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CONTENTS

Student Retention Analytics: Modeling the Effect of Poverty on College Student Retention

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ABSTRACT: Utility maximization theory is used to construct a rational choice model that examines the effects of the determinants of college student retention. The current research examines the impact that poverty has on year-to-year student persistence probabilities for freshmen students enrolled at a multicampus nonprofit private university that serves students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Institutional database records were used to generate a sample of 480 first-time full-time freshmen who were observed in between their freshmen and sophomore years. The dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of persistence taking the value of one if a student re-enrolled during the following academic year, making it possible to cross-examine the results of multiple econometric estimation methodologies including the linear probability model, logistic regression, and probit regression analysis. Additional variables, some of which are new to the persistence literature, are included to control for academic, social, financial, economic, and student background contexts. The study ends with policy-recommendations centered on the creation of attrition-minimization programs for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: student retention, student persistence, poverty, attrition, neighborhood effects

Introduction

The goal of higher education is to improve economic prosperity through the development of human capital (Mulvenon, Denny, Stegman, and McKenzie 2005). Unfortunately, of the two-thirds of high school students who go to college, fifty percent drop out, and of those fifty percent who drop out, fifty percent drop out during their first year of study (Seidman 2005). Consequently, decision-makers in higher education must examine the factors that affect college student success during the first year of study. The problem of college student dropout, also known student attrition, has been an ongoing concern of stakeholders in higher education including policymakers, administrators, donors, faculty, staff, and students. Over fifty years ago, Spady (1970) used Durkheim's theory of suicide to motivate a critical review of the dropout literature. Shortly after, Astin (1972) empirically examined economic, academic, social, and psychological predictors of student dropout. Since then, the topic of college student retention is one of the most widely studied in the higher education literature.

The current study uses a rational choice model to estimate persistence probabilities for first-time freshmen enrolled in classes at a multi-campus nonprofit private university. Retention is modeled as a function of explanatory variables commonly cited in the retention literature including student background characteristics, indicators of student financial and economic contexts, and the levels of academic and social integration. Neighborhood effects, measured as student zip-code-based poverty rates, are used to assess the relationship between neighborhood context and student success. Although modeling the effect of poverty on persistence probabilities is rare in the retention literature, it is common in research that evaluates student success at the primary and secondary school levels. Another variable unique to the current study is a direct measure

of social integration calculated as the number of credits earned in an institution-specific program dedicated to building social relationships through volunteer work and service-learning activities. Finally, a series of categorical variables are included to measure the effect of location on freshmen to sophomore year persistence decisions.

Literature Review

Student retention has been examined from many different points of view, from literature incorporating qualitative analyses of the determinants of retention (Hazel and Moria 2004, Hickson 2002, Johnson and Watson 2004, Lau 2003, Taylor and Bedford 2004, Watson, Johnson, and Austin 2004) to quantitative studies that use empirical data to model persistence decisions (Bailey, Bauman, and Lata 1998, Blose 1999, Cabrera and Castaneda 1993, Dey and Astin 1993, Kerkvliet and Nowell 2005, Sandler 2000, Wetzel 1999). Two of the most widely cited theories used to study student retention include Tinto's theory of goal and institutional commitment and Bean's student attrition model (Bagayoko 1994, Blose 1991, Cabrera and Castaneda 1993, Kerkvliet and Nowell 2005, Wetzel 1999).

Vincent Tinto (1975 and 1987) argued that the alignment between student social preferences and academic capabilities and the institution's academic and social frameworks affects the decision to persist. The probability that a student leaves a particular institution of higher education is affected by variables that act as proxies for student and university-specific academic and social characteristics. Since indicators of major area of study and choice of course affect academic and social integration, they are often included in retention studies (Johnson and Watson 2004, Bagayoko and Kelly 1994). On the other hand, Bean (1985 and 2000) contends that attrition is like customer turnover and that attitudinal variables such as student satisfaction and perceptions are important predictors of persistence.

Retention studies have elaborated upon these theoretical perspectives to include variables that measure financial aid, wage-based opportunity costs, major area of study, and demographic variables including gender, race, and ethnicity (Dey and Astin 1993, Wetzel 1999, Leppel 2001, Kerkvliet and Nowell 2005). Cabrera, Nora, and Castaneda (1993) accounted for external factors that affect persistence, ranging from indicators of a student's sociocultural and economic situation to those of parental and peer valuation of the importance of getting a college education. Finally, studies investigating the effect of financial aid on persistence have provided inconsistent results, with some authors finding a direct relationship between student financial need and persistence and other authors reporting an indirect effect (Wetzel 1999, Kervliet 2005).

Methods

Utility maximization theory is used to motivate the construction of a simple rational choice model that examines the effects of the determinants of college student persistence. Although some scholars have argued that students lack the sophistication required to conduct complex cost-benefits analyses that entail estimating the monetary and non-monetary benefits of persistence (Bean and Eaton 2000), others have argued that a rational choice model simply requires individuals to be able to formulate and act on reasonable estimates of the benefits and costs of persistence decisions (DesJardins and Toutkoushian 2005). Following is a revised version of Kerkvliet and Nowell's (2005) application of utility maximization theory to the problem of college student retention.

A student's utility from matriculating at the ith university at time t depends on the subjective probability of graduating, P_{it}, the market and nonmarket benefits of attending the ith school, Y_{it}, the explicit and implicit costs of completion, E_{it}, and the consumptive

benefits of attending the ith educational institution, Z_{it}. The subjective probability that an individual will graduate from college depends on his or her background characteristics, Θ, and level of academic integration, Φ. The explicit and implicit costs of attending a particular school depend on the availability of financial aid, ξ_{it}. Finally, a student's consumptive benefits depend on his or her level of social integration, ζ_{it}. To empirically examine persistence decisions, the above categories of variables should be contained in the right-hand-side equations of empirical models of college student success, $X_i B$.

If a student's decision to enter higher education is narrowed down to the ith university, he or she enrolls if the utility associated with doing so is greater than the utility from entering the workforce, denoted as U_0. That is,

$$U[P_{it}(\Theta, \Phi), E_{it}(\xi_{it}), Z_{it}(\zeta_{it}), Y_{it}] > U_0 \tag{1}$$

At the end of the year, students will revise their expectations, costs, and benefits based on their academic and social experiences at the ith college or university. Students will exit their current institution if the benefits of persisting to the next term are less than the utility of entering the workforce. That is,

$$U[P_{it+1}(\Theta, \Phi), E_{it+1}(\xi_{it+1}), Z_{it+1}(\zeta_{it+1}), Y_{it+1}] < U_0 \tag{2}$$

This model can be expanded to examine how students evaluate multiple schooling options by allowing students to put side-by-side their expected utilities from attending different universities. Thus, if the expected utility from attending the jth school is greater than the expected utility from remaining enrolled in classes at the ith educational institution, a student will dropout. That is,

$$U[P_{it}(\Theta, \Phi), E_{it}(\xi_{it}), Z_{it}(\zeta_{it}), Y_{it}] < U[P_{jt}(\Theta, \Phi), E_{jt}(\xi_{jt}), Z_{jt}(\zeta_{jt}), Y_{jt}] \tag{3}$$

To empirically model persistence decisions, explanatory variables from constructs above including student background characteristics, indicators of student financial and economic contexts, and the levels of academic and social integration are contained in estimated models of revealed preferences. Since it is difficult to measure utility functions, rational choice models of persistence based on observed behavior, or revealed preferences, are used in empirical analyses. Econometric models used in current study include the linear probability model (LPM) estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic regression and probit regression models estimated using maximum likelihood estimation. Dey (1993) and Wetzel (1998) outline some of the major troubles associated with using OLS and the linear probability model in the analysis of college student retention, namely counterintuitive predictions, the incorrect functional form, and the violation of the assumption of independent, randomly distributed error terms.

Logit and probit regression analysis are based on more reasonable assumptions than LPM and are therefore more theoretically appropriate in the analysis of student retention (Dey, 1993, Wetzel, 1999). Further, point estimates of parameter coefficients estimated using maximum likelihood are asymptotically consistent, efficient, and normally distributed (Long 1997). In logit and probit regression analysis, the probability of a student staying or leaving a particular school is linked to both the magnitude and the sign of parameter coefficients for explanatory variables included in the model. The logistic regression function is S-shaped and is considerably more vertical when the probability of retention is 0.5 and flattens out on both ends as the probability approaches 0 and 1 (Dey 1993). Since probit regression analysis uses the cumulative normal distribution function,

which is also S-shaped, to estimate persistence probabilities, it is based on distributional assumptions similar to logit regression analysis (Wooldridge 2003).

Sample and Data

The current research uses LPM, logit, and probit regression analysis to empirically examine the effect of student background variables, student financial and economic contexts, and the levels of academic and social integration on year-to-year persistence decisions for traditional students enrolled at a small private business university with campuses located in the Midwest, Southeast, and Southcentral regions of the United States. Traditional students are first-time full-time freshmen who are United States citizens under twenty-five years of age. Data obtained on a cohort of traditional freshmen students for the 2000-01 and 2001-02 academic years were merged with 2000 census data to include zip-code-based poverty rates. Out of the sample of 1,496 freshmen students in attendance on all three campuses, a total of 651 students fit the definition of traditional students. Due to data limitations, 480 students were included in the sample. Table 1 provides an overview of variable definitions and descriptive statistics for the dependent variable and explanatory variables used in this study.

The dependent variable, stay, is a dichotomous measure of persistence taking the value of one if a student re-enrolled during the 2001-02 academic year and zero otherwise. Student background variables including location, zip-code-based poverty rates, expected family contribution, race, gender, and ethnicity are included as explanatory variables. Variables included as controls for the academic and social environments include high school class percentile rankings, the change in college grade point averages, major area of specialization, and whether students participate in a Greek organization, are a merit scholar, or are a recipient of athletic scholarships. A direct measure of student social integration equal to credits earned engaging in community service is also included, *excel01*. The financial and economic context are controlled for using student loans measured in thousands of dollars and the effective price measured as tuition less all sources of financial aid.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Variable Definitions

Variable	Description	Mean	Stdev	Min	Max
stay	1=Stay, 0=Otherwise	0.711	0.454	0.000	1.000
female	1=Female, 0=Otherwise	0.392	0.488	0.000	1.000
black	1=Black, 0=Otherwise	0.220	0.414	0.000	1.000
hisp	1=Hispanic, 0=Otherwise	0.089	0.286	0.000	1.000
povrate	Zip Code Based Poverty Rates	9.815	8.056	0.899	46.308
excel01	Total Excel Credit 2001	3.369	4.423	0.000	35.000
greek	Greek System Participation	0.157	0.364	0.000	1.000
athl	Total Athletic Scholarships	0.549	1.969	0.000	18.965
hsrnkpct	HS Class Ranking	44.887	24.315	0.22	98.990
chgpa	Change in College GPA	-0.205	0.970	-3.930	3.350
merit	1 = Merit Scholar, 0=otherwise	0.610	0.488	0.000	1.000
loans	Total Loans 2001	2.702	3.055	0.000	2.063
efc	Estimated Family Contribution	8.502	15.364	0.000	100.000
price	Tuition Less Financial Aid	3.168	6.463	0.000	15.000
MGT	1=Management Major, 0=Otherwise	0.178	0.383	0.000	1.000
FIN_ECN	1=Fin and Ecn Major, 0=Otherwise	0.091	0.288	0.000	1.000
FMM	1=Fashion Major, 0=Otherwise	0.049	0.216	0.000	1.000
SouthC	1=Texas Attendance, 0=Otherwise	0.154	0.361	0.000	1.000
SouthE	1=Florida Attendance, 0=Otherwise	0.173	0.379	0.000	1.000

*Dollar amounts in thousands

Research Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that student background variables affect the probability of retention in between the first and second years of study. Since research that examines the impact of student background variables including gender, race, and income is uncertain in terms of the magnitude and sign of the effect, the precise nature of the effect of demographics is unknown (Bagayoko 1994, Bean and Metzner 1985, Dey and Astin 1993, Leppel 2001, Wetzel 1999). Bean (1985) noted that such inconsistencies exist because researchers that include student demographic data in retention models use different controls leading to different results. To the extent that sociocultural and economic factors differ for students from poverty-stricken neighborhoods, and to the extent that such differences affect student persistence probabilities, it is hypothesized that students from poverty-stricken neighborhoods are less likely to persist.

Variables that measure the degree to which students are academically integrated including high school rank percentiles, whether a student is a merit scholar, the change in college grade point averages, and major area of study are hypothesized to impact retention. Categorical variables are included to control for academic majors including general management, fashion merchandising, and finance and economics. Indicators of social integration including participation in social organizations, extracurricular activities, and college sports are all hypothesized to affect student social integration, and therefore college student retention. The financial and economic context are controlled for using student loans, the effective price, and estimated family contribution, all of which are measured in thousands of dollars and hypothesized to impact student success. Estimated family contribution is a federally computed income-based figure that reports the dollar amount families must contribute to the annual costs of a higher education.

Results and Discussion

Regression results are presented in Table 2. Columns are arranged to facilitate comparisons between base and elaborated models to examine how parameter coefficients change when new variables are entered into estimation equations. Tables 2 and 3 show that LPM, logistic regression, and probit regression analysis provide similar results in terms mean predicted probabilities. The size, sign, and level of statistical significance of coefficients estimated using logit and probit regression are also extremely similar, which will be ascertained more completely by examining marginal effects at variable means and odds ratios. Due to the previously discussed problems with LPM and the advantages of the logit and probit models estimated using maximum likelihood estimation, the results from the logit and probit regressions will be emphasized.

Table 2: Econometric Models of Student Retention

Stay	Logit Models 1-3			Probit Models 1-3		
	L1	L2	L3	P1	P2	P3
female	0.0285	-0.4289	*-0.6360	0.0127	-0.2657	**-0.3910
	0.9080	0.1610	0.0520	0.9310	0.1280	0.0350
black	*-0.6060	-0.3874	*-0.7889	**-0.3801	-0.2263	*-0.4281
	0.0590	0.3290	0.0640	0.0500	0.3260	0.0800
hisp	0.0569	0.0593	-0.5687	0.0392	0.0254	-0.2947
	0.8820	0.8930	0.2660	0.8630	0.9190	0.2970
povrate	-1.4740	**-4.7387	**-4.1370	-0.7988	**-2.5178	*-2.2423
	0.3960	0.0180	0.0440	0.4410	0.0290	0.0570
excel	***0.1954	***0.1262	***0.1678	***0.1106	***0.0657	***0.0934
	0.0000	0.0090	0.0030	0.0000	0.0100	0.0020
greek	***1.9289	***1.6674	***1.5945	***1.0450	***0.8892	***0.8417

Variable						
	0.0000	0.0040	0.0070	0.0000	0.0030	0.0050
athl	***0.0003	0.1654	0.1672	***0.0002	0.0918	0.0812
	0.0040	0.1650	0.1680	0.0030	0.1500	0.1880
hsrankpct		**-0.0163	**-0.1631		***-0.0098	**-0.0098
		0.0120	0.0160		0.0090	0.0110
chgpa		***1.0582	***1.0637		***0.6247	***0.6233
		0.0000	0.0000		0.0000	0.0000
merit		0.4396	0.4409		0.2466	0.2509
		0.1630	0.1740		0.1730	0.1760
loans		**-0.1125	*-0.1102		**-0.0629	*-0.0623
		0.0410	0.0540		0.0450	0.0530
efc		0.0084	0.0080		0.0046	0.0046
		0.3740	0.4300		0.4030	0.4350
price		**-0.0905	***-0.0836		***-0.0506	***-0.0475
		0.0020	0.0060		0.0020	0.0060
MGT			0.5586			0.3490
			0.1550			0.1110
FIN_ECN			**-0.9894			**-0.5648
			0.0240			0.0250
FMM			0.7233			0.4000
			0.2930			0.3150
SouthE			-0.3066			-0.1793
			0.3660			0.3510
SouthC			**1.0124			**0.5547
			0.0150			0.0150
P-R²	0.13	0.31	0.34	0.13	0.31	0.34
LR	68.93	168.41	186.95	69.17	168.45	187.53
LL	-237.63	-187.89	-178.62	-237.51	-187.87	-178.33

***Significant at 1 percent
**Significant at 5 percent
*Significant at 10 percent

Table 3: Mean Predicted Probabilities

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max
Stay	0.7458	0.4359	0	1
LPM	0.7458	0.2453	-0.0025	1.3617
Logit	0.7458	0.2565	0.0316	0.9998
Probit	0.7462	0.2543	0.0254	0.9999

A series of likelihood ratio tests based on the chi-square distribution indicate that all categories of variables hypothesized to affect persistence probabilities including student background variables, indicators of academic integration, measures of social integration, major area of study, and location, are statistically significant at below the five percent level of significance. Base logit and probit models estimated include student background variables and measures of student social integration as regressors. These models are elaborated upon to include indicators of academic integration and financial status, and then again to account for major area of specialization and location. Whether key categories of variables are included in the elaboration paradigm has an impact on the size, sign, and statistical significance of parameter coefficients.

