small migrant and immigrant community of about 16,000 people, mostly Mexican American in Kern County, California. Although there wasn't much emphasis on theater, a powerful performance depicting our stories and histories on stage inspired me to change my situation. I had an excellent drama teacher who still inspires me to this day. I worked in the fields alongside my parents, but the theater opened my eyes to new possibilities.

Maroon also mentioned her parents didn't understand why she wanted to pursue something without guaranteeing success. However, she believes it's better to do what you love than settle for a job or degree just because it's safe. As a professor, some of her students have faced difficulties with their parents not supporting their choice of major. To address their concerns, she would give a talk on campus to help first-generation students and their parents understand the value of a theater or arts degree. Maroon knows from experience how hard it can be to explain your passion to those who don't understand, and she wants to help those who are struggling.

Overall, participants recalled their families offering emotional support, even when they did not understand the process or expectations of graduate school. Blue's family finds her education interesting because they know she's studying again but don't fully understand why it's important. While they know she has always been in school, they only have a basic understanding of her field of work. Also, since her grandmother mainly speaks Spanish, explaining what she does for a living is challenging. Nowadays, Grandma thinks Blue is a school principal due to working in education for a long time. Although it's very different from what she does, that's close enough. Regardless, her sister, mother, and cousins who

graduated from college understand better. Blue can't afford to let fear stop her from doing things; she wouldn't be this far today. In light of how significant is Blue's mother to fuel her PhD aspirations, she stated:

My mother raised my sister and me independently and worked hard to support us.

Despite harsh times, we made it through. My mother was a role model and taught me that I shouldn't let fear stop me from achieving my goals and dreams. I always strive to succeed and won't accept failure as an option. I know I will face challenges but am determined to overcome them.

VII. DISCUSSION

This qualitative phenomenological study investigated how students of color identifying as FGCS described barriers and the support experienced when accessing and completing a doctoral degree. This study was necessary and relevant because much of the research on first-generation college students has been conducted at the undergraduate level (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Tate et al., 2015; Yuma et al., 2016), not at the doctoral level. Specifically, three Mexican American first-generation college students unveil moments during their graduate studies. Red explains more in-depth the relevance of this cultural background in relation to her doctoral studies. Red stated,

So, I feel coming from this background, I knew things would be hard. Never even question it. I knew everything I would do academically would be more challenging for me than for others. So, I was just ready for it, never a surprise. I didn't slow down. I always had a plan, and this is what I want to do.

VIII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had several areas for improvement and limitations. Besides time constraints and a small sample size, my positionality created biases. For instance, the research question on barriers initially focused on a deficit framework. I assumed systemic problems were detrimental. Although

challenges existed for these participants, I found three individuals who have had academic success given their ability to navigate their imposter syndrome, persevere, and have the support of their families. Examining how FGCS utilized supports using a different theoretical model might yield different information. Bean's (1980) Student Attrition Model accentuates the importance of background characteristics, socioeconomic status, student satisfaction, and the influence of peers on student retention. Understanding FGCS perseverance from various angles helps develop more effective support programs that detect more than satisfactory behavior.

8.1 Implications for Practitioners

Based on the findings of this study, there are some implications for practitioners that require discussion. The first implication is that colleges and universities can work to better support FGCS by understanding imposter syndrome, how they experience perseverance, and how relatives influence their educational journey. The first recommendation for practitioners is to create a space that values FGCS at their college institution that addresses imposter syndrome.

Whereas most of the research on imposter syndrome occurs at the undergraduate level, FGCS at the graduate level continues to face challenges unique to that stage in education (Cunningham & Brown, 2014; Vasil & McCall, 2017). However, participants in this study exhibit ferocious perseverance in graduate studies. This growth mindset has broad implications for disenfranchised communities who need more representation in fields such as healthcare, academia, and politics, most of which require advanced degrees for leadership roles (A. Banks & Hicks, 2015; LaRochelle & Karpinski, 2016). Ongoing qualitative research is needed to investigate the sources of support necessary to stoke FGCS perseverance and to inform policymakers and stakeholders of the need to increase retention and graduation.

8.2 Implications of Findings for Future Research

Future researchers should consider comparing the differences between male and female FGCS needs.

