



IMAGE: A MAP OF THE STARS OF THE ORION CONSTELLATION

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# Journal Content

In this Issue



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- i. Journal introduction and copyrights
- ii. Featured blogs and online content
- iii. Journal content
- iv. Curated Editorial Board Members

- 
1. The 3 S's of FIFA – Soft Power, Sports washing, Sports Diplomacy: The BRICS and Qatar World Cups. **1-11**
  2. Parentification and the Accomplishment of Developmental Tasks in Adolescence: A Case of Identity Exploration. **13-26**
  3. Debasish Lahiri's Transgressive Ontologies. **27-30**
  4. Inclusive Subtitles for All: Developing Practices and Guidelines for Accessible Media Content in Newly Experimenting Territories. **31-52**
  5. Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelties. **53-68**
  6. Intrigues at the Royal Court. **69-79**

- 
- v. Great Britain Journals Press Membership



Scan to know paper details and  
author's profile

# The 3 S's of FIFA — Soft Power, Sportswashing, Sports Diplomacy: The Brics and Qatar World Cups

*Marco Antonio Bettine de Almeida & Marina Özdemir*

*University of São Paulo*

## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how the BRICS countries and Qatar used sporting mega-events as a discourse to expand their political influence. To this end, the article discusses (a) the public sphere and its interfaces in sports and (b) the 2010 to 2022 World Cups as examples of Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy. As an analytical structure, we will make an interface between the studies that discussed the role of the Western media during the events and FIFA's 3 S's. The central argument resides in FIFA's role during the World Cup cycle in countries of the Global South and the existence of a FIFA *modus operandi* in the last four World Cups.

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# The 3 S's of FIFA — Soft Power, Sportswashing, Sports Diplomacy: The Brics and Qatar World Cups

Marco Antonio Bettine de Almeida<sup>α</sup> & Marina Özdemir<sup>σ</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes how the BRICS countries and Qatar used sporting mega-events as a discourse to expand their political influence. To this end, the article discusses (a) the public sphere and its interfaces in sports and (b) the 2010 to 2022 World Cups as examples of Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy. As an analytical structure, we will make an interface between the studies that discussed the role of the Western media during the events and FIFA's 3 S's. The central argument resides in FIFA's role during the World Cup cycle in countries of the Global South and the existence of a FIFA modus operandi in the last four World Cups.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, new regions, represented above all by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), have been reconfiguring the world's political and economic power centers, shifting them away from the United States and Western Europe. Comprising 41 percent of the world's population and 24 percent of the world's GDP, the countries in the bloc have turned to holding major sporting events to boost their economies. This phenomenon began with the Olympic Games in

Beijing in 2008. Then it was South Africa's turn to return to the world stage: after almost half a century of apartheid rule (1948-1994), the country had elected Nelson Mandela as president, promulgated a new constitution, and redesigned its national flag, which came to symbolize the various elements of the country's society. In Sports Diplomacy, the organization of the FIFA World Cup in 2010 — the first held on the African continent — accompanied this process of overcoming the past and seeking a new level of global integration. The international community's use of sport to condemn the segregationist regime in the past makes this event even more important. Specifically, the country was not allowed to compete in the Olympic Games from 1964 until 1988 and faced a ban from FIFA between 1961 and 1991.

Under the first Lula government (2003-2011), Brazil broadened its space for multilateral relations through Soft Power and intended to redesign the UN Security Council. It hosted the first Olympic and Paralympic Games in South America and was the first country to organize the world's two most significant sporting events in less than two years, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio Games.

Russia, for its part, hosted the Winter Olympics in 2014 and the FIFA World Cup in 2018. Vladimir Putin was personally involved, including visits to other committee member countries where he sought support in the votes, such as sports diplomacy. The organizers aimed to showcase the new Russia, as strong as it had been, to the world and its citizens and to make the country more attractive for establishing relations with other countries. All of this stimulated a sense of

national pride after a period of domestic crisis resulting from the collapse of the USSR, at which point discussions began about the abuse of Soft Power and the attempt to use sport to wash away a tarnished reputation or Sportswashing.

Qatar was the first Arab and Muslim country to host the FIFA World Cup. It aimed to extend partnerships with the West for the sale of gas. The deliberate use of sporting soft power contrasted with the analyses of sportswashing in Qatar and the Gulf States.

In the specific case of this article, we will analyze how the BRICS and Qatar have used sporting mega-events as a discourse to expand their political influence.

We will explore the following topics in depth:

- The concept of the public sphere and its interfaces in sports diplomacy;
- The broadening concept of sports diplomacy in the context of global society and its limits, and
- The use of the World Cups from 2010 to 2022 as examples as an analyze FIFA's 3 S's — Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy — by analyzing articles that studied the Western media during the events.

We will review recent research into tangible and intangible legacies and the problems these countries face in hosting mega-sporting events. One of the aims of this article is to maintain a dialogue with national and international publications and to consider, through these countries' experiences, the dynamics of international confederations and federations as global players in international relations.

## II. SPORTING MEGA-EVENTS, TRANSNATIONALITY, AND THE STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS

The use of sporting mega-events in the globalized world goes hand in hand with advancing neoliberalism. Nye shares this view on the idea of Soft Power, where military and economic coercion must be combined with cultural influence. For Bettine, it is building the quest for international

prestige and influence through military and symbolic force.

Jennings (2011), Murray (2012), and Müller (2015) present the new contours of sporting mega-events in the 21st century. Firstly, for the authors, there has been an increase in the use of sport as a diplomatic means, Sports Diplomacy; secondly, the exponential increase in public spending in the BRICS countries and Qatar to host the FIFA Men's Football World Cup; and lastly, structural corruption in FIFA and the use of events to clean up the organization's reputation — Sportswashing. This article aims to understand FIFA's *modus operandi* across the four FIFA Men's World Cups by seeking cross-cutting analyses with critical literature on FIFA, including works by Ferreira (2020), Gaffney (2018), Damo (2016), Brannagan and Rookwood (2016), and Cornelissen (2010).

According to Bettine (2023), developed nations use cultural and social co-optation elements to impose their strength in the international political arena. The author advocates for a broader understanding that builds the phenomenon of sport as a global structure based on Debord's principles of the society of spectacle. According to this model, the dominant nation captures the hearts and minds of dominated nations, thereby exercising domination through strategic co-optation and reification.

To analyze the sports phenomenon in mega-events, particularly FIFA's, the concepts of the public sphere, Soft Power, Sportswashing, and Sports Diplomacy will be explored in depth. The analysis is transversal and tangential to the three previous categories, the so-called legacies.

Examples of legacies range from commonly recognized aspects (urban planning, sports infrastructure) to intangible legacies, such as urban regeneration, international reputation, tourism, improved public welfare, jobs, business opportunities, corporate relocation, city marketing, renewed community spirit, better inter-regional cooperation, production of ideas, production of values, popular memory, educational opportunities.

These positive legacies contrast with negative legacies such as construction debts, high opportunity costs, unnecessary infrastructure, temporary exclusion of citizens, loss of tourists, increased property rents, socially unjust displacement, and poor income distribution.

If, on the one hand, the Olympic Games and the World Cup have extended their global reach from Eurasia to South America, passing through the African continent and ending in the Persian Gulf, on the other hand, there are engaged and politicized social movements. People and communities have developed an awareness that the costs of mega-events – social, economic, and environmental – often exceed their benefits. Academics and activists have attracted significant attention in political circles, with publications demonstrating mega-events unfavorable cost-benefit ratios (Kassens-Noor, et al., 2015; Zimbalist, 2015). The global media widely publicized the negative consequences of the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 and Rio de Janeiro in 2016, and the World Cups in South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Qatar, ranging from human rights violations to financial excesses and dubious legacies.

Public opinion in many cities has also turned against mega-events. Mega-event boosters' promises to increase jobs, transform a city's image, and build new infrastructure are now subject to intense public scrutiny. Ongoing cases of corrupt dealings by mega-event owners have caused a public outcry and increased pressure for mega-event reforms (Lenskyj, 2020).

The BRICS Cup occurred in South Africa in 2010, Brazil in 2014, and Russia in 2018. In 2022, the World Cup took place in Qatar. Generally speaking, the final FIFA tournament will be held in one country, except Japan and South Korea in 2002, and Canada, the USA, and Mexico in 2026. The media have widely discussed the fairness of the selection process for these countries. FIFA, the World Cup Organising Committee, and the Local Organising Committee have been portrayed and shown to have complex bribery structures and a lack of transparency, as Jennings (2011).

The analyzed countries faced significant challenges during the implementation phase of their bid pledges, encountering the expected delays characteristic of Global South nations. The term "realization" refers to the actual period of the games and the extensive years of preparation that precede the championships. These challenges largely stem from FIFA's increasingly stringent and demanding requirements over the years, which have necessitated the completion of urban infrastructure projects outlined in the Bid Books and later modified by the Inspection Reports.

As a result, the specifications FIFA set for stadiums, tourist transport, and game logistics received priority from an early stage, frequently overshadowing the infrastructure developments intended to benefit the local population.

The article presents FIFA's governance model through a comprehensive analysis of the World Cups in the BRICS countries and Qatar. It posits FIFA as the protagonist in numerous political-economic transactions throughout the World Cup cycle. Additionally, it identifies a *modus operandi* with the Global South countries, amplifying the host country's Soft Power and fostering a structure of Sports Diplomacy. Cases of corruption are softened with the discourse of the wonder of sport and its art, in other words, Sportswashing.

### III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 *Newspapers as Articulators of the International Public Sphere*

The public sphere takes on the symbolic function of promoting social integration and ensuring the autonomy of the world of life in relation to the system. "It emerges as a conflict zone in which opposing principles can be debated in the search for consensus" (Avritzer, Costa, 2004, p.715). The primary characteristic of the public sphere is that it serves as an unrestricted space for communication and public deliberation, with no possibility of predetermination, limitation, or restriction, and one cannot anticipate its constitutive elements. In principle, it is open to the whole of society. There are no a priori topics or contributions that are included or excluded.

The public sphere is always indeterminate regarding the content of the political agenda and the individuals and groups that can feature in it.

In this approach, Habermas (2014, p. 93) suggests adopting the procedural idea of public deliberation. According to this idea, the "contours of the public sphere take shape through the processes of identifying, filtering, and interpreting" themes and contributions that emerge from autonomous public spheres and move to the formal and institutionalized forums of the political and administrative system. This procedural character of legitimacy justification actualizes the normativity of the public sphere.

The public sphere is a way of looking at something that is judged and questioned and has a vital function in controlling the exercise of political power. By publicizing institutional political actions, the public can supervise and criticize them, ensuring greater transparency. The notion of public opinion is fundamental because it is based on the communicative rationalization inherent to the human condition, enabling any argument to be put to the test (Losekann, 2009).

The critical and selective potential of an audience, capable of preserving its internal differences and plurality despite the media's culturally and politically homogenizing pressure, should not be underestimated. The source of political legitimacy cannot be the will of individual citizens but the result of the communicative process of forming a collective will. This process operates within the public sphere and mediates between the world of life and the political system, allowing impulses from the world of life to reach the decision-making bodies established by the democratic order (Lubenow, 2012; Melo, 2015).

As far as international media material is concerned, the various transformations of globalization have greatly affected journalistic material.

The mass culture of transnational capitalism has begun to blur the boundaries of erudite culture, popular culture, and advertising. It has even contributed to dissolving the delimitations of textual practices in the idea of genres in

journalism. Even the World Cup has become a consumer product of FIFA's highly profitable cultural industry, surpassing mere sporting competition between countries.

As a marketing item, the World Cup has become increasingly present in the lives of its audience/recipient/consumer, especially in the 21st century. This presence spans from publicizing major brands and venues to ticket sales, building new stadiums, boosting tourism and hotels in the host cities, and advances in advertising and publicity, including broadcasts on TV, the internet, and international news media (Maharaj, 2015).

Alongside this evolution, the change in the "how to" of journalism reflects a growing concern about how events and concepts are reported, underscoring that this concern is as significant as the obligation to inform about society and what is happening worldwide critically. The current moment serves as a backdrop for relativizing the precepts that govern factual discourse and, in this way, reflecting on the place of journalism, redefining the role of the text producer and that of the reader as (re)producer of discourses.

Communication is no longer identified with information but with a simple signal transmission procedure (Habermas, 2012a, p.35). On the contrary, in a broader sense, the theory of communicative action has treated interaction as central. For interaction, it is increasingly necessary to know who the possible listeners of the message are, its recipient-interpreter, and the contexts in which it was produced and received.

As Habermas (2012a, p.123) wrote, "Human specificity lies in subjectivization and dialogue." No communication vehicle writes in vain but presupposes another, a necessity intrinsic to the social character of language. Communication, journalism, culture, and narrative are words under reconstruction through the eyes of communicative action.

The purpose of communication is to give meaning to the act of speech and to make language part of the World of Life. It is the sign of exchange, of relationship. It is the place of observation of the

world in which we live and speak, the world as it happens. There is no journalism without communication. Journalism is a cultural-historical process, the locus of mediations and representations. Journalists use language to cover events and create meaning for them to happen. That is why it is essential to get to know the culture to insert oneself in order to understand the communication processes and, from there, to produce narratives.

Audience segmentation and the frequent search for audiences exemplify these concepts in journalism. The Information Age (immediate and multi-platform) demands more from journalism if it wants to remain significant. It needs to offer information as an educational process in a more in-depth, analytical way and, above all, embedded in a language that belongs to the reader. A language that is part of their context and represents the World of Life. Information becomes pure enunciation in contexts that can vary according to the target audience or recipient-subject that the vehicle/journalist envisages when producing content. "It builds knowledge and, like all knowledge, it depends at the same time on the field of knowledge that circumscribes it, on the situation of enunciation in which it is inserted and on the device in which it is put into operation" (Habermas, 2012b, p.12).

The media, whose informational, economic, political, and sociological roles, among others, are presented simultaneously at various times, will be understood by their communicative characteristics. There is no naivety in thinking that the media used does not have a systemic structure, both in the Money System and the Power System. They function according to the economic logic that makes every information organization act like a company to produce a product defined by its place in the consumer goods exchange market. However, we will focus on the symbolic logic that makes every information system participate in constructing the public sphere.

Journalists construct meanings for objects in the world, transforming an event into news. News articles act as speeches for communicating

subjects, whose mission is to inform and bring the news to their audience, enabling subjects to understand objects.

The countries studied are not only made up of institutions but also of symbols and socially shared representations of their people's characteristics. These constructed meanings are embedded in memories, essential for constructing an identity and part of an imagined community (Hall, 2005, p.57). Language plays a fundamental role in this process because it is through language that these shared representations materialize, coming from the individual's experience and contact with other community members.

In countries with a wide range of ethnic and cultural diversity, as well as in an event such as the FIFA World Cup, multiple and unstable identities become even more visible as we problematize and try to characterize them. South Africa, Brazil, and Qatar are no different from the colonies and other dependencies of former empires that became liberated countries. Like them, "however new and unprecedented their emergence, they need a history and a flag. Only in this way can their memory of the old empire be dominated by the story of the creation of the new country, which tends to take the form of a founding myth of struggle and liberation" (Hobsbawm, 2014, p.82). Alternatively, conversely, to legitimize the return of an empire, which would be the USSR.

With the advent of mass media, international competitions have also become a spectacle, and host countries and cities have taken advantage of the increased attention from foreign audiences to project their image to the world. The governments see the organization of mega-sporting events of the host countries as a platform for the international promotion of their interests and for the dissemination of messages directly to the populations of other countries.

With cameras all over the world focused on these countries, the media allows itself to construct the identity of a country through the multiple personal identities, the multiple characters interviewed, and the multiple facets constructed

from the published reports. Communication is a privileged area for the exercise of understanding, in the broadest sense: an excellent arena for rethinking the relationship between subject and object, between the familiar and the distant, and for reviewing the hierarchies of cultural classifications.

## IV. RESULTS

### 4.1 *Analysing the Data*

Turning to the material under analysis, we examine the subjects: South Africa, Brazil, Russia, and Qatar. All these nation-states utilized the mega-sporting events as a showcase. The country's leaders perceived the mega-sporting events as an opportunity to demonstrate the country's development and organizational capacity to the world. Through the games, they aimed to portray themselves as nations that adhere to international rules within the framework of neoliberal globalization. In addition to using typical international relations strategies for foreign trade demands, what has become evident in the 21st century is the strategic use of sport to seek international political and economic promotion, as well as the intention to reinforce domestic agendas, political legitimacy, and national cohesion.

In South Africa, the focus of the press was on apartheid, the racist regime that was in force between 1948 and 1994, which was discussed in depth by the press, from its historical roots to its contemporary ramifications, using strategies of Soft Power and Sports Diplomacy. In the Daily Mail, an emblematic article called "South Africa skipper Aaron Mokoena: Mixed-race football helped overcome my fear of white people" (Barlow, 2010). In the article, the captain of South Africa's national team recalls Nelson Mandela's achievements at the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a device for uniting the country. Mandela encouraged blacks to support the Springboks, traditionally a symbol of the white Afrikaner ruling class. The team's victory, according to Mokoena, helped unite the nation. Mokoena says, however, that in 1992, the town where he lived was the scene of a massacre. The South African

captain was 11 years old when "46 people were killed by members of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)" (idem).

The former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Nelson Mandela dominated the international media, with reports analyzing his daily life, story, and political views. His prominence was further heightened by the tragic car accident that claimed the life of his niece on the eve of the opening ceremony, which garnered widespread press coverage of his mourning.

Russia has an important influence on Western culture: its literature, films, the Bolshevik Revolution, and tsarist are all sources of topics for understanding the world of Russian life. However, the most discussed topic was the country's return to the negotiating table with Western nations. In the New York Times article, "Russia has set the terms of the World Cup for the West. Will Russians embrace Putin's party?" Smith (2018) discusses how Russia won the right to host the tournament, its warlike culture; the spectre of racism and homophobia, and disfiguring hooliganism, "this will be the big event in Putin's move" (idem). At various times, Russia is portrayed by a Sports Diplomacy orientated towards the East and the use of Sportswashing.

Concerning Qatar, strong criticism of the country's culture, especially regarding gender inequality, was anticipated. However, the researcher saw the possibility of finding articles that discussed the origins of Islam, the figure of Mohammed, the cities of Medina and Mecca, Arab culture, the relationship with the Ottoman and Persian empires, architectural forms, sand cities and a little about the transition from a small tribe that lived off pearls to one of the largest petro-monarchies in the Middle East.

However, public opinion in journalistic discourses presented Qatar as a hostile environment for tourists unless they were extremely wealthy. The Qataris did not seek dialogue with the visitors; the reports showed that only the migrant community related to those who visited the World Cup. Newspaper records show that the number of tourists staying in Qatar was the lowest of all the

World Cups studied (Bettine, 2023). The universe of documents analyzed shows the recurrent use of Sportswashing by Qatar and the Gulf countries.

The Guardian's text announces the start of the Qatar World Cup as follows: "Qatar 2022 is actually happening" (Liew, 2022). The article reports on the deaths of migrant workers on the construction sites, "we owe the victims of this World Cup our present remembrance and future vigilance" (idem). Another editorial in The Guardian (2022) discusses the employment system in Qatar, the Kafala, "Has the World Cup really improved workers' rights in Qatar? Five experts give their verdict".

Contrary to what one might expect, the mega-sporting events did not show unique aspects of the culture of these countries but rather focused on elements already common to readers, in this case, Apartheid, the warlike history of the USSR/Russia, migrant labour, and the lack of human rights in Qatar.

Another important aspect was the newspapers' analysis of football culture in each country. In South Africa, the media portrayed football as an emerging sport. In Brazil, the focus was on the sport's deep historical significance and the metaphor of the "country of football" and the "homeland of football boots" (Daily Mail, 2014). The main football news story in Russia was the relationship between host cities and football teams. According to the Spanish newspaper El Mundo, of the eleven host cities for the 2018 World Cup, only five have football teams in the top division. At the Qatar World Cup 2022, Qatar's investment in European international football was discussed, especially the purchase of PSG and investments in Germany and England. One point unique to Qatar compared to other World Cups was the BBC's journalistic investigations into "fake fans".

The Guardian (2022) discusses "What does the World Cup mean to the Middle East and Arab world?". "The first thing to make clear is that we are talking about a massive slice of humanity". The "Arab world" stretches from Morocco on the northwest coast of Africa to, depending on your

definition, the United Arab Emirates or as far east as Afghanistan. If we define the Arab world only as those nations where Arabic is predominantly spoken, we're still talking about 22 countries with a population of 430 million.

People viewed Russia as a country hostile to foreigners, one that warranted caution due to its racist, misogynistic, and homophobic culture (Senett, 2018). The country arrested several activists and expelled or denied entry to reporters from free media outlets. The World Cup has strengthened warmongering, such as the war in Syria, the downing of a civilian aeroplane by a missile, and the poisoning murders of Putin's opponents.

Qatar followed the same path as Russia, but with the added duality of extremely wealthy tourists and those who came on a budget and with a lot of passion to follow the World Cup. The citizens of other countries had little contact with the Qataris, the locals were extremely segregated, with draconian laws regarding women, homosexuals, and the journalistic community that would like to build a vision of Qatar by the Qataris and not be limited only to the official discourse.

Another objective of a nation hosting a mega-sporting event, from the perspective of Sports Diplomacy, is to publicize its political values, to demonstrate that the institutions work, the country is safe, and that it respects diversity in every sense. Communicative action plays a fundamental role in this process, presenting the country to the foreign public with otherness, seeking to know the other and help them, to have democratic institutions that uphold the rights of all nations and beliefs, where the host country is an inspiration to visitors, who can take back home the feeling of being in a place that respects universal ethical values.

The literature analyzed casts doubt on the institutions of the host countries, especially their democracies, which were considered fragile (South Africa and Brazil) or undemocratic (Russia and Qatar). These countries were considered structurally corrupt. About human rights, structural racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and

homophobia were evident. In the case of South Africa and Brazil, the literature is dominated by social issues, mainly related to inequality, sanitation, lack of opportunities, and urban infrastructure.

In the case of South Africa, there was widespread discussion of the AIDS epidemic. In Brazil, the *El País* editorial published a report titled "Childhood + Favela = Football" (Hierro, 2014). The media often utilized the favelas in Brazil and the townships in South Africa as focal points for discussing the social situation in these countries. These areas were depicted in a conflicting manner: on one hand, the media portrayed the communities as unique and exotic regions with a more authentic culture, but on the other hand, they highlighted severe social and economic problems in these regions (Almeida, Özdemir, 2022).

In an article published in the *South Africa Medical Journal*, Richter and Massawe (2010) discussed the 2010 World Cup. The researchers pointed out that in South Africa, extraordinary courts were set up in the host cities to curb violence against tourists. The reports analyzed often referred to the United Nations and the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. The secretary pointed out that the infrastructure for the games should go beyond the World Cup to build compelling campaigns against child abuse, exploitation, child sex tourism, and human trafficking. Other events and campaigns should include racism and intolerance, child labor, violence against women and girls, and HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care, and support.

In Brazil's case, the media widely covered the collapse of a viaduct built for the games in the host city of Belo Horizonte, highlighting the lack of quality in the infrastructure and the expenditure on the World Cup without any benefit for Brazilians. The portrayal of the favelas and the clashes between the police and the communities, resulting in the deaths of young black men, was extensive, with a reference to the UN report. Another significant point was raised by Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations

Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, who highlighted the deaths of journalists in Brazil. In Russia, new elements emerged. The coverage focused on social issues such as racism, sexual harassment, homophobia, and xenophobia. Xenophobia and racism follow a similar trajectory. The issue of xenophobia is present in the British press, such as in *The Guardian*, in a report on 14 June 2018, "Don't have sex with men from 'different race' during World Cup, warns Russian politician," in which Russian legislator Tamara Pletnyova states: "Russian women should avoid sex with non-white foreign men during the football World Cup because they could become single mothers of mixed-race children" (*The Guardian*, 2018). In this case, the legislator describes to the newspaper the difficulty of non-white children in Russian society. In the case of homophobia, the concern comes from the idea that Russian society is hostile to the civil rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, as in the case of CNN, "UK gay rights activist arrested in Russia as World Cup opens". Russia has adopted a series of laws restricting the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community (Spark, 2018).

In the case of Qatar, FIFA intervened directly by banning the teams from wearing the rainbow armband. *Folha de S. Paulo* discussed why FIFA threatened to issue a yellow card so that the teams would not wear the armband against homophobia. According to the Brazilian newspaper, since being nominated to host the event in 2010, Qatar has been heavily criticized, further intensified by the proximity of the tournament, especially in terms of human rights, particularly LGBTQIA+ people and migrant workers, including those who worked on the World Cup construction sites. Another UN report in 2018 by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) describes unmistakable evidence of successive purges against LGBTQIA+ people, suggesting a pattern of impunity detrimental to accountability for human rights violations. Qatar is an example of Sportswashing, deliberately trying to use sporting Soft Power to change a tarnished global reputation.

International politics is communication between nations, which communicative or strategic interests can guide. In the focus of this study, Sports Diplomacy uses international norms and values, as well as other agents in the public sphere, such as clubs, federations, and NGOs, to build institutional bridges in foreign relations. For South Africa, it was a question of demonstrating that the country had built up Western values after the international community's embargoes linked to apartheid; Brazil wanted to secure a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; Russia sought to present its credentials as a holder of power in order to impose its demands after the fall of the USSR; Qatar wanted to increase its participation in the Western political scenario in order to protect itself against the embargoes of the Gulf countries.

## V. DISCUSSION

The countries analyzed used the event to expand Sports Diplomacy and Soft Power, with different personalities and world leaders who would circulate during the event, creating bigger agendas in international relations.

In Russia's case and especially Qatar, the term Sportswashing was often used to demonstrate the use of sport to clean up the country's image. The term Soft Power in sports originated in Africa but had more repercussions in Brazil due to the doubts hanging over the event's organization after the June 2013 protests.

FIFA commercializes its product, and among the many points for selling this product are Sports Diplomacy and Soft Power. For a long time, the host country will be in the sights of the world media. It will be able to conclude its commercial agreements in a neoliberal environment based on systemic structure and strategic action. However, intangible values such as culture, political values, and international politics have not been achieved because they lack elements of communicative action and valorization of the world of life.

The countries analyzed have fed FIFA's power due to their feeling of a lack of representation and interest in increasing their strength and power in the global geopolitical arena. In these countries,

the World Cup has left a trail of corruption, displaced people, violence against human rights, and obscurity. FIFA involves its partners and top management in a system of corruption and power, as demonstrated by the investigations into the scandals generated over the last two decades.

The World Cup in countries of the Global South demonstrated (a) evictions of poor populations without any compensation; (b) abuse of workers, especially migrants; (c) changes in civil rights and the curtailment of social movements; (d) threats, intimidation, and imprisonment of free media journalists.

When analyzing the news coverage, one can observe that the media outlets' various formats and editorial lines did not impact the surplus. The newspapers tended to discuss the same events with a similar focus, a trend already noted in other studies. There is no editorial conflict between outlets, as a few critical issues are covered in one outlet rather than others (Graeff et al., 2019; Gutierrez & Bettine, 2020).

It is only possible to speculate on the reasons for this homogeneity of coverage, which could be related to the fact that it is a sole event that takes place over a limited period, not allowing for a broader approach, or have roots in the way the press in developed countries portrays the countries of the Global South.

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# Parentification and the Accomplishment of Developmental Tasks in Adolescence: A Case of Identity Exploration

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## ABSTRACT

This study raises the problem of the construction of identity in parentified adolescent. It is indeed a question of measuring the influence of this wide spread phenomenon in the far north region of Cameroon, on the identity process as a major developmental task in adolescence. To achieve this, a qualitative study was conducted with 10 adolescents from the city of Maroua. Based on a semi-directive interview guide and a parentification rating scale, informations focusing on the two main themes of the study was collected, analyzed and discussed. It emerges that in a situation of parentification, the identity process is disturbed, the crisis of adolescence and existential questions give way to adult concerns for which the subject is not prepared. The quest for masculine or feminine identity is short-circuited, it gives way to a precocious tendency that is unsuitable for carrying out adult tasks.

*Keywords:* adolescence; developmental task; identity; parenting function; parentification.