Whether a student is black is statistically significant in models that only account for student background variables and indicators of social integration but becomes statistically insignificant once measures of academic integration and financial status are included as

controls. In fully elaborated models, whether a student is black has a negative effect on retention and is statistically significant at below the five percent level. Whether a student is female has a negative and statistically significant impact on retention, a finding that replicates Leppel's (2001) observation that females majoring in business are less likely to persist. The relative magnitude of the effect of zip-code-based poverty rates stabilizes after the base-case model is elaborated upon to include measures of academic integration and financial status. Even after controlling for expected family contribution, zip-code-based poverty rates are negatively and statistically significantly related to college student retention. Those from poverty-stricken neighborhoods might have social and cultural capital that is less transferrable to a higher education setting.

Indicators of the degree to which students are socially integrated including whether a student is a member of a Greek social organization, participation in varsity sports, and the number of volunteer and service-learning credits earned have a statistically significant correlation with persistence decisions. All variables take their expected signs, although competing in sports becomes statistically insignificant when academic integration, financial aid, major area of study, and location are included as explanatory variables. Positive changes in college grade point averages have a positive and statistically significant effect on persistence probabilities, whereas high school rank percentiles have an inverse effect. The dollar value of tuition less financial aid and loans are statistically significantly and inversely related to first-year retention. The negative coefficient on loans might be more indicative of socioeconomic status than the financial benefits of additional funding. Finally, whether students major in finance and economics is negatively correlated with retention and whether students are enrolled in classes at the south-central campus is positively related to first year success.

The degree to which the size, sign, and level of statistical significance of coefficients are consistent from one estimation methodology to the next can be determined through an examination of marginal effects at variable means and odds ratios. As you can see by looking at Table 4 below, the marginal effect on the probability of retention for a one-unit change in a regressor, holding other variables constant at their means, can vary significantly by estimation technique, a finding that contradicts Dey's (1993) observation that there is little practical significance of using maximum likelihood estimation despite its theoretical advantages. For example, the probit model predicts that the probability of persistence will decrease by 32.94 percent for students who are black, whereas logistic regression and the linear probability model predict a change equal to 5.82 percent and 5.16 percent respectively.

Given a discrete change in whether a student is a female, i.e., from 0 to 1, the probability of persistence decreases by 0.06, or roughly 6 percent. Furthermore, as zip code-based poverty rates increase by one percentage point, the probability of persistence decreases by roughly $0.01*0.6534 = 0.65$ percentage points. The remaining variables can be interpreted similarly in terms of marginal effects. A quick review of the odds ratio for females indicates that female students are about 34.88 percent less likely to persist as compared to male students. Similarly, for a one percentage point increase in a student's home zip code-based poverty rate, a student is roughly 4.63 percent less likely to persist from one year to the next. The linear probability model predicts that a one-unit change in *excel01* increases the probability of persisting by 0.99 percent, whereas the logit and probit models predict changes equal to 1.74 percent and 1.71 percent respectively.

Table 4: Marginal Effects at Means and Odds Ratios

	Marginal Effects			Odds Ratio
Variable	LPM	Logit	Probit	Logit
female*	-0.0676	-0.0610	-0.0708	0.6512
black*	-0.0516	-0.0582	-0.3294	0.6788
hisp*	0.0304	0.0081	0.0065	1.0611
povrate	-0.0069	-0.0065	-0.0065	0.9537
excel01	0.0099	0.0174	0.0171	1.1345
greek*	0.1316	0.1573	0.1681	5.2987
athl	0.0057	0.0228	0.0239	1.1799
hsrankpct	-0.0023	-0.0023	-0.0025	0.9838
chgpa	0.1773	0.1460	0.1624	2.8812
merit*	0.0745	0.0634	0.0663	1.5521
loans	-0.0184	-0.0155	-0.0163	0.8936
efc	0.0012	0.0012	0.0012	1.0084
price	-0.0157	-0.0125	-0.0131	0.9135
*Discrete changes in dummy variables from 0 to 1				

Conclusion

The current research used a rational choice model to examine the determinants of college student retention for students enrolled at a multi-campus private university. A base model consisting of student demographics and indicators of social integration was expanded upon to include categories of variables identified in the persistence literature. Excluding variables known to affect student retention distorts the relative importance and the direction of the effect of included variables. The findings of fully elaborated upon models of retention varied by estimation methodology. More specifically, the magnitude of the effect on probability of persistence for a one-unit change in independent variables under analysis can vary considerably depending on whether the linear probability model, logistic regression, and probit regression analysis is used to obtain results. Statistical evidence supports the inclusion of a variable unique to the current study, a direct measure of student social integration. Statistical evidence also supports the inclusion of zip code-based poverty rates in econometric models of college student success. Since it is likely that the effects of poverty compound over time and permeate all aspects of life, attrition minimizations programs should be focused on early intervention strategies that make it possible for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to thrive in higher education.

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A Strong Dynamic Financial Growth of Moroccan Family SMEs: What Feasibility of Artificial Intelligence?

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ABSTRACT: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a priority for the Moroccan government recent years. As a tool "of today and the future," artificial intelligence interferes in all economic aspects, allowing better decision making and evolutionary financial growth of companies in the market. Between fear and excitement, artificial intelligence is frequently perceived by the public as a very sophisticated and complex technology to implement. For some, cognitive AI takes on a human form, a rather caricatured perception that echoes within some organizations. To optimize the digital transformation of family firms, demystifying AI is an essential prerequisite. This work highlights the importance of adopting intelligence in the practices of Moroccan family SMEs. An empirical study corroborates our postulates regarding the dynamism and feasibility of artificial intelligence for the financial growth of Moroccan family SMEs.

KEYWORDS: Intelligence, financial growth, Moroccan family SMEs, Digital transformation, challenges, opportunities

Introduction

Mid-sized companies want to integrate AI and are most likely to reap the benefits of early adopters, typically AI-based software companies that address business problems. According to a study commissioned by Dell Technologies & Intel, companies that have invested in AI have, on average, improved their customers' spending by 18% (Statista 2021). Yet, 40% of European startups considered AI companies are not using the technology in any meaningful. So, for small and medium-sized companies where investments can be key, understanding AI in its entirety is crucial to fully benefit from it. The interest and desire of companies to innovate with the implementation of new applications embedding AI is undeniable. Artificial intelligence is a very promising market with a global value that is expected to reach 89.9 billion euros by 2025, compared to 4.06 billion in 2016. The number of companies that have adopted AI-based technologies has increased by 270% between 2015 and 2019 (Statista 2021). However, the term "AI-based technology deployment" is still too generalized and can mean many things. To grasp the true scope of this phenomenon, we need to get back to basics.

Artificial intelligence analyzes and responds to mathematical algorithmic logic and is inspired by natural intelligence. It covers a series of missions, which could require natural intelligence such as problem-solving, translation, speech recognition, and visual perception (Dick 2019). We can already see the major impact of AI in all sectors. Contrary to popular beliefs from science fiction classics, AI does not appear in human form and is far from reaching the level of complexity needed to surpass human intelligence (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2019).

In the early days of AI, there was Data Science with a high degree of interaction between humans and programs (Fetzer 1990). Then, AI can be divided into two categories. The first category is the most recognizable: "general artificial intelligence,"

which is the hypothetical intelligence of a machine with the ability to understand or learn any intellectual task that can be performed by a human being. The second category is "narrow artificial intelligence," which refers to specific aspects of human intelligence and perception, such as face or voice recognition. Today, AI is mostly used in two types of operation: deep learning based on enormous datasets, which keeps learning by penetrating a PB of unstructured data, and expert systems, which allow the progress of an intelligent and interactive environment (Haenlein and Kaplan 2019).

Today, these technologies are everywhere with the growth of automation, from targeted advertising to smart home devices. AI is positively redefining the future of many industries. For small and medium-sized businesses, it is more likely to see AI used for approaches such as document analysis, fraud detection, marketing activities, or sales optimization (Thiebes, Lins and Sunyaev 2021).

Whether descriptive, predictive, prescriptive, or cognitive, the common thread between all forms of AI is the insatiable need for computing power. With the exponential growth of data, there is a real opportunity to collect information to support innovation and the creation of new products and services (Huang and Rust 2018). Nevertheless, there is no single solution since not all data requires the same processing, it is important to keep in mind that the quality of AI depends on the data that feeds it. The first step for companies is to sort through their data and make sure they are compliant with the various regulations, and then become familiar with the AI tools at their disposal.

Beyond the basics, successful implementation of artificial intelligence requires an enabling environment. Like humans, AI is a technology that needs time to learn and solve specific problems. The key to its success will therefore depend on the confidence of organizations in this new technology. Allowing time for these learnings until the desired results are achieved and the application is deployed is essential. Companies also need people who can guide the advancement of AI because often the major issue is that business and IT are not aligned on a data-driven strategy and do not have a clear vision of the expectations of AI projects (Lee, Suh, Roy, and Baucus 2019).

To facilitate the design of AI projects, many frameworks are developed by different companies. Moreover, to simplify access to AI, high-performance computing servers integrate middleware for managing, sharing, and optimizing computing resources, especially GPUs. Finally, to offer a well-structured and flexible approach to AI projects, reference architectures have been designed around use cases. Organizations will be able to understand the importance of AI and question its operational necessity while reducing business risks.

There is no longer a shadow of a doubt about AI and its ability to energize companies large and small. However, mastering this complex technology is not always easy, regardless of company size. Implementing AI strategies is a collaborative process. In the age of technological innovation, the time has come to start harnessing the potential of AI, whose improvement will certainly be boosted by the advent of these new technologies (Thiebes, Lins, and Sunyaev 2021). This paper examines the perception of SME managers towards the opportunities brought by AI. The objective is to explore the results of the adopted empirical study. This study allows a good understanding of the definition of AI in Moroccan family SMEs, as well as identifies the opportunities brought by this revolution and the challenges to be overcome for Moroccan family SMEs.

Firstly, our study has defined the concepts of digital transformation and traces its effects on the strategies of the Moroccan family SMEs. Secondly, the used methodology for the exploratory study is described to highlight the issues and challenges of Moroccan family SMEs. The synthesized results and contributions of this research will finally be discussed.

1. Digital transformation: a promising opportunity for Moroccan family SMEs

Digital transformation, also known as digitization, is still a protean concept; some practitioners characterize it as the changes made about by digital technologies in all aspects of human life (Stolterman and Fors 2004).

As soon as computers appeared, companies found in information technologies an opportunity to organize their work. In many areas, the results of the integration of information technology are very beneficial for the company (an increase in its productivity). Computerization in companies has also contributed to the advancement of computer learning by individuals. The equipment was very expensive at the beginning, the individuals who had access to these technologies were rare. The use of these technologies in the work practice allowed the discovery of the use of information technologies. The company was the institution that advocated the use of these technologies. This is no longer the case with digital technologies. For the first time, technologies are accessible to individuals on a massive scale before they are taken over by the enterprise. If we look at the previous technological disruptions (telephone, fax, Internet, etc.), companies were the drivers (and therefore controllers) of their deployment. In the case of digital technologies, the phenomenon has been reversed and companies are questioning the opportunity to deploy this type of technology to improve their work practices. The company is now short behind the innovations and uses developed by its employees. These technological evolutions, as well as the progressive learning of new practices of information diffusion and management by individuals, have made companies' representations of the impact of information technologies on the organization evolve.

Digital Transformation refers to all actions implemented by a company to integrate digital (Internet-related) technologies into its business (Hamon 2015). In other words, a digitalized company is not only:

- A company that has an e-commerce site because the digital transformation cannot be reduced to support, to the technique. The change is more profound and concerns the company's business models, its approach to the market, its customer relations.
- A company that invests in start-ups, because digital transformation is not only external but also, above all, internal. It concerns above all the processes and mentalities.
- A company that is present on social networks because must first and foremost listen to its customers, suppliers, employees, and all stakeholders.

The digital economy is based on the exploitation of data and more specifically on the valuation of free labor provided by users, "who produce an activity whose positive externalities will, in the form of data, be incorporated into the production chain without monetary compensation for the latter, and from which the digital company creates its value chain" (Fuchs and Fisher 2015). In addition, the management of personal customer data is now at the heart of the company's daily business. Data security and confidentiality are essential enablers for companies, but also potential obstacles. They will have to identify new models of protection and privacy guarantee capable of meeting their expectations and those of their customers.

Digital visibility is expressed less and less on the internet and more and more on social networks. The value of a company is no longer measured by the product manufactured or the service rendered but by the quality of the software, the platform or the application proposed. An icon on as many smartphones as possible has become more profitable than a store in the most prestigious of locations. "But, already, the relationship between the company and its customers is moving from the internet to messaging and social networks" (Belleguic, Coutard, and Doueihi 2011). Also, brands are diversifying their digital communication and are also using influencers, people active on social networks who, by their status, position, or media exposure, can influence consumption

habits. The digital revolution has empowered the consumer who is no longer captive but has become a zapper. The customer now can interact with the company. "Communication has become two-way and interactive, it no longer goes only from the company to the customer, but the latter also has the possibility to respond, react, speak, express an opinion or dissatisfaction. Through his comments on social networks, the consumer becomes, in turn, a consumer prescriber" (Colin et al. 2015). Consumers want tailor-made products. He wants to be produced for him, with him, he wants to be a co-creator, to be listened to, and have his opinion taken into consideration. They have become unpredictable, chameleon-like, and in search of emotions and new "experiences." The new consumer demands mean everything, right away, to be talked to, informed, answered, and treated in a personalized way. Customer relationship management (all the tools and techniques designed to capture, process, and analyze information about customers and prospects, to build loyalty by offering or proposing services to them) has also been revolutionized by artificial intelligence.

2. Issues and challenges of artificial intelligence in Moroccan family SMEs

Long considered a frightening science fiction subject, artificial intelligence today offers new perspectives to companies (Žigienė, Rybakovas, and Alzbutas 2019). In Morocco, as in the rest of the world, the race for data (big data) is launched and its exploitation creates many opportunities. However, the repercussions on the job market and the private life of each individual raise questions that sometimes remain unanswered.

2.1. Demystifying artificial intelligence

Between fantasies, hopes, and worries, artificial intelligence (AI) probably represents a great debate of our time. If the theories on intelligent machines are not new and go back to the 1950s (to Alan Turing's works) (Morgan 2018), it is during the last decade that computers have reached the necessary computing power to realize a good number of projects that were previously confined to science fiction! Marvin Minsky, one of the creators of AI, challenges it as "the construction of computer programs that engage in tasks that are, for the moment, more satisfactorily accomplished by humans, because they require high-level mental processes such as perceptual learning, memory organization, and critical reasoning" (Asaad et al. 2021). AI thus deals with the study, design, and implementation of intelligent machines, involving many areas of computer science and applied mathematics. Here, the term "machine" does not designate a physical object, but rather an automatic system capable of managing information. It is not necessarily a question of robots. Moreover, in an increasingly digital environment, AI does not need to wait for the progress of robotics to have an impact on the world.