While the female participants cited familial and social capital as the most critical factors to their success, the hyper-focus on achieving goals somewhat hampered personal dating relationships. This ordeal for Mexican American female scholars determined to reach the highest pinnacle of education amounts to a serious romantic cost. Although the Latina student may not face direct pressure from her family, she often feels alone in balancing her responsibilities at home, work, and doctoral studies (Flores, 2023). The gains of earning a PhD degree include dismantling cultural beliefs that subordinate women in Latin America. Otherwise, Latinas feel obligated to repay their parents by providing support and assistance. In this case, how does the absence or presence of a suitable life partner enrich a meaningful life that's fulfilling onward? Future qualitative research can implement more disenfranchised groups, as this study only explored the experiences of Mexican American able-bodied folks. Because of cultural homogeneity, different underserved populations are invincible. It is beneficial for stakeholders to understand how members of diversified groups access support. This way, generalizations do not enlarge stereotypes or promote prejudices. Another step onward is to examine how recent immigrants in Latinx communities experience graduate studies when compared to Latinx individuals whose families have been in the United States for longer than one generation. In this case, assimilation, acculturation, and resistance to the status quo are noteworthy.

IX. CONCLUSION

Despite an increase in earned graduate degrees, minority students continue to lag behind their White counterparts (NCES, 2017). Particularly, first-generation doctoral students face even higher attrition rates, with approximately 30% failing to complete their degrees (Roksa et al., 2018). Gender and ethnicity also play a critical role in degree persistence and completion rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), Latinas comprised only 0.6% of women who obtained a doctoral degree. Unfortunately, few studies focus on Latinas' experiences pursuing doctoral programs (Arocho, 2017; Kohler, 2023).

However, available studies often combine the experiences of male Latino students, White graduate students, and students from other racial groups. Also, the identity terminology of “Hispanic or Latino” refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Clearly, female and minority students, especially first-generation students, have a higher inclination to pursue a doctorate degree, according to a study by Hoffer et al. in 2003. They are motivated to excel academically due to the challenges faced by their parents, which include relocating to the U.S., working tirelessly, and grappling with the English language, as reported by Easley et al. (2012). However, interviews from these participants suggest their experiences are shaped by perseverance, which goes beyond a narrative of lack of resources. This study attempts to contribute to advancing research on factors that have influenced FGCS students of color who dared to start a PhD program; some have achieved tenure-track positions. It shows that despite imposter syndrome feelings, their efforts and support networks led them to success.

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APPENDIX A

Figure 1 depicts the steps for data analysis for Steps 1 and 2, starting with listening to the data, reading, and re-reading data on an exploratory level. An example of the types of notes made related to the segments of the transcript appears after in Table 1.