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# Parentification and the Accomplishment of Developmental Tasks in Adolescence: A Case of Identity Exploration

Parentification et Réalisation des Tâches Développementales à L'adolescence : Cas de la Quête D'identité

Lan-Mique Haigue<sup>α</sup> & Maguiabou Tchidjo Aline<sup>σ</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This study raises the problem of the construction of identity in parentified adolescent. It is indeed a question of measuring the influence of this wide spread phenomenon in the far north region of Cameroon, on the identity process as a major developmental task in adolescence. To achieve this, a qualitative study was conducted with 10 adolescents from the city of Maroua. Based on a semi-directive interview guide and a parentification rating scale, informations focusing on the two main themes of the study was collected, analyzed and discussed. It emerges that in a situation of parentification, the identity process is disturbed, the crisis of adolescence and existential questions give way to adult concerns for which the subject is not prepared. The quest for masculine or feminine identity is short-circuited, it gives way to a precocious tendency that is unsuitable for carrying out adult tasks.*

**Keyword:** adolescence; developmental task; identity; parenting function; parentification.

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## RÉSUMÉ

*La présente étude pose le problème de la réalisation des tâches développementales chez l'adolescent en situation de parentification. Il s'agit en effet, de mesurer l'influence de ce phénomène très répandu dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord, Cameroun, sur le processus identitaire en tant que tâche développementale*

*majeure à l'adolescence. Pour y arriver, une étude qualitative a été menée auprès de 10 adolescents de la ville de Maroua. Sur la base d'un guide d'entretien semi-directif et d'une échelle d'évaluation de la parentification, des informations axées sur les deux principaux thèmes de l'étude ont été recueillies, analysées et discutées. Il en ressort qu'en situation de parentification, le processus identitaire est perturbé, la crise de l'adolescence et les questionnements existentiels cèdent la place à des préoccupations adultes auxquelles le sujet n'est pas préparé. La quête de l'identité masculine ou féminine est comme court-circuitée, elle cède la place à une tendance précoce et inadaptée à la réalisation de tâches adultes.*

**Mots clés:** adolescence ; tâche développementale ; identité ; fonction parentale ; parentification.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ces dernières années, l'Afrique connaît des crises multiformes qui placent les institutions sociales stratégiques (familles, écoles, infrastructures hospitalières...) dans une situation d'extrême difficulté. Au Cameroun en particulier, depuis 2014, les crises sécuritaires qui sévissent dans les régions de l'Extrême-Nord, du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest affectent la stabilité politique, socioéconomique, culturelle et religieuse du pays (ACF, Action Contre la Faim, juin 2022). Pour s'adapter à la situation, au-delà des dispositions prises par les politiques, des mécanismes de résilience multiformes se développent au niveau de la base de la pyramide sociale, notamment au

niveau des familles. Ces mécanismes embarquent très souvent maladroitement des enfants et des adolescents en plein processus d'élaboration psychique de leur personnalité.

En ce qui concerne la région de l'extrême-Nord spécifiquement, la secte islamiste Boko Haram commet de violentes exactions depuis une dizaine d'année. Entre juillet 2015 et octobre 2016 les attentats attribués à Boko Haram ont fait au moins 290 morts et plus de 800 blessés. Plusieurs femmes et filles ont été utilisées dans des attentats-suicides, de jeunes garçons enrôlés par le groupe armé, des pillages, vols, trafics ont été perpétrés (Rapport d'enquête publié en 2020 par le CAERT, Centre Africain d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le terrorisme). L'on a assisté également à des attaques de convois des commerçants, d'humanitaires, inspirées des méthodes de coupeurs de routes des années 1990. Les attaques sont essentiellement concentrées sur trois départements : Logone et Chari, Mayo Tsanaga et Mayo Sava, soient 90% des incidents enregistrés dans la Région de l'Extrême-Nord. Le bureau de la coordination des affaires humanitaires (OCHA) dans son dernier aperçu de la situation humanitaire de la zone datant d'avril 2022 publie les statistiques suivantes : au mois de janvier 2022, 39 incidents perpétrés par le Boko Haram ont fait 22 victimes ; au mois de février 2022, 20 incidents ont fait 35 victimes ; en mars 2022, 63 incidents ont fait 23 victimes (ACF, 2022). Des familles ont ainsi perdu leurs membres, leurs biens, leur communauté, des villages entiers ont été rasés. Ces incidents continuent d'entraîner d'importants mouvements migratoires vers des localités moins à risque d'attaques. Il existe à cet effet aujourd'hui de nombreux camps de déplacés internes dans la région de l'Extrême-Nord.

La crise du Boko Haram s'est malheureusement inscrite dans la durée, en ce sens que, jusqu'à l'heure actuelle, la situation sécuritaire reste préoccupante dans la région. On assiste à un regain de violence, alors même qu'une période de latence avait fait penser au recul du phénomène Boko Haram. De plus, à la crise du Boko-Haram, s'est greffée depuis le mois d'août 2021, celle liée aux conflits intercommunautaires Arabe

Choa-Mousgoum, impliquant des éleveurs et des pêcheurs, crise qui a exacerbé la situation d'instabilité socioéconomique que connaissait déjà la région (Mba & Ngueta Nouffessie, 2022).

Le secteur de santé comporte lui aussi des problèmes majeurs. L'accès aux soins de santé primaire est difficile. Les enfants et les femmes en paient le plus lourd tribut. Le taux de mortalité maternelle a considérablement augmenté ces dernières années, passant de 860 décès pour 100.000 naissances vivantes en 1996/1997, à 1.099 décès pour 100.000 naissances vivantes en 2004 pour atteindre un nouveau record au niveau mondial, soit 1.200 pour 100.000 en 2010. La raison en est que cinq femmes sur six accouchent encore à domicile et seulement 23% des parturientes reçoivent l'aide de personnel qualifié 8% chez les plus pauvres. De plus, le suivi post-partum ne concerne que 5% des mères (EDS/MICS, 2014, 2015).

Ce contexte de crise multiforme installe les populations de la région de l'Extrême-Nord dans une situation de vulnérabilité et de précarité. La pauvreté s'exacerbe, les familles développent tant bien que mal des stratégies d'adaptation et de survie. C'est dans cette perspective que naît et se prolifie le phénomène de parentification. De nombreux parents, en effet, pour faire face aux difficultés économiques, sociales et psychologiques qu'ils rencontrent, utilisent leurs enfants comme béquilles, comme objets d'étayage. Malgré les actions entreprises par l'État et les organisations humanitaires, subventions, dons, allocations, l'amélioration des conditions de vie des populations reste un véritable challenge. Le phénomène de parentification est une réalité dans l'ensemble de la région de l'Extrême-Nord. Dans le cadre de cet article, la ville de Maroua, ville cosmopolite, qui accueille des personnes venant de différentes localités environnantes, constitue notre site cible de recherche.

## II. PROBLÉMATIQUE

L'adolescence est le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte. C'est l'âge du changement, entendons l'ensemble des manifestations morphologiques et physiologiques qui apparaissent, sous l'influence

de sécrétions hormonales et qui préparant le sujet à une sexualité de reproduction (Marcelli & Braconnier, 2013). L'adolescent est donc reconnaissable aux transformations pubertaires dont il est le lieu. « Au cours de la puberté, le corps de l'enfant se modifie dans sa morphologie, dans son fonctionnement et dans son apparence ; en peu de temps, en moyenne quatre ans, il devient un corps adulte, sexualisé » (Bloch, 1997, p.31). Il n'est certes plus un enfant, mais il n'est pas encore un adulte, il est tout de même dans le processus d'en devenir un. Le processus implique la réalisation de différentes tâches développementales dont la principale est la construction de l'identité. Selon Cloutier (1996), l'adolescence c'est l'âge de la « cristallisation de l'identité ». Il s'agit en fait d'un processus qui débute dans l'enfance et qui atteint sa forme mure à l'adolescence (Erikson, 1972). Pour arriver à la connaissance et la définition de soi, l'adolescent passe par différents stades de développement préparatoires, jonchés de crises « normales », dont la gestion harmonieuse conditionne l'élaboration d'une personnalité saine et d'une identité structurée (Erikson, 1972). L'identité se construit autour des interactions personnelles qui s'opèrent entre l'enfant et son entourage, à travers notamment : l'apprentissage, l'identification, l'évaluation (que fait le sujet des événements de vie qu'il expérimente), les comparaisons qu'il établit entre lui et son environnement immédiat (Papalia & Martorell, 2018). Ainsi, la façon dont l'enfant est accueilli et traité par son entourage familial, le support émotionnel qu'il reçoit de ses parents, les premiers repères sociaux qu'on lui offre, influencent la structuration de son identité. De ce fait, le parent qui ne s'offre pas comme objet d'étayage pour son enfant et qui doute de ses aptitudes, inhibe la curiosité, les investissements émotionnels et les explorations de ce dernier. Inversement, le parent qui sert de médiateur entre l'enfant et le monde extérieur, qui a confiance en son enfant et en ses aptitudes, communique cette confiance et cultive chez ce dernier la confiance en soi et aux autres. Ainsi, lorsque le sujet est évalué à sa juste valeur par ses parents et son environnement immédiat « microsystème », cela contribue adéquatement à l'élaboration d'un sentiment d'identité stable (Papalia & Martorell,

2018). Ce qui signifie que même si l'adolescent clame haut et fort son autonomie, il a besoin d'être accompagné au plan psychologique, social, voire matériel par ses parents dans le processus d'élaboration de l'identité de soi. Les parents ou les instances tutélaires en charge de son éducation constituent ses premiers repères d'identification et d'orientation psychosociale.

Or, de ce qu'on observe dans plusieurs familles de la région de l'Extrême-Nord, notamment dans la ville de Maroua, notre site d'étude cible, l'adolescent ne bénéficie pas d'un cadre approprié d'élaboration psychologique de son identité. En effet, au moment où l'adolescent a besoin de repères pour se construire une identité de genre masculine ou féminine, s'identifier aux rôles sociaux qui guideront son entrée à l'âge adulte, définir des projets de vie sociale et professionnelle, ce dernier est pris de court par les parents qui court-circuitent le stade de l'adolescence pour faire passer le sujet directement au stade adulte avant qu'il soit psychologiquement préparé à réaliser les tâches développementales y afférentes. Précisément, les parents ont tendance à attribuer aux adolescents des responsabilités supérieures à leurs possibilités. Démissionnant de leur fonction parentale, ils rendent l'adolescent responsable des charges familiales en le contraignant d'une façon ou d'une autre, à mener des activités génératrices de revenus, qui serviront à couvrir les besoins de l'ensemble de la famille. C'est ainsi qu'on voit de nombreux adolescents de la ville arpenter les rues, proposant aux clients des articles divers. L'argent issu de ce commerce sert à couvrir les besoins alimentaires et les soins de santé de toute la famille, et, le cas échéant, les frais de scolarité des frères cadets et de l'adolescent parentifiés lui-même. Outre ces activités commerciales, la parentification de l'adolescent se lie aussi à travers la tendance de certains parents à confier à l'adolescent la responsabilité quotidienne de ses frères cadets, leur protection, leur sécurité et leur accompagnement pédagogique.

Les adolescents en situation de parentification n'ont pas le temps d'apprendre à connaître leur corps en transformation et à s'y adapter. Ils n'ont pas l'occasion de mettre à l'épreuve les

potentialités intellectuelles que la puberté innove en eux, en affirmant leur maturité et en explorant les diverses possibilités qui s'offrent à eux avant de s'engager. Autant de tâches qui préparent l'adolescent à l'accession harmonieuse au stade adulte. On assiste en effet à un passage précoce du stade d'enfant au stade d'adulte sans y être préparé, sans en avoir développé les compétences. En d'autres termes, les tâches développementales propres à l'adolescent sont comme escamotées et remplacées par des tâches adultes que l'adolescent n'est pas encore prêt à assumer (Claës, 1996 ; Golse, 2010). L'inadaptation des adolescents à la réalisation des tâches adultes se justifie par le fait que plusieurs adolescents en situation de parentification sont exposés à des risques divers : exploitation sexuelle, enrôlement dans la secte islamiste Boko Haram, enrôlement dans des bandes criminelles, agressions physiques, vol de leurs marchandises, consommation de substances psychoactives, travail forcé, commerce de la drogue... (Centre Africain d'Etudes et de Recherche sur le Terrorisme, CAERT, 2020).

Fort de ce constat, la présente étude ambitionne de questionner le déroulement du processus identitaire chez ces « adolescents-parents ». Elle explore en effet l'implication du rôle inversé que joue l'adolescent sur la construction de son identité. Comment se structure le moi de l'adolescent parentifié ? Quels sont les mécanismes psychologiques qu'il met en œuvre pour se construire en tant qu'individualité fasse à toutes ces sollicitations psychosociales qui ne correspondent pas à son âge et à ses possibilités ? C'est autour de ces interrogations que s'est construit le problème qui sous-tend cette étude. L'objectif principal de l'étude est donc de mesurer l'influence de la parentification sur le processus identitaire en tant que principale tâche développementale à l'adolescence.

Étant donné que l'étude pose le problème de la construction de l'identité chez l'adolescent dans un contexte familial où les fonctions parentales sont inversées et assurées par les adolescents, deux théories principales ont été identifiées comme fondamentales pour la résolution de ce problème : la théorie de la parentification et la théorie de l'identité. Ainsi, avant l'examen de la

situation sur le terrain, intéressons-nous à la documentation autour de la parentification et de la construction de l'identité.

### III. PARENTIFICATION ET PRISE DE RESPONSABILITÉS D'ADULTE AU SEIN DE LA FAMILLE

La parentification désigne un processus d'inversion de rôles dans lequel un enfant ou adolescent est obligé d'agir en tant que parent auprès de ses frères, de son ou ses parent(s), bref en tant que parent auprès de sa famille. C'est un processus d'attribution des fonctions parentales à l'enfant ou à l'adolescent. Ce dernier devient le protecteur de ses frères, de son ou ses parent(s), de sa famille. Il assure leur sécurité émotionnelle, physique et même matérielle. Il devient en d'autres termes un adolescent avec des problèmes d'adulte à résoudre.

Selon Haxhe (2019), la parentification est un processus holistique basé sur la prise de responsabilité parentale par l'enfant au sein de la famille. Ici, l'enfant ne joue pas au parent, mais il est le parent de son parent, de ses frères, il est « le chef » de famille, au vue des charges qui lui incombent, il est appelé à assumer des responsabilités qui dépassent ses possibilités. Dans ces conditions, ses propres besoins, ses intérêts, ses préférences ne sont pas pris en compte et il ne reçoit pas de reconnaissance pour les sacrifices qu'il fait.

Le Goff (1999) définit la parentification comme un processus interne à la vie familiale qui amène un enfant ou un adolescent à prendre des responsabilités plus importantes que ne le voudraient son âge et sa maturation et qui le conduisent à devenir un parent pour ses parents. L'auteur identifie deux principaux facteurs comme explicatifs du phénomène de parentification : - *Les facteurs destructifs*: ici, l'enfant est surchargé de responsabilités dépassant ses compétences cognitives, émotionnelles ou physiques ; les besoins de l'enfant sont négligés ou exploités ; l'enfant ne reçoit pas de reconnaissance pour ce qu'il donne ; l'enfant est blâmé et son comportement est désigné comme mauvais ; l'enfant est impliqué

dans une relation érotisée avec l'un des parents ; on note une absence de soutien de la famille d'origine des parents. Dans ce contexte, les parents sont blâmés plutôt par une personne étrangère à la famille ayant une position d'autorité.

- *Les facteurs constructifs* : contrairement au premiers cas, ici, les parents reconnaissent la contribution de l'enfant, ils soutiennent l'enfant s'il en a besoin ; l'enfant a connu des périodes de confiance vis-à-vis de l'adulte parentifiant ; les parents évitent de placer l'enfant dans une situation de loyauté clivée ; si les parents en sont empêchés, un autre adulte ou les membres de la fratrie reconnaissent les contributions de l'enfant ; des éléments factuels, comme le décès d'un des parents ou la recomposition familiale, connus des membres de la famille, interviennent dans la parentification ; l'enfant n'est pas placé dans une relation à teneur sexuelle et l'enfant n'est pas blâmé.

Dans le cadre de cette étude, notre intérêt ne se situe pas au niveau de la typologie de parentification, ni au niveau du vécu de la situation par l'adolescent (approche clinique), mais au niveau de l'élaboration psychologique de l'identité chez l'adolescent en situation de parentification, l'identité étant considérée ici comme tâche développementale majeure à l'adolescence. L'étude aborde donc le phénomène de parentification dans une approche développementale, contrairement à une autre étude sur la parentification menée en 2019 par une équipe de psychologues cliniciens, qui, dans une approche psychopathologique et clinique de la question, ont démontré que la parentification influence positivement l'élaboration de l'identité du moi à l'adolescence (Ndje Ndje, Ndzèrem & Tsala Tsala, 2019). En effet, cette étude aboutit à cette conclusion parce qu'elle se focalise davantage sur la fonction de la parentification et le vécu psychologique de la situation par l'adolescent. L'adolescent qui subvient aux besoins de sa famille a évidemment le sentiment de bien faire, puisque le changement matériel est perceptible au niveau de la famille. Elle passe d'une situation de manque à une situation de

satisfaction des besoins. La présente étude aborde la question différemment. Elle veut savoir comment l'identité, en termes de processus développemental, peut se poursuivre en contexte de parentification. En effet la parentification se positionne théoriquement comme une crise maturative que le sujet doit pouvoir gérer pour passer à l'étape de développement suivante. C'est pourquoi nous abordons la question en termes de tâche développementale. L'adolescent parentifié est-il encore capable de s'inscrire dans le processus psychologique de réalisation des tâches développementales relevant de son âge, notamment la quête d'identité, alors qu'il est déjà appelé à remplir des fonctions de parent ? Voilà sous quel angle la question de la parentification est posée dans le cadre de cet article.

Les formulations théoriques autour de la parentification nous enseignent que le processus invite l'adolescent à la résolution de problèmes d'adultes alors même qu'il n'en a pas fini avec ceux de son âge. En effet devenir parent est une construction à la fois psychologique et sociale (Bydlowski, 2010). Il ne suffit d'être désigné comme parent pour en revêtir automatiquement les compétences. Selon Poussin (2004) la parentalité correspond à : un désir d'enfant ; une phase de transition manifestant le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte et une capacité à assumer les responsabilités liées au statut de parent. Il a théorisé et rendu célèbre le concept de « fonction parentale ». La fonction parentale implique une préparation psychique et la capacité à assumer des responsabilités juridiques, morales et éducatives.

Compte tenu de la littérature ci-dessus développée, en contexte de parentification, sur quelle trajectoire identitaire l'adolescent s'inscrit-il ? Avant de répondre à cette question, explorons la notion d'identité à l'adolescence et les mécanismes psychologiques inhérents à sa formation.

#### IV. LA QUÊTE DE L'IDENTITÉ À L'ADOLESCENCE, UNE TÂCHE COMPLEXE ET DYNAMIQUE

L'identité est la conscience que l'on a de soi-même, c'est la capacité du sujet à se définir comme individualité, distincte des autres. L'identité est un processus qui se construit avec l'âge et qui fluctue en fonction des situations critiques auxquelles le sujet est confronté au cours de son développement (Erikson, 1972 ; Mouchenik, 2002).

Erikson (1972), théoricien majeur de l'approche développementale de l'identité, postule que le processus identitaire se déroule suivant un plan fondamental préétabli, il est le résultat de l'interaction entre les mécanismes psychologiques et les facteurs sociaux. Le sentiment d'identité résulte en effet, d'une tendance inconsciente du sujet à établir une continuité dans son expérience subjective et à rechercher un sentiment d'unité et d'intégration à partir de la multiplicité des identifications aux modèles proposés par les groupes sociaux auxquels le sujet appartient (sa communauté, sa nation, sa classe sociale). Erikson (1972) distingue en fait huit stades de développement de la personnalité qu'il nomme stades psychosociaux. L'adolescence intervient au cinquième stade, il est celui de la cristallisation de l'identité, laquelle cristallisation est influencée par les stades précédents. L'auteur insiste sur le fait que les repères identitaires que construit l'adolescent sont en lien direct avec la manière dont il a géré les crises de chacun des quatre stades précédents et intègrent de ce fait l'héritage identitaire de ces stades. En prolongement de la perspective eriksonienne, Marcia (1980) postule que la quête de l'identité à l'adolescence se fait par questionnement et engagement. Ces deux facteurs sont cruciaux pour la construction d'une identité stable et l'accès aisé à l'âge adulte. L'adolescent questionne les patterns issus de l'éducation familiale, scolaire, communautaire, et prend position relativement à ses préférences et à l'orientation qu'il souhaite donner à sa vie. Marica (1980) propose ainsi un modèle permettant d'apprécier l'évolution du processus identitaire à la fin de l'adolescence. Il décrit quatre statuts identitaires résultant du croisement de deux

dimensions: l'engagement (fort ou faible) et l'exploration (forte ou faible) permettant de rendre compte du degré d'évolution du processus identitaire de l'individu à la fin de l'adolescence et de son niveau d'adaptation sociale.

A cette approche génétique de l'identité que proposent Erikson et Marcia, s'oppose celle de Kestenberg (1980) et de Marcelli et Braconnier (2013), plus phénoménologique. Cette autre approche ne considère pas l'identité de soi à l'adolescence comme le résultat d'un processus qui s'origine à la naissance, mais comme une crise ponctuelle qui implique la rupture d'avec les premiers objets d'identification et la quête d'objets nouveaux. Malgré cette opposition épistémologique autour du concept d'identité, les théoriciens de l'adolescence sont néanmoins unanimes sur le fait qu'à cet âge le sujet est en quête de nouveaux repères identitaires. Il s'agit d'un processus qui se résume en ceci : désir de se défaire des imagos parentales pour chercher à l'extérieur de la famille de nouveaux objets d'identification ; désir de faire fonctionner quelque chose et de le faire comme il faut (l'enjeu ici c'est l'identité) (Marcelli & Braconnier, 2013).

Au regard de toutes ces formulations théoriques, il nous apparaît pertinent de nous interroger sur le sens que prend le processus identitaire en contexte de parentification ?

#### V. MÉTHODOLOGIE

L'étude repose sur une approche qualitative de collecte et d'analyse des données, l'objectif étant d'étudier en profondeur le contenu du discours de chacun des participants, afin de mieux cerner l'influence de la parentification sur le déroulement du processus identitaire à l'adolescence.

## 5.1 Profil des Participants

Tableau n° 1 : Récapitulatif des caractéristiques générales des participants

| Noms des participants | Sexe | Âge    | Nationalité  | Niveau d'étude   | Lieu de résidence  | Religion                 | Ethnie   | Vit avec         | Durée de l'entretien | Score obtenu au test de parentification |
|-----------------------|------|--------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------|---|
| DANY                  | F    | 16 ans | Camerounaise | CM2              | Maroua (Ziling)    | Chrétienne (catholique)  | Guiziga  | Père             | 30 min               | 110                                     |
| BOUBA                 | M    | 17 ans | Camerounaise | 1 <sup>ère</sup> | Maroua (Doualaré)  | Musulmane                | Peule    | Les deux parents | 26 min               | 95                                      |
| JEAN                  | M    | 17 ans | Camerounaise | 2 <sup>nd</sup>  | Maroua (Djarenkol) | Chrétienne (protestante) | Massa    | Les deux parents | 40 min               | 108                                     |
| FELICITE              | F    | 16 ans | Camerounaise | CM2              | Maroua (Pont-Vert) | Animiste                 | Guiziga  | Les deux parents | 30 min               | 86                                      |
| AMIRA                 | F    | 17 ans | Camerounaise | 5 <sup>e</sup>   | Maroua (loukéo)    | Musulmane                | Peule    | Tuteur           | 20 min               | 97                                      |
| ABDOU                 | M    | 17 ans | Camerounaise | 3 <sup>e</sup>   | Maroua (Djoudadou) | Chrétienne (catholique)  | Mafa     | Tuteur           | 30 min               | 101                                     |
| OUSEÏNI               | M    | 16 ans | Camerounaise | 5 <sup>e</sup>   | Maroua (Palar)     | Animiste                 | Haoussa  | Mère             | 19 min               | 85                                      |
| ANA                   | F    | 15 ans | Camerounaise | CM2              | Maroua (Kongola)   | Chrétienne (adventiste)  | Toupouri | Tuteur           | 27 min               | 88                                      |
| FADILA                | F    | 17 ans | Camerounaise | CM2              | Maroua (Douggoï)   | Musulmane                | Peule    | Mère             | 23 min               | 117                                     |
| AÏCHA                 | F    | 16 ans | Camerounaise | CM1              | Maroua (Hardé)     | Musulmane                | Peule    | Les deux parents | 25 min               | 122                                     |

10 adolescents ont pris part à l'étude. Ils sont âgés de 15 à 17 ans. Le choix de cette tranche d'âge se justifie par le fait qu'elle correspond à la période de l'adolescence proprement dite, caractérisée par la construction des règles sociales et la quête de l'identité (Le Bigot et al., 2004).

L'échantillon comporte 6 filles et 4 garçons. Bien qu'il corresponde à un échantillonnage par choix raisonnée, cet écart fille-garçon traduit la réalité des faits en matière de parentification. En effet, l'enquête sociale montre qu'il y a plus de filles en situation de parentification que de garçons. Ces derniers bénéficiant d'un meilleur accès à l'école que les filles. Ces dernières sont davantage destinées au développement des compétences qui les préparent au mariage (Ezémbe, 2009; Maguïabou, 2020).

Tous les participants sont de nationalité camerounaise et résident dans la ville de Maroua. Ils ont tous été scolarisés à un moment donné de leur parcours. Ils sont tous originaires de la Région de l'Extrême-Nord et vivent avec parents ou tuteurs. Avec chacun d'eux, l'entretien a duré

au moins 19 minutes et au plus 40 minutes. L'écart s'explique par la tendance de certains participants à être plus disposés se raconter que d'autres.

En ce qui concerne la parentification, le statut des participants a été évalué sur la base d'une échelle de mesure de la parentification qui établit que le sujet peut être considéré comme parentifié s'il obtient un score au moins égale à 85. Les participants à l'étude ont obtenu un score compris entre 85 et 122.

## 5.2 Instruments de Collecte des Données

Deux instruments nous ont servi de base de collecte des données:

- *L'échelle de mesure de la parentification de Mika et al. (1987), PS (Parentification Scale) :* elle nous a permis de sélectionner les adolescents en situation de parentification. La PS permet d'identifier les enfants ou les adolescents parentifiés et d'évaluer le degré de parentification en les soumettant à 30 items correspondant au rôle qu'ils jouent au sein de

la famille et qui traduit la situation de parentification. Elle définit quatre degrés de parentification : rôle de parent envers son/ses frère(s)/sœur(s) ; rôle de parent envers son/ses parent(s) ; rôle de partenaire/époux envers son parent ; prise de responsabilités d'adulte non spécifiques. A chaque degré de parentification sont associés des items. L'enquêté est appelé à indiquer, pour chaque item la proposition qui correspond à sa situation en se positionnant sur une échelle de Likert allant de « très souvent » à « jamais ou ne s'applique pas ». Un exemple d'item : « Ma mère m'a fait part de ses problèmes ou préoccupations personnelles comme si j'étais un autre adulte (1) avant l'âge de 14 ans, et (2) de 14 à 16 ans : (a) très souvent, (b) souvent, (c) occasionnellement, (d) rarement, (e) jamais ou ne s'applique pas ». Un score compris entre 85 et 90 correspond à un degré de parentification cliniquement significatif. Tous les adolescents enquêtés ont obtenus un score au moins égal à 85. La consistance interne du PS a été évaluée à l'aide de la corrélation de Spearman.

- *Le guide d'entretien semi-directif* : les informations collectées auprès des adolescents étaient axées sur les thèmes suivants : les antécédents à la parentification, qui explore les événements de vie familiale qui ont précédé la situation de parentification ; la parentification proprement dite, qui aborde les indicateurs de parentification chez les participants et les modalités y afférentes ; la construction de l'identité, qui s'intéresse aux modalités de réponse à la question existentielle : « qui suis-je ? ».