2.2. Data at the heart of AI

In the face of the famous big data, which operate with the help of large calculation capacities, AI makes it possible to implement algorithms or more autonomous environments to manipulate these large quantities of data. Today, the latter is democratized thanks to the "clouds", which allow companies to access them remotely at very reasonable costs. Therefore, algorithms are progressing rapidly and responding to a growing number of businesses problems, provided that they are supplied with relevant data, as shown in figure 1. Purchased or recovered via various tools, websites, and connected objects in particular, "data" is at the heart of AI, the information is often available, but it is essential to process it efficiently before hoping to get anything out of it. Indeed, the collection and use of data are governed by a strict legal framework: Law 09-08 in Morocco and the RGPD (General Data

Protection Regulation), for companies working with the European Union, impose numerous rules on companies.
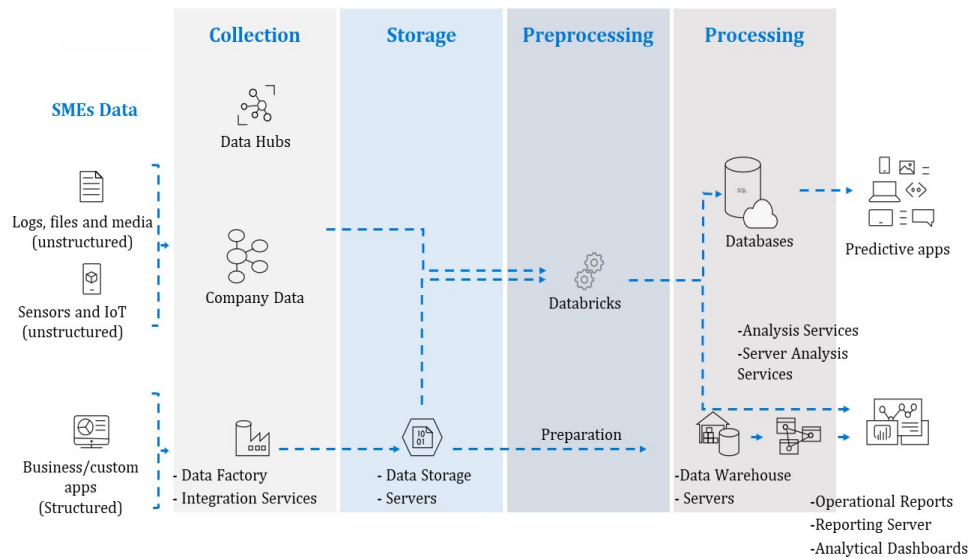
Figure 1. AI importance for data management in a Moroccan family SMEs

3. AI adoption in Moroccan family SMEs: an empirical study

3.1. Methodology

The methodology proposed in this study is based on a qualitative approach. This method of analysis favors the search for rich and extensive information. Indeed, the implementation of a qualitative study allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomena related to the adoption of AI, to the adoption of the function, and to the adaptation strategies to respond to it, the collection of information was established by individual semi-directive interviews.

3.2. Data collection techniques

We opted for remote semi-directive interviews (via telephone, meet and zoom), which lasted, on average, 45 minutes for each case. Through open-ended questions, we let the interviewees express themselves freely to generate the maximum amount of information. We guided them from time to time once they went beyond the subject. Similarly, follow-up questions were asked, using the last words of their answers, to make sure of the meaning they wanted to convey. This interview guide is organized around three research themes, which are:

- The company's perception and maturity towards the adoption of artificial intelligence.
- The opportunities that AI represents for the company.
- Challenges and issues.
-

Selected population

The sampling is based on the objectives of our study and aims to constitute its empirical corpus. The size of a convenience sample depends on criteria based on imperatives related to the target population, the context in which the data is collected, and the time available for the survey. Regarding these guidelines, two criteria are highlighted to justify our sample: the size of the sample to know at what point we can stop, and the respect of the context of the study. The choice of the studied SME was made selectively to ensure that the selected case studies meet several criteria. Thus, the use of owner-managers or managers is considered

as a source of information to understand the logic and the digital trend of the studied EMS. This method is recommended by many researchers for its purpose of collecting information and validating the data collected.

Table 1. Description of the information from the Family SMEs studied and the interviewees

Code	Interviewee	Years of experience	City	Activity
SME 1	Manager	10	Agadir	Agri-food
SME 2	Manager	12	Agadir	Agri-food
SME 3	Manager	7	Agadir	Insurance
SME 4	Manager	11	Agadir	Tourism
SME 5	Manager	15	Agadir	Agri-food
SME 6	Manager	11	Marrakech	IT Services
SME 7	Manager	7	Marrakech	Tourism
SME 8	Marketing Manager	8	Marrakech	Studies and consulting
SME 9	Manager	15	Marrakech	Tourism
SME 10	Manager	14	Marrakech	Tourism
SME 11	Manager	15	Marrakech	Tourism
SME 12	Manager	19	Marrakech	Tourism
SME 13	Manager	5	Casablanca	Agri-food
SME 14	IT Manager	12	Casablanca	IT Services
SME 15	Manager	20	Casablanca	Textile
SME 16	Manager	17	Casablanca	Textile
SME 17	Manager	11	Casablanca	Textile
SME 18	Manager	9	Casablanca	Insurance
SME 19	Manager	5	Tangier	Textile
SME 20	Manager	10	Tangier	Textile
SME 21	Manager	12	Tangier	Agri-food
SME 22	Manager	7	Tangier	Studies and consulting

A total of 22 EMSs agreed to participate in the survey, with their owner managers expressing interest in sharing their experiences with us. We assigned codes to the different units of analysis to guarantee the anonymity of the actors interviewed. The coded names assigned to the companies and the information derived from them are shown in Table 1.

In a qualitative study, data analysis "consists of reducing the information to categorize it and relating it to each other before arriving at a description, explanation, or configuration" (Wacheux 1996). The collected information is formatted in a written "verbatim," which represents the raw data of our survey. The transcription is done manually to faithfully record what the interviewees said. It notes word for word everything the interviewee says, without changing the text, nor interpreting it and without abbreviation to facilitate the reading and to have a faithful trace. To process all the interviews conducted, a thematic content analysis was carried out. The combination of the vertical analysis (interview by interview) and the horizontal analysis (theme by theme) allowed us to highlight a certain number of results.

4. Results and discussion of the qualitative study

Three main themes are highlighted in the presentation of the results: the importance of SME maturity, the opportunities offered by AI, and the challenges hindering the adoption of AI in Moroccan family SMEs.

4.1. *Analysis of the Moroccan family SMEs' maturity towards AI*

The variation between the different companies regarding the perception of AI is no longer marked, as 16 respondents say they are aware of the trend. Thus, the Moroccan company seems quite aware of this revolution. Despite a rather classical or traditional vision of automation or IT functions a weak presence of AI-based functions. Indeed, the terms used by companies speak of IT in general, rather than new intelligent technologies or artificial intelligence, as described in Figure 2.
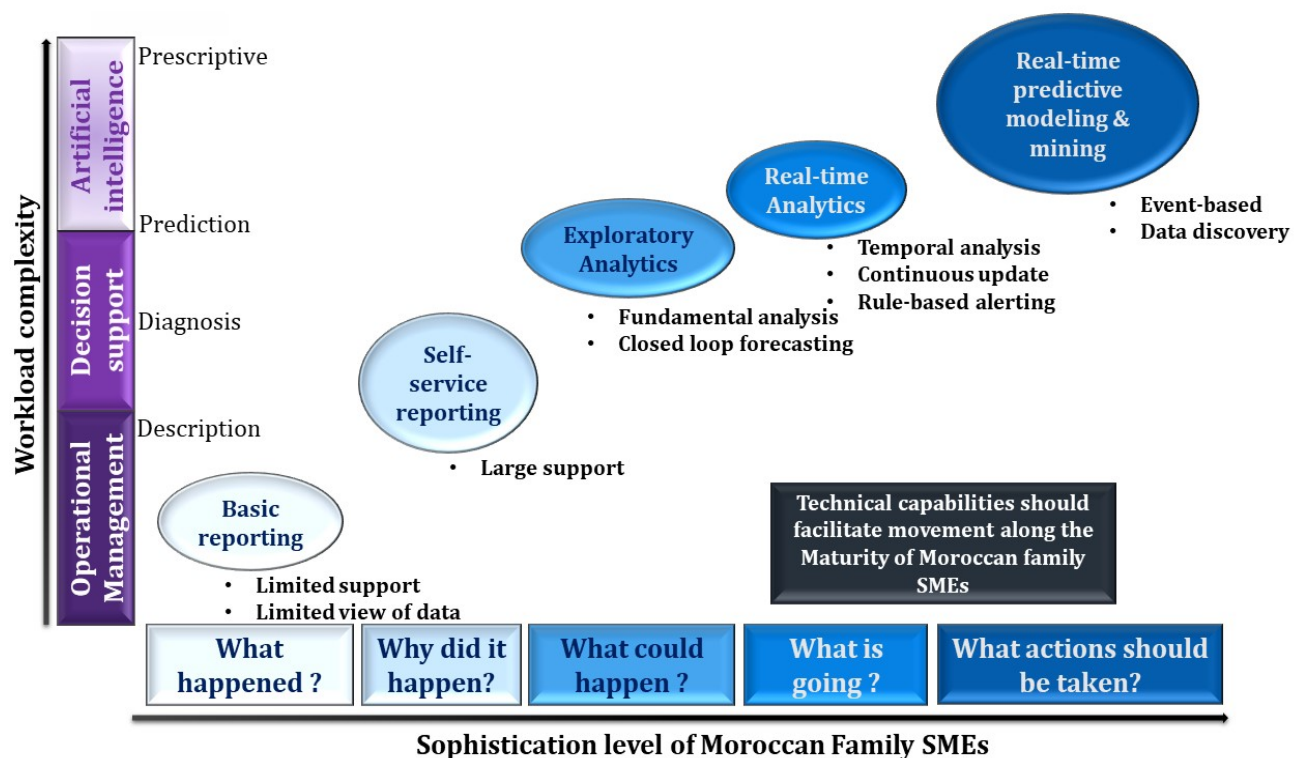
Figure 2. Maturity analysis of Moroccan family SMEs

Source: Authors

In addition, nearly a third of SME managers indicate that AI is part of their plans. In this context, at the level of the implementation of projects related to the subject, the interviews have ensured a diversity of profiles between companies that have carried out projects in AI (2 companies), this is reflected by their field of activity. However, for the others, the computerization of their systems is translated by the creation of a website or a page on social networks. Companies with projects in progress (2 SMEs) and companies with projects that have not yet started or do not have AI projects (3 SMEs). Another very important finding is that these companies did not know that AI could boost their e-commerce activities. And even nearly 75% of respondents are not present on the e-commerce channel.

4.2. *The opportunities of AI adoption*

The combination of factors generated by AI should help stimulate economic growth, few economists venture to measure the effects of AI on future GDP. In this study, business representatives estimate that the specific contribution of AI to Moroccan GDP will be around 11,300 billion MAD by 2025, an increase of 14%. AI could double the growth rates of Moroccan family SMEs, thanks to "new relationships between the seller and the customer and between man and machine". The impact of AI-based technologies is expected to improve work efficiency by up to 40% in some Moroccan family SMEs.

We note that many surveyed Moroccan family SMEs in this study stated that the benefits of IA for them could be numerous to:

- Improve workflow.
- Access to globalized marketplaces.
- Favors export, especially for the agri-food and textile sectors.
- Organization and automation of tasks.
- Improve the supply chain.
- Strengthen the performance of the company.
- Develop new services.
- Ensure better quality productions.
- Optimize production costs.
- To better develop the skills of the employees.
- To give the image of a modern company.
- Facilitate the work of employees or professionalize certain administrative processes.

4.3. Challenges and issues

Our study shows that AI adoption presents several major challenges for the companies surveyed, namely the lack of technical digital skills. Most (10 respondents) of the Moroccan family SMEs believe that the human challenge is one of the main challenges to face, they insist on the development of new skills. While others believe that financial means can be a major challenge. In the broadest sense, the human factor, therefore, weighs more heavily than the lack of budgetary resources.

A human challenge in terms of increasing the skills of internal resources to be able to support this transformation. The second challenge concerns the financing of this transformation because it involves an investment. Of course, there is a return on investment, but for the SME, it is first necessary to succeed in mobilizing the resources. We can also add that the lack of time and means, but also a concern for confidentiality and a lack of trust, the complexity of the process, and the lack of knowledge of existing possibilities are other obstacles to be mentioned.

This work brings together, in an exploratory manner, three important dimensions, namely, the perception of Moroccan SME managers and executives, challenges, and issues related to the adoption of AI. The findings on the impact of AI on business practices are widely shared by research studies. Other than the financial and human challenges, the debate between those who consider that AI is a tool for the elimination of employment and those who believe that it is a liberating tool, allowing the employee to focus more effectively on his task.

4.4. New perspectives

It must be said that the prospects offered by AI to professionals seem infinite and whet many appetites. All sectors are potentially concerned. Companies such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft are investing more and more in this field. While in 2015 the global AI market was valued at $200 million, it is expected to reach $90 billion by 2025. Also, the number of startups developing new businesses around AI is constantly increasing, expanding the fields of application: health, education, finance, commerce, etc.

Multiple applications of artificial intelligence are already very present in our lives, obviously through our smartphones - new GPS, voice assistants, etc. - and increasingly in our cars. - and more and more in our cars. The same is true in companies, where we often use many other tools such as machine translation or chatbots to answer consumers

on the Internet. But AI allows us to go much further and offer more innovative solutions to our customers. It is no longer about winning at chess or beating champions, but about making companies more productive, more efficient, and more innovative! For example, it is becoming possible to perform predictive maintenance. For example, Kone, the elevator manufacturer, has implemented a solution that helps predict breakdowns by using sensors that constantly transmit information. This information is analyzed by the AI, thanks to millions of data collected previously in similar situations, and allows to anticipate problems by replacing a part at the right time. In this way, the algorithms learn to detect the warning signs and are constantly improving.

The same approach is used in the legal sector, where we talk about predictive justice. Some large law firms train their AI with data from millions of court decisions, to be able to advise their clients on the appropriateness of a lawsuit, considering many parameters.

AI represents a major opportunity for Morocco. There are currently eight sectors mature enough to take full advantage of these technologies: banking, telecoms, insurance, automotive industry, agriculture, energy, self-employment, and e-gov (electronic administration). For the moment, observers point out that Moroccan companies are not very advanced in this area. Large companies seem to be reluctant to capitalize on their data, except in the banking and insurance sectors, or in telecoms, where digitalization and competition are pushing towards these new approaches. More generally, the march towards AI is gradual, with, for example, the multiplication of chatbots to respond to customers. Last April, Royal Air Maroc announced the launch of its chatbot on WhatsApp, becoming one of the five companies in the world to offer this service. On the SME side, some startups are playing the AI card, but again, the phenomenon seems to be in its early stages.

To accelerate the trend, the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education and Scientific Research has just launched, in partnership with the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Investment, and Digital Economy and the National Center for Scientific and Technical Research (CNRST), a call for research projects on artificial intelligence. With a budget of 50 million dirhams, this program aims to adapt AI to Moroccan contexts to generate a real socio-economic impact. The role of research is indeed essential in this field, but AI only exists through the uses we make of it. Hence the importance of developing real "use cases" that can convince Moroccan companies to play the game.

Finally, artificial intelligence should be approached with caution while questioning the ethics of these new approaches. Algorithms are not immune to errors, quite the contrary. Design flaws, faulty hardware, biased data... the risk factors are multiple and remind us that no machine is infallible. Similarly, AI behaves as it has been programmed, which can alter its decisions. Ethics are also at the heart of the matter. With the big data frenzy and the craze around personal data, the question of privacy arises more than ever. While legislative frameworks are evolving and trying to adapt to these new international issues, few measures are taken, for the moment, against companies that do not observe them. The safeguards exist, but the contours are probably still vague. For example, a few weeks ago, the Bloomberg news agency revealed that thousands of people were listening to recordings from Alexa, the voice assistant offered by Amazon. The same practice is reportedly underway at Apple, Google, and Microsoft: officially to "improve the customer experience". More generally, a few media scandals regularly alert international public opinion to the use of personal data. But, in everyday life, who cares about their data?

For Moroccan family SMEs, AI is a promising field that offers several advantages:

- More transparency through the implementation of an intelligent tool for process management. This has the advantage of bringing more transparency between departments and thus bringing better visibility to employees.
- Harmonizing the company's processes will not only secure procedures but also help newcomers to become familiar with the company's operations more quickly.
- Reduce costs by visualizing malfunctions more quickly to anticipate risks and accelerate decision-making.
- Improve customer satisfaction by improving operations, exchanges will become more fluid, and the reactivity of the teams will improve, thus improving customer satisfaction.

At the same time, for many Moroccan family SMEs, this adoption of AI still seems too expensive and too complex to implement. In addition, the investment to be made is to be carried out over time. Companies also identify risks inherent to the transition to new technologies.

Conclusion

The analysis of the average level of digital maturity indicates that the various managers perceive the potential of AI as a factor of business development. But there is still little investment in AI and the implementation of a really smart strategy. The main finding of the study is that the priorities of companies in terms of digital remain rather basic and oriented on a traditional vision of the IT function. The issue of support for these companies is identified as a challenge to be met to help them take the plunge and engage in an approach to AI. Along with this challenge, the availability of qualified resources or the increase in skills in this area is also often problematic. It is, therefore, essential for the SME to surround itself with professionals who will be able to support it in this beneficial, even essential, way for its development. The development of sectors dedicated to innovation and robotization of production and operating processes will enable Moroccan companies to gain a competitive advantage and, consequently, ensure their sustainability and expansion in virtual markets with high growth potential.

Given the importance of these elements, this study has led us to identify a few recommendations, of varying nature and importance, that can help accelerate and succeed in the adoption of artificial intelligence within Moroccan family SMEs:

- Strengthen the support of Moroccan family SMEs regarding AI.
- To offer a legal and fiscal framework that is incentive and protective.
- Develop sectors dedicated to innovation and robotization of production processes and operations.
- Develop digital education through initial and continuing education.
- Mobilize training resources to facilitate the adoption of AI.
- Integrate AI concepts into the core knowledge of companies.
- Place AI at the heart of professionalization and bridges between professions.
- Put AI at the service of the quality of life at work.