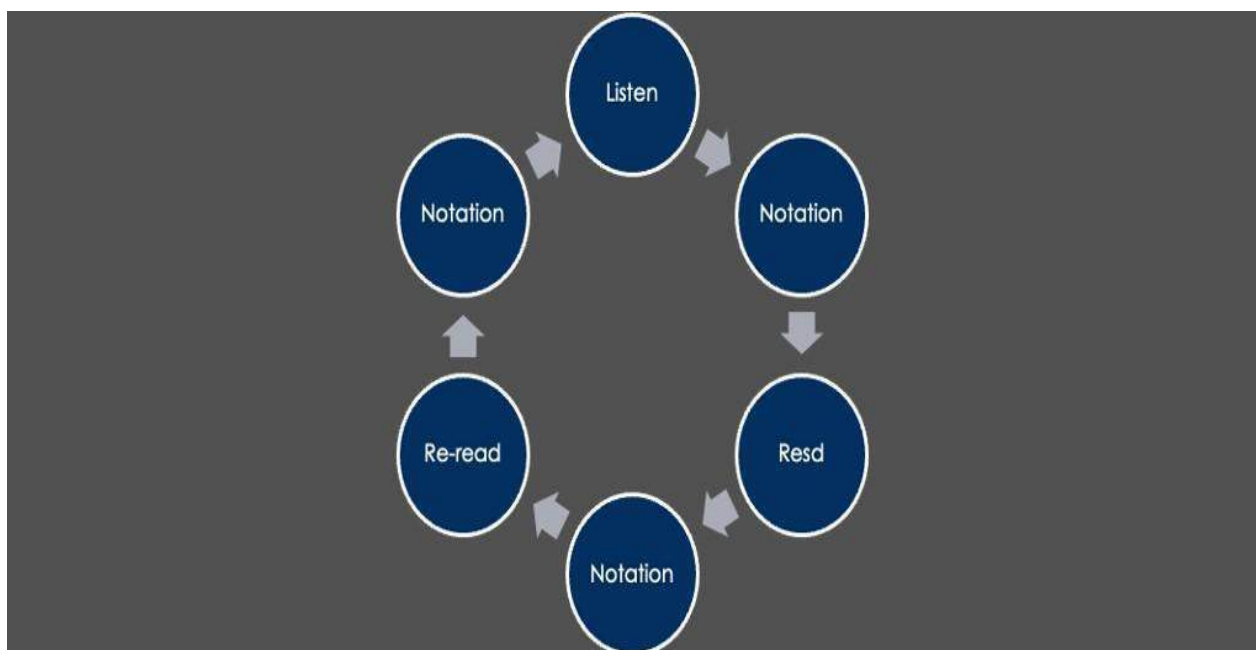


Figure 1: Case by Case Analysis: Steps 1 and 2

Notes: Depiction of the data analysis for Steps 1 and 2 in a circulation formation beginning with listening, notation, read, notation, re-read, and notation. The data for this representation came

from interviews with top women leaders, which depicts Steps 1 and 2 of Smith et al.'s (2009) description of interpretative phenomenological data analysis.

Table 1: Example of Step 2-Participant 1

Original Transcript D	Researcher's Notes
I didn't stop long enough to allow that fear to come in me. I was like you want to do this. This is what this is, what it takes. This is the first step, you know. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, you try again later, if you want to, and if not, you still figure something else out. So, I feel like with a lot of people that sometimes don't end up taking those steps is because you stop too long to question whether or not it's the right choice.	Sounds like her life experiences made her persevere. Mentoring had a significant role in her perseverance. This was a big deal to her. I notice eyes of a tiger.

APPENDIX B

Code System	Memo	Frequency
First Generation College Student (FGCS)		
Imposter Syndrome		
Perseverance		
Family		
A person whose parents did not complete a 4-year		
A person whose parents did not complete a 4-year 3 college or university degree, or high school		
Feeling Different	22	
Keep going. Step up	22	
Aspiration to create a better future	15	

APPENDIX C

Figure 3 depicts identifying connections across emerging themes within a singular case. The result of all four of these approaches in Step 4 resulted in clustering emerging themes into subordinate themes, as illustrated in Table 4.

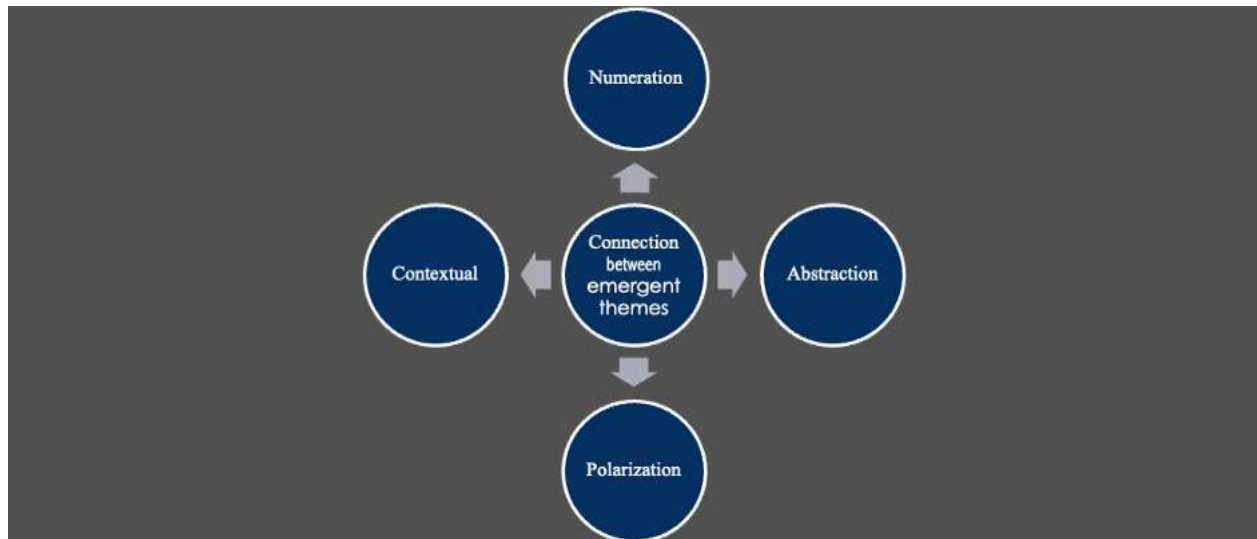


Figure 3: Case by Case Analysis: Steps 4 and 5

Note: Depiction of data analysis for Steps 4 and 5, which involved analysis within a singular case. Analysis at this stage began with numeration, abstraction, polarization, and contextualization to identify the connection between emergent themes. This figure was prepared by Saundra D. Schrock, researcher, as a representation of Steps 4 and 5 of data analysis for an interpretative phenomenological study described by Smith et al. (2009). The emergent themes coming to the surface include perseverance, family support, and the imposter syndrome.