### 5.3 Procédure

La première étape consistait en la sélection des participants à l'étude. Avec l'aide d'une travailleuse sociale, nous avons pu entrer en contact avec des adolescents commerçants ambulants de la ville. Après les avoir mis en confiance, nous leur expliquions l'objet de notre sollicitation et réquérions leur consentement éclairé, avant de vérifier leur éligibilité à la recherche. Lorsque les critères d'âge, de nationalité, de résidence étaient satisfaits, nous

soumettions l'adolescent à la *parentification scale*, pour s'assurer qu'il était en situation de parentification. Lorsque c'était le cas, l'entretien semi-directif était directement engagé avec le participant. Les entretiens avaient lieu sous un hangar mis à notre disposition par la travailleuse sociale qui nous a facilité l'accès aux participants à l'étude. L'atmosphère était plus ou moins calme mais convivial. L'heure des entretiens dépendait de la disponibilité des adolescents. Nous nous sommes servis d'un dictaphone pour enregistrer les discours des sujets, question de garantir un recueil exhaustif du discours verbal, et de faciliter l'observation directe de l'adolescent et la prise de notes relatives aux aspects non verbaux du discours. Pendant l'entretien, nous évoquions le thème puis le sous-thème sur lequel le sujet devrait s'exprimer, et au fur et à mesure de l'évolution de son discours, nous faisons usage de relances pour orienter son propos, suivant nos objectifs de recherche, et pour l'amener à nous fournir des explications ou des informations plus exhaustives. Les entretiens se faisaient en français et en fulfuldé.

### 5.4 Considérations Ethiques

Les principes de clairance éthiques ont été respectés et les outils de collecte des données ont été soumis uniquement à des participants consentants.

### 5.5 Technique D'analyse des Données

L'analyse de contenu ou analyse thématique nous a permis d'exploiter les données issues des entretiens semi-directifs. Il s'agissait pour nous de retrouver dans les discours des participants des propositions se rapportant aux thèmes définis relativement à nos objectifs de recherche. Une fois l'analyse de contenu effectuée, nous avons procédé à l'interprétation et à la discussion des données d'analyse sur la base des théories qui sous-tendent la recherche. La partie opératoire de l'étude est ci-dessous présentée.

## VI. RÉSULTATS

Nous présentons les résultats suivant les axes thématiques du guide d'entretien. Nous proposons ensuite des morceaux choisis des

entretiens qui illustrent bien la problématique de la construction de l'identité chez l'adolescence en situation de parentification.

### 6.1 Les Antécédents à la Parentification

Différentes raisons expliquent la situation de parentification chez nos sujets d'étude : les conflits conjugaux qui entraînent l'abandon des responsabilités parentales (chez Amira et Abdou) ; le décès de l'un des parents ou des deux (chez Dany et Fabila) ; le divorce des parents (chez Ana) ; le départ en aventure sans retour du père (chez Ouseïni) ; l'abandon de ses fonctions par le père à la suite d'un second mariage (chez Bouba) ; le refus des parents d'assumer leurs responsabilités (chez Jean et Aïcha) ; la perte d'emploi du père (chez Félicité).

### 6.2 La Parentification Proprement Dite

De ce qui ressort des discours des adolescents enquêtés la parentification se décline en trois principaux sous-thèmes :

6.2.1 *L'exercice du rôle de parent auprès des frères*, qui se manifeste par les indicateurs suivants : Maternage des frères ; Surveillance et protection des frères ; Soutien psychologique ; Assistance pédagogique auprès des frères. Nous présentons ci-dessous des extraits de discours qui l'illustrent.

« Je suis devenu le père et la mère de mes sœurs et mon frère. Je me comporte comme le faisait nos parents de leur vivant. S'il y a eu des moments de querelles entre nous, c'est moi qui est amené à les punir et conseiller, à régler le conflit avec le voisinage, j'éleve mes sœurs et mon frère comme un parent. En espérant que le tout puissant fera des miracles pour m'aider ». (ABDOU)

« Depuis la mort de mes parents, j'ai compensé l'absence de mes parents pour m'occuper de ma petite sœur et mon petit frère quotidiennement que ce soit pour les surveiller, conduire à l'école, les ramener de quoi manger après mon travail, femme de ménage, de les consoler et conseiller lorsqu'ils sont tristes etc. » (AMIRA)

« C'est à moi maintenant de faire ce que ma mère faisait pour nous, je dois être comme leur père et leur mère vu que mon père s'en fiche de nous, c'est à moi d'aller, chercher de l'argent pour ramener de quoi on va manger à la maison. Je suis leur grande-sœur. Je soutiens mes frères et sœurs depuis la mort de notre mère, c'est vers moi qu'ils se tournent quand ils ont les problèmes, je suis la seule et l'unique personne qui les aide. Je les aide à faire leurs devoirs, les console quand ils sont tristes, comme le faisait notre mère quand elle vivait ». (DANY)

« Quand je rentre du marché le soir, je dois m'assurer que mes frères et sœurs ont mangé, ont fait leurs devoirs, et s'ils ont besoin de quelque chose je dois le résoudre (...) Depuis le remariage de mon père, je suis devenu pour mes frères et sœurs comme leur père qu'ils ont cessé d'avoir ». (BOUBA)

« Tout repose sur moi à la maison, je dois protéger mes frères et sœurs des dangers, je dois leur donner une bonne éducation, surtout mes petites sœurs pour qu'elles ne soient pas comme ma mère (...) Je suis une source de réconfort pour eux lorsque nos parents leur parlent mal (...) Je les aide tous les soirs à faire leur devoir je m'assure qu'ils l'ont bien fait une fois rentré du marché le soir ». (JEAN)

6.2.2 *L'exercice du rôle de parent auprès de son ou ses parent(s)*, qui s'exprime en terme de : Soutien financier ; Soutien affectif ; Soutien matériel ; Fonction de protection. Les extraits ci-dessous sous-tendent cette modalité.

« Lorsque ma grand-mère tombe malade, c'est moi qui lui achète les remèdes, je reste avec elle tout le temps, jusqu'à ce qu'elle guérisse, je la console dans ses souffrances ». (AMIRA)

« Ma mère me fait part de ses souffrances comme si je suis une autre adulte qu'elle a en face, elle me demande mon avis sur sa relation avec mon père. Je soutiens mon père quand il rentre saoul à la maison (...) C'est moi qui est chargée d'aller chercher l'argent dehors pour mes parents ». (FELICITE)

« Je suis devenue un soutien affectif et émotionnel pour mon père depuis la mort de ma mère, je lui donne des conseils pour arrêter de boire et m'aider avec mes frères, mais c'est en vain puisqu'il ne les met pas en pratique. C'est moi qui part chercher mon père dans les cabarets et le ramener à la maison le soir pour le protéger des agressions ». (DANY)

« Je console ma mère lorsque mon père lui fait se sentir mal. Je donne de l'argent à ma mère pour les besoins de la maison quand je rentre le soir du marché. C'est moi qui protège ma mère contre la deuxième femme de mon père, je mets la paix la maison quand il y a les conflits entre mon père et ma mère, ou entre ma mère et ma marâtre (...) Je suis la principale personne qui assiste ma mère lorsqu'elle a un problème financier, et elle vient souvent me voir pour discuter de ce que mon père lui fait subir durant mon absence de la maison ». (BOUBA)

« J'ai commencé à faire du commerce très précocement, lorsque ma mère est tombée malade en faisant du porte à porte pour vendre des légumes secs comme ma mère le faisait autrefois à la maison. Depuis qu'elle est morte, je console mon père quand il est triste. Mon père partage ses problèmes avec moi comme si j'étais sa femme ». (DANY)

6.2.3 La prise de responsabilités d'adulte au sein de la famille, elle se traduit par la tendance de l'adolescent à assumer : Soins nutritionnels ; Soins de santé ; Scolarisation des frères et de Soi-même ; Gestion de conflits parentaux. Des extraits y afférents sont ci-dessous exposés.

« C'est moi qui m'occupe de ma famille (...) Grâce à mon commerce, je paie le loyer où nous habitons, je prends soins de mes parents lorsqu'ils se sentent mal ou malades, je ramène de quoi on va se nourrir ». (FELICITE)

« Je suis la seule qui ramène de quoi manger à la maison, acheter les médicaments à mes frères et sœurs, à mon père lorsqu'ils sont malades, acheter de l'eau à la maison, acheter les habits (...) Je paye la scolarité de mes frères et sœurs, et concernant les travaux ménagers à faire à la maison, j'ai départagé les tâches entre mes

frères et sœurs, chacun sait ce qu'il doit faire avant que je rentre de mon commerce le soir ». (DANY)

« Avec mon commerce, je m'occupe de presque tous les besoins à la maison, c'est moi qui donne l'argent pour acheter la nourriture, pour payer les études de mes frères et sœurs, et même de donner l'argent en cas de maladie pour les médicaments (...) Lorsque ma mère ou mes frères et sœurs tombent malade je suis la personne responsable pour prendre soin d'eux (...) » (BOUBA)

« C'est à moi de m'occuper de tout à la maison pendant que mon père passe son temps à boire et jouer aux cartes avec ses amis (...) Je dois laisser de quoi on va manger avant de sortir de la maison pour aller vendre mes marchandises, d'acheter les médicaments aux membres de la famille lorsqu'ils tombent malade, de payer les études de mes frères et sœurs ». (JEAN)

« Je m'occupe de tout à la maison (...) ». AMIRA

« C'est moi qui donne l'argent de ration, pour habillement à mes frères et ma mère ». (OUSSEINI)

La tendance est plus forte encore chez les adolescents aînés de la fratrie, qui se sentent automatiquement substitués des parents en cas de défaillance de la fonction parentale.

### 6.3 La Construction de L'identité

De ce que révèle l'analyse des discours recueillis auprès des participants à l'étude, l'adolescent parentifié a tendance à :

6.3.1 Se définir, se percevoir comme parent. Le fait de subvenir aux besoins de leurs parents et de leurs frères cadets emmène les adolescents à se substituer aux parents et à légitimer cette fonction parentale précocement acquise ;

« Je dois être à sa hauteur, je dois faire ce que ma mère faisait pour nous de son vivant, je suis leur grande sœur aînée et c'est à moi de m'occuper d'eux (...) Je suis maintenant comme la mère et le père de mes frères et sœurs, et de mon père ». (DANY)

« Je suis à la fois la mère et le père de mes sœurs et mon petit, vu que je suis leur frère aîné ». (BOUBA)

« Etant leur frère aîné, je suis le parent (...) et je dois être à cette hauteur ». (JEAN)

« Je suis leur enfant, et un enfant a le devoir de s'occuper de ses parents ». (FELICITE)

« Je suis comme le père et la mère de ma grand-mère et je dois faire tout pour elle ce que mon père devrait faire pour elle si il était-là ». (ANA)

« Je suis le chef de la maison, tout passe par moi, je suis un modèle pour ma petite sœur et mon petit frère, je dois faire tout pour eux comme nos parents ». (AMIRA)

« C'est moi qui a remplacé mon père ». (FADILA)

6.3.2 S'identifier au rôle social de parent, à travers notamment l'adoption de comportements correspondant aux rôles sociaux de parent ou de grands-parents, d'époux ou d'épouse ;

« Je dois m'occuper d'eux et savoir ce qu'ils ont besoins puisque tout est à ma charge maintenant ». (DANY)

« Tout repose sur moi, depuis que mon père a pris sa deuxième femme, je suis le père de mes frères et sœurs, l'homme de la maison ». (BOUBA)

« L'aîné est comme chef de ménage (...) Je dois agir comme parent auprès d'eux (...) Je considère mes frères et sœurs comme s'ils étaient mes propos enfants (...) Mon devoir c'est de m'occuper d'eux (ses parents) je n'ai pas le choix, ce sont mes parents et je dois les accepter ainsi ». (JEAN)

« Je m'occupe de tout à la maison avant de sortir de la maison pour mon commerce, je laisse des instructions de certaines choses que ma maman doit me le faire avant que je ne rentre le soir concernant mon commerce et qu'elle n'apprécie pas en disant que c'est elle ma mère pas le contraire, mais elle le fait quand même parce que c'est sur ce que je ramène à la maison qu'elle compte pour nourrir la famille, et c'est moi qui

décide de quoi on va manger à la maison ». (FELICITE)

« En sortant de la maison je laisse l'argent de la ration à mes sœurs et je demande à mon petit frère de venir m'aider un peu au marché à faire les étalages de mes pommes de terre avant de retourner à la maison (...) Je suis le seul à décider à la maison ». (ABDOU)

« Je suis la mère et le père de ma grand-mère depuis que son fils nous a abandonnées, au début quand je vivais encore avec ma mère, je préparais pour apporter de la nourriture à ma grand-mère, mais actuellement que je suis avec elle ensemble dans la même maison, je prends en charge toutes les dépenses de la maison comme un père ferait pour ses enfants ». (ANA)

« Je suis la seule à m'occuper de mon petit frère Moussa comme si j'étais ses vrais parents. Il m'appelle 'nenné' ce qui signifie maman. Au début quand il m'appelais ça me dérangeait mais maintenant ça va puisque je me vois déjà comme une mère et que je m'occupe de lui depuis sa naissance ». (AÏCHA)

« Je m'occupe de mon petit frère, ma petite sœur et ma grand-mère (...) Je considère comme s'ils étaient mes propres enfants ». (AMIRA)

« Je suis comme le père de mes frères et de ma mère, je fais tout pour eux à la maison ». (OUSSEINI)

« Je suis le parent et je dois tout faire pour ne pas les décevoir et être un bon modèle à suivre pour mes sœurs ». (FADILA)

6.3.3 Faire des projets de vie impliquant le statut de parent, c'est ainsi que l'adolescent désigne le célibat comme statut matrimonial de préférence, annonce qu'il se mariera et vivra avec son épouse et ses enfants dans la maison des parents pour continuer à veiller sur ces derniers et sur ses frères, se considère déjà comme parent tellement saturé de responsabilités qu'il n'envisage pas avoir des enfants. D'autres adolescents projettent de rompre avec la famille pour se libérer de son joug.

« Je prie avoir un bon mari qui a assez de moyen (...) qui pourra prendre soin de moi et accepter

mes frères et sœurs comme étant ses propres enfants et également de prendre soin de mon père». (DANY)

« Je ne souhaite pas me marier si je n'ai pas beaucoup d'argent nécessaire (...) mon souci est de m'occuper de mes frères et sœurs et de ma mère vu que notre père (en secouant les épaules, comme pour dire qu'il a démissionné de ses responsabilités » (BOUBA)

« Je continuerai de prendre soins d'eux (...) Je souhaite me marier, fonder une famille avec une femme qui accepte de s'occuper de mes parents comme si c'était ses parents » (JEAN)

« Je souhaite me marier avec un homme qui a assez de moyen, et d'amener mon petit vivre avec nous». (AÏCHA)

«Je projette dans le futur rencontrer un homme riche, attentionné, qui va m'accepter tel que je suis et également qui va considérer ma grand-mère comme sa grand- mère et continuer à s'occuper d'elle comme je le fais actuellement. Je souhaite me marier ensuite avec lui et avoir des enfants, bien les éduquer, je tiens à ne pas reproduire les erreurs de nos parents ». (ANA)

« Je dois me marier avec un homme qui a assez de moyen pour pouvoir continuer de prendre bien soin de ma famille ». (AMIRA)

« Dans le futur, je compte fonder une famille et avoir des enfants. Si je regarde comment je vis tout en prenant en charge mes sœurs et mon frère, j'espère que je trouverai une femme qui m'aidera à prendre mes deux petites sœurs et mon frère comme nos enfants, qu'ils s'entendent bien avec ma femme, elle doit être compréhensive (...) un parent qui a beaucoup de patience, simple ». (ABDOU)

« Je veux me marier avec quelqu'un qui va accepter de s'occuper de mes parents comme s'ils étaient ses propres parents. Si ce n'est pas comme ça je préfère rester avec eux sans me marier. Si je pars ils vont faire comment? ». (FELICITE)

« Je souhaite également trouver un bon mari pour mes sœurs ». (FADILA)

## VII. DISCUSSION

L'analyse thématique du discours de chacun des cas étudiés, nous amène à poser que : en situation de parentification, le processus identitaire est perturbé, la quête de l'identité masculine ou féminine, inhérente à l'adolescence est comme court-circuitée, pour faire place à la quête d'une identité d'adulte, de parent, alors même que l'adolescent ne dispose pas d'outils psychologiques adéquats pour y faire face. Le fait pour l'adolescent de porter la famille sur ses épaules développe chez ce dernier le sentiment d'être la figure d'autorité dans cette niche sociale. Il revêt le manteau de chef de famille sans en avoir ni la maturité biologique, ni les compétences psychologiques appropriées pour assumer des tâches développementales propres à l'adulte. En effet, le cerveau humain acquiert sa maturité vers 25 ans, permettant ainsi au sujet de trouver le juste équilibre lors du conflit système limbique-cortex préfrontal. Cette compétence aide le jeune adulte à faire face, de manière efficace aux situations-problèmes de la vie courante (Le Bigot & al.,2004 ; Boyd & Bee, 2017).

L'adolescence est la période pendant laquelle le sujet se lance dans la quête de modèles sociaux auxquels il pourra s'identifier dans la perspective de construire une identité personnelle (Erikson, 1972). Le processus d'individuation exige un important retour sur soi que le processus de parentification inhibe car les besoins du parent viennent concurrencer ceux de l'adolescent. Chez nos sujets d'étude ces modèles d'identification n'existent pas. Les parents disparaissent, démissionnent de leur fonction pour céder leur place à leur enfant. C'est ainsi qu'on assiste chez l'adolescent à une tendance précoce et plus ou moins maladroite à se substituer au parent. Maladroite dans la mesure où chez certains participants à l'étude, les parents semblent être transparents. L'adolescent se comporte comme si celui-ci n'existe pas. Il ignore complètement l'autorité du parent et prend de grandes décisions familiales, souvent sans en avoir mesuré les conséquences. Cette disparition symbolique du parent n'est-elle pas préjudiciable pour la construction de la personnalité de l'adolescent, voire de sa descendance ? Etant donné qu'en

psychologie du développement, il est clairement admis que chaque milieu social par lequel passe l'enfant est une niche de développement chargée de symboles déterminants pour l'élaboration de l'identité de soi (Papalia & Martorell, 2018). L'adolescent noie sa vie et son avenir dans celle d'un parent qu'il n'est pas encore, mais qu'il se sent obligé d'être compte tenu des responsabilités qui lui incombent. Les rêves de l'adolescence n'existent pas chez ce dernier. Les ambitions démesurées, la folie de l'exploration, la fragilité de l'engagement, toutes ces tendances propres à l'adolescence, qui marquent et agrémentent la crise de transition vers l'âge adulte, n'existent pas chez l'adolescent parentifié. Le sujet n'envisage pas sa vie en dehors du cadre familial restreint. Il sacrifie son avenir, sa vie affective, ses rêves personnels au profit des intérêts de ses parents, voire de ses grands-parents, de ses frères et sœurs qu'il couve.

L'identité sociale est une autre modalité du processus d'individuation à l'adolescence, cette modalité apparaît difficile à développer chez nos cas d'étude en ce sens que les préoccupations familiales les empêchent de tisser des relations sociales avec les pairs notamment. Pourtant, les pairs, dans certaines situations de vie sociale, remplissent une fonction d'étayage qui permet à l'adolescent de rebondir des situations de crise (Chassaing, 2008). L'inadaptation de l'adolescent parentifié à la vie d'adulte s'observe également dans la tendance de certains à envisager un jour la rupture d'avec la famille pour se libérer du poids des responsabilités familiales. Cependant, non pas pour vivre leur propre vie de manière responsable, mais pour vivre caché, dans la clandestinité, de façon à ne jamais être retrouvé. Une sorte de fugue. Le poids de la parentification pèse davantage sur les aînés qui, de façon naturelle, ont tendance, au sein de la niche familiale et en contexte de défaillance de la fonction parentale, à se substituer en parent, époux, médiateur des conflits dans la fratrie (Bee & Boyd, 2017).

L'exercice du rôle de parent influence significativement l'épanouissement psychologique et social des adolescents. Le processus identitaire chez l'adolescent en situation de parentification revêt les propriétés d'un labyrinthe dont il est

complexe de sortir, l'adolescent n'étant pas inscrit dans le processus d'élaboration psychique de la parentalité. En effet, devenir parent exige une préparation psychologique qui va au-delà du simple fait de donner naissance à un enfant. La parentalité est un construit psychologique, qui va au-delà des possibilités biologiques et des déterminants sociaux (Houzel, 1999 ; Poussin, 2004 ; Bydlowski, 2010).

## VIII. CONCLUSION

L'objectif principal de cette étude était d'évaluer, dans une approche qualitative l'influence de la parentification sur la construction de l'identité en tant que principale tâche développementale à l'adolescence. L'analyse des données collectées auprès des adolescents de la ville de Maroua a révélé que : l'exercice du rôle de parent auprès des frères, à travers la tendance de l'adolescence à assumer la fonction de maternage, de surveillance, de protection, de soutien psychologique et l'accompagnement pédagogique des frères cadets influence la construction de l'identité chez l'adolescent ; l'exercice du rôle de parent auprès des parents, c'est-à-dire la tendance de l'adolescente à apporter soutien financier, affectif, matériel et fonction de protection à ses parents a un impact sur la construction de l'identité chez l'adolescent ; et enfin la prise de responsabilités d'adulte au sein de la famille, notamment la tendance de l'adolescent à s'occuper des soins nutritionnels, de santé, de la scolarisation des frères et de soi-même a des répercussions sur la construction de l'identité chez l'adolescent.

Ces résultats apportent un nouvel éclairage dans le domaine de la psychologie de l'adolescent, principalement en ce qui concerne la quête d'identité. Nous retenons en définitive que lorsque l'adolescent évolue en contexte d'inversion des rôles sociaux, il se retrouve en position de perte de repères identitaires. La construction de l'identité se fait par étayage sur un environnement psychoaffectif et social normatif. Le contexte de parentification n'offre pas de modèles d'identification adéquats et expose finalement l'adolescent à la prise de risque.

La parentification est une situation de crise qui vient perturber le cours normal du processus identitaire. Il revient de ce fait aux psychologues de mobiliser des stratégies d'accompagnement d'adolescents, voire d'enfants en situation de parentification.

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# Debasish Lahiri's Transgressive Ontologies

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## ABSTRACT

One of India's internationally acclaimed poets writing in English, Debasish Lahiri is making the universe his home, his concept art inviting more associations with Simon Armitage's poetry than those echoing from the title of the Poet Laureate's 2002 book (*The Universal Home Doctor*). An academic teaching at Kolkata University, Lahiri has a sense of the past which takes him back into the imaginative Middle Ages and further on into Eurasia's mythologies, where the motley threads of present cultural diversity resolve into subconscious archetypal unity. The passion for the haunting past, shared with his contemporaries (See Katy Shaw's *Hauntology. The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*), serves lessons both of political historicity and spiritual immanence. Lahiri shows an erudite's sensitivity redeemed by a feast of sensuous imagery and by an uncommon capacity for lexical creativity.

*Keywords:* Debasish Lahiri, literature in English, concept poetry, postcolonial intersectionalities.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of Debasish Lahiri's poetry, there is a perpetual genesis, not from an absolute beginning, however, but as ontological leap from one level of existence to another: from nature to myth, from myth to artifact, from artifact to dreams which materialize, bringing the beginning to a round end. In his poems, there is no end and no beginning, unless we see them in superposition (what Nicholas Cusanus called "coincidence of opposites") . The origin is indefinitely deferred, the prevailing trope being that of laying in the abyss: the poet looks at Turner looking at Shakespeare imagining Dover or having Edgar falsely representing it to his father (*King Lear*), or starts wording paint and brush to render his own view of Van Gogh's painting who was himself

repainting masters. The poet goes West to dig up its Sanskrit roots, he composes dirges on the deaths of tragic figures of the mid-twentieth century whom he destines to the Isle of the Blessed in ancient Greek mythology. Lahiri is casting the warp of his poems on a very wide scale trying to get at the core of being where everything is connected with everything else so that the disconnected bits of the everyday collect into meaningful wholes, in nostalgic imitation of the totalitarian myths imparting certainty on humanity's infancy. His own ekphrastic poetry appropriates in a way the poetics of ancient tragedies whose merit was the individual representation of commonly known plots. The stress falls entirely on the novelty of interpretation and the art of reinscription.

The ingenuity of his images, the daring metaphors and lexical creativity, the measured sequencing of words in unequal lines but with what feels like the natural rhythm of a heart-beat generate the unmistakable diction of his poetry, but formal refinement pales in comparison to the rhetorical schemes which structure his imaginaries.

## II. ONTOLOGICAL CROSSOVERS AND HOLISTIC IMAGINARY

The in-depth structure of meaning bespeaks a poetics of aesthetic detachment from the material world and refuge into an artificial paradise such as the museum space interposed between artist and life in the aestheticizing debut of western modernism. Instead of walking through the door into a perilous world of disappointment, perpetual change and waste, the poet choses to stay in a room visited by the muses, playing instruments and exchanging the morning scene outside with its artificial and multiple substitutes – a troubadour's aubade or a devotee's matins or mythic Krishna's fluting away a departing Radha

figure ("Not in Tune"). Lahiri works by analogies creating multiple planes in relation.

The poet speaks in the language of many cultures, East and West, bringing to the surface deep archetypal matrices of what Jung understood by humanity's collective subconscious. His selection of topoi seems to be guided precisely by the possibility of establishing analogies among mythical structures – a famous precedent being T S Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

The troping on creation straddles text and image. In his 2022 *Tether that Light*, for instance, the emblematic images accompanying the text are those of the peacock and of Radha - Lord Krishna's consort. The text is like a fan, opening both to western and Indian mythologies.

The troping is consistent across poems. Light is tethered, that is, forced into shapes – creation out of light, as form giving is any work of art. The poet calls himself a peregrine of *lumen* (the light emitted by the material sun) and not of *lux* (eternal light, preceding creation of the world). His creation yields an artifact, which has a double nature, material and ideal.

The hunt for corresponding signifieds of the spirit includes the Sufi tradition, a legend defining the peacock as the form given by God to the spirit. According to it, the peacock saw its image in a mirror and felt overwhelmed. Those drops of sweat falling from its body were the substance out of which the things in the world were created.

Likewise Radha will not play holi in the absence of her lord who had departed to Mathura. The coloured powder is replaced either with the book of rituals (missal) given to her by the dark lord or by dreams induced by his words free from the materiality of writing (the alphabet for them had not been invented).

Radha's sweat, like the peacock's in the Sufi legend, triggers a genesis of sorts. A sun, out of which planets were born, is ensnared (tethered) by a sea of golden sweat and sets the river on fire, flooding it with hues.

The power of Radha's love for the missing Krishna becomes manifest farther away in Mathura, where

the river Yamuna runs "red, green and amber," the same as in Vrindavan.

*Radha remembers  
how every pore of her body  
bloomed in sweat like marigolds  
till it ran in runnels,  
as though from the meadows of Braj,  
and clogged a river  
with a sea  
of golden sweat  
that snared a curious sun  
and kept him there  
all day.*

Radha's devotion to Krishna and the creative power attributed to her by the poet makes her a foil of Sophia, worshiper of the sun (divine wisdom) in Rosicrucianism, as well as of the figure of Wisdom which appears in the Bible (*The Book of Proverbs*) as God's assistant in creating the world.

The scenery of Lahiri's poetry is extremely diverse, feeding on encyclopedic knowledge and numerous cultural encounters. Whereas superficial perception is limited to differences, his poems submerge to the depths where the mind of humanity is revealed to be one.

Holism is not however limited to the order of culture. The poet's metamorphic imagination dismantles the object world replacing it with an aesthetic object. Allegorically, he shuts his door on the world, dissolves his room into sounds and employs the creative power of music to create a garden – the earthly paradise of art.

It is this life-threatening impulse that probably made him touch again and again upon the theme of suicide (as allegorical contempt of the world as it is in the famous *Axël* by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam).

*Tether that Light* too starts with an ekphrastic poem – the description of a Mughal miniature painting from the sixteenth century showing a man who had hanged himself. It is the duty of art to redress the frailty and meaningless of life. Contrary to the physical law of gravitation, the artist's arm has arrested the fall of the hanged

man's turban. Whereas life ends in death, art begins with restoration.

In "Gaspar's Dream", the process is reversed. Reality is delusive, all that lives in time turns to dust; the angel supposed to tell Gaspar about the star leading to the birthplace of Jesus is late, the star has not read the map correctly and is serenading a sleeping nymph instead of protecting the Virgin. The magi figures in the caravanserai, of uncertain status, vacillating between kings and beggars, are thus plodding their way without guidance, waiting for a late angel, experiencing fatigue and craving for sleep. The Eucharist is deconstructed as a blood-sucking mosquito. Myth and world are emptied out of meaning. And yet the dust, the debris of life, is cast into an enduring shape. It is not just any shape but that of a stone crafted by Gislebertus of the twelfth century in the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare, Autun, into a monument of the magi – the first mortals to whom Jesus was revealed. The master myth of the West is decentred, deferred, or even lost in doubt and skepticism. An earlier layer is uncovered and given a voice in a self-revealing dramatic monologue spoken by the Indian king, Magus Gaspar.