At the end of our study and given the potential of AI and its effects on the activities of Moroccan family SMEs, this research is far from complete. An effort of a comprehensive study, including other stakeholders such as employees, will also have to be made to enrich our understanding of the phenomenon. We consider that the main limitation of this research is our sample, which could be the subject of future research.

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Examining Bias-Sentencing and Recidivism of Minorities in South Texas: A Case Study Data Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Bias sentencing is subjective sentencing. This case study evaluated sentencing disparities based on gender, race, education, prior conviction(s), prior probation/parole, and prior revocation may effectually contribute to criminal justice reform. The investigator examined the available evidence on how the experience of incarceration impacted the probability that formerly incarcerated individuals would re-offend. Based on an initial examination of peer-reviewed quantitative data, the investigator theorized that a central aspect of bias in multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies is equal treatment under the law without regard to race, ethnicity, or gender. Prison overpopulation and astronomical incarceration costs have become a financial burden for many states. The favor of probation and parole is a critical component of the criminal justice system. There are more probationers than parolees, prisoners, and jail inmates combined. The disparities in probation revocations contribute to the disparities in incarceration. Few studies carefully examine racial and ethnic disparities at this decision point. The perception of bias plays a crucial role in the revocation rates for Black probationers, coupled with the risk assessment scores and criminal history being significant factors in revocation. Furthermore, this case study aims to build upon previous research on risk factors influencing sentencing and enhance the wealth of literature on predictive bias in sentencing and recidivism. This case study has practical implications for federal and state-level sentencing guidelines considering the risk factors that influence action and those (risk) factors that are unalienable to diminish prison recidivism rates in South Texas.

KEYWORDS: Recidivism, Sentencing, Criminal Justice Reform, Bias, Disparities, Gender, Race, Education Level, Prior Conviction, Probation/Parole, Revocation

1. Introduction

There has been a significant focus on prison recidivism rates, highlighted by inequalities that exist within race, class, and ethnicity (Omori and Petersen 2020; Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). However, these studies have failed to study other factors influencing prison recidivism and prison sentencing, such as age, gender, education level, prior offense(s), prior conviction(s), prior arrest(s), and prior probation/parole revocations. The investigator defines uncontrollable factors as factors that are outside the control of the convicted. These factors include age, gender, and race. On the other hand, controllable factors are defined as those factors that are within the control of the convicted, which

include: education level, offense, prior convictions, prior arrests, and prior probation/parole revocation.

This study aims to close the research gap between uncontrollable and controllable factors and their correlation to sentencing and recidivism rates. This study plans to add to the wealth of literature on the topic, adding a certain depth to the research by including variables that may correlate to an increase in prison recidivism and prison sentencing. The potential impacts of this study are innumerable, with applications in criminal justice reform and behavioral rehabilitation. In support, a South African study chronicles how prison rehabilitation is enhanced through trust rather than good prison behavior. This research starkly contrasts what researchers have been led to believe about prison reform and highlights the importance of further exploration on this topic (Gaum, Hoffman, and Venter 2006). This study makes a good case for the resourceful management of resources within the criminal justice system to ensure proper labels are placed on the offender to provide them with a targeted rehabilitation plan.

In addition, this study aims to close the gap in research between disparity and inequality in sentencing guidelines based on factors outside the control of the convicted, such as gender and race. A Florida study in Miami-Dade County determined that the most significant disparity in conviction rates and sentencing exists between White non-Latinos and Black Latinos, followed by White non-Latinos and Black non-Latinos (Omori and Petersen 2020). This research has the prospective to highlight inequalities in criminal justice that can change laws moving forward that affect federal and state sentencing guidelines for minority groups especially. The American justice system must provide rehabilitation to criminal offenders, and the findings of this research can provide the data necessary to create rehabilitation modules for non-violent offenders (MacKenzie, Bierie, and Mitchell 2007).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Predictive Bias in Sentencing

Skeem and Lowenkamp (2016) studied risk factors associated with sentencing, such as race, type of offense (violent or non-violent), and prior convictions. Traditionally, in America, these factors have been considered risk factors to the public. Risk assessment has been used to inform sentencing verdicts for almost 100 years (Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, 2011, as cited in Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). The front-running nature of this type of risk assessment has raised ethical concerns. Moreover, advocates of prison reform have underscored the moral responsibility of the American justice system in relation to sentencing guidelines (Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). For this study, participants were selected from a group of prior offenders, and race was coded as Black or non-Hispanic White. Additionally, gender and prior convictions were factored into the selection process. The most astonishing finding during the sampling process was the disparity between Black and White offenders (Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). Black males were determined to be younger and male compared to their White counterparts. The findings from the study suggest that risk assessment has been based on something other than race. On the contrary, risk assessment was determined to be strongly rooted in prior convictions, a strong indicator of recidivism amongst offenders (Skeem and Lowenkamp 2016). In summation, most differences in prison sentencing can be attributed to differences in criminal history, according to Skeem and Lowenkamp (2016). A 2018 study builds upon the foundation provided by previous research by exploring the role of race, and charge characteristics in bail decisions (Dobbie, Goldin, and Yang 2018). This study constructs the sampling method from data collected from the IRS and court data from Philadelphia, PA, and Miami, FL. This type of sample construction intersects the financial ability of an individual to post bail with the type of charge the individual has. Unlike most previous studies, this research is

quantitatively based, increasing the results' validity. Furthermore, the study employs data triangulation to furthermore increase the reliability of the results. The findings from this paper indicate that individuals released before trial have greater leverage than those that are not released before trial. The longer a defendant is incarcerated during pretrial, the more leveraging power for the courts is obtained (Dobbie et al. 2018). This further emphasizes the immoral practices of the courts to achieve guilty convictions at the expense of the convicted record, finances, and conscience.

2.2. Spatial Distribution of Felons and Race

An interesting study on the spatial distribution of felons in America extensively researched the connection between geography and demography. The aim of this study was to provide scope to the reach of the criminal justice system in America, specifically pertaining to those offenders that have attained felony conviction status. study consulted federal resources for data collection of the number of felons by race, by state from 1948. The study separated statistics by decade from 1980 to 2010 based on race and state. The findings of this study revealed that since the 1980s, there had been domestic growth in felony convictions deep-seated in race (Shannon et al. 2017). As of 2010, 10% of African American adults have been in prison or are currently in prison; however, the rate is 12% in California and 1% in Maine. This may be attributed to population size; however, Petit has estimated 28% of African American men will have entered prison by age 30 (2012, as cited in Shannon et al. 2017). This type of research benefits behavioral and lawmakers to comprehend the breadth of the social injustice and inequality in America. King's (2019) study further suggested a link between proximity and sentencing yet builds upon previous research by focusing on the societal changes for the rise in imprisonment rates. The study pulls data from the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission from 1981 to 2013 from 355,554 felony convictions. This longitudinal research design benefits the study by examining the change in conviction rates over time. The study showed that the likelihood of a prior convict returning to prison increased, consistent with findings from Shannon et al.'s study (2017) and King (2019). In addition, other studies suggested that an increase in convictions is a causative factor to an increase in prison sentencing (King 2019; Shannon et al. 2017; Omori and Petersen 2020).

2.3. Probation Rabbit hole

Between 1980 and 2007, the number of adults under probation supervision in the United States grew from 1.1 million to 4.3 million. While initially, probation was designed as a system to exact judgment on those deemed worthy of escaping the institutionalization of prison and jail. Research in the juvenile criminal justice system suggests that young black men are less likely to be recommended to rehabilitative programs over prison confinement (Phelps 2018). This study inherently suggests that there are potential biases in the probation system in which race is viewed as a potential risk factor in relation to choosing rehabilitative measures for offenders. in 2010, Minnesota reported an annual probation admission rate of more than 1,200 per 100,000 residents; New York's rate was just 175 per 100,000. According to researchers, disparities in annual probation admission rates can be attributed to the state's racial composition, violent crime rates, political philosophy, and the region (Phelps 2018). This research chronicles the need to close the gap between sentencing inconsistencies from region to region.

A 2020 Florida study determined quantitatively that being black male led to a 14.7% decrease in the possibility of receiving a split sentence when compared to whites and a 26.6% for Hispanics compared to whites (Lehmann and Gomez 2021). Furthermore, supporting the theory that young men of color are perceived to be more cognizant of the crimes they are committing in perpetuity and with a reprobate mind than their white

counterparts. This research does build upon previous research in the field of thought with findings that indicate greater racial disparities in offenders of age 21-29 and offenders over 30 (Lehmann and Gomez 2021). These findings may help future research by formulating studies that determine how certain age demographics are viewed in the eyes of probation/parole officers, judges, and jury members. In addition, these findings are particularly interesting because offenders of ages 18-20 may be considered juveniles in some cases, while in others, they may be prosecuted or convicted as adults (Lehmann and Gomez 2021). This discrepancy should also be studied to determine nuances in sentencing between age groups.

3. Theoretical Model

For this study, a binary regression model is proposed in the form of Bayesian regression using a model proposed by (De la Cruz et al. 2021). This study differs from De la Cruz et al. (2021) because this study does not aim to employ Bayesian regression methods to determine the likelihood of recidivism but rather correlations among variables. The data in this study were coded to binary form (count) data, and because of the lack of continuous form, simple regression methods would be required. In addition, the natural stepwise progression of the dataset is not maximized under simple regression methods (State of Georgia 2021). Also, Bayesian regression allows for efficient and thorough data analysis over a specific spatial distribution.

The sample size of this study includes 25,835 data points collected from the Bureau of Justice Statistics from survey statistics at the Georgia Department of Community Supervision factors influencing prison recidivism. Respondents were provided a survey that asked for responses about their criminal history, employment history, gender, race, and bail amount with current charges. The study's respondents were male and female, with respondents grouped into race as either black or non-black (State of Georgia 2021). The age range of the respondents is 28 to over 48 years old. Furthermore, the design of this study is a mixed-method design to add breadth and depth to the study by employing both quantitative and qualitative measures. In addition, data triangulation favors mixed-method studies, and this study aims to stand as credible, reliable research.

For this research proposal, the dependent variable, prison recidivism, is analyzed to determine factors influencing an offender returning to prison within the first three years of the initial release. The dependent variable is RECIDIVISM WITHIN 3 YEARS OF RELEASE, while the independent variables include BLACK (race), EDUCATION LEVEL, MALE (gender), OFFENSE, SENTENCE PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS, PRIOR FELONY ARRESTS, PRIOR MISDEMEANOR CONVICTIONS, PRIOR MISDEMEANOR ARRESTS, PRIOR PAROLE REVOCATIONS, and PRIOR PROBATION REVOCATIONS.

The investigator proposes that the independent variables EDUCATION LEVEL will exhibit an indirect relationship with the dependent variable RECIDIVISM WITHIN 3 YEARS OF RELEASE. On the other hand, the investigator proposes that all other independent variables will display a direct relationship between the dependent variables RECIDIVISM WITHIN 3 YEARS OF RELEASE.

For this study, various regression models were employed in preliminary data analysis. Preliminary logistic regression shows skewed results with more data points versus fewer data points. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, only 100 random data points were used in the analysis. All data was coded to ensure the data could be used to analyze under regression conditions. Previous literature on prison recidivism studies used Bayesian regression models for the data analysis (De la Cruz et al. 2021). Optimally, a Bayesian zero-

inflation count model would fit the data set best because the data is not continuous but relatively discrete.

4. Results of Analysis

4.1. Description of Data (Variables)

The data below is reliable because it came from a previous study on prison recidivism (State of Georgia 2021). However, because the type of Bayesian regression required to analyze this data is beyond the scope of this course, the dataset requires a further understanding of complex regression analysis.

Table 1. Summary Statistics for Dependent and Independent Variables

Variables	Name	N	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Source
Dependent Variable							
Has the released offender been sent back to prison/jail within 3 years of release (True/False)	RECIDIVISM WITHIN 3 YEARS OF RELEASE	25,835	0.42	0.49	0	1	NIJ
Independent Variables							
1 if male, 0 if female	MALE	25,835	0.88	0.33	0	1	NIJ
1 if black, 0 if non-black	BLACK	25,835	0.57	0.49	0	1	NIJ
0 if offender has less than HS diploma, 1 if offender has a HS diploma, 2 if the offender has at least some college	EDUCATION LEVEL	25,835	0.80	0.72	0	2	NIJ
0 if drug offense, 1 if other defense, 2 if property offense, 3 if offense is considered violent	OFFENSE	25,835	1.51	1.23	0	4	NIJ
0 if offender was sentenced to less than 1 year, 1 if offender was sentenced between 1-2 years, 2 if offender was sentenced to 2-3 years, 3 if the offender was sentenced to more than 3 years.	SENTENCE	25,835	1.28	1.12	0	3	NIJ
0 if offender has less than 10 prior	PRIORFELONY ARRESTS	25,835	0.24	0.43	0	1	NIJ

felony arrets, 1 if the offender has more than 10 prior felony arrests							
0 if offender has less than 6 prior misdemeanor arrests, 1 if the offender has more than 6 prior misdemeanor arrests	PRIOR MISDEMEANOR ARRESTS	25,835	0.32	0.47	0	1	NIJ
0 if offender has less than 3 prior felony convictions, 1 if the offender has more than 3 prior felony convictions	PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS	25,835	0.27	0.44	0	1	NIJ
0 if the offender has less than 4 prior misdemeanor convictions, 1 if the offender has more than 4 prior misdemeanor convictions	PRIOR MISDEMEANOR CONVICTIONS	25,835	0.23	0.42	0	1	NIJ
True if prisoner has previous parole violation resulting in being sent back to prison, false if prisoner has not violated parole resulting in being sent back to prison	PRIOR PAROLE REVOCATIONS	25,835	0.90	0.29	0	1	NIJ
True if prisoner has previous probation violation resulting in being sent back, false if prisoner has not been sent back to prison because of probation violation	PRIOR PROBATION REVOCATIONS	25,835	0.85	0.35	0	1	NIJ

Note. NIJ = National Institute of Justice.

5. Discussion of Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for this mixed-methods study's independent and dependent variables. The first column describes each independent and dependent variable within the scope of this investigation. The mean of the dependent variable RECIDIVISM WITHIN 3 YEARS OF RELEASE, is 0.42, which means that an average of 42% of respondents have recidivated within three years of prison or supervised release. The mean of the independent variable MALE is 0.88, which means that, on average majority of the

respondents are skewed towards being male. The independent variable RACE was determined to have a mean of 0.57, meaning that most of the respondents were black as the binary block code was one and non-white was 0. These findings are supported by Lehmann & Gomez, in which black females receive split sentencing at a rate of 3.04% lower than their white female counterparts. In comparison, the overall black-white marginal difference ranges from -7.41% to -5.30% (2021). The mean for EDUCATION LEVEL was around 0.80, meaning most respondents had an education level consummate with almost completing HS referenced by skewing closer to 1. The value 1 is equivalent to the offender completing a high school diploma.

The SENTENCE variable was determined to have a mean of 1.28, this statistic is parallel with the sentence in years, and most respondents were determined to have an average sentence of 1.28 years. When compared to the independent variable OFFENSE, with a mean of 1.51, most offenders were low-level offenders charged with minor offenses and minor property crimes. This is also exhibited in Phelps's research and how low-level offenders were processed, wasting valuable time and resources while causing punitive damage to the offender (2018).

The independent variables, PRIOR FELONY ARRESTS, and PRIOR FELONY CONVICTIONS, were determined to have a mean of 0.24 and 0.27, respectively. This means that most offenders have lower than ten felony arrests and lower than three felony convictions which may point to lower recidivism amongst the offenders. On the other hand, the independent variables PRIOR MISDEMEANOR ARRESTS and PRIOR MISDEMEANOR CONVICTIONS were determined to have a mean of 0.32 and 0.23, respectively. This data contrasts the felony subgroup data in that, on average more offenders were arrested for misdemeanor charges and not convicted for these same charges.

Conversely, on average, more offenders were convicted for felonies than their original arrests. These results differ from Omori and Petersen's study, in which convictions were lower than arrests (2020). The difference in findings may be attributed to the strict judicial philosophy of the Georgia Department of Corrections and harsher punishment for low-level offenders. The standard deviation for the independent variable PRIOR PROBATION REVOCATIONS is 0.06 higher than the standard deviation for the independent variable PRIOR PAROLE REVOCATIONS. These results are supported by a similar study that determined that by 2015, 3.8 million adults were under probation supervision, accounting for 56 percent of the 6.7 million adults under criminal justice control (Phelps 2018). Post analysis, the investigator conducted Bayesian multilevel Poisson regression on this dataset because of the data count data rather than continuous data. Initial results indicate that all the independent variable's mean fall within the 95% confidence interval range.