Table 4: Example of Case by Case Analysis Step 4: Participant 3

Emergent Theme	Original Transcript	Superordinate Theme
Perseverance	I didn't stop long enough to allow that fear to come in me. I was like you want to do this. This is what this is, what it takes. This is the first step, you know. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, you try again later, if you want to, and if not, you still figure something else out. So, I feel like with a lot of people that sometimes don't end up taking those steps is because you stop too long to question whether or not it's the right choice.	Mentored into PhD level

APPENDIX D

Code Examples

Thematic Category	Subcategory	Content Description
Overcoming Barriers when Accessing and Completing a Doctoral Degree	Imposter Syndrome	Resistance to conformity impacts future motivation, even though specific structural conditions enlarge imposter syndrome to explain how FGCS enrolls in and completes a Ph.D. program.
	Perseverance Family Encouragement	Historical evidence shows that minorities have developed the ability to endure years of oppression. They have learned to withstand racism, classism, and genderism that can make them feel undeserving of leadership positions. Bernal (1998) says a community's collective memory shapes individual experiences. For Chicanas and Latinas, ancestors and elders pass down knowledge via legends, storytelling, behavior, Chicano Studies scholarship, and Mexican folk ballads about conquest, land loss, and segregation.

APPENDIX E

Figure 2 depicts the start of the hermeneutic circle and the process for data analysis used in Step 3. The main goal at this stage is to turn notes into concise and pithy statements of emerging themes. These themes reflect the participant’s original narrative and the researcher’s interpretation of those words (Smith et al., 2009). Table 3 illustrates the relationship of the emergent theme to the original transcript and the researcher’s notes.

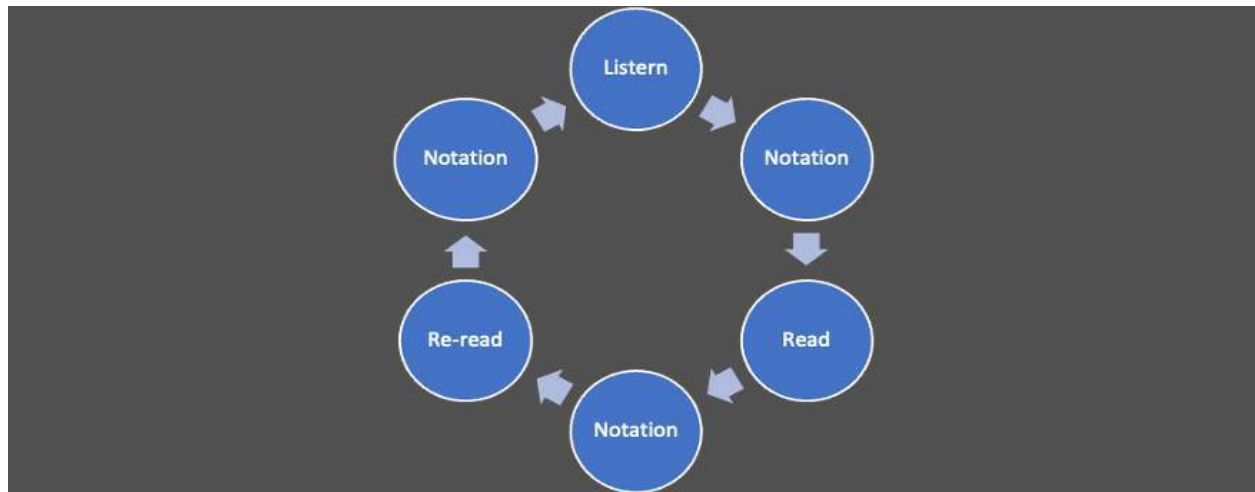


Figure 2: Case by Case Analysis: Step 3

Note: Depiction of the start of the hermeneutic in a circular process beginning with a word cloud, frequency of words in context, linked phrases, thoughts, trends, contradictions, and parts to the whole. The figure above is a representation of Step 3 of data analysis for an interpretative phenomenological study as described by Smith et al. (2009).

linkage to superordinate themes. Table 2 demonstrates the linkages from Steps 1 and 2, which involved taking notes before proceeding to Step 3, where emergent themes were identified.