But stone has a sacred ring to it as well - it is the philosopher's stone (*lapis philosophorum*), the symbol of the spirit as the terminal point of the alchemical process. Shaping, carving, writing – they are processes mediating between spirit/consciousness and the formless empirical world. Recurrent images are those of mortar, loam, the mix of blood and dust - the matter of creation as the ultimate reality which comes under the power of an intentional subject – the shape-giving artist.

Writing at a double remote from the empirical world, with night and day distilled into genre (threnody and aubade), with the world of physical distinctions disappearing into myth (alchemical wedding), the poet translates the oneness of the spirit as homogeneity of cultural signifieds. Poetry reverses God's play of creating the world. Light is restored to the word, and the word to the uttering throat – not of God but of the Greek and Latin speaking artist who breathes meaning into the dust hardened into carved stone. As if the poet's

subconscious worked through analogies among the main mythical structures, his figures of discourse deploy a coherent conceptual map.

Van Gogh's paintings exerted a similar fascination on the poet due to their violent treatment of landscapes and human figures. "On Van Gogh's *Asylum*" creates a dynamic picture of the hospital to which the artist had committed himself. Contorted, restless, unnatural, sick, it is not, however, a typical example of pathetic fallacy but rather an aesthetic allegory. The poet demonstrates his capacity of generating a new world out of words with changed functions – abstractions are reified, while objects are dematerialized. Blue veins of uncertain nature are running through the pavement, the tree, Van Gogh's suit with a flattening effect, as if physically mapping a three-dimensional landscape onto the bidimensional canvas. The poet is playing with directions. The whole world is uprooted, it starts gliding, rolling, turning. Light descends to Van Gogh's shoes while trees are turned upside down, with their roots in the air, reduced to an empty figure, a metaphor: the roots of pain.

Van Gogh's paintings are actually his own world which is not worldly but the mirror of the painter's mind.

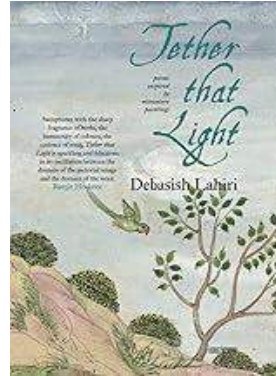
### III. CONCLUSION

Debasish Lahiri's poems invite lengthy comments on his profound sense of the pathos of existence, on his engagement with current international issues, such as displacement and cultural memory, or his experimentation with generic forms, such as ekphrasis or the dramatic monologue, but his most relevant contribution to contemporary poetry is probably his channeling of modernist aestheticism into the wake of postmodernist holism, bringing art and world into conjunction.

*Books of poetry by Debasih Lahiri:*

1. First Will & Testament (Writers Workshop, 2012).
2. No Waiting like Departure (Authors Press, 2016).

3. *Tinder Tender: Poems of Love & Loitering* (Authors Press, 2018).
4. *Poppies in the Post & Other Poems* (Authors Press, 2020).
5. *Paysages sans Verbes* (Éditions Apic, 2021)
6. *Tether that Light* (Red River, 2022).
7. *Legion of Lost Letters. Dramatic Monologues of Romans in Exile* (Eyewear Publishing, 2023).



Hindu Goddess Radha with the peacock.



On the “Dream of the Magi” by Gislebertus, C.1120-30 in the Cathedral of Saint-Lazare, Autun



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# Inclusive Subtitles for all: Developing Practices and Guidelines for Accessible Media Content in Newly Experimenting Territories

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides a descriptive and analytical overview of the ongoing practical projects and action research intended to implement inclusive practices in the media sector in Malta. It also provides a transversal analysis of the findings across a series of applied and experimental studies investigating the practice of inclusive subtitles, a translation mode that targets a broad spectrum of viewers, providing linguistic, cultural, and sensory access. These studies adopt a user-centred approach. They engage in reception studies to identify the needs of the local audience while testing and shaping a set of proposed guidelines to be adopted by local practitioners and stakeholders. The main findings and insights are based on the observation of patterns and potential norms that emerged across the studies and corroborate, or otherwise, the specifications and recommendations in the said guidelines while identifying the need for further research focusing on specific aspects. This paper could provide a model for similar territories that are seeking to engage in inclusive practices applied to media content.

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# Inclusive Subtitles for all: Developing Practices and Guidelines for Accessible Media Content in Newly Experimenting Territories

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## I. DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

Inclusive practices in the media refer to the application of modes, solutions, and techniques that ensure access to audiovisual productions by

as many users as possible, considering different needs, preferences, and sensitivities. This article focuses on inclusivity *through* language, in other words, language and translation as a medium to provide access on a linguistic, cultural, and sensory level. That said, it also considers inclusivity *in* language, therefore awareness and mindfulness towards diversity and different sensitivities, be they cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, or related to disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, and mental health issues.

The more differences are considered, the harder it becomes to cater to each separate need, a challenge that calls for one homogenous or universal solution to meet as many diverse needs as possible. This *universalist* approach (Greco, 2018; 2019) may not always be considered ideal as it does not cater to individual needs (Romero-Fresco, 2021). However, in mainstream workflows, smaller territories, or low-budget settings, this may often be the optimal solution in terms of financial and practical feasibility based on the availability of infrastructures, and technical or human resources.

Media localisation and accessibility services address the abovementioned needs through practices that utilise language and translation to provide access to media content. In academic settings, the disciplines of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and Media Accessibility (MA) contribute to these services and practices through research and didactic training.

AVT practices encompass captioning or revoicing modes and techniques aimed at providing linguistic and cultural access to the verbal information conveyed aurally and visually. This includes access to spoken elements that are heard and written elements that appear in the images.

The primary captioning modalities include interlingual subtitling, while the primary revoicing modalities include dubbing, voice-over, and narration. Interlingual subtitling implies the addition of written text on screen that provides a translation of the original dialogue and other verbal information conveyed visually (e.g., chat messages) or aurally (e.g., songs) (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2021). On the other hand, the revoicing modes imply the provision of an oral translation via voice recording in the target language. The newly recorded tracks overlap the original voice tracks in the case of voice-over (Matamala, 2020), while they replace the original tracks in the case of narration or dubbing, the latter also ensuring lip-synching, that is, target language utterances that perfectly fit the lip movements visible on screen (Chaume, 2012; Spiteri Miggiani, 2019). The choice of mode depends on the type of product (whether it is fiction or non-fiction) and the customs of the country or territory.

MA caters to the non-verbal aural or visual elements through visual or aural verbal text. In this case, the primary captioning and revoicing modalities include subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), also called closed captioning; and audio description (AD) for the blind and partially sighted. SDH provides a written rendition of the sounds and speaker identification, over and above the spoken dialogue (Szarkowska, 2020) which is presented either in the same language (intralingual subtitles) or in translation (interlingual), the former being more widespread, while AD provides an oral verbal commentary of the visual information for those unable to perceive it (Fryer, 2016). The AD language needs to match that of the spoken dialogue, be it in the original or in other dubbed target languages. Therefore, MA, traditionally, has been associated with sensory access for the visually and aurally impaired. However, Greco (2019) describes a relatively recent shift in MA that incorporates linguistic access into this package of services and subsequently a further shift that introduces the universalist approach, therefore not limiting access to any specific group, product, or service. The latter promotes wider interdisciplinarity and inclusive design practices

based on user-centred rather than maker-centred approaches (Greco, 2019). Indeed, recent shifts in approach have also started to prioritise a more proactive approach to inclusion, going beyond the mere provision of access by also recognising the importance of involving the d/Deaf community in the decision-making process (Uzzo, 2023). The research-based guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) discussed in this article, apply this user-centred approach whereby users contribute to shaping parameters and specifics.

In an age where streaming platforms produce and distribute so much content across territories while offering translation and accessibility services in the same user menu, it becomes challenging to view Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility as separate disciplines and practices, but rather “Accessibility is a form of translation and translation is a form of accessibility, uniting all population groups and ensuring that cultural events, in the broadest sense of the word, can be enjoyed by all” (Díaz-Cintas, Orero, & Remael, 2007, pp. 13-14). Indeed, this article highlights the development of inclusive practices in a specific territory, practices whereby the notions of ‘access’ or ‘accessibility’ align with the recent shifts described above, hence, a more comprehensive use of the term (Rizzo, 2019; 2020). The notion of access is not necessarily narrowed down to visual and aural impairments requiring sensory access but extends to language and cultural barriers, requiring translation and adaptation.

*Inclusive subtitles* can, therefore, be defined as a modality that provides interlingual captions while also ensuring sensory access for the aurally impaired. The term can also be extended to incorporate intralingual subtitles. This article discusses the development of inclusive subtitles in Malta, a European country where such services are relatively new. The practice of inclusive subtitles implies one version that combines translation and access to sound elements (the latter mainly benefiting aurally impaired users). This has obvious advantages from a budget perspective while offering various practical uses, such as the exportation of local productions; access to content by resident non-speakers of the local native language; access to foreign

productions in Maltese (rather than English) for language preservation purposes; language learning; and of course, sensory access. Similarly, access services and techniques are also extended to cultural spaces that host visual and performing arts or any form of cultural heritage that engages with the visual and aural channel and that may benefit from such verbal-written or verbal-aural linguistic *extensions* to the original content. Inclusive subtitles differ from intralingual or interlingual SDH because the target is not narrowed down to a sensory-impaired audience but rather seeks a balance that may satisfy a broader spectrum of viewers, irrespective of hearing impairments. Moreover, the term 'inclusive' is also intended to draw awareness and mindfulness towards sensitive content and language regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, mental health issues, disabilities, race and ethnicity, religion, and cultural sensitivities in general. Similar initiatives can also be encountered occasionally in other territories or regions, for instance, in Palermo, within the specific context of film festivals made accessible in the Italian language (Uzzo, 2023; 2024).

This article provides a descriptive overview of the ongoing practical projects and action research intended to develop inclusive practices in the media and cultural sectors in Malta. These initiatives are being implemented in a professional setting, though driven by academia, more specifically by the author with the support of students trained in the AVT postgraduate stream within the Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta. The article also provides a transversal analysis of the findings across a series of applied and experimental studies focusing on these practices. These studies aim to identify the needs of the local audience while testing a set of proposed guidelines for inclusive practices developed by the author. The main findings and insights drawn are based on the observation of patterns and potential norms that emerged across the studies and corroborate, or otherwise, these guidelines, while identifying the need for further research focusing on specific aspects.

The local ongoing pioneering projects also focus on creating *inclusive audio descriptive guides* for local heritage sites and museums in collaboration with national entities, such as Heritage Malta ([heritagemalta.org](http://heritagemalta.org)), among others. Academic research efforts also support this initiative. However, this article focuses mainly on the implementation of captioning modes on the island and the related research. The development of inclusive revoicing modes to provide access to visual arts and cultural spaces will be tackled in a separate paper.

This paper may potentially serve as a model for similar territories that are seeking to engage in inclusive practices to provide linguistic, cultural, and sensory access to media content.

## II. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: STATE OF PLAY IN MALTA

The motivation to export local film productions in Maltese has led local filmmakers to find the means to provide English subtitles or partial subtitles for dialogue in Maltese, considering the challenge of having Maltese-language content translated overseas. With regards to local television broadcasts, there have only been random attempts at providing interlingual or intralingual subtitles in Maltese or English over the past decade, possibly due to lack of awareness of viewer needs and existing practices, as well as budget constraints. However, in both cases, the examples available do not cater to a non-hearing audience and do not rely on formally trained practitioners, therefore the outcome does not align with standard norms and conventions necessary for a pleasant, readable, understandable, and inclusive experience. The lack of an established subtitling professional practice, in general, has so far implied the exclusion of d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing users, as well as non-Maltese speakers living on the island, who would require English captions to access Maltese language content.

Constitutionally, Malta adopts English and Maltese as official languages. Therefore, native and foreign residents may either be bilingual or get by well with just one of the two languages,

particularly foreign immigrants who settle on the island. To this end, providing either Maltese or English subtitles for local or imported content is the best way to ensure inclusivity on a linguistic level while at the same time catering to viewers with hearing loss. Different viewers may benefit from captions for other reasons (e.g., age-related issues or low proficiency in English or Maltese). Moreover, inclusive subtitles also provide opportunities for language learning, especially in Maltese. In the future, this practice could expand to incorporate live interlingual respelling for live broadcast events or important national press conferences. A case in point is the live press conferences broadcast by the health authorities throughout the recent pandemic. Important health-related guidelines and restrictions were being issued live, in Maltese, therefore, excluding part of the population who had to wait for a translated written summary in English published in newspapers at a later stage.

The foundation of a specialisation stream in Audiovisual Translation within the Translation postgraduate course programme at the University of Malta is slowly changing the local scenario by promoting awareness around these services, encouraging stakeholders to invest in audiovisual translation modes, and more importantly training students and ensuring professionalism and quality standards. The availability of qualified translators and adapters in subtitling, subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing, voice-over, dubbing, audio description, and so on, ensures the necessary application of norms and conventions. Moreover, these resources are also trained specifically for local needs, implying awareness of issues and strategies suited to the Maltese language (as a new AVT language) and culture, as well as the necessary know-how for the implementation of *inclusive subtitles* as the best-suited modality for local purposes, a modality that, by default, encompasses sensory access.

The availability of trained resources has led to project-based collaborations between the AVT stream within the university translation department and local stakeholders, including film producers, filmmakers, and TV networks. A few of

the very first examples include TV programmes (mainly documentaries), feature films, and local TV series such as *Culhat Al Belt* (PBS, 2019), *The Local Traveller* (Clare Agius, 2019-), *Merjen* (Take 2 Entertainment, 2020), *Miraklu* (Take 2 Entertainment, 2019), and several others. These productions consisted mainly of Maltese language content that required English language subtitles. These in turn triggered other projects whereby the department's students and alumni were engaged directly by the stakeholders, which was an important goal: the development of a professional practice in terms of job opportunities. Among these projects, some worth mentioning are *Avarù* (Brandon Terribile, 2021), a TV programme intended also for an autistic young audience. In this case, intralingual Maltese subtitles were offered; or *Blat: The Island Fortress* (MAVC 2022) which is worth mentioning because it is the first Maltese language opera film, and this was provided with Maltese intralingual subtitles and English interlingual subtitles. The content also included multilingual utterances.

The first projects triggered the need to develop a set of local guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) that could be adopted by local subtitling teams, especially in the case of serial productions that require consistency. These guidelines refer to the linguistic and technical parameters of the captions. Moreover, because of these pilot projects, it became apparent that there was an urgent requirement to identify workflows tailored to the local scenario, especially considering the stakeholders' need for guidance in this new and unexplored sector. 'Educating' stakeholders is an integral part of the process and this requires trained resources who have the practical and theoretical know-how, acquired through formal education within a postgraduate course programme, ideally combined with some professional experience.

Another significant result triggered by the AVT specialisation stream is the collaboration among students and alumni who practice teamwork both throughout the course and after, when teams are set up for specific professional projects. This type of collaboration has also led to the foundation of a local association in Audiovisual Translation:

Audiovisual Translators Malta Association, composed of the AVT stream alumni, therefore, members who are professionally qualified and trained in the field.

### III. OVERALL RESEARCH-BASED FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section outlines the methodology and main overall findings of the applied and experimental studies aimed at 1) developing the practice of inclusive subtitling; and, 2) adopting and testing a set of proposed guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) for the local context. The guidelines address both intralingual and interlingual inclusive subtitles in Maltese as well as English. That said, this research aims to analyse primarily Maltese, as a target language, (as opposed to the English language captions required in the broadcast projects mentioned in the previous section). Each study focuses on specific linguistic or technical issues to test and corroborate (or otherwise) the related specifics proposed in the local set of guidelines that are a continuous work in progress (see Appendix ). This section describes the methodology and provides the main outcomes and insights based on a transversal descriptive analysis across the different studies.

#### 3.1 *Research Methodology Applied Across the Studies*

The various studies were carried out as part of student postgraduate dissertation projects under the author's supervision, and form part of a larger research route map aimed at developing the practice of inclusive subtitles and research-based guidelines while adopting a user-centred approach. The research design and methodology of the individual projects was thoroughly vetted and the final dissertations were evaluated by the appointed examining boards. Each study consisted of an applied component requiring the creation of Maltese inclusive subtitles added to specific media content in different source languages. These are also among the first subtitling experiments in Maltese, enabling the public to experience Maltese subtitles as a novelty, the novel aspect deriving both from the language

and inclusive approach<sup>1</sup>. The media content was carefully selected focusing on various foreign source languages (rather than English) to increase the viewers' reliance on translation and subtitles to understand the dialogue. The second part of each research project engaged in a reception study to gauge the audience's response regarding readability, comprehension, enjoyment, and other factors that will be discussed further on. Preference was measured by using the Likert scale and other measurable rating systems. Readability, reading speeds, comprehension and the efficacy of sensory access elements were measured by testing the audience via specific questions focusing on plot details, character identification, dialogue (e.g., lexical choices) and attention to visuals.

This was done by collecting data directly from the viewers who experienced Maltese inclusive subtitling of a selection of media clips. The data was collected anonymously through a series of questions and tests shared via online survey tools incorporating the chosen subtitled media snippets. This online method, as opposed to recruiting small focus groups in person, allowed for a reasonably sized sample of participants from a wide range of demographic groups in terms of age, locality, level of education, gender, and language skills and proficiency. That said, online survey tools distributed through social media also present limitations, mainly the risk of underrepresentation of a specific demographic group, that is, viewers aged 60+. However, this limitation was addressed by resorting to direct outreach, distribution and assistance in completing the survey.

The subtitles applied the proposed set of guidelines that address the main technical and linguistic issues in subtitling, among these: character limitation, reading speed, duration, frame gap, position, text segmentation into subtitles, timing and shot changes, line breaks, italics, dual speakers, ellipsis and suspension dots, on-screen text, numbers and time (English and

<sup>1</sup> There have also been some initiatives before the foundation of the AVT stream at the university and before the availability of guidelines and identification and application of norms and standards. These include Maltese subtitling projects supervised by Professor Anthony Aquilina.

Maltese), units of measure and currency, abbreviations, quotes, sensory access, glossaries, target language specifics Maltese-English, target language specifics English-Maltese, sensitive language and content. The specifics and parameters adopted are bound to influence the audience's experience. Consequently, developing and shaping guidelines according to user demands and experience can be considered impact research since it has a direct effect on these newly emerging services offered to the public.

### 3.2 Identifying Local Language and Culture-Specific Needs

The Maltese context has its own linguistic and cultural demands that require tailor-made approaches and parameters in creating subtitles, both in English and Maltese. One of the distinctive traits of the island is its bilingualism, which leads to an 'extra vulnerable' subtitling experience. Subtitles are considered a vulnerable form of translation (Díaz Cintas, 2003: 43) due to the possibility of comparing the original audio with the written captions in the case of spectators who are proficient (even partially) in the original language. English subtitles for Maltese content and Maltese subtitles for English content, therefore, produce an extra vulnerable scenario in a Maltese context. The bilingual characteristic of the population also implies different linguistic backgrounds that may have an impact on language preference (Maltese versus English subtitles) and on the subtitling display rate that viewers can handle. Local academic research has so far focused on how bilingualism impacts reading, written and spoken preferences or language learning abilities on the island (Vassallo and Sciriha, 2021; Vella and Gauci, 2022). Further research is necessary to investigate how this bilingualism affects subtitling preferences. One of the experimental studies outlined further on serves as an initial exploration into the topic.

Indeed, another distinctive trait to consider is non-habituation to subtitles, particularly Maltese subtitles, and this impacts the audience response and experience as well as their needs in terms of reading speed. Moreover, when translating from

other foreign languages, Maltese tends to have a lower delivery speech rate compared to other languages, for instance, Spanish, which is considered among the fastest languages when it comes to spontaneous discourse, more precisely, adopting an average delivery rate of 7.82 syllables per second (Pellegrino et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be challenging for a Maltese audience that is not accustomed to Maltese subtitles to keep up with the pace and rhythm of certain languages. This may be less challenging with English subtitles since the locals have more exposure to them thanks to streaming platforms. Last but not least, another challenge lies in the universalist approach of the inclusive subtitles mode proposed. Apart from the fact that the Maltese audience is not accustomed to additional information indicating, say, sounds and speaker names in the subtitled translation of the dialogue, creating a 'one-size-fits-all' solution may not satisfy individual needs and preferences. Indeed, one of the main concerns was that hearing viewers may not be satisfied with the *inclusive-by-default* approach since they do not need the additional tags and information targeted at the d/Deaf and hard of hearing.

The studies sought to investigate the general reaction to the inclusive modality, and collected data on viewer preferences and demands, both linguistic and technical. The studies reveal that lack of exposure to Maltese subtitles and non-habituation prompt viewers to prefer English subtitles when directly asked about their subtitle language preference to access foreign content. However, their response changes once they have been exposed to Maltese subtitles. When asked which subtitling language they would prefer to watch the Spanish TV show *La Casa de Papel* (Alex Pina, 2017) in the research project carried out by Warren Taliana (2021), 33% of the respondents (164 in total) said that they would not opt for Maltese subtitles if they had the choice. After watching the pilot episode with Maltese inclusive subtitles, this percentage decreased to 20%, marking an increase in preference towards Maltese. In Taliana's research, 83% of the participants considered the Maltese inclusive subtitles a very positive experience.

Similarly, the Maltese inclusive subtitles in a study carried out by Nigel Bugeja (2021) obtained a very positive rating from 73% of the respondents (661 in total). Both studies included hearing and hard-of-hearing viewers, 29 participants in Bugeja's study and 12 in Taliana's study. Arianna Mangion (2022) further emphasized the accessibility features when investigating viewer response towards the inclusive-by-default format. Out of 302 respondents including 25 hard-of-hearing viewers, 82% of the respondents reacted positively towards the overall experience. A total of 33% declared that the sound tags providing additional information did not make a difference, 28% found them very helpful, 23% did not find them useful, and only 16% found them distracting.

These three studies point towards a general positive response towards inclusive subtitles in Maltese as well as an improved perception and opinion after viewers are exposed to Maltese subtitles. Another recent study by Emily Hili (2024) provides mixed responses on subtitling language preference for foreign content. In this study, each media clip was presented to the respondents twice, once with English subtitles and another with Maltese subtitles to provide a comparison. This direct comparison combined with non-habituation towards Maltese subtitles led most participants to prefer the English subtitles or to like both versions equally. This result does not align with their responses about everyday language use since 75% of the respondents (111, in total) declared that they mostly speak Maltese, as opposed to 8% who said they use mostly English; the rest use both. It does however align with their reading preferences declared at the beginning of the questionnaire, whereby 53% of the participants stated that they prefer to read in English. In comparison, only 7% displayed a preference towards Maltese. In other words, the previous studies that presented only the Maltese version yielded a much more positive response. The selection of media clips in Hili's study includes a variety of French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, and Korean snippets. In this instance, languages that are less familiar to the Maltese audience were included deliberately to

induce the viewers' reliance on the subtitles. The subtitles adopted direct and indirect translation workflows to investigate any related impact on viewer response. The results reveal no significant difference in preference that could depend on familiarity with the source language or the different translation workflows adopted. However, some participants noticed the use of pivot translation. Another interesting piece of data is that those participants who had already watched the series before participating in the study tended towards English subtitles, the same language used in their previous experience.

A common thread across all studies, irrespective of preference, is the viewers' awareness of the language learning and language and cultural preservation benefits of subtitling in Maltese, both for a Maltese-speaking audience or non-Maltese speakers residing on the island. Viewers seem to prioritise this over preference for entertainment purposes, which is an essential factor to consider when shaping guidelines and policies. Another aspect that emerges across all the reception studies is the importance of quality standards. Viewers declare that this can influence language preference and the decision to use subtitles in the first place.

### *3.3 Shaping Guidelines: Main Technical and Linguistic Outcomes*

The applied and experimental studies led to significant findings that could help shape the guidelines and, in turn, impact the overall viewer experience. This section does not include all the specifics that were under scrutiny and does not engage in demographic considerations that may have influenced the study outcomes. Other publications focusing on the individual studies could make room for further detail, but this does not align with the scope of this article which aims to provide a comprehensive overview, identifying the main patterns. Therefore, only the main guiding parameters and outcomes are discussed.

Mainstream platforms prioritise standardised technical parameters across territories, but a newly experimenting territory may have different demands and challenges, or distinctive traits as

outlined in the previous section. Moreover, the Maltese scenario can tailor specifications and guidelines according to its needs and preferences. This is perhaps one of the advantages of developing a new practice in virgin territory. In the absence of a tradition and consolidated practice, there is no obligation to mirror the exact specifications used in other regions. That said, the various guidelines are based on widespread global norms, research, and professional practice and are used as the foundations that could be further adapted according to the island's needs. One of the main differences between the locally researched practice and mainstream platforms is that the latter generally provide two separate subtitled versions, standard subtitles in translation and closed captions (mostly intralingual) to cater to hard-of-hearing viewers. While, as mentioned in the introduction, adopting one hybrid or combined version seems more efficient for a small island setting.

### 3.3.1 Technical Issues and Guidelines

One of the main technical parameters considered is the so-called *reading speed*, or more precisely, the subtitling display rate that impacts the viewers' reading speed and is typically measured in number of characters per second. Establishing the length and duration of subtitles is crucial to ensure a readable, understandable, and stress-free experience while ensuring that the viewers' attention to the images is not significantly compromised. It is not easy to reach this delicate balance, which can depend on several factors and can vary across languages and territories. Viewers who are not accustomed to subtitles in a specific language are likely to require more time to read and understand them. A Maltese audience may cope with higher reading speeds in English, if they are accustomed to mainstream streaming platforms, but their reading speed may be lower in Maltese. Bugeja's (2021) study adopted a methodology whereby the 661 respondents recruited were divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, whereby each group experienced a different version of Maltese subtitles applied to the same media clips drawn from the Italian Rai fiction series *Tutto può succedere* (RAI fiction, 2018). The participants were divided into two

groups to avoid any bias from watching the same videoclip twice. This way, each group watched each videoclip only once. Group A experienced a subtitling display rate of 15 characters per second (cps) applying the local guidelines proposal, while Group B experienced a display rate of 17 cps, which is the standard adopted by Netflix. In other words, Group B experienced faster subtitles. From a linguistic perspective, this implies longer subtitles as opposed to more condensation applied in the lower reading speed, as experienced by Group A. Respondents were asked to quantify the subtitles read and were also asked questions to test plot comprehension and attention to detail in the images. Bugeja's study reveals a preference for the lower reading speed (15 cps) as per the local guidelines. In Group A, 88% of the respondents managed to read all or most of the subtitles, 79% performed well in the comprehension test, and 83% considered the overall experience as very positive, even though the respondents hinted at reduced accuracy in translation. On the other hand, in Group B, on average, 81% of the respondents managed to read all or most of the subtitles. A breakdown of the data reveals that 19% considered the subtitles too fast and the number of participants who managed to read all the subtitles dropped by 25%, the comprehension score was 73% and the overall reception experience rated at 73%. The subtitles, however, were considered very accurate from a translation perspective. The difference in overall reception rating is more significant when the results from the hard-of-hearing viewers are isolated, that is, 29 respondents out of 661, therefore 4.3% of the participants. The hard-of-hearing participants in Group A gave a 57% rating to the higher reading speed of 17cps, while those in Group B gave an 80% rating to the version adopting a subtitling display rate of 15cps. The need for lower reading speeds may be due to different needs in terms of cognitive load and visual processing speeds given the reliance on the visual code. This confirms that for the time being the reading speed parameter proposed in the guidelines, aligns with local needs. Taliana's (2021), Mangion's (2022) and Hili's (2024) studies, also outlined in this paper, reveal consistent results related to the reading speed

proposed by the guidelines even though, unlike Bugeja's study, only one reading speed was adopted throughout these other projects.