6. Conclusion and Future Scope

This case study has endeavored to broaden the scope of the research of Phelps (2018) and Lehmann and Gomez (2021) with a dataset from 2021 to determine the correlation between (un)controllable risk factors and sentencing for offenders using a statewide dataset. This research provides a valuable finding of an increase in the number of probation revocations from parole revocations. This finding may suggest an increase in the number of probation violators combined with most low-level offenders suggesting nuances in sentencing for these offenders. Furthermore, community resources should be allocated for the proper rehabilitating of offenders whose offense is consummate with a sentence of supervised release. While supervised release may be seen as a privilege to some, few studies, if any, have failed to study determining factors such as prior convictions and prior arrests. The variables were statistically manipulated in this case study to add to the field of thought

considerations of criminal record when determining where the offended should receive the supervised release. The EDUCATION LEVEL is an interesting variable that should be further studied to determine if offenders with a perceived higher level of education are more aware of the consequences of their actions. In addition, the study should examine the likelihood of the more educated offender committing crimes with a sub-focus on the magnitude of the offense.

The possibilities for this research topic moving forward are endless. There is a plethora of research that has been conducted about prison recidivism both nationally and internationally. In addition, there is plenty of data for those who look to pursue this research topic further. However, this research topic comes with its shortcomings from an ethical and practical perspective. Firstly, a thorough study of how practical the survey administration is must be considered. Due to the mental and physical constraints of being an inmate, inmates have no incentive to complete a survey on prison recidivism accurately and or within a timely manner. Also, this survey's ethical ramifications extend to gaining IRB approval. Change to: The lessons learned from this research assignment are innumerable. On the one hand, the study did not go as anticipated; however, the investigator acquired a deeper understanding of how to conduct a more thorough study in the future. Additionally, data analysis is an important part of the research that may be overlooked for quantitative and mixed methods studies. Data analysis tools like STATA allow researchers to analyze raw and coded data but require specific knowledge of various analysis methods. This research topic is relevant, and future research should look to add original findings to the field of thought.

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Development and Globalization as Challenges – A Christian Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to discuss development and globalization and the challenge they pose when consumerism and endless economic growth are thoroughly pursued as economic doctrine. Issues such as social justice and poverty are also addressed, as well as the role of faith communities in providing alternative models that affirm life, justice, and right relationships. It is argued that faith communities ought to be communities that live out such alternatives.

KEYWORDS: Development, globalization, consumerism, cultural change, Christian existence

Introduction

We live in a "global village." It is a world in which the task faith communities have assumed, to provide coherence and the perpetuation of positive values, becomes increasingly challenging (Măcelaru 2020, 87-96; Măcelaru 2014a, 169-74; Măcelaru 2009, 123-47). Below are some reflections on this task in the light of the concepts of development and globalization. Both play an important role in the world today, and this is so because both are not only facets of contemporary economics, as some would purport, but their impact caries out into areas such as social justice/injustice, poverty, migration, etc. In the light of these, believers and faith communities ought to consider their stance vis-à-vis development and globalization (Rotaru 2014, 532-541) to identify in which way these have an impact on the values we affirm and ponder further about their task to be light and salt in the world today (cf. Mat. 5:13-16).

Development

Development as a concept is essentially secular in its origin. It is the child of the European and American Enlightenment. It embodies the belief that the natural condition for the free person is to achieve unending economic and social progress. This approach to life is so widely spread that it became "the secular religion" (Rotaru 2006, 251-266) of the contemporary society (Sine 1987, 2; cf. Sine 1983, 9-36). This progressive view of the future contains the firm conviction that economic progress will automatically result in social and moral progress. Within it, human activities are focused on production and consumption. The mind-set driving such life-style, called consumerism, emphasizes productivity to the point that members of society that do not conform to it are neglected or entirely left out. Thus the increasing ability to produce ever-new goods and services has become a synonym for "good-life." Economic growth has become synonymous with a better future.

Development as a concept is in constant flux. It is carried out in the context of the global economy, but is also influenced by local culture and religion. As early as 1954, Schumpeter (1954, 9-41) described development as an innovative technological phenomenon that breaks the capitalist cycle and initiates a new economic process. This process is seen as progress and, ultimately, the very "road to prosperity." This also became the economic doctrine by which the world was divided into rich and poor countries, the latter being pushed to reach higher levels of economic status through

industrialization. Thus the widespread use of labels such as "the first world" vs. "the third world." Admittedly, voices that began to question the development doctrine and patterns observed in European and North American societies as normative for the rest of the world emerged as early as the 1960s. Representatives of poorer countries talk about "alternative development" that accounts for their own traditions, culture, and societal arrangements. Notions such as person-centered development are also put forward as alternatives. These single out "human" development as a goal of economic growth. Yes, the development of industry, agriculture, and communal potentials does not necessarily lead to the development of human beings (Rotaru 2016, 29-43). Thus, there is a need for holistic alternatives that take into account the needs human beings have that are not material but rather social, psychological and spiritual.

After Schumacher published his classic "Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered," a new model of development based on small-scale technological initiatives began to flourish in the so-called "underdeveloped" countries. We consider these as the first signs of a return to values such as human dignity and community-nurturing (Măcelaru 2021, 596-608). As Chavannes Jeune (1987, 218-25) has pointed out, poverty is not an accident. It is a consequence of the existing socio-economic and political order – where the wealthy endeavor to stay wealthy, the poor will remain poor. The mechanism of injustice is based on dependency and oppression. Consequently, the "developed" countries ought to ask themselves if the help given under the rubric of development is *for* the poor or *with* the poor. Within Christianity, the example of Jesus is a life shared with those in need (Rotaru 2010, 7). We should ask ourselves whether the help provided really addresses structural poverty or simply scratches the surface of the problem. As Jeune (1987, 220) observes, "the nature of structural poverty demands that we tackle its root causes rather than just its effects."

Of course, the possibility of establishing a new international economic order may seem unattainable, at least for as long as mentalities and life-models in the "developed" world remain the same. Yet, beginning in the mid-1960s, Christian voices have begun to strongly address the issue of social justice vs prosperity. The slogan became "help them to help themselves," and this became a major topic of discussion at such gatherings as Vatican II (1965) and the Second Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin, Columbia (1968). The principles put forward in such gatherings emphasized the self-reliance of those involved; the pursuit of social justice in respect to work, property, education, and political participation; and the change of focus from economic growth for its own sake to the betterment of standards of living for the poorest amongst us.

The debt crisis of "underdeveloped" countries is another important issue within this discussion. The debt of the so-called Third World countries constitutes between 46 to 60 percent of their annual export earnings. During the 1980s, the Church began to step up and openly side with such impoverished nations, disclosing national debt as a fundamental issue of justice. The call was made to industrialized countries to stand in solidarity with the less fortunate ones and to solve the problem through debt remission.

All these point to the need to reexamine the models of economic development perpetuated in the world today. Christians should raise questions about who benefits and who loses within the current economic growth framework. In reality, what kind of economics can help the poor without adding new burdens on their shoulders? To what extent is this the responsibility of faith communities? Perhaps we should look again at what the Scriptures have to teach us (Măcelaru 2019, 31-40; Măcelaru 2016, 13-19; Măcelaru 2011, 167-73). in terms of living a simple lifestyle, in spite of the material wealth made available to us. For "if we do not authentically incarnate the values of the kingdom in lifestyles of simplicity, how can we work with the poor in integrity?" (Sine 1987, 15).

Globalization

There are millions of people nowadays who live in utter poverty. Many lack the very basic necessities in life and the very survival of thousands is at stake on a daily basis. Even more millions live without access to clean drinking water, without appropriate health care, and opportunity for employment and education. This is the one side of the global picture nowadays. The other side is the hopeful image projected by the increased connectivity and opportunities associated with globalization.

There is no single definition of globalization. It has been said that globalization is a "multifarious, ever changing, and at the same time, vague phenomenon" (Măcelaru 2014c, 71). The term "globalization" appeared in the sociological literature during the 1970s. However, its emergence as a concept that describes global trends came during the 1990s. As a process, globalization has two main characteristics. It unifies cultures, making the world more and more "a single place," while also broadening the consciousness of the world as a whole. Globalization is sometimes called the process that creates the McWorld or the process of CocaColonization of the world. However, the issue is more complex, since, with globalization, the shape of the world is in a continuous flux: the West is no longer seen as the colonizer but is itself colonized and changed due to massive migration (Măcelaru 2018, 69-76), a process which is itself facilitated by the ease of traveling and communication characteristic of globalization. Thus, globalization also brings the fall of local borders and the universalization of markets, ideas and technology. Măcelaru (2014c, 72) defines globalization as:

> ...a process of transformation, presently ongoing worldwide, that touches upon all areas of life and is characterized by: pronounced economic change, technological advancement particularly felt in the development of various modes of global communication, the emergence of a more homogenous global culture as cultural differences between nations and social groups begin to dissolve, and the apparition of a pronounced risk culture whereby manufactured risks (e.g., pollution, AIDS, international terrorism) begin to surpass natural risks (e.g., natural calamities).

This definition, however, is functional and leaves out other global trends, such as the political, evident in the "intentional" spread of liberal democracy, the dominance of global markets, the pursuit of global economic integration, and the transformation of production systems. Also, on the negative side, the different standards that are being applied, contribute to making the rich richer and the poor poorer and the influence of globalization on demography. While child mortality rates have decreased, so did birth rates. While life expectancy has increased, so did human upheavals, displacement, violence, wars and death caused by wars.

To these, I would also consider the influence of globalization on the life of faith communities. From the above, it should be obvious that globalization is an ambiguous process, operative in today's world, that holds together positive and negative elements. Positive in that globalization works against sectarianism, racism, exclusivism, and any other negative stance that threatens values, cultures, economies, and political structures all around the world. Negative in that communities come under unfair economic, political and cultural pressures exerted by "developed" countries upon their "underdeveloped" neighbors.

From a Christian perspective, the contrast described above is the same contrast faith communities have faced, between the positive outlook on life in community, where people are predestined to depend on each other and to engage in meaningful relationships, and the negative realities of sin, that bring out egoism, egocentrism, power plays,

ethnocentrism, individualism, racism, greed, sexism, and a general hermeneutic of suspicion. I propose though that the Church does have the resources to meet such challenges head on. As people of God, a community that finds her identity "in Christ," the Church should reject the way of life described above, and instead embrace actions such as breaking the denominational boundaries, focusing on community life as an alternative to individualism, involving all members of the community (including the laity) in the life of the Church, and cooperating with other religious communities in the pursuit of peace and the common good.

Along similar lines, Larry Rasmussen discusses globalization as a three-way move: the globalization of conquest and commerce; the globalization of development; and the globalization of "free trade" liberalization (Rasmussen 1999, 126-31). He also pleads for the application of "eco-justice," which is his way of advancing changes in seven dimensions of life: economic, social, institutional, informational, demographic, technological, moral and religious (Rasmussen 1999, 131-33). It is within this context of change that Rasmussen gives contours to the mission of the Church – she is not called to work for "sustainable development" but for "sustainable community." As for how this is attained, Anderson's proposed habitus may provide a process to be undertaken by faith communities at large. In Anderson's words:

> I understand *habitus* to be a practically oriented disposition of the human soul formed from general spirituality, shaped by disciplined meditation and the study of Christian texts, informed by a careful reading of the signs of the times and the practical knowledge necessary for the work of ministry in this time. A habitus is not just about thinking and it is more than skills (Anderson 1997, 44).

As for the principles of living undergoing such habitus, Anderson points out the need to wonder at the mystery of human uniqueness, to recognize the other, to practice hospitality toward the stranger and reconciliation as a way of living with diversity (Anderson 1997, 58). Thus, the aim of Christian mission, in Anderson's view, is not to convert or transform the other but to live peacefully with the neighbor in pursuit of common good and happiness.

Conclusion

To conclude then, it appears that development and globalization are issues that are radically changing the context for mission, both domestically and internationally. The question of how the Church responds to the changes in the global economy, the ecological urgency, and the political, multi-religious, and multicultural arena remains challenging. As cultures are challenged to change, so do religions. The challenges for the traditional faith communities are the fragmentation brought in by the consumer culture of the globalized society, the religious relativism, and the increased individualization of faith. As for the responses suggested, these are:

- The renewed conscientization and active engagement of faith communities in performing their *traditional* role of providing meaning to life, even within the global system.
- The living out of the *prophetic* role faith communities have to demask injustice – the lacks, irregularities and problems that development and globalization may create.
- The steadfastness faith communities must show in their *revisionist* role, rejecting aspects of global culture that are contrary to the biblical vision of human flourishing (Măcelaru 2017, 49-55; Măcelaru 2014c, 233-36) and advocating for a return of societal values that have been challenged or lost.

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Using Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time Model to Conceptualize a School-Based Intervention to Help Prevent Adolescent Intimate Partner Violence

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ABSTRACT: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a pervasive global issue affecting the health and well-being of adolescents. This study utilized Bronfenbrenner's PPCT theory to investigate the risk factors that contribute to IPV and to help develop a school-based intervention to prevent IPV among adolescents. A number of factors from different levels of the PPCT framework that may impact the efficacy of intervention development are explored. The PPCT model of Bronfenbrenner has the potential to unify IPV propositions in the existing literature into a coherent theoretical framework to interpret and analyze IPV phenomena, generalize various aspects of prevention addressing IPV issues, and guide practical intervention. Consideration is given to the four defining properties of the bioecological theory in proposing implications for school health practices pertaining to addressing IPV issues among adolescents through a school-based intervention.

KEYWORDS: Bronfenbrenner, PPCT, intimate partner violence, adolescents, intervention

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as a major global issue affecting adolescents' health and well-being has been well documented (Decker et al. 2014; García-Moreno et al. 2013; Lewis and Fremouw 2001), which highlights the significance of preventing the occurrence of this phenomenon within this group. Globally, one particularly striking statistic is that about one in three ever-partnered females between the age of 15 to 19 have already been exposed to IPV, suggesting that this phenomenon is already prevalent among them (García-Moreno et al. 2013). Encountering IPV during adolescence is associated with worse academic performance, more inadequate personal and mental strengths, and the greater likelihood of perpetrating or suffering in later life (Cui, Ueno, Gordon, and Fincham 2013; Pittenger, Huit, & Hansen 2016). Adolescents who have history of being IPV perpetrators and victims are more prone to regard violence as a normal tactic to maintain a relationship, and this can spill over into marriage or cohabitation, in turn leading to inter-generational cycle of IPV episodes (Manchikanti Gómez 2011; Shakoor, Theobald, and Farrington 2022).

Since the 1990s, a rapid increase in the number of preventive interventions have been implemented within school settings to educate adolescents with regard to IPV-related issues (Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, and Killip 1992; Krajewski, Rybarik, Dosch, and Gilmore 1996; Lavoie, Vézina, Piché, and Boivin, 1995). However, a limited range of theories as guiding or underlying frameworks to develop a school-based intervention preventing IPV can be revealed. Although several reviews of IPV theories were

developed to explain the mechanism through which violence operates in intimate relationships i.e., feminist theory, attachment theory and power theory (Ali and Naylor 2013; Bell and Naugle 2008; Burelomova, Gulina, and Tikhomandritskaya 2018), they were limited to provide a comprehensive account of variables that may affect an intervention's efficacy. Many studies have employed Bronfenbrenner's multi-layered environmental framework to conceptualize contextual factors that can increase the probability of IPV abuse at various levels in a nested model i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-and macro-systems (Alaggia, Regehr, and Jenney 2012; Pokharel, Hegadoren, and Papathanassoglou 2020), and the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted it in its widely cited report on violence and health (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, and Zwi 2002). However, Bronfenbrenner's theory was either partially presented or misused (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik 2009). Nearly none of the preventive studies can be identified using the evolved version of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, involving Process, Person, Context and Time (PPCT) (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007) to the construction and implementation of a school-based intervention.

Therefore, instead of applying an earlier iteration of Bronfenbrenner's theory to conceptualize IPV episodes through a contextual lens of risk factors, this study integrated it with the other three crucial elements in the model, namely process, person, and time, which are frequently overlooked in many studies. The application of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model could provide a powerful explanatory mechanism through which an adolescent act in IPV episodes and a cohesive framework to help review a wide range of developmental influences and functional correlates for preventing IPV issues that are evidenced in a multidisciplinary field of IPV research. Doing so, the focus of this study is to (i) extract influential factors that reinforce adolescents' IPV victimization and perpetration and (ii) variables associated with the effectiveness of developing IPV preventive interventions within school settings.