Otherwise, Table 3 shows an example of the analysis process described in Step 3 of the analysis.

Table 2 demonstrates the linkage from initial codes to emergent/subthemes and, finally, the

Table 2: Code Book Summary

# cases	# Codes/Descriptions	#Emergent Themes	# Superordinate Themes
3	21	5	2

Table 3: Example of Case by Case Analysis Step 3: Case 1

Emergent Theme	Original Transcript	Researcher's Notes
Perseverance	I didn't stop long enough to allow that fear to come in me. I was like you want to do this. This is what this is, what it takes. This is the first step, you know. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, you try again later, if you want to, and if not, you still figure something else out. So, I feel like with a lot of people that sometimes don't end up taking those steps is because you stop too long to question whether or not it's the right choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sounds like her life experiences made her persevere. • Mentoring had a significant role in her perseverance. • This was a big deal to her. I sense gratitude.

APPENDIX F

Figure 3 depicts identifying connections across emerging themes within a singular case. The

result of all four of these approaches in Step 4 resulted in clustering emerging themes into subordinate themes, as illustrated in Table 4.

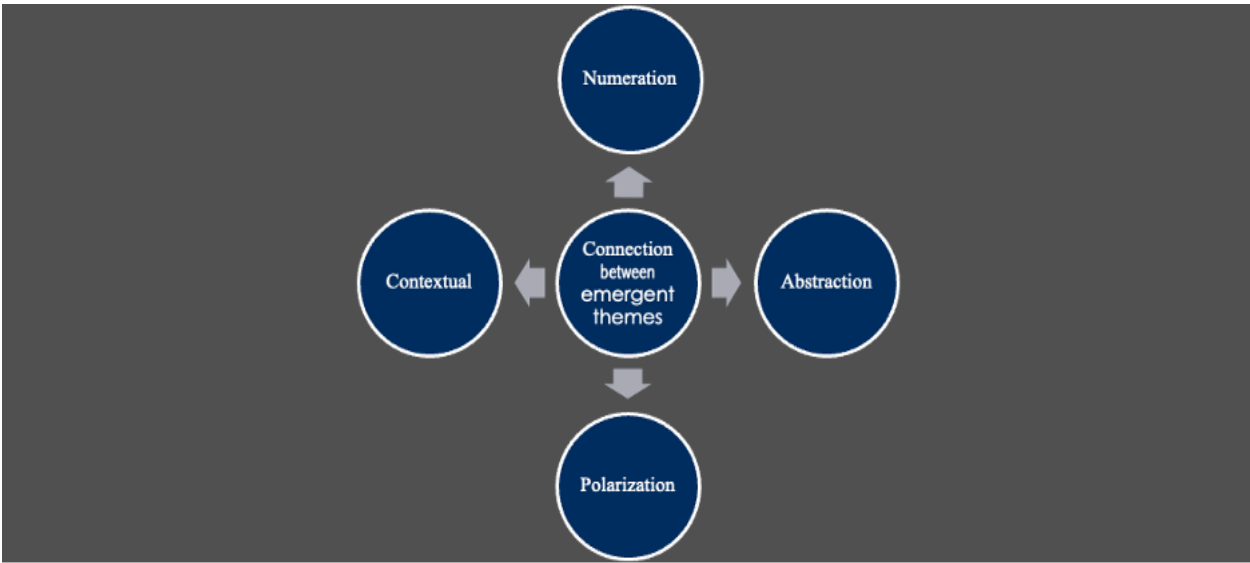


Figure 3: Case by Case Analysis: Steps 4 and 5

Note: Depiction of data analysis for Steps 4 and 5, which involved analysis within a singular case. Analysis at this stage began with numeration, abstraction, polarization, and contextualization to identify the connection between emergent themes. This figure was prepared by Saundra D. Schrock,

researcher, as a representation of Steps 4 and 5 of data analysis for an interpretative phenomenological study described by Smith et al. (2009). The emergent themes coming to the surface include perseverance, family support, and the imposter syndrome.