### 3.3.2 Linguistic Issues

Mangion (2022) tackled this parameter from a linguistic perspective by allowing the respondents to compare two subtitled versions of the same media clips drawn from the Spanish TV series *¿Quién mató a Sara?* (José Ignacio Valenzuela, 2021). Variant 1 provided subtitles that adopted extreme condensation to suit reading speed demands and provide a stress-free experience. Variant 2 applied no condensation, therefore verbally equivalent subtitles, despite condensation or reduction being one of the common strategies adopted in subtitling. Every time a new video clip was shown to the participants, the researcher changed the order of the two strategies proposed, to reduce the bias of watching the same videoclips twice. Variant 1 was the preferred choice by 60% of the participants (302, in total) despite 52% declaring that they could read all the subtitles in Variant 2. Also, 71% of the respondents declared that they could not identify any differences between the two versions, while 29% noticed that Variant 1 applied reduction and simplification strategies, as well as syntactical and lexical differences, and observed that the subtitles were longer and faster in Variant 2. This study further confirms that the preferred reading speed is the one proposed in the guidelines, at least for the time being, since the audience is bound to evolve, and its needs may change with habituation. Despite being able to read all or most of the subtitles in Variant 2, the participants preferred Variant 1 as an overall experience based on comfort.

Mangion's study also delves into other specifics such as using digits versus words for numbers between 1 to 10, with the majority (64%) showing a preference for the written form in words, in line with the guidelines. Another linguistic aspect investigated by Mangion (2022) is the subtitling language choice for song lyrics in English or foreign languages: whether to adopt 1) intralingual subtitles (e.g., original lyrics in Spanish in a Spanish original series or original

lyrics in English in a Spanish series); 2) interlingual subtitles (translation into Maltese); or, 3) provide the song title only. Even in this case, the respondents were given different versions for comparison. Overall, the intralingual version was preferred over the translated lyrics. In the case of English lyrics, 49% of the respondents (147 out of 302) preferred the intralingual version or no lyrics at all (37%, 111) over the interlingual translated lyrics (14%, 43). However, the latter percentage included participants with hearing loss who declared that they would need access to the verbal content. These findings align with the proposed guidelines that recommend that English song lyrics are not to be translated into Maltese. However, it may be necessary to incorporate the possibility of providing an intralingual transcription, especially if relevant to the plot, to enable access for non-hearing viewers. Regarding Spanish lyrics, the respondents also preferred the intralingual version (39%, 118) or no lyrics at all (32%, 98) over the translated lyrics. Only 29% (86) opted for the translated lyrics in Maltese, even though 62% of the respondents did not know the Spanish language. Despite not yielding the expected result, double the respondents opted for the translation in the case of Spanish lyrics when compared to the English lyrics, so a lack of familiarity with the source language affected the outcome. In a subsequent, more generic question in which respondents were asked whether it is vital to provide a translation for lyrics, a small percentage (12%) declared that translating the lyrics would be helpful to access the verbal content in the case of hearing loss. In comparison, 22% found that it does enhance the viewer experience when the source language is not known. The popularity of the Spanish song in question might also have influenced the results, and it would be worth investigating further and repeating the experiment with different songs and languages.

Another important linguistic aspect examined by Bugeja (2021) focuses on incorporating English loanwords in Maltese subtitles, and more specifically on the orthography to be used, whether a Maltese phonetic-oriented orthography or English orthography. Maltese grammar has

specific rules that determine which to use, and the guidelines recommend applying them. Still, considering the immediacy of the subtitling experience, the expected outcome was that familiarity and ease of readiness might prevail from a viewer's perspective. This expectation was confirmed when the respondents were presented with subtitles that included loanwords. Group A was presented with the English orthography version and Group B with the Maltese orthography version. Both groups were asked to rate the solutions. Overall, there wasn't a significant difference in preference, though the number of respondents who preferred or did not mind English orthography was slightly higher, 64% versus 56% who rated Maltese orthography positively. That said, there was a minimal percentage difference between the respondents in Group A who found English orthography annoying (8%), and those in Group B who found Maltese orthography annoying or distracting (13%). Some examples adopted in the subtitled media clips included using the word *pipe*, *foul*, or *hello* versus *pajp*, *fawl* or *helow*, the latter solutions often adopted in everyday written language. When Maltese equivalents are available, the use of English loanwords can be debatable, and a language preservation attitude would tend to favour Maltese equivalents. That said, the subtitling modality cannot be compared to conventional written text. The functional and 'visual' nature of subtitles, combined with the speed and immediacy required (in terms of readability, recognition, and comprehension), usually favour solutions that are familiar to the public and that are simple and fast to understand, unless, of course, the subtitled product is meant to have a didactic function. To this end, the proposed guidelines recommend compliance with Maltese grammar rules whenever possible, while considering that the nature of the subtitling experience may call for the prioritisation of familiar and widespread terms based on language use (e.g., in the case of English loanwords). The guidelines also highlight the need for consistency in a given product or across episodes of serial productions. Other studies that tackled the loanword issue adopt other examples in the subtitled media clips. Mangion (2022)

incorporates the use of *please* in Maltese subtitles rather than *jekk jogħġbok* because it sounds more spontaneous and natural within the specific context. The same applies to taboo language, where the term *fucking* was incorporated in Maltese, for naturalness' sake, despite some respondents complaining about these choices (Mangion, 2022). Similarly, another study carried out by Kimberly Cutajar (2022) reports 75 out of 181 respondents in favour of retaining English vulgar terms in Maltese subtitles, when the source language is English, while 61 respondents prefer a Maltese rendering, and 45 respondents were indifferent to the matter.

### 3.3.3 Sensory Access

Some of the accessibility-related specifications in the guidelines were also tested. Mangion (2022) analysed viewer preference concerning the so-called sound tags and speaker identification. The sound tags are captions that provide information on the sounds produced by objects, nature, animals, or characters, or simply any form of sound effects added extra-dietetically, for example, *dog barking*, *door creaks*, *Sara sighs*, *gun shooting*, and so on (Zárate, 2021). Generally, plot-related sounds and reactions that are not immediately visible on-screen are given priority (Netflix, 2022). Speaker identification, on the other hand, refers to strategies that help non-hearing viewers identify who is speaking, when the speaker is off-screen, or when the source of the utterance may not be explicit (e.g., in crowded scenes, or over-the-shoulder shots).

As for the sound tags, Mangion provided the respondents with different versions of the same media clips, each providing a different grammatical form. The options provided were one-word sound tags, more specifically nouns, e.g., *żaqżiq* (creaking), *ragħad* (*thunder*) noun-based phrases, e.g., *tektik ta' minutiera* (ticking of a clock) or *biki ta' Sara* (Sara's weeping), or tags composed of a subject and verb; *minutiera ttektek* (clock ticking) or *Sara tibki* (Sara crying). The third option prevailed, suggesting a preference towards the use of verbs rather than nouns. The proposed guidelines recommend one-word sound tags be they verbs or nouns, so this guideline may

need to be revised to prioritise the adoption of one-word tags composed of verbs or the subject-verb grammatical form.

Another feature intended to enhance sensory access is speaker identification. The options provided in Mangion's study (2022), drawn from various practices globally, are the use of colour coding (that is, a colour assigned to the subtitles spoken by a specific character), name tags (the name of the speaker or character within brackets at the beginning of a subtitle, whenever this is necessary), or the use of displacement (shifting the position of the subtitle to the left or right of the screen, as close as possible to the character who is speaking) (Zárate, 2021). The name tag system was the one that prevailed in the reception study, in terms of preference (60% out of 302 respondents). Moreover, participants managed to attribute utterances quickly and accurately, thus corroborating the recommendation in the local guidelines. The colour coding system was considered distracting by 46% of the respondents followed by displacement (44%). In conclusion, the incorporation of name tags appears to be the most effective and least distracting method.

It is easy to assume that habituation to mainstream subtitling in English may have possibly influenced some of the respondents in the various reception studies.

### *3.3.4 Sensitive Content and Inclusive Language*

Finally, the issue of taboo or vulgar language was tested with the local audience. Taliana (2021) was the first to tap into this issue and the viewers' reaction to vulgar language in Maltese subtitles. The findings of this study hinted at a high acceptance attitude towards vulgar language in Maltese subtitles, except for blasphemy which was not considered acceptable. To this end, a more in-depth reception study focusing only on vulgar and sensitive language ensued (Cutajar, 2022), and considering the initial data collected in Taliana's study, the research sought to further corroborate (or otherwise) this high tolerance threshold as well as the rejection of any form of censorship. The general subtitling norm globally has traditionally been to tone down vulgar

utterances (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2021), particularly for specific media, such as television. The reason is the shift from the oral to the written mode, which impacts the perception of vulgar language. However, considering the development of a new practice in virgin territory, it can be assumed that, in building their norms and guidelines, the Maltese islands are not necessarily obliged to follow traditional standards and conventions.

Cutajar's findings (2022) challenge the initial expected outcome in that the respondents (a total of 181) indicated a clear preference for the attenuation of vulgar expressions when these were rendered in Maltese. Cutajar presented the respondents with two subtitled versions of each media clip, and therefore the audience was able to compare different levels of vulgarity including attenuated solutions, omission, equally vulgar solutions, or aggravated solutions, all strategies encountered in AVT in general. A broad spectrum of strategies was deliberately applied to elicit various reactions and the order of the chosen strategies adopted varied from one clip to another to reduce the bias of watching the same videoclip twice. The respondents opted for the attenuated solutions across all media clips irrespective of genre, context, plot, and characterisation. When the participants were asked to further motivate their responses, and their attention drawn towards contextualising the utterances being analysed and compared, they displayed a higher acceptance level. That said, first reactions matter the most since these align with the immediacy of the subtitling experience. Therefore, these have been considered in the formulation of the local guidelines, which currently recommend considering attenuation strategies depending on the medium, target audience, function, and context. Cutajar's study (2022) once again reveals zero tolerance for blasphemy. In such cases, the respondents preferred the omission strategies.

However, this study went beyond the investigation of taboo language and tapped into sensitive content, that is, potentially derogatory or offensive language concerning gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, and mental health issues. Upon initial response,

the audience showed a heightened level of acceptance for offensive language regarding mental health, while demonstrating a decreased tolerance for derogatory terms related to sexual orientation, and an even lower level of acceptance for racist language. However, these outcomes experienced significant changes when the respondents' focus was directed toward these sensitive topics, leading to more contemplative responses. Their position changed, displaying greater tolerance towards racist language if required by the context while preferring omission and toning down for offensive language related to mental health issues. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, results varied and became more nuanced when viewers were asked to ponder a policy regarding vulgar language in Maltese-inclusive subtitles.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

The above sections outlined the main subtitling projects and research intended for the continued development of a new professional practice in Malta. The user-centered approach adopted aims to create an optimal enjoyable and inclusive experience. The research so far also enabled the necessary data collection to help shape a set of guidelines that can ensure quality standards and consistency, thus easing the process of viewer habituation in this newly experimenting territory. The universalist approach adopted caters to a broad spectrum of viewers, including both hearing and non-hearing persons. The vision behind this approach is the adoption of a translation modality that unifies viewers rather than divides them due to their different needs. This may entail a certain degree of tolerance and acceptance on the viewers' part, since it may imply compromises, maybe loss on the one hand, or unnecessary information, on the other, depending on the viewpoint adopted. The goal (and challenge) is to provide a balanced solution that includes and satisfies as many viewers as possible.

As a result of the findings outlined above, it can be concluded that most of the guidelines in question can be confirmed as valid, for the time being, since they now have the backing of user-centred data. These include specifications relating to

technical issues such as reading speed (characters per line and characters per second), linguistic issues such as loanwords, density of dialogue lines, taboo language and sensitive content, numbers, and sensory access issues such as sound tags and speaker identification and the use of the inclusive subtitles 'format' in the first place. The specifications that may require minor adjustments are those related to the grammatical form of sound tags and how song lyrics are handled.

The audience is continuously evolving and the local demands identified are bound to change due to increased exposure to inclusive subtitles and consequent habituation, which will in turn impact both technical and linguistic parameters. The guidelines were first published online in 2021. Further research is necessary to continue to monitor local demands and the guidelines will require review on a regular basis to align with research findings. There certainly is room for other studies focusing on specific groups, such as the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing with respect to sensory access, children with respect to reading speeds and language learning, or immigrants with respect to language learning. Likewise, Maltese intralingual subtitles and related technical and linguistic parameters also require investigation.

Academia has the potential to implement and shape new inclusive practices through training, research, practical application and the creation of guidelines, thus creating social impact and contributing to the community. Moreover, moving forward requires additional concrete actions, such as implementing a national inclusive media content policy aligned with the EU directive for Audiovisual Services (EU Parliament and Council, 2018) that entices member states to actively pursue media accessibility for persons with disabilities, in particular with a visual or hearing impairment. Establishing a minimum quota for subtitled media content on local broadcast television could be a first step towards inclusive practices, that can be extended beyond sensory access to also incorporate linguistic and cultural inclusion.

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### APPENDIX

The appendix presents the proposed guidelines discussed throughout the article for further reference. Since the article is written and published in English, the English version is presented hereunder. Both the English and Maltese version are available at <https://www.localiseinmalta.com/guidelines>.

*Proposed guidelines for inclusive subtitles in a Maltese context (EN).*

*Compiled by Giselle Spiteri Miggiani, first published in January 2021, last updated in December 2022.*

The following guidelines are to be considered work in progress. Further experimental studies

are necessary to test and develop them further. Meanwhile, they are being used for didactic and educational purposes, applied research, and for local professional media localisation projects.

The parameters and specifications provided are intended for interlingual and intralingual subtitling both in English and Maltese (source languages: English, Maltese, or foreign languages). They are meant to guide audiovisual translators in a Maltese linguistic and cultural setting. They draw on widespread standards and conventions and their variations in use across TV networks, streaming platforms, and localisation companies globally, and have been adapted to suit Maltese-specific needs.

Inclusive subtitles are intended for a broad spectrum of viewers who may or may not have hearing loss, and who may or may not understand Maltese. The specifications and strategies proposed aim to create an inclusive enjoyable experience that can be shared by all alike. The aim is to seek a balance that ensures that no viewer is deprived of essential information (e.g., relevant sounds, or culture-specific terms and references) while trying to avoid overabundant or redundant information.

#### 1. Character Limitation

- Characters per subtitle line for documentaries, TV programmes, interviews, or similar reality productions: 40 (spaces included)
- Characters per subtitle line for fiction productions (film & TV series): 38 (spaces included)

#### 2. Reading Speed

- Adult programmes: max 15 cps (characters per second)
- Children's programmes: max 12 cps (characters per second)

#### 3. Duration

- Minimum duration: ideally, 1 second. Minimum 20 frames in the case of one-word subtitles.
- Maximum duration: 6 seconds per subtitle event.

#### 4. Frame Gap

- Minimum 2 frames between subtitles.

#### 5. Position

- In general, subtitles should be centre justified and placed at the bottom of the screen, unless otherwise requested by the client.
- Subtitles can be aligned to the top throughout opening credits or if there is on-screen text in the video material. Maintain consistency at the top all throughout the opening credits instead of alternating between the top and bottom of the screen.
- Displacement to the left or right can be adopted in short dual dialogue scenes. Character tags are not necessary if displacement is used in such instances.
- Creative positioning and subtitle display options can be discussed with the client depending on the type of production at hand. Compatibility with the editors' program needs to be verified to ensure that any typeface formatting, alignment, or displacement are not lost.

#### 6. Text Segmentation into Subtitles

- Maximum of 2 lines per subtitle.
- 3 lines can be used at the end for subtitling credits.
- Prioritise two-line subtitles in documentaries, informative videos, or similar genres.
- Use both two-line and one-line subtitles for fiction productions as necessary. Merge and separate lines according to the speech flow, rhythm and pauses to enhance the reading experience.
- Avoid segmenting text in such a way as to have to resort to the euphonic /i/ in MT at the beginning of the next subtitle. Resort to reformulation where necessary.

#### 7. Timing and Shot Changes

- Ideally subtitles should match the duration of the utterance. If this is not possible and a longer duration is required, extend up to 12 frames max.
- Whenever possible, avoid subtitles that cross over shot changes (that is, subtitles that continue over a cut). Start or end the subtitle

with the shot change when the cross-over duration before or after the shot change is 7 frames or less.

- Ideally, the time code of entry and exit should match the speech utterance. However, customised solutions are often necessary to suit local productions, particularly in the case of inconsistencies or broken speech in documentary interviews (e.g., false starts with pauses, a word repeated multiple times at the beginning of a line, and so on). It might be necessary to cue in a subtitle slightly later when the speech starts to flow, thus adopting a more customised synchronisation approach.

### 8. Line break

- When the text needs to be subdivided into 2 lines, prioritise the reading flow. Ideally, break the line before conjunctions, after punctuation marks, before prepositions, possibly obtaining a self-contained semantic unit on each line.
- Ideally, the line break should not separate a noun from an adjective or an article, a verb from the subject pronoun, a prepositional verb from its preposition, a verb from its auxiliary, reflexive pronoun or negation.
- Try not to separate names from surnames.
- When subtitling in MT do not separate hyphenated or prepositional articles from the noun (e.g., fix-xitwa, it-traduzzjoni).

### 9. Italics

- In fiction productions: voice-over speech, narration, or inner thoughts.
- In documentaries/TV programmes: italics may be avoided for narrators/speakers/presenters when the voice-over narration constitutes almost 50% of the spoken content in the programme. Name tags can be used to indicate voice-over narration (e.g., [host], [Clare], [narrator]).
- Only when the speaker is not in the narrative/diegetic space and not merely off camera.
- Dialogue heard over the phone, television, computer, or any electronic device that produces a voice effect.
- Song lyrics. Use quotation marks for song titles. A musical note can be added at the

beginning of each song lyric subtitle. The last lyric subtitle will have a musical note at the beginning and end to highlight the end of the song.

- Titles of books, newspapers, works of art, music albums, movies, TV shows.
- Unfamiliar foreign words and phrases. Names of food/dishes or other culture-specific elements.
- Do not italicise proper names such as MT or foreign locations or company names. Simply use upper case for the first letter.
- In EN subtitles, do not italicise MT words in general, such as intercalary words (e.g., mela, ejja) or familiar words in other languages (e.g., “ad hoc,” “rendezvous”) when retained in the target text.
- In MT subtitles, do not italicise EN words in general or familiar words in other languages.

### 10. Dual speakers

- Use a hyphen without a space to indicate two speakers in one subtitle. One line per speaker. The hyphen precedes any name tag.

#### Subtitle 1

- Where have you been?
- London.

#### Subtitle 1

- [Clare] Let's talk about it.
- [Joe] Yes, of course.

#### Subtitle 1

- [Joe laughs]
- I told you so!
- Use two hyphens when you have a sound caption or tag on one line coming from one source and a dialogue line on the next line coming from a different source.
- [phone rings]
- Hello?

### 11. Ellipsis and suspension dots

- Do not use ellipses (3 dots) or dashes when an ongoing sentence is split between two or more continuous subtitles.

#### Subtitle 1 We had asked you

#### Subtitle 2 to focus on your final exams.

- Use ellipsis at the end of the first subtitle only if there is a long pause between subtitles. In this case, it is not necessary to use an ellipsis at the beginning of the second subtitle. If the pause is very long you can consider ellipsis also at the beginning of the second line to indicate that it is a continuation. Otherwise, when there are no pauses, do not use dots every time you split a sentence.
- Avoid graphical overlap with any onscreen text - position subtitle where it would be easier to read.
- Do not combine dialogue and narrative titles in the same subtitle.
- If a narrative title interrupts the dialogue, use ellipsis at the end of the subtitle and the beginning of the next one.

*Subtitle 1* Had I known...

*Subtitle 2* I wouldn't have called.

- To indicate a pause within the same subtitle use three dots without leaving a space.

*Subtitle 1* Had I known...I wouldn't have called.

- Use suspension dots to indicate an incomplete sentence or an abrupt interruption.

*Subtitle 1* Where the hell are yo...?

*Subtitle 2* Shut your mouth!

- Use an ellipsis without a space to indicate that a subtitle is starting mid-sentence.

*Subtitle 1* ...be going to school.

## 12. Written graphics/on-screen text

- When the main SL is MT, and the TL is EN, any MT or foreign-language on-screen text requires an EN translation unless 'covered' in the dialogue/speech or purposely added in the subtitled speech content (e.g., adding the title or designation of an interviewee in the subtitles).
- When the main SL is EN, and the TL is MT, it is not necessary to translate the English on-screen text.
- Use upper case letters for the whole text, except for written passages taken from books, letters, newspapers, or very long chat messages. If the characters are reading the on-screen text aloud use quotation marks.

*Subtitle 1* NO TRESPASSING

- If a character/speaker reads the on-screen text, use inverted commas (and no upper case letters) to highlight that the text is being read. Use a name tag if the character/speaker is not on screen.

*Subtitle 1* When I was young...

*Subtitle 2* NO SMOKING

*Subtitle 3* ...we were allowed to smoke anywhere.

- When translating and subtitled the title of a production use upper case for the whole text (e.g., CULHAT AL BELT, THE LOCAL TRAVELLER).

## 13a. Numbers and Time (English)

- From 1 to 10 - written out in words (e.g., wiehed, tnejn, tlieta).
- Above 10 - written numerically (e.g., 11, 12, 13, 135, 1,000) Use the written form (or a combination of numeric and written form) for larger numbers with several zeros, and the numeric form for numbers with a decimal point for ease of comprehension (e.g., one million, 12 million, 100 thousand, 2.5 million).
- Use word form when a number is at the beginning of a subtitle.
- Be consistent with points and commas (e.g., 5,000, 1.95 million inhabitants, 9.30 pm).
- Be consistent with dates and ordinal numbers (e.g., 5th May, May 5, or 5th of May). The first option is preferable.
- Use numerals for dates (even 1 to 10).
- Time: a) Use numerals (e.g., 11.30 am); b) Use lowercase am, and pm when specifying is necessary; c) Time expressions that do not include numbers need to be written in words (e.g., half past, quarter to, midnight, noon).

## 13b. Numbers and Time (Maltese)

- From 1 to 10 - written out in words (e.g., one, two, three, etc.).
- Above 10 - written numerically (e.g., 11, 12, 13, 135, 1,000 etc.).

- A combined numeric and word form can be used for larger numbers (e.g., 70 elf).
- Use the numeric form for numbers with a decimal point (e.g., 2.5 miljun).
- Use word form when a number is at the beginning of a subtitle.
- Use word form for all morphological inflections (e.g., ħamest itfal, źewg, mitt, 1,000, mitt elf, ħames miljuni, tlett irgjel).
- Use numerals for dates (5 ta' ġunju)
- Time: use numeric form and the 12-hour clock format (e.g., fid-9 am). *Nofsillejl* and *nofsinhar* can be written out in words, time and space permitting.

#### 14. Units of measure and currency

- Translate but do not convert old units of measurement that are not in use today (e.g., in history documentaries).
- When the target audience is unknown it is recommended to translate and convert imperial measurements into the metric system (centimetres and metres rather than feet, inches, yards etc.).
- If the target audience is Australian or Maltese, imperial measurements can be taken into consideration. Adopt consistency throughout.
- When the TL is MT, convert units of measure according to MT usage.
- English abbreviations for measurements can be used in MT subtitles (e.g., cm, m, km).
- Whenever possible use currency in words (pounds, yen, krona) instead of the symbol. An exception can be made for the more commonly used € and \$ in the case of time and space restrictions.
- The % symbol (no space) can be used, and fractions can resort to the numeric form (e.g., 1/3, 2/3).
- 'M' can be used for million or miljun.

#### 15. Abbreviations

- Well-known abbreviations/shortenings/acronyms/contractions may be used. No full stops. Use upper case for abbreviations: FYI, ASAP, FBI, EU, MEPA, WWI, and a blend for contractions if needed (e.g., Dr, Mr, km, cm, m)

#### 16. Quotes

- Double quotation marks are to be used for quoted words, phrases, and sentences; use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Subtitle 1 She told me: "Lectures are cancelled."

- If the quote extends beyond more than one subtitle, use an open quote at the beginning of the first subtitle and an end quote at the end of the last subtitle.

Subtitle 1 "If you can fill the unforgiving minute

Subtitle 2 With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,

Subtitle 3 Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

- Periods and commas precede closing quotation marks, whether double or single.
- Colons and semicolons follow closing quotation marks.
- Question marks and exclamation marks follow quotation marks unless they belong within the quoted text:

*Subtitle 1*

Which poem contains the phrase:

"If you can fill the unforgiving minute...?"

*Subtitle 2*

"If" by Rudyard Kipling.

- Song titles should be enclosed in quotes. Italics are used for the lyrics and names of music albums.

#### 17. Sensory access

- Providing sensory access to HOH viewers among the broader target audience is taken as a default approach unless otherwise specified by the client.
- Sounds and speaker identifiers: Use square brackets and lowercase letters (except for proper nouns) for captions describing sounds, music, as well as name tags (e.g., [Joe laughs], [whistling softly], [Joe] I knew it was her).
- Do not italicise even if the dialogue that follows is in voice-over etc.

- Dialogue: In the case of intralingual subtitles include as much of the original content as possible – ideally verbatim. Omitting parts of the original dialogue should be a last resort when synchronisation and reading speed is an issue.
  - Include name tags or sound effects only when the speaker or source of sound cannot be seen or clearly identified visually – that is, either off screen or on screen but not clearly visible.
  - When the source of the sound is visible on-screen use sound captions only if necessary to qualify the type of sound (e.g., [door creaks], while [door opens] may not be necessary). Consider volume, intensity, duration, and other qualities of the sound.
  - Describe generic ambience (e.g., [crowd murmur]).
  - Describe diegetic or extradiegetic music. Capture the mood of the music (e.g., spiritual, relaxing, ethereal). More specific descriptions can be used, too (piano ballad, cello solo, percussions). Distinguish between diegetic and extra-diegetic music (e.g., [upbeat music] for extradiegetic music; [Street violinist playing] for diegetic music if violinist is not seen. If the violinist is seen describe the style of music).
  - Song lyrics: Subtitle song lyrics that are relevant and that do not interfere with dialogue. Where possible avoid alternating dialogue and song lyric excerpts. Use [song] at the beginning of the subtitle unless the musical note symbol is available in the subtitling software. Use only question marks and exclamation marks at the end of lines, no commas or full stops. Commas can be used within the lyric line if necessary.
  - Add song/music titles when known before the start of a song (space and time permitting). The titles can replace the lyrics when these cannot be included. Place song titles in quotes and album titles in italics (e.g., [“Bohemian rhapsody” playing]).
  - Use tags to specify that a foreign language is spoken (e.g., [bit-Taljan] or [in Italian] followed by the translated text when this is meant to be understood by the viewers).
- Otherwise, include a tag and leave dialogue untranslated (e.g., [in foreign language])
- For MT captions use nouns when the source is generic or extended to several people and not specific to one character or person (e.g. [čapčip] rather than [nies ičapčpu], [lehen baxx], [dahq], [xita], [hoss tal-magna]. However, use [tibki], [jisghol], [jonfoħ], [jidhqu], [Joe jidhaq] when the character/s and/or gender are specified).

## 18. Glossaries

- In the case of serial productions, create a shared consistency sheet or glossary with key names and phrases and/or specialised jargon. The consistency sheet can also contain specific notes, such as forms of address. This would need to be updated constantly.
- These specific key names and phrases can be decided upon by the translator in question when they first appear. The rest of the team will follow. Alternatively, the keywords in the original version can be identified and listed, and then discussed together with the team before submission.
- A consistency sheet may consist of various data including source language version, target language version, episode number, sound tags adopted, MT orthographic adaptation of EN loanwords (only if applicable, see 20).

## 19. TL-specific guidelines: EN (SL- MT)

- Adopt standard English.
- Adopt a standardised and neutralised speech register unless a distinct register is relevant to plot and characterisation. Avoid slang and colloquialisms where not necessary.
- When having to choose an English variety, adopt British English spelling, vocabulary, and spontaneous speech features (discourse markers, fillers, interjections, etc.) Avoid over-domestication. Avoid American vocabulary such as “elevator”, “sidewalk”, “pants”, “purse”, “hall” etc.
- Avoid lowering or over-formalising the general language register in documentaries or informative productions (e.g., opt for “poor” rather than “bad,” “efficient” or “effective” rather than “good”).