2. Bronfenbrenner's PPCT Theoretical Model

Bronfenbrenner's theory consisted of two distinct phases involved in the evolution from ecology to bioecology (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; Tudge et al. 2009). In the 1970s, his ecological paradigm was initially articulated and culminated in his book The Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory builds a new paradigm to help investigate the wide-ranging developmental influences an environment can have on an individual's development, thereby providing an operationally, theoretically and methodologically sound model in the domain of human development and across diverse disciplines. The model argues that the ecological environment is not static, but evolved over time, whereby, the developing individual plays an active role in a continuous adaption of a changing environment, whilst on the other hand, the environment changes in order to accommodate better the developing individual residing therein.

Bronfenbrenner's theory was in a state of continuous progression (Bronfenbrenner 2005; 2007; Ceci 2006; Tudge et al. 2009). In his later works, he started to stress the role of genetic endowment in the process of human development, as well as the core issue of understanding the mechanism through which the individual's genetic potential transformed into phenotypic functioning in the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; 2007). To manifest the prominent part genetics played in the ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner extended his theory by naming it the 'bioecological theory of development'. In this newly named theory, Bronfenbrenner defined the degree of genotype differences,

realised in phenotype differences, as 'heritability', and the engine that drives an individual's genotypes actualised in phenotypes as a 'proximal process.' A strong proximal process was believed to stimulate the genetic potentials (genotypes) to produce more positive developmental outcomes and buffer developmental dysfunctions (phenotypes). That is to say, enhancing the effectiveness of the proximal process can contribute to a higher level of heritability, actualise biological potentials and, in the meantime, produce a more advanced level of psychological growth and developmental functioning.

The proximal process is therefore regarded as the most distinctive characteristic of Bronfenbrenner's theory, as it distinguishes his writings from previous ones, and henceforth, he referred to Process (proximal process), together with Person (the developing bio-psychological person), Context (micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems) and Time (chronosystems) as the four defining properties of his bioecological model as well as the complex, dynamic and reciprocal interactions among them (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007). For this review, the bioecological lens was adopted to synthesize the evidence base to explore factors influencing adolescents' IPV victimization and perpetration and variables hindering or promoting the efficacy of a school-based IPV intervention. Additionally, this study encompasses a wide variety of literature and categorizes various influences into the four defining priorities of the PPCT model. The application of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model can ensure a sufficient understanding of IPV episodes, and a cohesive theoretical framework will be developed to conceptualize interventions preventing IPV within school settings.

3. The application of PPCT model to adolescent IPV

3.1 Proximal Process

Proximal process was described as the mechanism through which human development takes place (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994). To initiate the mechanism and keep it going requires four dynamic energies and forces, namely form, power, content and direction, which are introduced in the one central proposition within the bioecological theory below:

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007).

Translating this proposition into an example of a school-based intervention preventing IPV, setting the proximal process in motion and promoting intervention efficacy involves the joint functioning of four-pronged sources: form, power, content, and direction. This study refers form as adolescent students formed conception of IPV-related behaviors. Students, especially those at risk i.e. have experienced unhealthy or abusive relationships or witnessed it at home or among peers, may be unwilling to participate in such an intervention and it can be difficult for them to internalize disorders and adjust problems (Edwards Sylaska, and Neal 2015; Graham-Bermann, Miller-Graff, Howell, Grogan-Kaylor & Development 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to develop a good knowledge of participating students' IPV-related thoughts and feelings (Lundgren and Amin 2015) i.e., are there any students who had witnessed, experienced or perpetrated IPV? Also, it's of critical importance to recognize that those

following a faith or religious belief may be uncomfortable learning about this topic (Maguele, Tlou, Taylor, and Khuzwayo 2020). More consideration should be given to ethnic minorities to construct appropriate content for them (Dunn, Oths, and Nursing 2004; Sabri et al. 2018). Additionally, gender variances in perceiving IPV issues should be built into such an intervention to avoid stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against gender (Hickman, Jaycox, and Aronoff 2004; O'Leary and Slep 2012; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, and Saltzman 2007). Moreover, special attention should be paid to male students, since they may be prone to seeing IPV issues from a perpetrator and developing a counter reaction of being such an intervention, resulting in high rate of dropouts (De Koker, Mathews, Zuch, Bastien, and Mason-Jones 2014; Edwards et al. 2015). In contrast, females could become too cautious and worried about encountering abusers in their future intimate relationships after being part of IPV-related intervention (Fox, Hale, and Gadd 2014; Stanley, Ellis, Farrelly, Hollinghurst, and Downe 2015).

Power refers to the importance attributed by relevant stakeholders to the development of a curriculum preventing IPV among adolescents. Teachers are more willing to devote time and effort undertaking an intervention if the school has an engaging and encouraging environment for IPV prevention (Whitaker, Murphy, Eckhardt, Hodges, and Cowart 2013). Also, teachers were deemed to be more familiar with students' learning capacities and interests, therefore possessing better knowledge of what intervention content would be required (Wilson et al., 2019). Support given by parents to schools to deliver the subject to their children, was seen as essential for the successful construction of interventions. Professionals' active involvement in relevant health and prevention services were purported to provide schools with sources, materials and experience (Stanley et al. 2015; Whitaker et al. 2013).

Content is understood in this study as the variability of students' learning capabilities and their prior knowledge of IPV. When developing an intervention, teachers should have a good understanding of what students have learned previously regarding IPV, and then plug any gaps to ensure a smooth transition from lower- to higher-level learning. Also, having a good understanding of students' applicable knowledge and suitable learning capabilities to take part in the intervention should be considered a contributor to the success of developing an intervention with efficacy (Stanley et al. 2015; Whitaker et al. 2013).

Direction is about the aims of having such an intervention i.e., change attitude, promote awareness, increase knowledge and mitigate incidences. A substantial number of studies reported supporting evidence for school-based programs do appear to enhance young people's cognitive skills in dealing with IPV issues (i.e., increased knowledge, promoted awareness, and altered attitudes) (Cornelius and Resseguie 2007; De Koker et al. 2014; Whitaker et al. 2013). Further, a number of programs reported less perpetration of physical violence, e.g Safe Dates and Fourth R. Also, Shifting Boundaries reported less IPV perpetration and victimization (De Koker et al. 2014). However, there is mixed evidence regarding the efficacy of transforming internal cognitive outcomes to external behavioral outcomes (Edwards et al. 2015; Lundgren and Amin 2015).

Furthermore, change within the process is not a one-off event but repeats throughout an individual's life. Finally, the effects of the proximal process, as the engine to stimulate IPV prevention, should be considered as a whole within the PPCT model, involving the biopsychological traits of a person, and interacting with the immediate or remote context over an extended time.

3.2 Person

Individuals' bio-psychological characteristics were effective predictors of IPV tendency but were absent in many studies (Ehrensaft 2008). Bronfenbrenner sees the bio-psychological characteristics of individuals as significant factors in shaping the way they perceive and experience the environment. Three types of personal traits constructing an individual's life developmental trajectory were labeled, namely demands, resources and forces. Demand characteristics are personal stimuli recognizable from a physical appearance e.g., age, gender and appearance, based on which it is possible to promote or impede social interactions, due to an immediately formed expectation (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998; 2007). A number of studies have discussed age variable associations with IPV, as adolescents, are regarded as being at an alarmingly dangerous stage of life in terms of experiencing IPV but are also the most prospective fruitful targets for preventive programs (Cornelius and Resseguie 2007; Humphrey and White 2000; Ybarra and Thompson 2018). When it comes to gender, a vast majority of global studies overwhelmingly focus on female victimization and male perpetration (Decker et al. 2014; Humphrey and White 2000). However, in comparison, a review found out that females and males are equally capable of perpetrating IPV, and females are slightly more likely than males to resort to violence in an intimate relationship (Capaldi, Knoble, Shortt, and Kim 2012). Therefore, when developing an intervention preventing IPV among adolescents, it is of critical importance to avoid gender bias towards males, since both males and females could be the one to abuse or be abused (Hickman et al. 2004; Whitaker et al. 2007).

Different from demand characteristics, resource characteristics are not physically seen but are more relevant to mental and emotional resources that can affect an individual's entire life (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2007; Tudge et al. 2009). As for IPV, a number of studies mentioned in the literature herein revealed that individuals who observed or suffered IPV-related abuse in childhood were highly associated with sequential risks of victimization and perpetration within adolescence (Cornelius & Resseguie 2007; Pittenger et al. 2016), and adulthood and observed a higher rate of re-experiencing IPV at between 20 and 39% (Pittenger et al. 2016). Therefore, protecting students from being re-victimized and re-perpetrators should be set up within a school's safeguarding or pastoral system, as well as within a supportive environment, to nurture students' sense of belongingness and connectedness and help them seek help or report issues if they are in or have experienced an IPV situation.

Force characteristics refer to individuals' dispositional variances in terms of motivation, persistence and temptation, which can be categorized into generative or disruptive manners. Individuals with generative force characteristics are more likely to initiate proximal processes when completing complex tasks, deferring immediate gratification and sustaining long-term goals (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998). On the contrary, individuals with disruptive force characteristics tend to fail in emotional and behavioral management. This theoretical hypothesis is consistent with relevant findings identified in literature (Espelage 2014; Spencer 2006), which suggest that individuals with personal traits and genetic potentials, such as hedonistic tendencies, aggressive or volatile personalities and depression or suicide susceptibilities accordingly have a significantly higher risk of engaging in deviant activities such as substance abuse and sexual behavior disorders, thereby leading to a higher possibility of IPV victimization and perpetration (Cleveland, Herrera, and Stuewig 2003; Jewkes 2002; Silverman et al. 2006). These necessitate an IPV-related intervention teaching adolescents safe and healthy relationship skills i.e social-emotion learning, self-regulation and conflict-management skills.

The above three types of biopsychological characteristics are not static – they are inherent in the developing person and change biologically over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998). Biological changes alter the nature of the role the developing individual plays in the environment. These changes can be relatively passive, for example the environment may react differently to individuals, due to changing demands characteristics such as growing older, or they can be more active according to the developing individual's resource characteristics such as ability, experience, knowledge and skills, which are linked to their capability when actively engaging in the environment. Alternatively, they can be most active in such a way that their force characteristics set in motion the desire or drive to create new features that alter the surrounding environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 1998; 2007). Therefore, when applying the person as one of the defining properties of Bronfenbrenner's PPCT theory to facilitate well-being and mitigate the risk of IPV, it is of crucial importance to consider the nature of the developing individual's biopsychological features, e.g. demand, resource and force, together with their various changing patterns and interrelationships in shaping the environment.

3.3 Context

Schools are important settings for interventions aimed at adolescence, but connections with broader avenues are needed (Whitaker et al. 2013). The context in Bronfenbrenner's early works has been widely applied to explore IPV risky factors from different levels of environment (Alaggia et al. 2012; Krug et al. 2002; Little & Kaufman Kantor 2002). The contextual model involves four interrelated systems, namely microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994), each of which is now discussed in turn.

Microsystems represent the surroundings with which the developing individual immediately and directly interacts (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994). These are generally in face-to-face settings and are made up of individuals' personal and biological characteristics, relationships, roles and activities within the environment. As outlined previously, three types of bio-psychological features of the person shape the ways in which individuals communicate with or react to the observed environment and experience or perpetrate IPV in an intimate relationship. Further, microsystems involve persons, objects and symbols that can have a direct impact on shaping a developing individual's personal and biological characteristics, especially those with which individual has enduring and stable forms of interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci 1994). For example, families, social groups and media approaches that adolescents constantly exposure to (Ehrensaft 2008; Lourenço, Fornari, Santos, and Fonseca 2019; Lundgren and Amin 2015).

Mesosystems contain links, relationships and activities within two or more microsystems, in which the developing individual interacts directly and participates actively (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Settings containing the developing individual in mesosystem are dynamic, they link together and transact with each other and individuals residing in them move from setting to setting (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Appling mesosystems-related theory to IPV research, studies stress that schools' engagement in fostering collaboration across microsystems to develop effective intervention (Ehrensaft 2008). Schools' involvement in IPV primary preventive programs can be developed in such a way as to not only mitigate the risk of IPV among students participating in the program, but also promote awareness within a network of settings surrounding them (Arriaga and Foshee 2004; Cornelius and Resseguie 2007). For example, research illustrates that assisting students to develop a positive and healthy

perspective on IPV situations can alter the way they see and deal with such issues occurring in their peer groups, families or neighborhoods (Espelage 2014; Pittenger et al. 2016). Additionally, students who have gained knowledge of IPV from school can have a positive impact on their own beliefs or attitudes regarding issues in their current or future intimate relationships (Little and Kaufman Kantor 2002). Hence, to prevent the potentially ingrained phenomenon of IPV in society, by delivering an intervention within school settings, can be considered a promising and fruitful endeavour.

Exosystems consist of interactions taking place between two or more systems, at least one with which the developing individual has no direct connection, for example a parent's relationship with a child's school, or a child's relationship with a parent's workplace (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998). At this level, a number of studies note that the community environment can be linked to a higher level of IPV perpetration and hinder the process of recovery from victimization (Capaldi et al. 2012; Espelage 2014; Pittenger et al. 2016). As evidenced in studies, community poverty and rurality can lead to weak community cohesiveness and low willingness to interact with neighborhoods, which discourages bystander intervention and help-seeking attempts by individuals (Capaldi et al. 2012; Krug et al. 2002). Similarly, school communities located within an impoverished environment can also diminish how students feel connected to schools and lower their confidence to seek support from teachers or peers when suffering IPV (Arriaga and Foshee 2004; Capaldi et al. 2012; Post, Klevens, Maxwell, Shelley, and Ingram 2010).

Macrosystems present the cultural structures that permeate micro-, meso- and exosystems, with reference to the developing individual's beliefs, worldview and customs (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci 1994). At the macrosystems level, social norms related to gender inequality and stereotypes are considered deep-rooted risk factors for an individual learning about IPV behaviors (Heise 2011; Krug et al. 2002). Since social norms and beliefs are the shared expectations of a particular group of people regarding how individuals should behave, if a particular country promulgates ideological factors such as male honor, female obedience and tolerance of violence as a way to resolve conflicts, individuals from the group are more likely to suffer IPV (Krug et al. 2002). According to the WHO multi-country study (Heise, 2011), women who supported wife-beating accordingly increased the odds of IPV incident in 13 out of 15 countries. In addition, over 35 population-based studies from Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East demonstrated that condoning IPV among both women and men is regarded as a strong predictive factor in preventing IPV perpetration. Moreover, A number of studies have adapted US dating violence preventive programmes to other national settings, such as the adoption of the Safe Dates project to the context of Francophone Switzerland (Hamby, Nix, De Puy, and Monnier 2012) and the delivery of Coaching Boys into Men to India (Miller et al. 2012). However, modifications should be considered when trying to fit a programme into another community or society, such as the usage of key terminologies, the cultural acceptability of violence and gender norms (Hamby et al. 2012; Meiksin et al. 2020; Stanley et al. 2015).

3.4 Time

Time is an equally important structural component in the system since all the other elements change in terms of the passage of time, including the individual's development at each stage throughout life within the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner 2005; Ehrensaft 2008). Although the early versions of Bronfenbrenner's model did not have time as an essential concept, he incorporated a specific reference to it in the notion of a "chronosystem"(Bronfenbrenner 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2007). As for time

and change, IPV studies point to the potential of individuals who have experienced IPV in adolescence suffering adverse outcomes in later life such as post-traumatic disorders, lower self-esteem, substance abuse and academic failure (Cornelius and Resseguie 2007; Cui et al. 2013). Moreover, experiencing initial IPV perpetration or victimization at an early stage of life suggests that individuals will most likely endure IPV again in adulthood (Cui et al. 2013). IPV in adolescence is closely associated with the phenomenon in married relationships, which can lead to domestic violence such as parent-child aggression and child belligerence (Humphrey & White, 2000). Therefore, if IPV preventive work could be delivered to teenaged students who are in the early stages of an intimate relationship, it could be effective in reducing violent issues in current or future relationships. Another way time may get involved in IPV preventive research is that the length of intervention can be a key influential variable of efficacy. For example, it's argued that interventions carried out over a longer duration across more than one session with sufficient followed-up increased the effectiveness of the intervention (Edwards et al. 2015; Lundgren and Amin 2015; Whitaker et al. 2013). However, some reported that intervention effect can attenuate and vanish at longitudinal follow-up (De La Rue, Polanin, Espelage and Pigott 2014; Stanley et al. 2015).