Table 4: Example of Case by Case Analysis Step 4: Participant 3

Emergent Theme	Original Transcript	Superordinate Theme
Perseverance	I didn't stop long enough to allow that fear to come in me. I was like you want to do this. This is what this is, what it takes. This is the first step, you know. If it works, it works. If it doesn't, you try again later, if you want to, and if not, you still figure something else out. So, I feel like with a lot of people that sometimes don't end up taking those steps is because you stop too long to question whether or not it's the right choice.	Mentored into PhD level

APPENDIX G

Table 5 presents a cluster of superordinate themes and their distribution across the three cases. The superordinate themes were identified after reading and re-reading the emergent themes. I selected each superordinate theme by counting the occurrence of an individual's

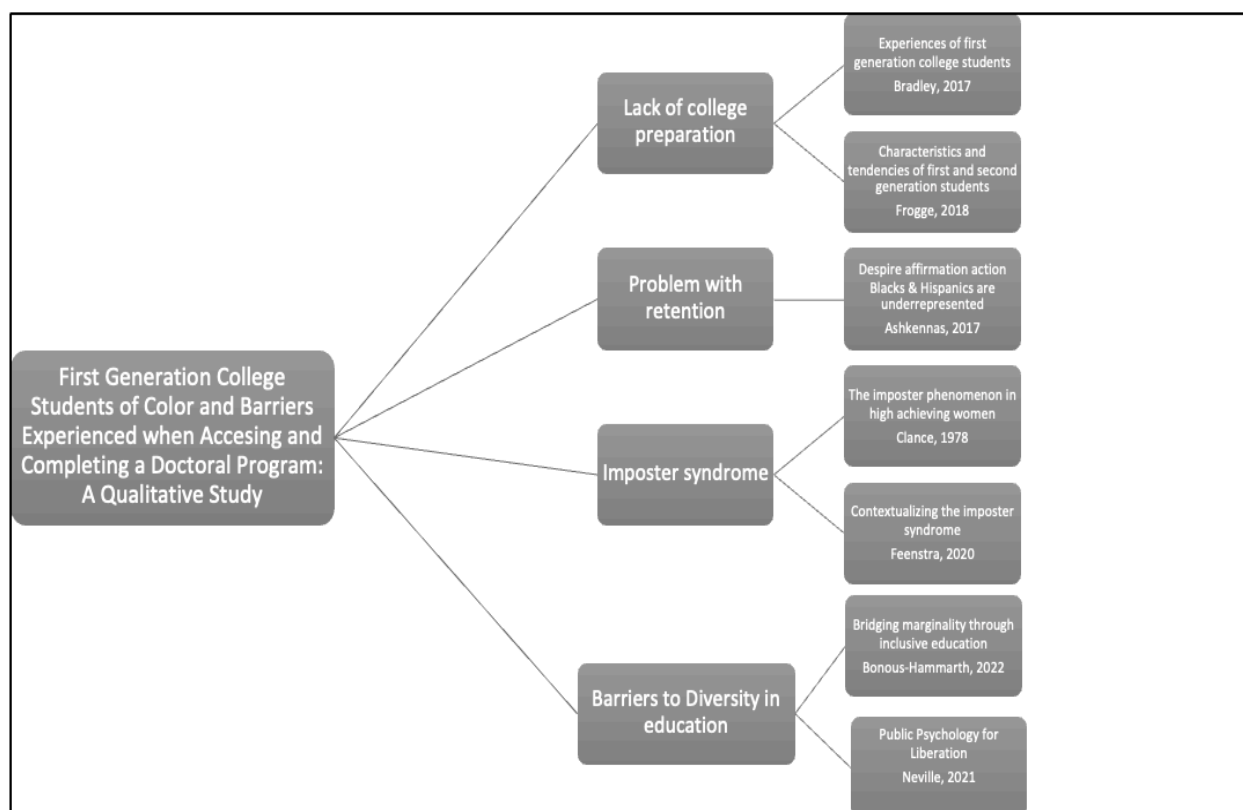
experience as a single case. This way, I considered what is meaningful for each personal experience during a doctorate program. The percentage number for each case marks the prevalence of the imposter syndrome narrative, participants must diffuse to succeed.

Table 5: Distribution of Themes

Cluster/Superordinate Theme	# Cases	% Cases	# Subthemes
Imposter Syndrome	3	92%	4
Perseverance	3	88%	2
Familial Support	3	88%	3

APPENDIX H

A Literature Map of the Research



APPENDIX I

Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

- Age
- Gender

- Race/Ethnic Background
- Type of Doctoral Program
- Number of Years in Doctoral Program

Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me why you decided to pursue a doctoral degree.
2. Tell me about your experiences when first studying as a FGCS.
3. What barriers did you feel you experienced when studying as a FGCS.
4. Tell me how your university supported you as an FGCS.
 - a. What were some of the most effective supports?
5. How did you overcome any barriers or obstacles when studying as an FGCS?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about studying as a FGCS?

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