- Retain -whenever possible- culture-specific terms and names in MT in order to ensure an MT flavour. Use italics to highlight culture-specific items (or, as a last resort, single inverted commas in the case of client software incompatibility with typeface formatting). Consistency would be necessary throughout. Discuss this translation strategy with the client, when appropriate, and consider the target audience (general web, Australian-Maltese, local residents (Maltese and local non-Maltese).
  - Consistency would be required for names of streets and squares.
  - Spell names consistently across episodes even when there are inconsistencies in the original text. Prioritise spelling visible in on-screen text.
  - Monument names or other cultural sites and museums that are widely known and publicised among locals and tourists in EN may be translated in EN (e.g., St. John's Cathedral).
  - Numbers: see 13a.
  - Watch out for source language calques on a lexical and syntactical level. Avoid literal translation and prioritise the target text flow and comprehension.
  - Tighten sentences by omitting redundancies, repetitions, hesitations, speech errors (e.g., when interviewees correct themselves), and simplify or sharpen sentences that sound too blurred. Comprehension and avoiding viewer distraction are a priority.
  - Adopt reduction as a strategy where necessary but avoid lines that are way shorter than the original.
  - Use up-to-date inclusive language to refer to ethnicity, race, age, mental health disorders, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on. Refer to local associations to identify sensitive language and preferred terms and use of language in English among local communities (e.g., a viewer "has" a hearing impairment rather than "suffers from" a hearing impairment; the deaf and hard-of-hearing). This applies especially to non-fiction productions. Non-inclusive language can be considered in fictional productions only if functional to the plot and characterisation and therefore contextualised.
20. *TL-specific guidelines: MT (SL- EN)*
- Use standard MT– neutralise any slang and dialects.
  - In general, pick the more familiar term if a choice arises between an EN term widely used in spoken spontaneous language and its less used MT equivalent - unless the intention is didactic or to enhance the use of less common MT vocabulary (e.g., use "selfie" rather than "stessu", "flashcard" rather than "leħħa", "orange juice" rather than "sugu tal-laring").
  - In fiction productions, use the MT equivalent of geographical names only when these are familiar and commonly used in everyday spoken language. In documentaries, speeches, TV programmes, and other formal contexts, use official MT equivalents when these are available. Refer to <http://publications.europa.eu/code/mt/mt-5000500.htm>.
  - Toning down vulgar language depends on the medium, target audience, and individual dialogue context within the AV content –whether its function is relative to the plot, characters, or circumstance. In the case of free-to-air TV channels, vulgar language should always be toned down, and similar though less strong equivalents sought. More flexibility can be applied in the case of feature films in cinema theatres, pay platforms and services, and online platforms in general. MT direct equivalents may be stronger than their SL counterparts: due attention must be given to MT language norms.
  - On-screen text in English can remain untranslated (e.g., newspaper headings, chat messages, slogans, billboards, etc.) (See 12).
  - Any English language dialogue segments should be subtitled verbatim or edited slightly (hesitations, errors, repetitions can be filtered), thus making them accessible to the HOH.
  - No italics for English borrowings (See 9).
  - Avoid unnecessary contractions (e.g., haw', fej', 'habba).
  - Avoid informal variants (e.g., iwa).

- Adopt punctuation and upper case according to the MT language [e.g., Tlieta and tlieta to distinguish between the weekday and the number]
- Write foreign territory addresses in their original form (e.g., Gower Street, Londra, and not Triq-Gower). If an address that has both an EN and MT version is spoken by a character or narrator, subtitle it in the same language used by the narrator.
- Avoid coining new MT equivalents.
- Use up-to-date inclusive language to refer to ethnicity, race, age, mental health disorders, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on (e.g., persuni b'dizabilità, persuni neqsin mis-smiġh, persuna b'kundizzjoni ta' saħħa mentali, nies LGBTI, Rom, persuni gay, persuni omoesswali, persuni transgender, Indjan, Pakistan, Ċiniż, persuni anzjani). Refer to [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35465/mt\\_inclusive-comm-gsc-28052018.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35465/mt_inclusive-comm-gsc-28052018.pdf) Refer also to local associations and communities. This applies especially to non-fiction productions. Non-inclusive language can be considered in fictional productions only if functional to the plot and characterisation and therefore contextualised.
- In intralingual MT, standardise the language and keep condensation to a minimum (ideally, verbatim when possible). The text may be edited to omit hesitation, repetition, and to clean up broken or inconsistent speech – unless these have a function relevant to plot and characterisation.
- Use correct grammar despite any incorrect grammar in the original source text, unless the use of incorrect grammar has a specific function.
- In the case of wordplay, word puns, or rhyme that do not have an MT direct equivalent, the original wordplay can be retained when the SL is EN. Find corresponding or similar wordplay or pun or rhyme to convey the effect when the SL is a foreign language.
- Do not translate song lyrics if these are in EN.
- “OK” is acceptable in MT subtitles.
- When using EN loanwords, an initial epenthetic vowel is sometimes necessary following the article in MT (e.g., l-ispeaker).
- EN loanwords that end in ijiet in the MT plural form adopt MT orthography even in their singular form (e.g., brejk, brejkijiet, kejk, kejkijiet).
- When EN loanwords are conjugated in MT, adopt MT orthography (e.g., chat, tiċċettja, save, tissejvja).
- EN words that end in /s/ in the plural form are retained in EN. In general, it is preferable to avoid orthographic adaptation for EN loanwords that do not require any morphological inflection when used in MT in both the singular and plural form (e.g., use “claim” and “claims” rather than “klejm” and “klejms”, “shower” rather than “xawer”, “fridge” rather than “friġġ”, “technician” rather than “teknixin”, “canteen” rather than “kentin” or “kantin”, “manager” rather than “meniġer” or “maniġer”). This is especially the case when more than one MT variant exists.
- Exceptions to the above based on widely used MT orthography are acceptable. However, though due to the functional and visual/graphic nature of subtitling (that differs from written text on paper or on web), and, in the absence of an official list to refer to, subtitlers need to avoid choices based on subjective linguistic style, and require strict criteria to ensure consistency across serial productions. A possible solution could be to create a project-specific MT consistency sheet or glossary to be shared and integrated by the entire translation team across all AV content related to the same localisation project. In order to develop and enhance subtitling habituation, consistent standards across productions and media would be preferable.

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# Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelties

*Dr. Giovanni Antonio Cossiga*

*Università Sapienza*

## ABSTRACT

The impression we have that we are in the future, but we think with the mind of the past. Not only for the war of the last Tsar of Russia, which shakes the remains of the post-Soviet empire but also for the religious war in the Middle East. Our world is also marred by other wars in Africa, in the Caucasus, in ex-Soviet Asia but they are conflicts of an economic nature for the control of the great resources of the black continent. Thus defined the geopolitical framework, the current horizon is clarified, and the gaze is freed for the near future. Because, as in the times of the Homeric wars, what is up for grabs is the economy and the coordination of growth to accelerate common development. There is an urgent need for humanity to free itself from the constraints that hinder progress yesterday and today. First, dedicate large resources to changing the resources we can use as energy, to restore good relations between humanity and the planet that welcomes us. It is not enough. Because the potentials in the West and East are blocked by laws of nature, such as inflation and deflation, monetary anomalies that slow down development and excite old grudges and ideas from the past. We can get rid of the monetary anomalies that excite selfishness (speculation) and return to constant and coordinated development. In fact, the objective of accelerating coordinated development as a whole is certainly important, as opposed to today's messy situation, with countries lagging behind on the path to progress and civilization.

*Keywords:* social rapports, deflation and inflation, monetary policy, constant & coordinated development.

*Classification:* DDC Code: 551

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# Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelities

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## ABSTRACT

*The impression we have that we are in the future, but we think with the mind of the past. Not only for the war of the last Tsar of Russia, which shakes the remains of the post-Soviet empire but also for the religious war in the Middle East. Our world is also marred by other wars in Africa, in the Caucasus, in ex-Soviet Asia but they are conflicts of an economic nature for the control of the great resources of the black continent. Thus defined the geopolitical framework, the current horizon is clarified, and the gaze is freed for the near future. Because, as in the times of the Homeric wars, what is up for grabs is the economy and the coordination of growth to accelerate common development. There is an urgent need for humanity to free itself from the constraints that hinder progress yesterday and today. First, dedicate large resources to changing the resources we can use as energy, to restore good relations between humanity and the planet that welcomes us. It is not enough. Because the potentials in the West and East are blocked by laws of nature, such as inflation and deflation, monetary anomalies that slow down development and excite old grudges and ideas from the past. We can get rid of the monetary anomalies that excite selfishness (speculation) and return to constant and coordinated development. In fact, the objective of accelerating coordinated development as a whole is certainly important, as opposed to today's messy situation, with countries lagging behind on the path to progress and civilization. The perspective is already underway although, due to the myopia that distinguishes us, it is not fully perceived. The sign of novelty comes from the social and economic tensions that have allowed the creation of supranational bodies, starting with the UN and the planned and ongoing continental unions which indicate the way to finally relegate the*

*very idea of wars and conflicts to the history books. With the angle from the economic side, the tense relations between the West and China can be simplified. The problems of the economy do not absolve anyone. Let's consider that half the world is in the grip of deflation and the other half is in the grip of inflation. All of us, and together, we must face the planet's malaise and the coordination of development between continents. A reality awaits us where science is destined to overcome the value of money and, at the same time, to change social values.*

**Keywords:** social rapports, deflation and inflation, monetary policy, constant & coordinated development.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

That we are in a transition phase says it the almost wonder that assails us in front of the geopolitical scenario. Studded with wars that are like shadows of a past that for some does not pass. It is certainly singular that the wars in Europe and the Middle East broke out in the aftermath of the great epidemic that hit humanity in the 2020s and the scenario is moving on fearfully obsolete settings. Wars that only the autocrats of large countries can imagine while humanity struggles to face and resolve major racial problems, migration from the poorest areas, the disordered and differentiated development of continents, the development model that cannot be against the planet that welcomes us. From the geopolitical scenario, a sort of decoupling between the Western Anglosphere, Japan and Africa, etc. is demonstrated. and countries that start wars. Don't be surprised that I include Africa among the countries that appear to be in the first group, because it is true that the Black continent is

struggling with local wars. But they are wars born of poverty and the contrast with the presence of essential natural riches in the African subsoil. The West is capable of carrying out the great task of accelerating the development of the Black continent and it would be enough to ease the internal struggles to give strength to the African Union and strengthen relations between the EU and the African Union.

Even China, the economic giant of Central Asia, is in no way comparable to the bloc of the war masters. Meanwhile, Western concern that China wants to invade the island of Taiwan remains only an unsupported hypothesis. Furthermore, China is facing problems that are not easy to solve, after a long period of more than fifty years of breakneck economic growth. An unsustainable pace that lasted beyond the limits due to the state of malaise of the planet which did not tolerate the mandarins' lack of attention to the state of the planet and tolerance for excess waste and greenhouse gases. This means that China has internal problems that are too significant to be able to give in to warmongering flattery. Autocratic or democratic regimes are however subjected to the evaluation of the communities. Which decide consensus or dissent on the basis of the economic and social advantages that the regime, whether libertarian or liberticidal, guarantees or not. It seems clear in light of this precept that the strength of the post-communist regime in China also depends on the strength of the development that has characterized the Asian giant. What can happen at this point, when the success of the Chinese economy is languishing and the conditions can be depressing, starting with unemployment. Without appealing to data that are not always truly truthful, nor to the limitations on technologies envisaged by Westerners about technologies, the interest that Chinese leaders are giving to the delegations of representatives of the economy of Western countries is certainly significant. Confirming that it is not just the weakness of the real estate sector that worries those in charge of the Middle Empire.

Let's not forget that an indicator of the slow decline of the Chinese economy is underway and is creating concerns in the old and new continent:

deflation. For Chinese exports, it is driven by natural dumping due to the drop in industrial and food prices and the indirect transmission of deflation to importing countries, in the old continent, in Germany, France and Italy. Of course, it is premature to think of social unrest due to economic and social problems, due to resentment over the decline in the economy. Yet, the behavior of the leaders of the large Asian country already seems to take into account an ongoing change in the relationship between the enormous community and post-communist power.

The area of democratic countries appears interested in giving consistency and powers to supranational unions, on a political, social, and commercial level. Even under the improper impulse of China's alleged warmongering attitude. This trend is moving towards the right horizon of minimizing differences and aiming for the harmonization of common development. Unfortunately, the issue to be addressed in common is precisely that of development. Which must finance not only the growing expenditure on scientific research but also jointly find the recipes and new discoveries necessary to bring global warming under control. (Fagan 2017) A theme certainly ignored by the warlord countries and still grappling with the obsolete religious wars, used as a curtain for the decadence that afflicts them. Obviously, it is not enough to understand the absolute need to give strength to economic development, we must look at Africa, a continent that was first colonized and then abandoned to historical social, cultural and economic delay. A very serious mistake which can only be remedied by acknowledging that the accelerated development of the black continent requires adequate and substantial funding which only development supported by the rest of the world can ensure.

Not crumbs, therefore, but a common commitment based on a community vision and equally common orientation in terms of commerce, industry, family, and commonality of purposes and objectives. Let us consider that if Europe and North America accept this common vision of the prospects, we can witness, alongside

the accelerate improvement of conditions on the African continent, a new winning collaboration. We consider that the accusation that blame the West for the vision based everywhere on democracy and freedom are completely off track. As always, the real division that separates between the countries that have reached an acceptable level of democracy and the others, is the presumption that the state of the economy, is the center of gravity in which the order of the world is being played out. Just as the world of the Cold War revolved around the relative efficiency of systems between the West and the Soviet Russia, no differently today the battleground is always on the level of the efficiency of economic systems.

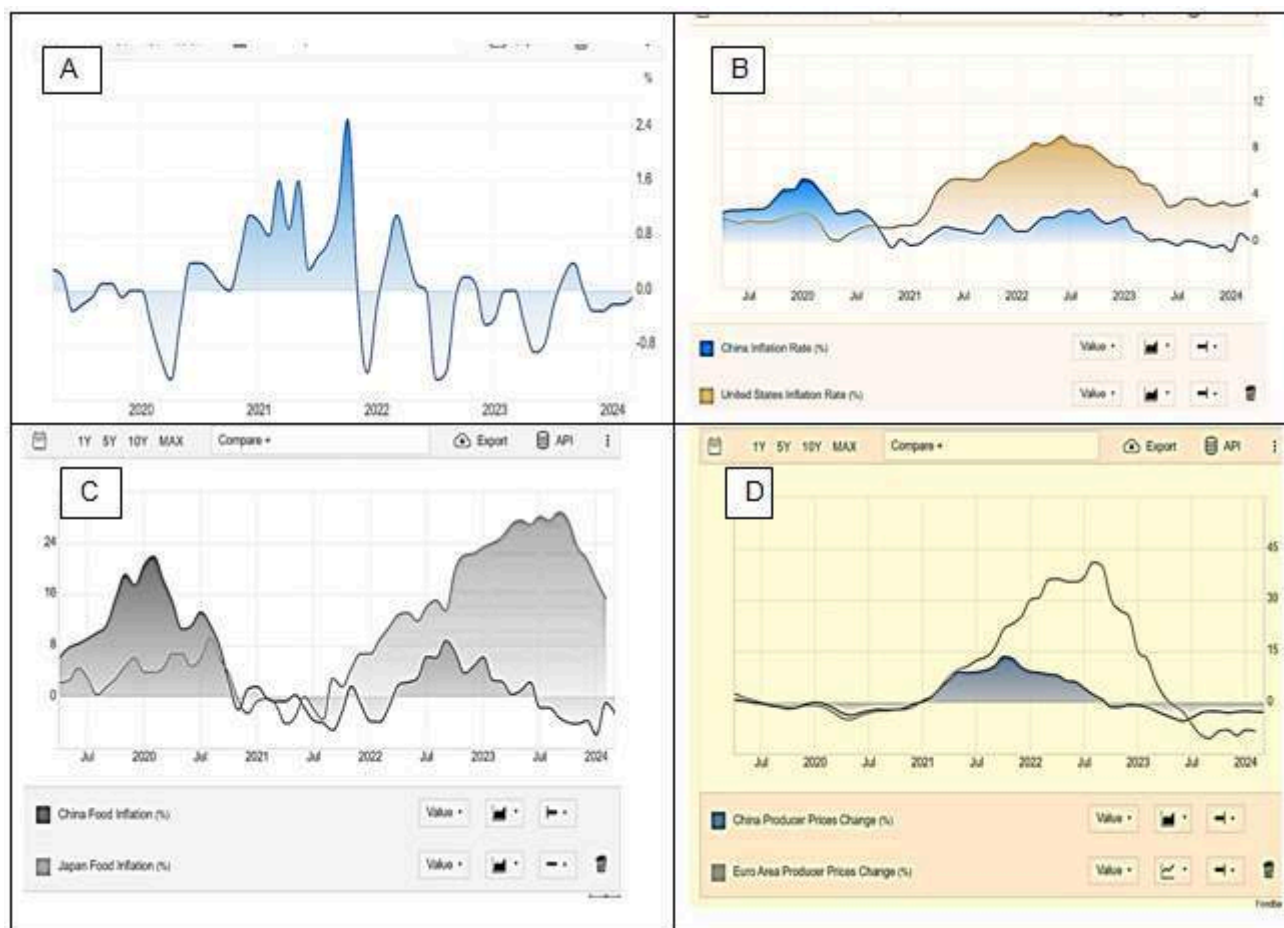
It is therefore not singular that at the height of an alleged conflict there is the relationship between China, a new entrant in the geopolitical circuit, and the West, understood as a special relationship between the USA and the European Union. The terrain of the solution is once again economic, in the sense that efficiency will decide who has the control stick. Now this approach is really wrong because it is based on competition and not collaboration. It would be absurd for the group of democratic countries not to take note that humanity doesn't have to choose the most beautiful or most fascinating of the contenders. Rather, it is casting the net to attract into the area the countries that have suffered the denial of slavery and colonization and that are waiting to regain the fortunes of a development that history has denied, starting with Africa. (Dozon, 2011)

### *1.1 In Truth, the Turning Point Could be Africa Uniting Without Hesitation with the West*

“Wanting peace is preparing for war” is the opposite of the present condition. I repeat, it is not the competition of arms that is at stake but the competition of the economy. The claim that war decides is wrong. It's an old arsenal to be buried in the history books, there's no use. Instead, the difference between levels of development between continents needs to be overcome by any means. Consider that Humanity needs new work resources in terms of scientific research and financial resources to be mobilized

to address the common evil of global warming. A sort of *redde rationem* that makes us understand what the world needs and doesn't need. The common fight against the planet's malaise cannot be a device in the hands of the great governments of the world. It makes no sense for the West to pay attention to the issue while others are not affected by everyone's problem. (Cossiga, 2023)

In the same way, it is no longer possible that on economic issues, i.e. the direction of development, the search for votes and consensus with the usual selfish attitude is entrusted to the narrow vision of individual governments. It is certainly no coincidence that the idea of coordination at a supranational level is gaining strength in communities, in America, Europe, Africa and between the continents of Europe and South America, the Anglosphere, etc.



Source: Elaborations on Trading Economics

**Figure 1 A:** China inflation rate (%) **B:** China Inflation Rate (%) & USA Inflation Rate (%)  
**C:** China Food inflation & Japan Food Inflation **D:** China & Area Euro Production Prices Charge (%)

The geopolitical picture is thus simplified. The comparison does not see two blocks pitted against each other. Each with its allies and enemies. In truth, the turning point could be Africa uniting without hesitation with the West, as the pivot around which the entire geopolitical framework evolves. (See: Sixth European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030). The contrast between the USA and China seems rather a metaphor for the expected trend of the two economies. But as I was saying, the topic of comparison takes place in the field of development of two large economies. THE assumption that in the next few years or decades the economy of the Middle Empire can continue the domineering march of the previous half century is pure fantasy. Unfortunately, China has hit the wall of building speculation which, as in the episodes that affected Japan and the West in 2008-2009, marks the inevitable end of the

acceleration phase and the return to a period of waiting. The Asian country was taking into account the progress in the future to address the great economic and social differences between city and countryside, between great wealth and equally great poverty to relaunch the post-communist model of power. I'm not saying the Chinese economy will be crippled. Of course not, but it will undergo a slow inexorable decline which certainly does not encourage the adventure of a comparison with the rest of the world. (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006).

And from the context of the confrontation that is believed to be underway, let's remove China. Not that it fits in with the world of democracy but that it dilutes the in vain purpose of a world in Sino-structure projection. Have we perhaps gone back with the nostalgia to the "victorious" America at the time of the Cold War? The

Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelities

confrontation between regimes, the freedom and rights allowed by advanced democracies and the post-communist centrality, yesterday and today. Although yesterday as today the problems under management are the development of the economies on one side and the other. As I have had the opportunity to say, if we look at the relations between states and continents, placing the issue of the economy at the center is a winner and above all simplifies the picture.

On the other hand, it does not seem reasonable to blame the liberal policies of the last fifty years, which have moved industrial production from the West to China and have therefore attenuated the development trends from this part of the world towards the East. In reality, this shift towards lower wages and savings for businesses could not be circumvented. Just as discreet backwards movement cannot be circumvented today (reshoring). The problem today is not to slow down China's development to restore the order of primacy. It is not so. Nor is it possible that our governments can succeed in the task. In reality it is not the geopolitical framework that conditions relations but always the driving force exerted by the development of the economy. Well, it makes no sense to kill a dead man just as it makes no sense to punish China for the favorable conditions that were created in the last century to sustain accelerated march that brought the Asian country among the protagonists.

It makes sense instead to consider (see figure 1) that unrepeatable conditions had been created for in terms of costs, availability of expert manpower, liberalization of markets and communication routes that allowed a common advantage. These facilities are now partly worn out and no longer repeatable. It therefore seems like a singular dispute that has been ongoing for some years between the West and China. In reality, apart from these political skirmishes, the natural path of relationships proceeds according to the rule. That is, the need for a renewed conduct of human activity towards the environment. Also, because it escapes no one that the formidable push and development in Asia and the rest of the world has contributed to the planet's reaction. As if to say that human work is at the mercy of the well-being

or malaise of the Earth that welcomes us, and it certainly makes no sense to build political signals when natural orientations have changed and require a reflection of all Humanity.

All this to say that the geopolitical framework, apart from the harsh declarations, which also hide problems within the large countries, can be considered lightened. Leaving the decisions on the decentralization or centralization of plants to economic and commercial interests, as in the last fifty years. From this point of view, it appears that the position expressed with great impetus by the former American president Trump is dictated rather by political emphasis. It would therefore be excluded that the world is divided into two parts, between good and bad, although it is not clear who be it one or the other party. It seems rather that the tendency of mutual distrust, especially between the USA and China, can be dictated by issues linked to the natural need for a change in the essential parameters on which the development of humanity is based. We may consider that the issue of discord concerns the exchange between energy factors provided by nature, between fossil energies and renewable energies. A topic on which the next G20 should agree, on the assumption that this sword suspended above humanity requires a common vision and political commitment from all participating countries. With these considerations the geopolitical picture is simplified. We do not have two sides of good and bad, but rather one big side with most continents. With the exclusion of Russia and Iran, which are the oil-producing countries that see with anxiety and trembling the inevitable decline of fossil energy on which the warmongering arrogance that characterizes them is based.

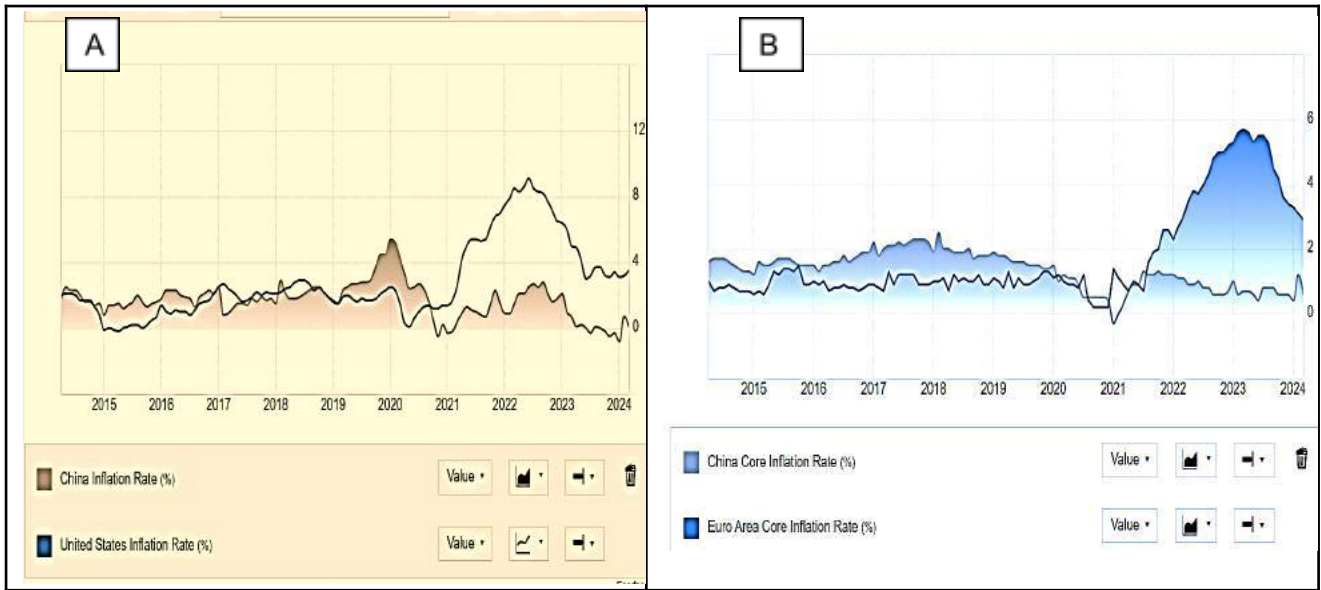
China does not appear in the geopolitics picture, as simplified according to the economic aspect. It's like waiting. The large Asian country must reconcile post-market communism with the potential decline, natural I would say, of the overwhelming development of the recent past. There is no point in a trade war which, as mentioned, must be channeled into a profile of natural compatibility. Not even competition on cutting-edge technologies seems appropriate,

both because collaboration and not antagonism must prevail in this matter.

### *1.2 The Stasis of Economic Development which, Like Sleeping Beauty, May Remain Flat for Several Decades*

Having simplified the geopolitical scenario on the basis of the general economic framework, there is the cumbersome demand for the resources necessary to face the planet's troubles with a probability of success. Without forgetting, however, that everything is subject to the ability of the global economic system to create the greater necessary resources. As I was saying, the problem is not the recompositing of the reserves of weapons and ammunition, which are the dark side of the opposition between the blocs. But, on the contrary, the possibilities offered on the economic side, to coordinate the harmonious development of the continents, which is the basis for tackling the curse of unnatural development. As if to say that the problem of global warming requires first overcoming the distortion of disorderly economic growth. In fact, the conflict between humanity and the planet that hosts us must be addressed by all communities. The attention of some and the inattention of others making no sense. But harmony in action is necessary.

The starting point, therefore, is the state of the global economy. Why in the last thirty years has the world economy been affected by violent speculative processes that have led to serious financial crises. In short, the speculative race until the final crisis affected Japan in 1990, much of the West in 2008 2009 and finally China in recent years, again in the real estate sector. I would add that the ultra-speculative phenomenon has always manifested itself with the aftermath of a serious deflation. For our purposes, i.e. the medium-term economic horizon, the ongoing story in China is important. The race of financial values is a dramatic event but generally underestimated, except in the face of the fearful crisis that is its natural severe sequel. It seems difficult to digest but the financial crisis puts an end to the process of values growing without rules, albeit with serious damage to the economy.



Source: Elaborations on Trading Economics

Figure 2 A: China & USA Inflation Rates      B: China & Euro Area Inflation Rates  
 C: China, Euro Area, India, USA Producer Prices Change (%)

The underestimation of the phenomenon, while it is ongoing, is in fact. Not differently in China, the progressive insolvency of three real estate giants (Evergrande, Country Garden, Shimao Group), and the related excess of construction without a market and prepaid and undelivered houses, is partly contained with public spending. Also to contain social resentment. The experience of the speculative booms of the past seems to confirm

that interventions are necessary on a social level, but without as much importance on the economic level, which inevitably suffers a serious recessionary crisis and at the same time the tendency towards deflation which shall prolonged over time –

The underlying issue that needs to be addressed is not so much the trend of the cycle in China but

Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelities

rather the sinking of deflation, which already from the first signs of excesses in residential construction showed the change in the direction of inflation. For what reason? Previous experience in theme of hard speculation shows that countries with weak finances are especially affected, in which there can be a noticeable drop in gross product. Countries, like Japan, which have not hesitated to support the economy post speculative boom, even at the cost of an acceleration of public debt to unusual levels, show a different fate. In fact, deflation has remained an unwelcome guest for over twenty years in the land of the rising sun. With an additional price. The stasis of economic development which, like Sleeping Beauty, are remained flat for several decades.