4. Discussion

Although Bronfenbrenner's theory has been in existence for half century, many studies in the field of IPV prevention have adapted ecological theory exclusively to contextual-based analysis and discounted the proximal process of an individual's development and person-context interrelatedness (Tudge et al. 2009). Instead of applying a partial version of the ecological model to explore IPV issues solely through a nested environmental context, the other three elements: the primary driving force of the human development-proximal process, the biopsychosocial characteristics of the person and changes over extended time, in Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model are considered herein. Additionally, and somewhat different from existing theoretical theories in IPV research, which have failed to integrate different perspectives from multiple stakeholders or address either context or proximal accounts within one model, Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model complies with the demand to blend the various views from multidisciplinary into one comprehensive framework. Since Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model has the potential to unify IPV propositions in the existing literature into one coherent theoretical framework to guide practical intervention, it is advocated and adopted by this research, in order to interpret and analyse IPV phenomena and generalize various aspects of an educational intervention addressing IPV issues.

4.1 Implications for School Health on Preventing IPV Issues

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT theory argues that interactions between the individuals and their surrounding environment are not unidirectional but run in both directions. That is to say, in order to examine the intervention's effects on addressing IPV issues, factors from both sides should be considered. To do so, the four defining properties of the PPCT model should be fully applied to obtain a comprehensive understanding of IPV phenomenon and its prevention at schools, which are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1. Implications for intervention development

PPCT Model	Implications for intervention development
Process	Considering four dynamic forces, including:
	Form: having a good knowledge of students' formed perceptions towards IPV-related acts
	Content: the variability of student's learning capabilities and the extent of their previously learnt IPV knowledge
	Power: the importance level attributed by stakeholders to develop such an intervention
	Direction: the aims of having such a curriculum
Person	Exploring three bio-psychological characteristics of the students, including:
	Demand: developing the curriculum content suitable to the specific age range of the group and considering gender issues sensitively
	Resource: students' IPV related experiences
	Force: students' motivations and persistency in learning
Context	Analyzing various factors from four levels of context, including
	Microsystems: families, peers and the other social groups that students have an enduring interaction with, and also media approaches i.e videos and dating platforms etc. that they constantly exposure to
	Mesosystems: schools' engagement in fostering collaboration across microsystems in IPV-related prevention development
	Exosystems: have a good knowledge of the community environment that the school located
	Macrosystems: the feasibility and practicability of adopting programs to another national context, considering factors i.e. language, beliefs, culture and gender norms
Time	Thinking about the length of an intervention, the frequency of delivering it and the duration of follow-up

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Counseling Migration

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the topic of migrant integration within their adopted community. The issue is examined from a Christian counselor's vantage point and the counseling model advanced in the paper is founded on a theocentric understanding of human existence. The argument is presented in three consecutive steps: a description of the issue, which justifies the need for this study; a discussion of counseling theories, principles and methods, highlighting the importance of a theocentric approach to the counseling process; and a short reflection on the implications of the process thereof.

KEYWORDS: migration, refugees, social reintegration, counseling process, Christian counseling

Introduction

According to the data published by the UN's International Organization for Migration (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou 2021, 10), it is estimated that a staggering 281 million people, about 3.6 percent of the current world population, qualify as migrants. Out of these, more than 35 million are children, 26.4 million are refugees, and 55 million are internally displaced persons. It means that more than half of the migrant population nowadays have had to leave their home due to dire circumstances, such as natural disasters, wars, and famine, that make the normal continuation of their life impossible (Solimano 2010, 22-40). Undoubtedly, however, migration is neither a new phenomenon nor a unilaterally definable existential reality (Măcelaru 2018a, 70-71; Wright and Măcelaru 2018, 91-93). Like any other group of people, migrant communities are made up of unique individuals, each with her/his abilities and needs, and each with a unique life-story to tell; and this is all the truer since the circumstances that lead to each individual's involuntary displacement or voluntary migration are equally diverse (Măcelaru 2018a, 71-72).

When migrants arrive in a new context, they are expected to adapt to their adopted environment, learn a new language, and embrace the values, beliefs, and customs of a new culture. This process of acculturation can last a long time, including social and psychological stresses that can be overwhelming. In fact, unless addressed appropriately within the migrant's cultural framework (Sue and Sue 1999, 51-120), such stresses may become the very factors that lead to the development of depression, that "common cold of mental illnesses" (Lastoria 1999, 335), or other psychological disorders. Migrants typically rely on their extended family and/or the faith communities to which they belong to mitigate their circumstances. Nevertheless, when such support systems are missing or do not satisfy the needs of the person seeking help, it falls to the professional counselor to help them cope with their circumstances and ultimately to help them become functional members of their adopted society. Moreover, it seems that, in such cases, the most effective counselor would be one who is also bilingual and bicultural, preferably someone who has experienced displacement and migration. However, since therapists who fit this description are but a few, the least preparation any counselor working with migrants ought to undergo is to gain knowledge and understanding of both minority and majority cultural values and beliefs (Clinton et al. 2005, 27-43). Furthermore, the founding of such

preparation on an appropriate view regarding the value of human beings and their inherent dignity seems to be a basic condition if the counseling process is to succeed.

Living as a migrant – the problem

People employ different methods to cope with life's dire circumstances and the stress these provoke. The level of security a person experiences is directly proportional to the success she or he has in coping with difficult situations (Rotaru 2012a, 5; Rotaru 2011, 4; Rotaru 2012b, 5). Thus, although the stress experienced will not subside easily, changes in how one approaches difficult situations may lead to a significant immediate improvement in the way one experiences life.

These are also true about one's experience as a migrant. The degree of stress she or he experiences depends on various contextual factors as well as the person's past experiences and how these have prepared the migrant to cope with new circumstances. Thus, for some, immigrating to a new country is a matter of joy, especially in cases where such a move means reuniting with family and friends. In such cases, it is most likely that the newcomer has an entire support system readily available to help them integrate and provide some financial assistance. These go a long way toward ensuring a certain level of stability right from the start.

For others, though, coming into a new context only adds to the stress factors that have led to the decision to move in the first place. If no family or friends are available, one may start a new life journey with only limited financial resources, not knowing the language of the land, and unaware of important socio-cultural issues. Adding to these the discriminating attitudes and the prejudice with which the indigenous population sometimes meets migrants (Sue and Sue 1999, 299), it is evident that sometimes living as a migrant becomes a major factor of risk, one that shapes one's approach to life and their relationship with other people. In such cases, the situation can deteriorate to the point that the intervention of a professional counselor becomes necessary.

Counseling depression – from theory to practice

There are various approaches to counseling, some of which complement each other and some as divergent as possible. This paper will explore the perspectives of four foundational theorists: Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers and B.F. Skinner. The purpose of this discussion is to expose the presuppositions of each approach and to point out what I believe are flawed premises or starting points in each theory. Specifically, the discussion refers to how each theory views the issue of depression and its cure.

Sigmund Freud advances a model of psychoanalysis totally void of any belief in God. In fact, he views faith as a pathological condition and morality as the result of an over-severe superego that causes the displacement of negative feelings for another person onto the self. Negative feelings, melancholia and depression therefore are to be addressed by gaining deeper insight into one's unconscious. This would lead to an improved self-esteem which in turn should improve one's overall mood and perspective on life (Bobgan and Bobgan 1990, 54-55). However, Freud also admits that his approach does not hold the secret to addressing depression. Rather, due to its complexity, depression seems to escape the kind of self-scrutiny Freud had advocated for. In his words, "even in descriptive psychiatry the definition of melancholia is uncertain; it takes on various clinical forms (some of them suggesting somatic rather than psychogenic affections) that do not seem definitely to warrant reduction to a unit" (Freud 1925, 164).

Because of his religious upbringing, Carl Jung is the analyst that seems to come closest to what we could call "a biblical view" of depression and its cure, often using

religious terms and imagery. To give but one example, in a personal letter he writes to a depressed individual, Jung refers to depression as a condition, a force, that presses people downwards and recommends that the depressed person finds some form of meaningful work to help bring them out of their situation. In his words (Jung 1976, 492-93), here is an example of Jungian self-therapy:

> I would raise animals and plants and find joy in their thriving. I would surround myself with beauty – no matter how primitive and artless – objects, colours, sounds. I would eat and drink well… When the darkness grows denser, I would penetrate to its very core and ground, and would not rest until amid the pain a light appeared to me, for in *excess affectus* [in an excess of affect or passion] nature reverses herself… I would renounce everything and engage in the lowest activities should my depression drive me to violence. I would wrestle with the dark angel until he dislocated my hip. For he is also the light and the blue sky which he withholds from me.

Carl Rogers taught that the central problem of humanity (and the underlying cause for depression) is individual failure to live up to one's full potential. The solution, he suggests, is to make use of all the resources one has within in order to solve the issue she/he faces (Adams 1973, 73). Rogers believed that professional counselors are not necessary. Rather, he taught a "person-centered" (Rogers 2021) counseling model, simple to use and available to everyone due to the underlying theory that generally people possess enough knowledge, personal insight, and resources to handle their own problems. Furthermore, Rogers believed that humans are basically good and therefore one only has to learn to self-actualize and thus release the inner power one has to overcome any dire situation (Adams 1973, 84-86). In doing so, one's "true self and personality would emerge from the experience" (Rogers 1963, 20). Due to the simplicity of the system and its minimal risk factor (since no advice is ever given to the client), the reflective therapy methodologies proposed by Rogers have become quite popular nowadays and are used by both secular counseling professionals as well as Christian ministers (Adams 1975, 160-61).

Skinner (1990, 1206) argued that the main problem people face is their environmental conditioning. Therefore, the solution for all psychological ailments is to recondition the counselee through behavior modification. As explained by Bufford (1999, 1129), Skinner's objective was "the control, prediction and interpretation of behavior [showing that] most animal and human behavior is controlled by its consequences rather its antecedents." The underlying claim within this model is, of course, the promise of a problem-free society. Since humans have no free will, as their behavior is determined by their surroundings, no real personal responsibility is actually present and therefore no feeling of guilt. In the light of this, the only way to adjust behavior is by rearranging and reprograming the responses of the counselee via rewards (pleasure) and aversive/punishing (pain) controls (Skinner 2002).

Skinner denied the dignity of man as created in the image of God and claimed that sin and salvation are nothing but baseless myths. These "rebellious" presuppositions led Skinner to conclude that man is to be manipulated. In other words, if the environment can be controlled in a utopian and scientific manner, the person can be then controlled and ultimately cured of their depressive mindset. Manipulate the environment to manipulate the depressed man and the proper behavior will eventually follow (Skinner 2002, 163-64). It is evident that, although quite different from one another, the counseling theories discussed above introduce ideas and techniques that can prove useful in the counseling process with migrants. Some of these are: adopting a positive attitude; developing new skills and new resources; relying on education and work experience; employing the help of one's family and community. However, in order to be truly effective, the counselor

and the counseling process ought to take into account the spiritual dimension of human beings and therefore to be positioned correctly *vis-à-vis* the biblically based Christian worldview. This paper concludes with a few principles that the author consider fundamental for counseling in general, particularly in the context of migration counseling.

Positioning the counselor and the counseling process rightly – in lieu of a conclusion

There are three phases to the process of migration. The geographical, social, cultural, economic, and religious transitions one experiences take place over a longer period, which can be divided into pre-migration, migration, and post-migration phases. Thus, while the migration process may begin with a conscientious separation from geographical, economic, and political realities, as one reaches new contexts, the adjustments a person must undergo are more related to beliefs and traditions. In fact, as one moves to the second and third phases in the process of migration, a certain amount of negotiation takes place. Important family and cultural traditions, which cannot be expressed or acknowledged in the adopted country are gradually replaced by new customs and beliefs; and it is at this stage that the migrant will most likely experience the highest level of stress and will eventually seek professional help. Given these, the author suggests that there is an appropriate positioning, and certain principles that the counselor should embrace to make his/her work as effective as possible.

First, counselors should seek to understand the migrant's view: customs, traditions, and family and institutional roles, that is, aspects that influence the interpersonal process. The migrant seeking counseling does not bring to counseling meetings only the surface issue that prompts the counseling process but also all the experiences of their pre-migration, migration, and post-migration experiences. In counseling, the migrant and the counselor must be mutually involved in the process in order to identify the needs and concerns of the client (Carkhuff 2008, 1-38).

Second, the counselor should be open about herself and the process, clarifying the expectations on both sides of the table to help the client feel safe enough to talk (Carkhuff 2008, 1-38).

Third, since there are numerous and varied approaches to counseling, pointing out the principles that underline the counseling relationship is important. In this regard, the author argues that the "client centered therapy" advanced by Rogers (2021), combined with what he would label "a Christian view" of counseling (Oprean 2021b, 203-14), is, founding the whole process of a theocentric view of human beings and their place within the creation, would suit best the counseling activity within a Christian worldview. The principles of such an approach would include:

- a starting point that recognizes the natural tendency for self-preservation all human beings have. That is, we all strive to do what is best for ourselves, no matter what conditions we find ourselves in or what problems we face. Even more, the Christian perspective on the place and destiny of human beings within the created universe emphasizes the responsibility each one has to seek flourishing and the right to attain it (Măcelaru 2017, 49-55; Măcelaru 2016, 13-20; Măcelaru 2014b, 233-36) in spite of changing life circumstances, personal and social, challenging or positive (Măcelaru and Măcelaru 2016, 365-71; Măcelaru 2015, 109-15). This also has a social dimension since the responsibility support systems, such as faith communities, have to work actively for the flourishing of the needy and the vulnerable, which has been well established in theological literature (Riviș-Tipei 2018, 117-22; Riviș-Tipei 2016, 319-28).
- the firm affirmation of the uniqueness and worth of each individual human being established in the very act of creation (Măcelaru 2021, 596-608; Oprean 2021a, 519–28). That is, we are all created with inherent dignity, having equal rights and

responsibilities as human beings (Măcelaru 2022, 621-29; Gheorghe-Luca 2019, 25-34; Măcelaru 2014a, 75-82), even in such cases where one's behavior becomes abusive and needs correction (Riviș-Tipei 2022, 618-28). From this follows the right each one of us has to make her and his own choices, both in terms of the values we live by and the directions we take in life; but also the act of creation establishes the responsibility each one of us has to bring her/his contribution to the common good (Mocan 2020, 121-30; Mocan 2018, 15-30; Mocan 2016, 289-318; Măcelaru 2018b, 31-40), thus balancing morally the freedom of choice human beings ought to exercise (Gheorghe-Luca 2022, 247-64; Gheorghe-Luca 2018, 5-14; Oprean 2016, 251-59).

- the focus on building a qualitative therapeutic relationship, characterized by transparency, genuine care, and real involvement on both sides of the table; a relationship that provides a safe space within which the client can feel understood and accepted (Carkhuff 2008, 39-210). This is a crucial point in working with migrant clients, where ignorance of cultural differences can become an impediment in building a relationship of trust between client and counselor (Pedersen 1997, 73-172).

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Postmodernism and the Consumer Culture – A Christian Response

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to explore the postmodern phenomenon in the light of the ever-growing consumer culture, whose origins can be traced to the Western free-market mindset. However, due to globalization and its leveling effects across the board, it has now become a feature of most contemporary societies. The thesis advanced is that consumerism is a major catalyst for the changes that are taking place in society, often labeled as "postmodern" without further qualification. In grasping this aspect of the ongoing societal changes, which are also strongly felt and widely embraced within the Romanian context, questions about the preservation of cultural and spiritual values pertaining to a people's very identity come to the fore. It is proposed that faith communities can provide the counter-culture move that would mitigate such changes.

KEYWORDS: postmodernism, consumerism, cultural change, cultural identity, faith communities

Introduction

There has been much talk, sometimes acrimonious debates, and certainly plenty of speculation, concerning the cultural developments of the 20th century, commonly associated with "postmodernism" (e.g. Morawski 1996, 1-24). As simple bibliographic research would reveal, academics in various fields have tried to describe, utilize, or critique the postmodern phenomenon (Hariharasudan et al. 2022). Yet, it is important to note that postmodernism is not just an idea for the academy to ponder about. It is, in fact, a real cultural phenomenon that has permeated Western culture for decades (Bertens 1995, 51-78, 107-32; Hutcheon 1988, 3-104) and has now become a widespread experience, a cultural trend of global proportions (Măcelaru 2014b, 67-78). No one would deny that within the past several decades, there have been monumental changes in culture, society, and thought. However, there is little consensus concerning the contours and meaning of the so-called "post-modernity."

In the argument developed below, we enter the debate with a short analysis of the relationship between postmodernism and the consumer culture. I argue that consumerism has been a catalyst in the development of the postmodern and the globalising effect of the marketplace has facilitated cultural changes thereof. In response to these, I argue that the fast-ongoing changes may pose a threat to the very make-up of our societies and, therefore, it is imperative that faith communities, which have historically played a role in preserving a people's identity and traditions, continue to do so in the current context.