The Asian country is adopting the same strategy used by its historic competitor. That is, an increase in public spending to avoid the bankruptcy of the real estate giants. This strategy to support the economy, and especially the residential sector, has profound social as well as economic reasons. Let us not forget that the country is the veteran of a long period of excellent results on the path of accelerated development and that the social acceptance of the non-libertarian regime is perhaps based on the economic achievements of which the regime boasts. It must be said that it seems risky to argue that the exceptional steps taken by China after the Second World War are thanks to the Chinese autocracy. It was a composite result in which, alongside the traditional culture of imperial China, a favorable global scenario converged. Well, apart from the search for the paternity of the exceptional economic leap in China, the fact remains that these excellences have undoubtedly favored an autocratic, post-communist regime.

Therefore, it is also the social tensions that have rumbled about the consequences of the near bankruptcies of giants in the real estate sector that recommend widening the public spending cord to contain the hardship of families waiting for homes, even prepaid ones. This brief aside consolidates the idea that the Chinese government is forced to keep these moribund real estate giants afloat. Which is to say that China is following the Japanese strategy after the exceptional

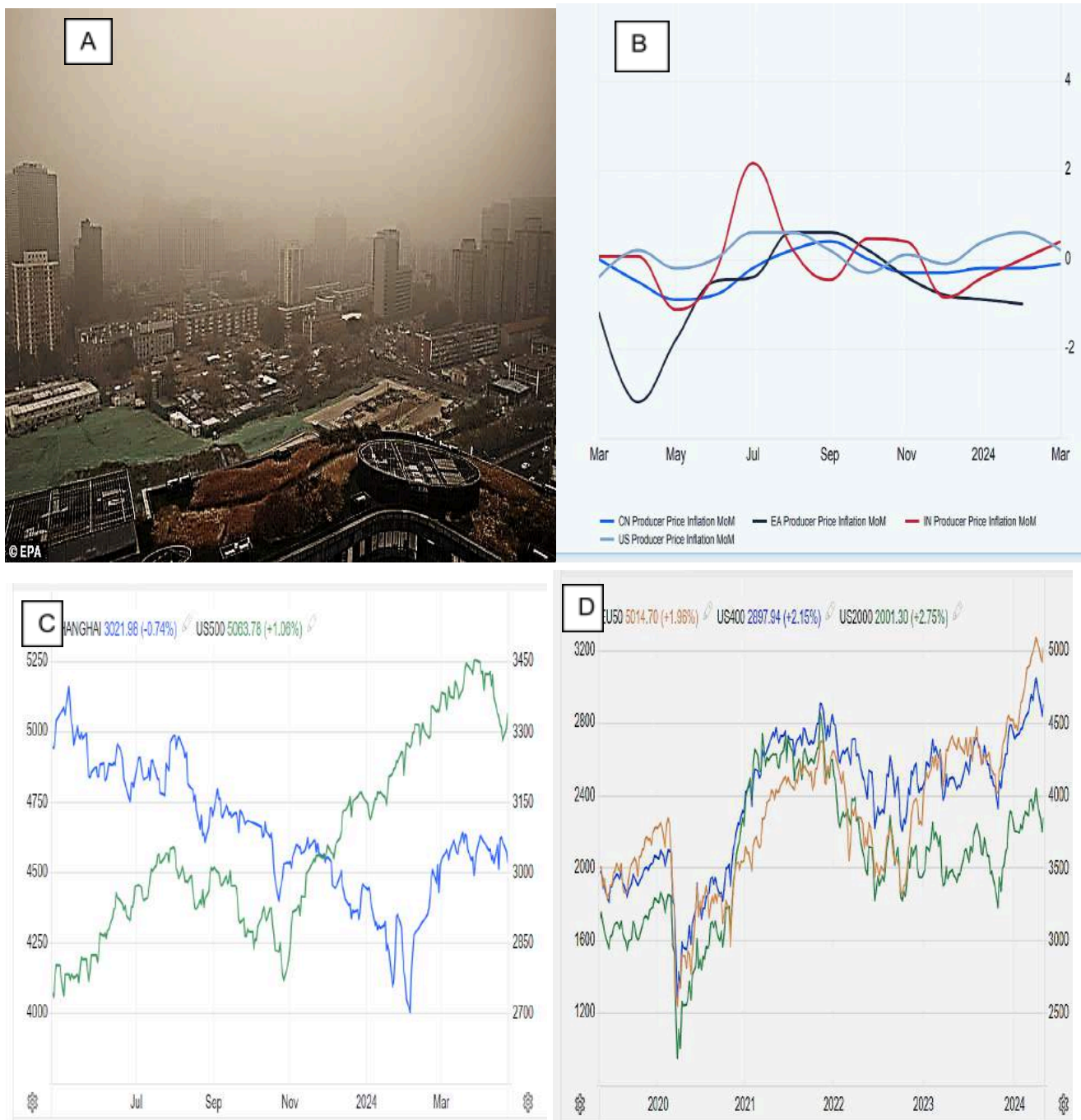
speculative boom for many reasons, not just economic ones. On a macro data level, this may mean that the decline in the pace of development, which until the end of the last decade ran in double digits, "obtorto collo", may undergo a considerable decline in the coming years. Until the peaceful haven of zero development for as many years as the duration of deflation in the country.

A mortgage on China's future that can give value to the thesis we support. China should not be considered a potential antagonist of a group that we can generally consider democratic and/or converging towards democracy. The country has internal problems and seems to aim not to disappoint the Chinese community which has an imperial past of excellent culture which, like the United States and other large countries, has an originality that made Morse, Jerome (1783) say "that the new country would expand westward, would propagate principles of freedom throughout the Americas and would become the supreme crowning achievement of human civilization throughout that period and beyond" "In that period America passionately argued that the challenge was not territorial expansion in the traditional sense, but the divinity-preordained diffusion of the principles of freedom." (Kissinger, 2015) – (Gordon (2016)

As I was saying, however, it is necessary above all to monitor the trend of domestic and export prices to measure the effects that current and future deflation may make slowing down the forces of development. In the coming years, the expectation is that the gross product in China will grow modestly and perhaps within the limits of 3-4%. Only to then suffer a decline and disappear to zero. As is known, deflation cannot be counteracted with the attempt to support the declining economy or, as in the case under examination, to avoid the financial collapse of the real estate giants. There is only one method to stem the decreasing or negative rates of prices (as well as the automatically accelerating rates of inflation), that is, recession. Because inflation and deflation are phenomena without a certain paternity, which are ideally modeled by physical laws such as those that regulate matter. They aim

to send a message to the community that things in the economy are going badly and that a change of management is needed. In democratic systems, the change of management is implemented by the communities through periodic recourse to the ballot box. For countries with autocratic management, the natural message on the fate of the local economy does not remain without meaning. Because the presence of inflation and deflation everywhere changes the community's framework of consensus and dissent. On the inevitable assumption that no autocrat can go against the current of community sentiment and sooner or later community negative feelings will prevail over illiberal power.

It must be added that both inflation and deflation are opposite phenomena that cannot coexist. Therefore, if a country is struggling with deflation, it cannot be allowed to coexist with natural inflation (therefore linked to an automatic mechanism that fuels the rise in prices). Therefore, the deflationary base that continues to characterize many areas of the West (especially Europe) could not have coexisted with natural inflation equipped with automatic acceleration. Therefore, the inflation that hit the West in the years 2021-2023 was an inflation from international costs (fossil energy), devoid of accelerating automatism.



Source: Elaborations on data Trading Economics

**Figure 3 A:** Thick cloud of pollution in Beijing **B:** CN, Euro, US, India Producer Prices Inflation MoM  
**C:** Shanghai, US 500 trend 2023 - 2024 **D:** EU 50, US 400, US 2000 Trend stock exchanges

This brief overview introduces us to the topic of deflation and the consequences of this monetary morbidity. Unfortunately, they are undervalued because the index usually falls weakly or tends cautiously to negative. The consequences on the economy, therefore, can be underestimated or even welcomed positively, especially in a country that is considered the world's factory. In truth it is

a rope that tightens the economy around the neck and sucks its potential. At first glance, as we have already said, the fall in gross product undergoes a slow decline, reviving hopes that the counteracting game carried out by public deficit spending can balance the attraction towards the recession typical of deflation. This is a serious mistake. Stemming the financial fall in a

Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelities

deflationary context can have convincing motivations and effects. However, the hope that we can fight deflation with the use of (excessive) liquidity is a mistake that Japan has paid for with the twenty-year stasis of the development trend. The issue, however, of deflation in China is not an event destined to remain within the country, precisely because of the size reached by the Chinese economy and the widespread network of commercial relationships with the rest of the world.

I am talking about the contagion that deflationary China can export to many Western countries that have extensive commercial links with Chinese entrepreneurship. Let us remember that one of the "natural" conditions that allowed the Asian giant to make a great leap for decades were American and European companies, attracted to China by the low cost of labor and a workforce with an adequate level of education. In response to the attraction to relocate industrial plants, China has become the factory of the world. I just note in passing that the move towards China has had no consequences, if not worsening, on global warming. The images of cities of the Middle Empire enveloped in a pall of soot and dust are sadly known. (Collins, & Margo, 2004)

In return (hyperbolic) to the transfer of industrial plants to China, today and over time we will have a return deflation in all countries that maintain commercial relations with the Asian country. We could say that it will be a light deflationary wave. However, the impact that the countries will suffer will be proportional to the export harvest that will reach individual Western and Asian neighboring countries from China. The concern may be intensified because many countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America already suffer from a residue of deflation, which is in the economic veins of half the world as a result of the financial crisis of 2008-2009. The question we can ask is the following. Can the residual deflation that has existed in Europe for over a decade be added to that we are importing from China? And with what consequences? To seek auspices regarding the summability of domestic and imported deflation, we can remember that even in the recent inflation from international costs the latter was added to

the residual existing deflation. I would say, thus contributing to the somewhat impulsive collapse of the leap in inflation.

IN conclusion, in the coming years the countries most exposed to Chinese contagion can expect some steps in imported deflation. Imported deflation behaves like international cost inflation; the in-corpore and imported deflation are algebraically added. With what practical effects? We have seen them in almost all European countries in which international cost inflation which had reached a level of 12% on average was reduced to 2.5% on average, I would say anticipating the also decreasing prices of fossil energy.

I would like to add that the transmission of Chinese deflation to Western and Asian countries moves in the wake of Chinese export prices around the world. The novelty lies in the strong impulse of the mass of Chinese exports, certainly not to be underestimated. I doubt we have an antidote to rid the world of the influence the Chinese economy will have on monetary anomalies outside of China. We also believe that China's export costs impose a downward trend on the production of export-oriented countries, including Germany and Italy. With the result of setting in motion a further push towards deflation, in particular, as a reaction in countries with an export vocation and which suffer from monetary dumping of exported Chinese products.

### *1.3 The Risk is Underestimating the Dangers Inherent in Deflation*

The thorniest issue is the real or expected behavior of the main Western central banks. Not only because of the uncertainty that seems to dominate interest rate trends. The panorama is complicated by the presence in Europe, and consequently in America, of the carambola of inflation and then of ongoing or imported deflation. Venturing into the jungle of forecasts is difficult because the disturbances that the wars in Europe and the Middle East will cause on the economies of the main countries are unknown. For the next meeting sessions of the FED or the ECB, the greatest concern remains regarding the

direction, up or down, that prices will take in the major countries. Dynamics on the cost of money are therefore expected. On the other side of the Atlantic, it is excluded rate adjustments which remain at 5-1/4 to 5-1/2%. If to simplify the reasoning we exclude the geopolitical framework for now, the thermometer seems linked to the strength of the American economy, which excludes interventions to lower rates for now. The expected decision of an initial downward adjustment of rates in the Euro Area is more problematic.

The euro area, in fact, is subject to residual inflation, due to international costs, and natural deflation, which remains in its veins with the impact of deflation imported especially from the Chinese market. The result is before our eyes. A perhaps too rapid decline in the inflationary wave that hit the costs of fossil energy. A condition has therefore been created that seems favorable to the expectations of a decline in the cost of money in the Euro Area with a first cut of 25 basis points by June. The positions remain somewhat conflicting. Which position to take and why? The geopolitical situation advises against anticipating monetary policy moves. But in the hope that the context does not worsen, we must insist on the inadvisability of reducing the cost of money. Let's see why. The economy of the area would benefit from a limited drop in the cost of money. Little or nothing, it would in fact be a conceptual push that relies on the hope of further cuts in the coming months. Well, this prospect seems harmful. The problem is the persistence of deflation and the downward pressure on the cost of imported Chinese products. The latter is a non-limited downward tension, destined to last for a long time. With what results. The downward pressure on industrial production in Europe due to the competitive pressure (monetary dumping) exerted by Chinese industry.

A real puzzle. Because the "natural" deflation that Europe inherited from the 2008-2009 financial crisis cannot be fought at the pace of favorable monetary and economic policy. Unfortunately, easing economic and monetary policies has a harsh cost: the fall in the economy's productivity and, in combination, the probable new race to the

top of stock markets and asset values. It can be added that an adjustment to interest rates would be welcomed in the commercial and industrial sectors to compete with Chinese competition. Furthermore, sharing the need for the European area to stem the innovation of below-cost products, it seems appropriate to implement anti-damping actions in defense.

We add that the geopolitical framework looms with fluctuations in the costs of fossil energy, with the consequence that cost inflation adds to the deflation in the field. Thus, it obscures the true presence of underlying deflation in many economic systems. In other words, modest variations above 2-3% in prices in the western area must be deciphered considering the confluence of disturbing elements on the prices scale. On the other hand, deflation and inflation are not tools at our disposal. Instead, they are, or we should consider them as such, instruments that have no paternity and which emerge to give alarm messages about the unbalanced direction of the economy. Therefore, help to avoid a potential irreversible fall on economic systems. As said, monetary messages are directed to the community whose task is to control and give correct direction to the economy. (Kose, Otrok, Whiteman, 2019).

In other words, following the natural order and not the selfishness of some leaders, it would be possible to maintain the course of development along the line of constant and gradual growth. Which instead is lost for the global economy due to wrong decisions. In this regard, it must be considered that it is up to the community to give consent or dissent to government programs. (Cossiga, 2023) Under non-democratic conditions, the principle always remains that no autocrat can rule against his citizens. In some way, the economy's tendency towards constant and gradual growth is written into natural laws, in accordance with the nature that welcomes us. The frequent deviations from the natural path of development of human societies are the reason and the cause that brings inflation and deflation into the field of economics. Two different and opposite monetary anomalies that come into play not by chance, but to correct distinct developmental ailments. As I have already said,

deflation comes into play when speculation pushes asset values to levels incompatible with the market. If this upward race could continue, the moment of no return would be reached. Well, to avoid the looming danger, deflation comes into play and informs the community about the serious malaise that looms. In order for the community can play its part as a guarantor of good governance for advanced democratic countries and to disagree elsewhere. It's not enough because the good rules don't end here. If the message of deflation is not enough to correct the status quo, it means that speculation will continue its crazy race. But here too there is a limit that cannot be overcome. Beyond which the unscrupulous race stops due to the looming financial crisis and the lack of liquidity.

It is difficult not to see in this relaunch between imbalance and sudden stops, on the threshold of grave danger for the fate of humanity, a wonderful natural shield against our ignorance. It's true that in economics nothing is free and if you make a mistake you pay. The community pays, as it is the spokesperson for the laws that regulate the economy and has the task of supervising the direction of development. Not only in countries of advanced democracy, which are responsible for political leadership, even in countries governed by autocrats who survive only if they increase the well-being of the community. (Cossiga, 2021)

The risk is underestimating the dangers inherent in deflation. The long-term monetary anomaly coexists with the phenomenon of speculation of financial values, which take on an autonomous character with respect to the real economy. The off-roading of asset values and stock markets is pushed towards increasing values independent of the condition of the real economy. On the other hand, the attraction exerted by the financial market takes away means and financing from the languishing real economy. Monetary policy then comes into play. It is considered reasonable for interest rates to fall in conjunction with deflated prices. A cheap credit market therefore opens, which fuels speculation and the rise in asset values. All this, while the real economy remains weak.

I repeat, the risk is the reiteration of the speculation process which stops with the financial crisis and the consequent damage to the development of the territory. The danger may intrude by an accommodating monetary policy, but it is an accommodation for speculation and leaven without substance for stock market and asset values. Given that interest rates have been affected by the recovery of inflation (from international costs), the claim that the conditions have been created in Europe for a reduction in rates, on several occasions until 2025, seems improvident. The issues of support for the economy are up to economic policy while monetary policy must look to the long term. And there is also, albeit remotely, the danger of the resurgence of a new speculative bubble that once again affects the economy at all levels. For those who suggest a drop in rates to give breathing space to industry and commerce, it must be confirmed that in times of even imported deflation, development potential languishes, while the availability of credit moves in favor of speculation. It must be repeated that deflation can only be fought with a restrictive monetary policy that allows the economic system to follow the path to recovery of equilibrium.

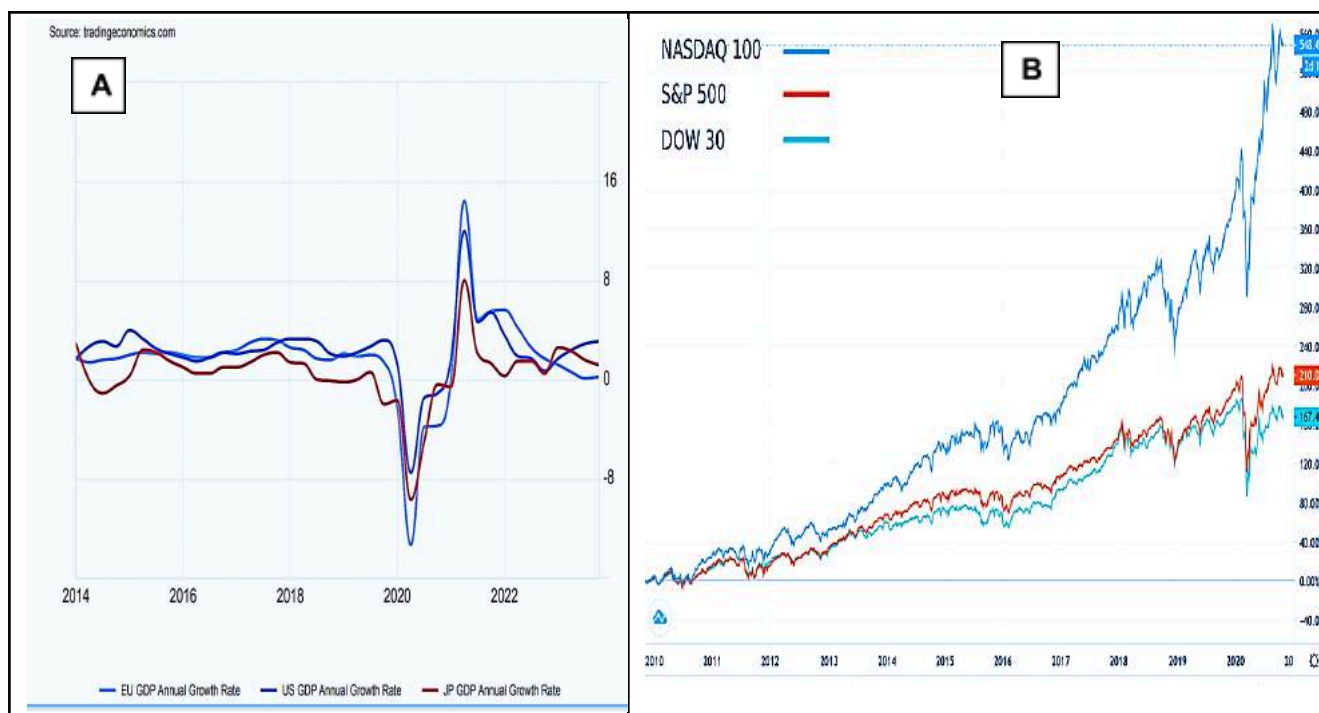


Figure 4 A: EU, US, JP GDP Annual Growth Rates B: Nasdaq 100, Dow 30, S&P 500 from 2010 to 2023

Still about the global economy, the danger of the current direction is confirmed among other things by the run of the US stock markets (see figures 4 B), which show the irresistible climb of stocks in American territory. The abrupt interruption marked in the 2020s confirms that not all evils come to harm. The serious Worldwide epidemic has severely affected life on the planet but has blocked the rise on the financial market. A deep pause. However, as can be seen, the attractive force of speculation has regained strength. An undoubted sign of the lack of attention paid to deflation, which instead fuels a danger that is as serious as long-term inflation. Also significant is the acceleration marked by the Nasdaq, the US stock exchange for technology companies, which are more sensitive to the tensions imposed by speculation. (figures 4 B)

Faced with the challenges that await humanity in relations with the planet and the various communities, the essential problem is to accelerate the development of the global economy by taking the path of constant gradual development, not in conflict with the laws of nature. Well, the current condition, which sees half the globe grappling with deflation and therefore with a chronic slowdown in economic growth, becomes in itself an unknown danger.

There is always a lurking theory that the good condition of the stock markets and finance is a good omen for the real economy. Unfortunately, this is not true. Why? The natural task of deflation is to correct the excess financialization of the market, which leads to speculative excesses. Letting the natural control mechanism operate means:

- Take note that support for the economy, for the relaunch of the declining economic cycle, goes against the natural ongoing correction.
- The cost of money plays a primary role in curbing the tendency towards a gap between the strength of the financial market and the weakness of the real economy.

It is naive to believe that we can circumvent the natural barrier represented by deflation. This is demonstrated by the singular weakness shown in the last decade by the euro countries and in particular by Germany, France and Italy. In compliance with the rule that in economics those who make mistakes pay, we must have the political courage not to intervene and to let the natural mechanism of recovery of imbalances operate.

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Perhaps We are at a Turning Point, But We are not Aware of the Novelities

The path that monetary policy must take in Europe and America is more difficult. Above all, we must not listen to the market sirens calling for interest rate cuts. An imminent danger in Europe, where the siren song of deflation hides the reality and presents a scenario of prices in equilibrium close to 2%. A false equilibrium which in concrete terms is the algebraic result of inflation from slowly falling international prices and continued deflation present in the EU area for well over a decade and exasperated by the financial crisis of 2008-2009. I would add that I agree with the economic and political analysis recently made by Mario Draghi, but without the discipline to ward off the siren of deflation, it will not be possible to recover the balance of constant and gradual development (to respect nature).

## II. CONCLUSION

In short, after having discussed the hypothesis that the resolution of the war in Europe could be the epicenter on which to reconstruct the transition towards a new era, still distant but whose contours can be glimpsed. It is suggestive to think that the topic in question is not a new balance between West and East, a new hierarchy between East and West but rather a change of perspective dictated once again not by the hierarchy of weapons but by the change in the economic paradigm. It is not a question of measuring the economic strength of each individual, because war can objectively be overcome, because it is in turn based on the variable wave of the economy. The idea is that the new economic paradigm is abundance. Therefore, abandon the ideology of scarcity on which the social scheme of relations between territories is built and instead admit that we have reached the threshold of an era that abandons wealth as a privilege of the few. (Smith, 1922) Choose the path of coordinated and accelerated development, which is now possible for humans only if we realize that the solution is never war. Also for the challenges that life has ahead of it.

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# Intrigues at the Royal Court

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## ABSTRACT

Saul used his son and daughters as pawns in his plan to kill David, his arch enemy. Contrary to his plans, Jonathan and Michal aided David. David's goal was to reach the throne thus he befriended and fooled them. It was a sympathetic author from the house of David who exaggerated the description of love between David and Jonathan and the tense relationship between Saul and his son Jonathan. By doing so he tried to legitimize David's right to the throne.

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# Intrigues at the Royal Court

Shaul Bar

## ABSTRACT

*Saul used his son and daughters as pawns in his plan to kill David, his arch enemy. Contrary to his plans, Jonathan and Michal aided David. David's goal was to reach the throne thus he befriended and fooled them. It was a sympathetic author from the house of David who exaggerated the description of love between David and Jonathan and the tense relationship between Saul and his son Jonathan. By doing so he tried to legitimize David's right to the throne.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Examination of texts from the Ancient Near East shows that deception was a way of life. Even the gods engaged in deception and trickery. In Mesopotamian literature Ea the god of great wisdom and cunning appears to be a trickster. In the myth of Adapa, the god Ea fears that the great god Anu was planning to offer Adapa the food and drink of eternal life. To prevent Adapa from accepting it, Ea tricked him into believing that the food and drink are deadly. Adapa listened to the advice and did not accept the food and drink and therefore humans are mortals.<sup>1</sup> Similarly in Egyptian literature four deities are mentioned as engaging in deception: Re, Isis, Horace, and Seth. In one papyrus Isis's talent for deception is mentioned:

“Now, Isis was a wise woman. Her heart was more devious than millions among men; she was more selective than millions among the gods; she was more exacting than millions among the blessed dead.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speiser, Adapa, 101-103.

<sup>2</sup> Legend, Ritner, 33-34.

The Hebrew Bible, with its high moral standards did not approve deceitfulness as we read in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20,7). However, deception was a way of life, and the Hebrew Bible contains many stories of trickery and deception. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob used deception. Abraham and Isaac passed their wives as their sisters, and Jacob deceived his older brother Isaac to steal the blessing from his brother Esau.<sup>3</sup> No different is the story of Saul and the establishment of the monarchy. All the main characters; Saul, his son Jonathan, his daughters Merab and Michal, and Saul's arch enemy David, are engaged in deceptive acts. King Saul used his daughters in his battle against David. He offered his daughter Merab and later Michal to David but then negated on those promises. Michal who was supposed to help her father in his feud with David turned against her father and helped David, but later despised David. David, like Saul, used Merab and Michal, he did not love them but used them for his own personal gains. Saul wanted his son Jonathan to replace him, but Jonathan, in contrast to his father's wishes, made a covenant with David and concealed his meetings with him. He aided his father's arch enemy. So, what led him to abandon his father and to aid his father's foe, how can we explain the covenant between Jonathan and David? What did Jonathan gain from it? Was David sincere about the covenant and his relationship with Jonathan? Why was Saul, who tried to trap and kill David, so zealous in his pursuit of him? We will examine the different acts of deceptions to understand the

<sup>3</sup> In the Jacob cycle all the protagonists take part and play a role in deception: Jacob, Rebecca, Laban, Leah, Rachel, Simeon, and Levi, Hamor and his son Shechem. Later in the Joseph's stories Jacob's sons, deceived their father, Tamar -Judah's daughter- in-law paused as a harlot and slept with Judah, Joseph put his brothers through a series of test and ordered to put the silver goblet in Benjamin's bag and afterwards accused the brothers with theft.

rationale behind them, to see what our protagonist tried to gain by those acts.

## II. SAUL VERSES JONATHAN

Although Jonathan is one of the main characters in the book of Samuel, he does not appear alone. Jonathan is always mentioned with his father Saul or with David. From the start, tension exists between Saul and Jonathan.<sup>4</sup> This tension will intensify with David's arrival at Saul's court. In Jonathan's second attack against the Philistine garrison, we read: "but he did not tell his father" (1 Sam 14,1). At first glance, it is possible that Jonathan did not reveal his plans to his father to guard the element of surprise. Had he known, Saul probably would not have approved his plan. Another possible explanation holds that Jonathan wanted to glorify himself, not his father. While Jonathan did not inform his father of his plan to attack the Philistine garrison, he does tell David that his father, Saul, wants to kill him (19,1). Later he again informs David about his father's plans (20,9). The narrator inserted these pieces of information to illuminate the tension between father and son. Jonathan repeatedly sides with David and conceals his relationship with David from his father.

To further demonstrate the gap between father and son, the text says that Saul wanted to kill David, yet on the other hand, Jonathan was "very fond" of David (1 Sam 19,1). The narrator used the words "very fond" to show the disparity between father and son. In the previous chapter, Saul's servants told David that the king was "fond of him," but evidently, they were not being honest (18,22). Originally Saul planned to kill David indirectly "by the hand of the Philistines" (18,17; 21; 25), however his plan failed therefore, he urged his son Jonathan and all his courtiers to kill David (19,1). He tried to enlist his son to join him in his murderous plan. But Jonathan who was "very fond" of David went directly to him and informed him about his father's plan. So, he advised David to hide which saved David's life. Jonathan acts contrary to his father's wishes; he aids his father's enemy. He also promised David that he would

speak on his behalf and keep him informed about what he discovered; in other words, he was David's spy. At this point, Jonathan tried to mediate between David and Saul. Jonathan is torn between his loyalties to his father and to his father arch enemy. In his plea to save David, Jonathan spoke well of David.<sup>5</sup> Jonathan stressed the fact that David did not sin against his father Saul, therefore, his father should not sin against David. He admonished his father to not shed David's blood. For a while Jonathan succeeds, since Saul agreed with him and swore that he would not kill David (19,6).

### 2.1 Saul's Fury Against Jonathan

An open rift between Saul and his son Jonathan is displayed at a sacrificial meal. What is not clear however, is why after three escapes recorded in chapter 19, did David returned to Gibeah. More so, what made him think that Saul would expect to see him in his usual place at the king's table? When Saul noticed David's absence, it appears he forgot about his murderous intentions towards David. He thinks that David's absence has to do with ritual uncleanness; therefore, he asked Jonathan why was David absent? In reply to his father's question, Jonathan answered with a lie that was arranged between him and David. Accordingly, David had to attend a family feast; therefore, he asked his permission to leave for Bethlehem. Jonathan used the phrase "let me slip away" to describe David's request. The verb *ml̄* appears several times to describe David's flight from Saul in the previous chapter (v. 10, 11, 12, 17, 18).<sup>6</sup> The usage of that phrase is striking since it provoked Saul's anger. In the previous chapter, it described Michal's assistance to help David escape; now it is Jonathan who helps Saul's archenemy. The mention of the sacrifice also contributed to Saul's anger; it reminded Saul of David's rumored anointing by Samuel in a similar

<sup>4</sup> Long, Reign, 101; Whitelam, Just King, 78.

<sup>5</sup> McCarter points to the Amarna archives, where the king of Jerusalem Abdi-Heba requested the Egyptian scribes act as his advocate and "speak good/beautiful words" to the king. McCarter recognizes the political overtones in Jonathan's words; that David has done well, that he acted with the loyalty that he owes his king. See: McCarter, I Samuel, 322.

<sup>6</sup> Edelman, King Saul, 159; Fokkelman, Narrative, 335.

situation.<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly Saul's reaction was harsh. He insulted Jonathan and called him a son of a perverse rebellious woman; he puts doubt on his mother's qualities.<sup>8</sup> Saul is very angry with Jonathan since he sided with his enemy. Jonathan forsakes him uniting with David, an act that casts a shadow on him and his mother who gave birth to him. His friendship with David was embarrassing, as it was embarrassing to the nakedness(*'erwo*) of his mother.<sup>9</sup>

Saul commanded Jonathan to bring David to him because he is "a son of death."<sup>10</sup> In contrast to his son Jonathan, who was naïve, Saul realized the danger that David posed; "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be secure" (20,31). He tried to appeal to Jonathan's self-interest as the future king.<sup>11</sup> Despite his father's harsh words Jonathan still tried to defend David. He asked why should David be put to death, what did he do? This is the same question that David asked Jonathan 'What did I do?' at the beginning of the chapter (20,1). In response to Jonathan's question Saul tried to kill him, he cast his spear at Jonathan. Jonathan finds himself in the same situation that David experienced when Saul tried to kill him twice. Jobling points to the merging of identities and roles played in the portrayal of David and Jonathan in these chapters.<sup>12</sup> According to Josephus, Saul was eager to kill him but: "he did not indeed do what he intended, because he was hindered by his friends."<sup>13</sup> Saul was so consumed with hatred and fear of David that he considered every ally of David as his enemy, even his own son.

Until this point Jonathan tried to convince himself that his father did not have any lethal intentions, but now he realized the true goal of his father. The rift between father and son is on full display. Jonathan rose from the table with rage, he was so angry with his father that he left without asking permission and without bidding farewell. He was so grieved that he did not eat that day. Jonathan was shocked by his humiliation; his father not only rebuked him in public but also tried to kill him. Klein suggested that Jonathan was more shocked at his father's humiliation of David.<sup>14</sup> Jonathan resented the wrong done to David, his father referred to David as the son of Jesse and a son of death. However, we believe that he was angry over his own humiliation in addition to David's humiliation.

## 2.2 Not a Mad King

Many passages in the book of Samuel portray Saul negatively- as a paranoid man who chased demons obsessed with the pursuit of David. More than once the text says that Saul feared David (18,12; 15; 29). At first it is not clear why Saul the king of Israel feared him. But a close reading of the biblical text reveals that Saul had good reasons to fear David. Saul understood that David planned to replace him as a king. As Saul's armor-bearer and leading the troops in the battlefield made him popular, all Israel and Judah loved him (v.16). The word "love" has the connotation of political loyalty here.<sup>15</sup> David received the loyalty of the troops because of his victories against the Philistines. Saul was acclaimed king after his victory against the Ammonite (1 Sam 11), he controlled his kingdom with his military troops. Now it is David who leads the troops that increased his popularity which caused Saul to fear him. In the ancient world kings feared for their life, many times they were overthrown by their own military leaders. Saul was fearing for his life and for the life of his son Jonathan. He wanted to create a dynasty that Jonathan would inherit. Therefore, he tried to speak to his son's conscience by telling him that

<sup>7</sup> Edelman, King Saul, 159.

<sup>8</sup> 4QSamb and LXX have "son of rebellious maidens," and McCarter accordingly reads "You son of a rebellious servant girl!" Saul accuses Jonathan of forsaking him, being "son of" meant member of the class, but Jonathan forsakes those to whom he owed allegiance see McCarter, I Samuel, 343.

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word *'erwo*, most often refers to genitalia, which seems to suggest that through his disgraceful actions, Jonathan also brought shame to his mother.

<sup>10</sup> The Targum translates here "for he is a man deserving death."

<sup>11</sup> Gordon, I&II Samuel, 168.

<sup>12</sup> Jobling, Sense, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Josephus, Ant. 6.11.9.

<sup>14</sup> Klein, 1 Samuel, 209.

<sup>15</sup> Moran, Ancient, 77-87; McCarter, I Samuel 33, 313.

his kingdom would not be established if the son of Jesse is alive (1 Sam 20,31).

The impression that David obtained power to rival Saul is a realistic one. Not only did David lead the troops, he also tried to sway the people to his side which is indicated by Saul's own words to his people: "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give fields and vineyards to every one of you? And will he make all of you captains of thousands or captains of hundreds? Is that why all of you have conspired against me? (22,7-8). David was a shrewd cunning man, he led the troops in the battlefield, befriended Jonathan the heir to the throne, and married Michal the king's daughter. His aim was to get closer to the royal family to have them support him and to seize power. He got closer to the royal family and he fooled Saul. At first Saul did not grasp the danger that David posed to his dynasty. Had he known, he would not have allowed David to undermine him.

David's rising popularity among the people following his victories against the Philistines led Saul to realize the danger that David posed to his kingship. Therefore, he started to fear him and planned to kill him. McKenzie suggested that Saul's pursuit of David is a result of a failed coup attempt although he maintained that it is impossible to prove it.<sup>16</sup> But reading the text indeed points to this direction. David led a group of rebels which means that he had his own army ready at any time to overthrow the king. He fought independently without Saul's aid and approval against the Philistines (1 Sam 23,1-4), and the Amalekites (1 Sam 30,17-20); all of this leads us to the conclusion that at some point he tried to overthrow the king.

Still the question remains; why did David failed in his attempt to seize the throne? The simple answer is that he did not receive enough support. The declaration that all Israel and Judah showed loyalty to David is an exaggeration (18,16). The description of David's flight from Saul in chapters 20-27 reveals that David and his people were unwelcomed in Judah which is David's own tribe.

David had to ask the king of Moab to let his father and mother stay in his territory so they would be protected (1 Sam 22,3). He experienced hostility from the inhabitants of Maon, Carmel and Zipah who were willing to surrender him to Saul. It is suggested that David was rejected by the people of the Judean hill territory because they feared Saul. This is unlikely, if they sided with David, we would expect to find some deeds that would show some support.<sup>17</sup>

What emerges from the stories about Saul and Jonathan is a rift and mistrust between father and son. Saul wanted to create a dynasty where his son Jonathan would replace him as king. He tried to use Jonathan in his fights against David. But Jonathan did the opposite he helped his father's archenemy David to escape. He became a loyal friend of David, the man who would be king instead of him. In the first part of the stories, Jonathan is portrayed as a military hero who fought for freedom from the Philistine oppression. These stories which stress Jonathan's heroism were written by the supporters of the house of Saul. On the other hand, supporters of David wrote the stories that describe the friendship between Jonathan and David. These stories came to legitimize David's right to the throne. Therefore, not surprisingly, we read about the rift and mistrust between Jonathan and Saul. Yet, despite all of it, with all the negatively that describes the tense relations between Jonathan and Saul, Jonathan did not desert his father. In the final battle on Mount Gilboa, he went and fought with his father against the Philistines, where he and his two brothers died.

### III. JONATHAN AND DAVID

Following David's defeat of Goliath, Jonathan's soul became attached to David's soul and Jonathan loved him as himself (1 Sam 18,1). This is the first time that the two met and they became "soul brothers." According to Ackroyd, Jonathan felt bound to him by affection and political loyalty.<sup>18</sup> The friendship between the two is repeated in the text (20,18); and when the two

<sup>16</sup> McKenzie, King David, 87-88.

<sup>17</sup> Brooks, Saul, 71.

<sup>18</sup> Ackroyd, Verb, 213-14.

finally were separated “they kissed each other and wept together” (20,41). In David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan, we read: “My brother Jonathan, you were most dear to me, your love was wonderful to me more than the love of women” (2 Sam 1,26). According to McKenzie there is an exaggeration in the description of this relationship. The two he suggested may have been friends once. But David break from Saul was also a break from Jonathan. Jonathan did not abandon his father and did not follow David into the wilderness. Instead, at the end he was loyal to his father and fought with him in the battle against the Philistines where they both died.<sup>1919</sup>

The love between the two led to a covenant which was based on Jonathan’s love for David. Later David will mention this covenant: “Deal faithfully with your servant, since you have taken your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you” (20,8). David’s motives for the covenant with Jonathan are clear. It took place during the period when Saul started to fear him and began his plans to kill him. The friendship between the two came to help David during this period, he used Jonathan to assist him to survive. What is not clear are Jonathan’s motives for the covenant. Why did he help David who sought to replace his father and take his own place as the future king of Israel? What did he gain by this covenant? Trying to explain the rational for the covenant Morgenstern raised the possibility that the son-in-law had greater claim to the throne than the son, so a pact between Jonathan and David was sealed.<sup>2020</sup> The fact that David was the son-in-law and a mighty warrior made him the natural candidate to replace Saul.<sup>2121</sup> However, this is unlikely since Jonathan was also a great warrior and was the king’s son. We believe that this description of the covenant between the two is hyperbole. More than likely, a sympathetic author who wanted to legitimize David’s right to the throne composed these stories.

As part of the covenant David promised not to cut Jonathan’s house (20,15; 42). This covenant spared Jonathan’s crippled son Mephibosheth’s

life (also called Meribbaal). David brought him back to the court and restored to him all the land that belonged to the Saulide family “for I will keep faith with you for the sake of your father Jonathan” (2 Sam 9,7). In another incident he spared his life when he handed seven males of Saul’s house to be sacrificed by the Gibeonites to end the three-year famine.

In ancient Israel, a king was a sacred person who had the authority to perform religious functions such as a priest.<sup>2222</sup> But the text of Leviticus (21,16-24) states that even a man of priestly descent could not qualify for priesthood if he suffered from any physical disability.<sup>2323</sup> The king was supposed to lead his army into the battlefield, but Mephibosheth’s physical condition prevented him from leading the troops. In other words, he was not a threat to David. By describing David showing compassion towards Mephibosheth after Jonathan’s death, the narrator depicted him as a merciful man who kept his promise to Jonathan and as a legitimate heir to the throne. However, in reality, David’s show of kindness was only because Mephibosheth was lame, nevertheless he kept him in the royal court so that he could watch him closely.

(We believe that this description of the covenant between the two is hyperbole. More than likely, a sympathetic author who wanted to legitimize David’s right to throne composed these stories. By mentioning the mercy that David showed to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth after his death, the narrator depicted David as a merciful man who kept his promise to Jonathan and as the true legitimate heir to the throne.)

In addition to his covenant with David, Jonathan removed his robe that he was wearing and gave his own weapons which were the most important to him as a warrior, to David. Noteworthy that the text says that he removed his clothes. The robe that he removed and gave to David was his royal robe. In other words, Jonathan relinquished his right to the throne in favor of David.<sup>2424</sup> It is a recognition by Jonathan that David and not him is

<sup>19</sup> McKenzie, King David, 84-85.

<sup>20</sup> Morgenstern, David, 322-25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> De Vaux, Ancient Israel, 113.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 346.

<sup>24</sup> Prouser, Suited, 27-35.

to be the next king of Israel (20,13-17; 23,17). Later David would take a slice of Saul's robe which meant that David took the kingdom from Saul (24,5; 12). King Saul understood it as a sign from God that his kingdom would be given to David. Jonathan's armor; his sword and bow were other symbols of his princely status that he passed to David.<sup>25</sup> Before when Saul gave David his armor, he returned it to the king since it was just too big (1 Sam 17,39). By Jonathan giving his own weapons, he removed himself from commanding the army in favor of David. (This act has the implication of political surrender (2 Kgs 11,10).) Dressed in Jonathan's clothes and having his weapons Saul put David in command of all the soldiers "David went out [with the troops], and he was successful in every mission on which Saul sent him" (1 Sam 18,5). It is odd and unlikely that Jonathan who just became David's friend would give up his right as the future king to someone who he just met. True, the monarchy in Israel was a new development and the question of successor had not been determined, but hereditary kingship was the norm in the Ancient Near East and it was expected that Jonathan would replace his father. Indeed, after the death of Saul we read that Abner son of Ner Saul's army commander took Ish-boseth and made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin -over all Israel (2 Sam 2,9).

#### IV. MERAB

The first time the reader learns Saul had a daughter occurs before the battle against Goliath (1 Sam 17; 25). We read that the person who would slay Goliath would receive Saul's daughter in addition to riches. However, no further information is given, not even her name. As Hertzberg pointed out, this is a folkloristic common theme.<sup>26</sup> Daughters had no say in virtually anything and were totally under their father's authority. The offer itself was made by the man of Israel but more than likely originated with Saul. This story is like 18,20-27 where Saul gives his youngest daughter Michal to David. It is only

<sup>25</sup> The bow that Jonathan gave to David is mentioned later in David's lament of Jonathan "The bow of Jonathan never returned back" (2 Sam 1,22).

<sup>26</sup> Hertzberg, I & II Samuel, 151.

after David's victory against Goliath that readers learn that Saul had more than one daughter and her name was Michal. It is noteworthy that the story of Merab, which appears in chapter 17, is not found in the LXX but appears in the Masoretic text. McCarter suggested that the offer of Merab (v.17-21) originally appeared after the battle against Goliath.<sup>27</sup> The setting of verses 17-19 are a logical continuation to the story of Saul's fear of David and prepare the reader for the following section of Michal as David's wife.<sup>28</sup>

David's victory against Goliath increased his popularity among the people and the realization that God was with David frightened Saul. This led him to devise a plan to get rid of his adversary. He negated on his promise to give his daughter to whoever could defeat Goliath. Instead set a new condition that David would have to fight his war against the Philistines (1 Sam 18,17-18). He appointed David to lead a combat battalion where he would be exposed to the enemy and would die on the battlefield. Saul said to himself "Let not my hand strike him; let the hand of the Philistines strike him" (18,17). God uses people to carry his plan so in the same way Saul was hoping that the Philistines would get rid of his adversary, but his plan failed. Was David aware that Saul tricked him? We do not know. However, David would later use similar trickery to eliminate Uriah the Hittite.

When the time came to give his daughter Merab to David she was given instead to Adriel the Meholathite which again invalidated Saul's agreement with David. Adriel, the Meholathite, is mentioned in 2 Sam 21,8 as Adriel the son of Barzillai. Adriel was from the settlement Abel-meholah, which was in Trans-Jordan. It appears that by this marriage Saul wanted to strengthen the ties between his kingdom and the settlements in Trans-Jordan. Merab was only a pawn in Saul's plan, and he was willing to use her to achieve his goals.<sup>29</sup> Merab does not utter a single word and there is no description of her

<sup>27</sup> McCarter, I Samuel, 301.

<sup>28</sup> Tsumura, First Book, 482.

<sup>29</sup> This episode is missing from LXXB it is possible that Saul offered Merab to David he refused and only than Michal was offered to him, and he agreed.

thoughts and feelings, she appears as a mute character.

## V. MICHAL

In the Bible we read many times about men who loved women, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel, Samson and Delilah, and Elkanah and Hannah. Michal is the only woman in the Bible where it states she loved a man “Now Michal daughter of Saul had fallen in love with David” (1 Sam 18,20). She loved David but his behavior and deeds do not demonstrate that he loved her. When David left Jonathan, they kissed each other and cried. When Michal helped David escape, no kissing or crying is mentioned. More so, David found various times to meet with Jonathan, but not with Michal. When Michal was given to another man, he neither protested nor raised any objections.

After negating his promise to give his older daughter Merab to David, Saul decided to trap David with his second daughter Michal. He used her love for David to implement his plan to kill him. David, on the other hand, used this opportunity to advance his political ambitions to become the king’s son in law. As with Merab, Saul set his conditions here. Instead of the payment of the bridal price, David had to fight Saul’s war and deliver foreskins of a hundred Philistines. Although Saul used trickery in his dealings with David, his request for the bridal price was not unusual. In ancient Israel, the groom paid the bridal price to the woman’s father. David was poor and unable to pay the bridal price for a princess. Fathers could indicate the bridal price; thus, Saul established the price of one hundred Philistine foreskins. But as we read in the text, this was only a ploy, Saul was hoping that David would die in battle against the Philistines. Unfortunately for Saul his plan failed, David went out with his men and killed two hundred Philistines and brought their foreskins. Not only did David fulfill the conditions, but he went beyond what he agreed to; he brought twice what Saul requested. It appears that the narrator exaggerated here, to depict David in a favorable light. Later in his demand to return Michal, David would mention the bride price: “Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid

the bride price of one hundred Philistines foreskins” (2 Sam 3,14).<sup>30</sup> It is only at this point, after David fulfilled his part of the agreement, that Saul gave Michal to David as a wife. Ishida suggests that the marriages took place before Saul started to mistrust David.<sup>31</sup> Noth argues that Michal’s marriage during Saul’s lifetime is not historical, but his view cannot be verified.<sup>32</sup> Although Saul mistrusted David, we believe that he gave his daughter Michal to David because this allowed him to have better control of his adversary, to keep a close eye on him. For David his marriage to Michal was an important step, he became part of the royal family. As for Saul his fear of David increased overtime, at first, he feared David (v.12), than he dread him (v.15) and following the marriage of Michal ‘he grew still more afraid of David’ (v.29).<sup>33</sup>

### 5.1 Meddling with her Father’s Plan

Michal, like her brother Jonathan, saved David’s life. She helped David to escape from her father who sent messengers to kill him. The Bible refers here to her as David’s wife (19,11), and not Saul’s daughter as she usually appears. The narrator stresses this to tell the reader that her love for her husband surpassed the love for her father. She lowered David through the window so he could evade Saul’s messengers. This description is reminiscent of the Rahab’s story who helped Joshua’s spies make a similar escape. David’s thoughts about his escape are described in Psalm 59. The psalm’s title is “A miktam when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to put him to death” (Ps 59,1). In the Psalms, David thanks God and not Michal for delivering him from his enemies, the evildoers, and murderers.

When Saul’s messengers came to capture David, they were deceived by Michal. She took the household idols (*teraphim*) and laid them in the bed and covered it with cloth; and at its head she put goat’s hair. She made it look as if David was still in bed. She did not give clothing to David as her brother did but used garments to help him to

<sup>30</sup> The LXX has a hundred for 1 Sam 18,27.

<sup>31</sup> Ishida, Royal, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Noth, History, 184, n.1.

<sup>33</sup> Driver, Notes, 155.

escape. The presence of *teraphim* in David's house is not clear since they are denounced critically in the Hebrew Bible. According to Budde, the existence of the *teraphim* in David's house was only accepted because "the person concerned was the daughter of the rejected Saul."<sup>34</sup>

Michal's usage of the *teraphim* in our story has some interesting parallel with the theft of the *teraphim* by Rachel. In both stories the daughters deceived their father and used *teraphim* in the deception act. The daughters betrayed their fathers' trust. Rachel is the mother of Benjamin, and Michal belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. At first Jacob and David had respectable relationships with their in-laws but this changed, and they had to escape; Jacob from Laban (Gen. 31,20), and David from Saul (1 Sam 19,12). Still, there are notable differences between the two stories. In Genesis, the *teraphim* disappear while in our story it is David who disappears. The act of deception goes undiscovered in Genesis, while in Samuel it is Saul who discovers his daughter's deception. More than likely, the author of Samuel 19 was familiar with the Rachel story and approved Michal's act of deception. He used the image of Rachel as a model for Michal. However, Rachel was punished for deceiving her father; she died while giving birth to Jacob's son Benjamin. Michal was also punished; she remained childless until her death (2 Sam 6,23).<sup>35</sup>

When Saul discovered his daughter's act, he asked her why she tricked him and let his enemy escape. This is the first time that Saul refers to David as his enemy. Interestingly, while in chapter 18, the narrator referred to Michal as Saul's daughter, here he mentions only her name. Perhaps the narrator wanted to convey a break in their relationship. Michal answered her father with another lie. She said that David threatened her: "help me get away or I'll kill you" (1 Sam 19,17). These words are allegedly the only words spoken by David to Michal, words that she invented to protect herself. She emphasizes that she was following David's orders and was not responsible

for his escape. She tried to gain her father's sympathy and trust by putting the blame on David. Saul's reaction is not mentioned; maybe he was satisfied with his daughter's explanations. Like Jonathan, Michal helped David to escape; she helped her father's enemy. David does not appear again in Saul's court after this incident.

Michal is not mentioned again until a brief note in 1 Sam 25,44 regarding David's marriage to Abigail and Ahinoam. The narrator states that Saul gave Michal, his daughter and David's wife, to Palti son of Laish from Gallim. His act had political implication. It broke the family ties with David, signaling that David has no claim to the throne. Strangely there is no reaction or protest by David. On the other hand, when Abigail and Ahinoam, and the wives and children of David's followers were taken in an Amalekites raid we read that David and the people who were with him cried (1 Sam 30,4-6).

### 5.2 The Return of Michal

Following Saul's death and a bitter civil war, Abner urged the elders of Israel to transfer their allegiance to David (2 Sam 3,12-21). In response to Abner's initiative, David set a condition that Michal would be returned to him before negotiations can begin. Once again David's political shrewdness is displayed. This move had one purpose: to ensure his legitimacy to the throne. The restoration of Michal was part of David's ambition to have complete control over Israel. Michal the daughter of the dead king was supposed to be the bridge of unification between Israel and Judah. David did not want to regain his beloved wife but to get the daughter of the former king. By doing so he could make sure that Michal would not bear a child to claim the throne after his death.

What is not clear, however, is the role that was played by Ish-bosheth. He complied with David's request and did not object to the return of Michal to David. The return of Michal meant the end of his kingdom and possibly his own life. According to Ben-Barak, Ish-bosheth gave Michal to David because David's demand was based on basic law and contemporary customs of society. Not

<sup>34</sup> Budde, Die Bücher, 138.

<sup>35</sup> Zakovitch, David, 83-84.

complying with David's demand would tarnish his reputation. He would be the king who undermined the legal foundation of society. He could be portrayed as not caring about social order and lawfulness in his kingdom.<sup>3636</sup> However, there is a simpler, more logical explanation for his actions. Ish-bosheth was an ineffectual weak king. The real power was in Abner's hands who Ish-boseth feared (2 Sam 3,11). Ish-bosheth was also realistic; he was aware that more and more people were siding with the house of David (2 Sam 3,17), which left him without any alternative but to agree with the demand to return Michal.

Michal left her husband Palti who she lived with for years. No words or description of her feeling towards him such as love, or sorrow are mentioned. Her husband on the other hand went with her walking and weeping (2 Sam 3,15-16). Michal suffered from being used by her father, and David's intrigues, now it includes the devoted husband Palti. When she returned to David after many years no verbal exchange between the two, the reunion is suppressed. The exchange between the two will take place later when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6,16-23).

The moving of the ark from its location at Gibeah, Saul's hometown to the City of David had political implication. By doing so David wanted to break the links between the ark and Saul's family. Worshipping the ark at Gibeah would remind the people of Saul therefore, David transferred it from Gibeah. Bringing the ark to Jerusalem and setting it in the City of David signaled David's dynastic ambitions to displace the house of Saul and establishing Jerusalem as his capital.<sup>3737</sup> Michal and her Benjaminite tribesmen probably felt resentment towards this act which took the ark from Saul's hometown.

When Michal, Saul's daughter looked and saw David dancing before the ark, she despised him (v.16). The mention of Michal peering out the window is a reminder of the window through which Michal helped David to escape. But in the first story she was referred as David's wife (v.11) while here she is Saul's daughter. At first David

was dependent on her mercy but here he is the king of Israel. Michal gazing through the window has also a negative connotation it is more like Sisera's mother (Judg 5,28), and Jezebel (2 Kgs 9,30), stories that ended with death. Michal criticized David for his behavior, she despised him, she did not share his enthusiasm of this joyous day. She despised him in the same way that the worthless men did not accept her father's leadership and did not acknowledge him as a king (1 Sam 10,27).

When David came home to greet his household, Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David. She speaks to him in sarcasm, in the third person and referred to him as rifferaff. She felt that dancing was an insult to royalty. At this point, we can see that she did not love him anymore. She probably realized that David used her to advance his political ambitions. The fact that she was David's wife is not mentioned here; she is referred to solely as Michal, the daughter of Saul. She is no more David's only wife but one of the other wives that David had. David rebuked her; his response was harsh. God had chosen him and rejected her father and her family. The narrator ends this interchange with a note that Michal remained childless until her death.<sup>3838</sup> Was Michal infertile as a punishment for her criticism of David or David stopped having sexual relations with her or maybe it was "the last painful twist of a wronged woman's fate."<sup>3939</sup>

What lies behind David's demand for Michal was his desire to get the daughter of the former king, not regain his beloved wife. In other words, David could make sure that Michal would not bear a child to claim the throne after his death. In light of this outcome Rost suggested that the 'Succession Narrative' started with verses (16,20b-23) which describe the final rejection of the house of Saul and opened the door to the succession struggle within the Davidic family.<sup>4040</sup> Michal gained nothing by returning to David. She lost the most in this story.

<sup>38</sup> The reference to Michal and her five sons that she bore to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite is a scribal error and should read Merab (2 Sam 21, 8).

<sup>39</sup> Alter, Art, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Rost, Succession, 85-87.

<sup>36</sup> Ben Barak, Legal, 88-89.

<sup>37</sup> Alter, Art, 123.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of deception was to gain the advantage to be in control. Therefore, Saul who wanted to get rid of David set a trap. He offered his two daughters to him on the condition that he would perform heroic deeds against the Philistines with the hope that David would die on the battlefield. At the same time, he gave his oldest daughter Merab to another man and similarly he gave Michal to a different man. Michal betrayed her father for David's sake because her love for him was true. Her character is tragic. David like Saul used Michal to advance his political ambitions; he married her because he craved admission to the royal family. Later he demanded her return to solidify and attract support from the Benjaminites to establish his claim to throne. Jonathan acted behind his father back and aided David. What is not clear is why he gave his royal right to David. Therefore, we believe that there is an exaggeration in the description of the friendship between Jonathan and David and the tense relationship between Jonathan and his father. Saul was not naïve and understood David's intentions very well. He was angry with Jonathan because he gave up the throne too easily. Saul wanted his son to succeed him. Jonathan, despite his quarrels with his father did not desert him and went and fought with him in the last battle on Mount Gilboa. As for David we believe that it was a sympathetic author from the Davidic circle who was responsible for the negative view of Saul. On the hand, the narrator claims that David was loved by Jonathan and Michal, in addition to all Israel and Judah who loved him. The goal was to legitimize David's ascension to the throne.

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