Postmodernism

Attempting to analyze postmodernity is problematic, to say the least. Scholars differ on almost every aspect examined under the label "postmodernism," something which presents to the student of the phenomenon quite a confusing scenario. One aspect of the problem is the uncertainty regarding the beginning of the postmodern. For some,

postmodernity began as a radical break from modernity (Oden 1992, 27). For others, postmodernity is simply a part of late modernity, defined by decadence and mistrust (Thornhill 2000). There are also scholars who refute the very existence of "postmodernity" as a cultural phenomenon (Hebdige 1988) and others who claim that postmodernity has come and gone (Myerson 2001).

It seems that at the heart of this confusion is the difficulty of defining postmodernism. Robinson (1999, 35-36) attempts a description of postmodernism, noting that it is likely an overly concise label for a group of attitudes that appeared at the end of the 20th century, yet he admits that no one can fully explain what the term stands for. Likewise, trying for some level of clarification, Philip Sampson (1994, 29) inserts in his explanation of postmodernism an ironic self-criticism aimed at deflating attempts of absolute definition, quoting the following from a newspaper article: "The word 'Postmodernism' has no meaning. Use it as often as possible." Sampson, of course, intended this as a critique of those who have been quick to seize the label "postmodern" and to use it to define nearly everything new.

Even though precisely defining postmodernity continues to be problematic, attempts to do just that have not come to a halt (e.g. Hariharasudan et al. 2022). The reason for this insistence is quite evident: although no one seems to present a precise explanation of the term, everyone must recognize the dramatic cultural changes that now affect most of the world. Thus, whatever this change may be called, it is important to recognize and analyze such trends, and to respond to the surrounding culture if we are to avoid "simply to reproduce it" – with both, its goods and its evils (Bartholomew 2000, 2). A helpful approach to the problem posed above is offered by Gene E. Veith. He begins his clarification of postmodernity by making a distinction between the term "postmodern" as it refers to a time period, and "postmodernism" as it refers to a distinct ideology (Veith 1994, 19). While Veith understands the two to be essentially related, his intention is to differentiate the complex philosophical "high" variant of the terminology present in the academia from the "low" variant evident in culture and common life.

While it is common in studies of postmodernity to trace the history of thought and philosophy, showing the progressive development of academic thought with its subsequent influence upon society, Veith's distinction helps point out that the vice-versa is also true – social changes themselves have affected ideas (Guinness 1994, 328). That is, developments in society have changed the way of life and the thinking of common people, which subsequently spilled over into established thought patterns and education (Rotaru 2021, 87-92). So, it is plausible to attempt a definition of postmodernism by referring to social changes that have occurred, rather than venturing into the deep waters of philosophical arguments. We are aware that this approach will not result in an exhaustive description of postmodernity. However, for the purposes of the present discussion it will suffice.

There are three main characteristics we will use below to describe postmodernity: pluralism, relativism, and fragmentation. Firstly, western society, and lately the emerging democracies in other parts of the world, are becoming increasingly pluralistic, whether in ethnicity and religion, due to migration, politics, styles of life, and sexual orientation. This not only denotes the wide variety of people groups present in society, such as nationalities and religions, but also points to the multiple options available from which to choose. In fact, choice has become the defining word for all areas of life. Being a free person means having the opportunity to make both, the big choices, such as one's own faith, political stance, or sexual orientation, and the smaller ones, such as the hair stylist, the clothes worn, and the food eaten. As Bartholomew (2000, 8) notes, in postmodernity "freedom is equated with individual choice and private life;" the consequence being that

such an increase in the number of choices one has to make can lead to moral and religious ambiguity (Rotaru 2019, 269-271).

Secondly, relativism also characterizes contemporary culture. This is often described by the idea that in postmodernity "there is no absolute truth." Ironically, this very statement is itself kept and keenly guarded as an absolute against which to judge other concepts. All claims to truth are understood as valid so long as they don't claim to be superior to others. In fact, one of the greatest sins in today's society is to claim that absolute, objective truth exists – this would be looked upon as intolerant and bigoted (Leffel and McCallum 1996, 200). This is generally understood as a reaction against modernity's failed claim to be able to discover all truth through reason, aided by the scientific method. At its most arrogant, modernity promised to solve the ultimate problems of humanity. Modernity's failure is thus understood as creating a backlash of frustration, distrust, and despair in society at large.

As consequences of pluralism and relativism, contemporary society also experiences the loss of a coherent cultural framework to guide and inform. In other words, society has lost its "metanarrative." That is, it has lost the overarching story that gives us orientation in the world, that forms the basis of our worldview (Eaglestone 2000, 51). The consequences are: (1) society has become fragmented into numerous groups and subcultures, each claiming its own values and truths; (2) the individual has become fragmented, unsure of her own identity in a multifarious setting. In this regard, Fidelibus (1996, 54) explains: "To be a part of contemporary society is to be part of a struggle for self-identity. To take a stand on any issue…seems arbitrary in the light of so many choices." He then goes on to explain that the uncertainty of the self in postmodernity easily yields the individual to lose his self-identity to prevalent cultural forces, which results in an "exchange [of] consistent self-identity for a shifting cultural identity" (Fidelibus 1996, 154). Here is but another ironic, even self-contradictory, facet of postmodernity: while pluralism and tolerant acceptance of diversity seem to be essential values, the contemporary society inherently creates a dissonant environment that "fragments the individual's personal identity and promotes isolation" (Fidelibus 1996, 146). The result is individuals who are increasingly vulnerable to being swept away by cultural trends and powers of manipulation, an aspect that decidedly discourages difference and plurality – at least on some levels.

Consumerism

One of those cultural forces that endeavor to manipulate the individual into forming his already unstable identity into an ever-changing cultural image is consumerism. Consumerism is, in short, life "mediated through markets", through the buying and selling of products (Wenham 2000, 119). Consumerism essentially consists of two elements: a system and mentality. As a system, consumerism is led by the instrument of marketing and advertisement, which seeks to convince the public of the necessity of buying any number of various products. Ron Sider notes that the purpose of the costly advertising industry is not to simply inform, but to create desire (Sider 1990, 21). In agreement with marketing, the public gives time and money to acquire these "necessary" products. The extent to which the public accepts these products as necessary and normative to ordinary life and begins to define their lives by purchasing these necessities is the extent to which they accept the consumer mentality. About advertisements, Storkey (2000, 106) observes: "…[viewed] every 15 minutes of people's lives, and never subjected to critical scrutiny, they add up to near terminal indoctrination." The public thus keeps a watching eye upon the newest "necessities" introduced by the marketing industry, and willingly discards that which becomes considered old and obsolete to buy the new. Wenham points out how the

self in the consumer society defines itself through this process, attempting "self-creation through the accessibility of things" (Wenham 2000, 119). Ultimately, the public recognizes the process of discarding and buying products as a source of meaning and personal fulfillment, becoming the main value and goal of existence.

Wenham further explains that while the consumer culture seems to offer greater freedom and individual choice, in reality it is intentionally manipulative and based upon "subtle forms of *un*freedom" (Wenham 2000, 129). While its claim is to satisfy the customer, consumerism actually aims to keep the public ceaselessly dissatisfied. As such, business preys upon the loss of identity in postmodernity, profiting by leading the public to believe that identity is best constructed through material objects (Wenham 2000, 130). Subsequently, one could conclude that in the consumer culture, those who do not mold their lives around the acquisition of the "necessary" products will be marginalized. That is, of course, one of the major reasons why people pursue it so heartily.

Postmodernity and Consumerism

We mentioned above three characteristics of postmodernity: pluralism, relativism, and fragmentation. It is no coincidence that these same three characteristics are visible in the consumer phenomenon. Storkey rightly notes that postmodernity is most visible in the habit of ceaseless material consumption. He writes:

> Postmodernism is consumption. The deconstruction and fragmentation which is often identified with changes in approaches to text and philosophy is actually buying, advertisements, TV culture, in-your-face entertainment, shopping, pressure, thing-filled living – in a word, consumption (Storkey 2000, 115).

While equating postmodernism with consumerism may be exaggerating the issue, Storkey's point about the interrelation of consumerism and postmodernity is a valid one. Consumerism presents the public with a wide variety of options from which to purchase. The more choices, the better! Truly, consumerism is driven by the plurality of choices pervading the marketplace. Harold Netland (1994, 91) connects the plurality of the marketplace with the plurality of philosophies, faiths, and worldviews, showing that cultural consumerization fuels a pluralistic mindset. As previously noted, pluralism has a tendency to relativize claims to truth. David Wells describes this phenomenon as it relates to the consumer mindset:

> The world is now filled with so many competing interests, so many rival values, so many gods, religions, and worldviews, so much activity, so many responsibilities, and so many choices that the older symphony of meaning has given way to the random tumult of the marketplace, to a perpetual assault on all of the senses (Wells 1994, 14).

The plurality of choices in the marketplace is easily transmuted to other areas of life. The consumer mindset turns all life into commodities to be consumed, bought, and discarded. All of life is thus "viewed through the prism of maximizing utilities" (Elshtain 1998, 8). The consumer mindset is not concerned with what is true and good, but with what works for a given individual at a given time. As such, the relativizing effect of market capitalism leads to a place where "we may have everything, but none of it means anything anymore" (Wells 1994, 14).

When everything is viewed as a consumer item, all of life turns into shallow preferences and trends. This is also true in man's search for spiritual meaning and religious identity. As Sampson puts it, in postmodernity people find meaning through consumption, and solidarity in "communities of product image, style, and design"

(Sampson 1994, 31). That is, consumer groups that share preferences in image, fashion, music, and lifestyle are usurping the role of the family as a socializing agent. Society, therefore, fragments into consumer sections, with little to no transcendent value to inform life except consumer fads and personal preferences (Sampson 1994, 42). The result is that, as with postmodernity, the individual in the consumer society, who has taken on the consumer mentality and approach to life, has no stable identity. Her identity rather oscillates according to the trends of the surrounding society and popular culture. She has no real self and thus seeks to create and recreate herself through consumption of products and the building of a certain self-image. As Elaine Storkey comments, "we both create and market ourselves; our goods and products are personalized, pointing back not just to the owner but to the creator of cultural objects" (1994, 145-46). In other words, the postmodern self finds its identity through consumption, and even understands itself as an item to be consumed.

From the brief discussion above, it can be concluded that consumerism shares many affinities with postmodernity. Still, in what way does consumerism operate within postmodernity? Scholars often present consumerism as a by-product of postmodernism (e.g. Clarke 2003), paying less attention to the fact that consumerism is itself a catalyst to societal change. Seen rightly, however, consumerism constitutes a major cause for the changes associated with postmodernity. The fact that changes in economic practices yield drastic changes in other areas of life has been well documented by sociologists like Max Weber and R.H. Tawney. Arguing along similar lines, George Ritzer (2019) proposes that the business practices of the fast-food industry, exemplified by McDonald's, have infiltrated nearly all aspects of our society. Ritzer claims that there are four dimensions of this process he calls McDonaldization: effectiveness, measurability, predictability, and control. These are, according to Ritzer, the central values of society around which we form our lives and decisions.

Adding to these, Craig M. Gay (1998) posits that the fundamental assumption lying beneath the structures of society is the irrelevance of God. His thesis is that most people live their lives as if God does not exist. The fact that he may actually exist, although philosophically intriguing, is inconsequential because God has become "largely irrelevant to the real business of life" (Gay 1998, 2). This overwhelmingly pervasive "practical atheism" is made possible by the process of secularization, which has been taking place in Western societies for quite some time, and is increasingly evident in the new democracies of Eastern Europe as well (Măcelaru 2021b, 80-84; Măcelaru 2020b, 375-86; Măcelaru 2016, 35-54). One important facet of secularization is "rationalization," that is, "the process in which social actions have come…to depend upon purely calculable and controllable criteria" and less upon religion and/or tradition (Gay 1998, 21).

Economic forces play a key role in the rationalization and secularization of life. Gay (1998, 132) asserts that "market economy is one of the most significant carriers of secularity and practical atheism in contemporary society and culture." Because rationalization rejects all but the calculable and tangible, the only viable forms of action in the capitalistic framework are those that can be proven to "contribute to planned outcomes" (Gay 1998, 136). Efficiency, measurability, and control become the values that determine decisions, whether in economy, politics, private life, or any other area of society. Reality becomes reduced to a controllable and profitable system. And since divinity is not an item to be measured and calculated, and from a human perspective appears immensely ineffective, rationalization eliminates belief in God as an irrational and inefficient decision.

The consumerization of society that has taken place during the later part of the 20th century has essentially sped up the process of rationalization. As such, it has also played a major role in secularization, and hence in the "move" to the postmodern condition. The

result of the frenzied pursuit of economic growth is that society is increasingly emptied of content that is not consumable, or a society that consumes not only the "products of capitalism but just about everything else" (Scotland 2000, 135). Consumer choice is, therefore, at the same time a central aspect and a fundamental value of contemporary "postmodern" society. As stated by Graham Gray (2000, 154),

> Postmodernity is characterized by the elevation of consumer choice to the integrating value of society; by an electronically globalized society that takes everything everywhere – radically increasing the apparent range of consumer choice – and by a profound distrust in rationalism and suspicion of large scale frameworks of understanding.

These elements of consumerism – the plurality of choices, secularization, and the resulting relativity which the consumer culture produces – clearly identify consumerism as a driving power in postmodernity. Not only is consumerism at home here, but it has created exemplary conditions for the existence and continuation of the postmodern mentality.

A Christian Response

Even though consumerism should not be simply equated with postmodernity as a cultural phenomenon, recognizing its presence as a major force in postmodernity can be enormously helpful to faith communities that have a responsibility for the preservation of cultural and spiritual values and traditions; the postmodern world seems to gradually squander (Măcelaru 2020a, 87-96; Măcelaru 2014a, 169-74; Măcelaru 2009, 123-47). While one can argue that postmodernity (and postmodernism) are just buzz-words, consumerism is a concrete, visible reality in everyday life. As such, it can be addressed in fruitful ways. Undoubtedly, tangible action may be difficult. Since consumerism saturates society so thoroughly, it may seem impossible to oppose its influence, to provide alternative ways of living. However, together with Gray, I argue that it is not sufficient for faith communities to simply "decry consumerism;" rather they are to work from within for the preservation of values, contextualizing their approach while avoiding syncretism (Gray 2000, 156). In the remainder of this paper, a few concrete ways will be suggested for the faith communities to address the challenges of postmodernity as exhibited in consumerism (Oprean 2009, 99-122).

Although the Church should not completely withdraw from society, it is vital that believers and believing communities are, in some ways, distinct from society at large. The Church, says David Wells, "carries within itself a discernibly different view of life from what passes as normal and normative in society" (Wells 1994, 41). The Church is to be a witness by its very life and action before a watching world (Rotaru 2012, 5). That means "not being conformed" to the patterns of this world, as the Apostle Paul put it, but by being "transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). This calls for decisive non-conformity on basic aspects of the consumer lifestyle.

Primarily, what this means is to renounce the fundamental values of consumerism and find concrete ways in which to purposely pursue alternative, community-building and life-affirming values. Within the Christian worldview, the disciples of Christ are not to find their value in material possessions, but in the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ exhibited in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:19-20). Personal freedom, as exhibited by Jesus Christ, is not reduced to individual choice and private fulfillment. Rather, it is found in community, in meaningful relationships, as one freely gives her life for the other (Gal. 5.13-14). Furthermore, we are not to live by the urge of our every desire but are to be self-controlled. A person guided by his compulsions is not free, as he supposes, but is

hostage to uncontrollable desires within and without. Such an individual is reduced to "a shadow of a genuine person" (Merton 1961, 86). Believers and faith communities therefore must start by closely examining their own lives to identify the influence of these ideas in their habits, attitudes, and economic practices; only then a better way can be embraced.

Not only is the Church to be a distinct community that refuses to be conformed to the consumer mindset of the larger culture. She is also to be a refuge for those who have been made homeless and fragmented by the prevalent consumerist forces. Secularization has impersonalized society (Rotaru 2006, 251-266), thus isolating the individual from his relation to others. The processes discussed in this paper have taken away the basic aspect of community, making immigrants of most people. The self becomes the only refuge for the individual; identity is found only in the changing images of postmodern culture.

The task of the Church is to oppose the tendency to treat people as objects to be manipulated. Rather, we can give ourselves to others, to love and trust them. That is, to live in relatedness with the other, not seeing our neighbor as something "to be consumed" but as a being created in God's image, having inherent dignity and value (Măcelaru 2021a, 586-608).

Conclusion

The complex nature of postmodernity reflects the complex nature of life in contemporary culture. Analyzing and interpreting culture is never a simple task, as there is always the risk of generalization or oversimplification. Yet, it seems that now more than ever, faith communities should understand the culture within which they exist and develop appropriate responses to the challenges it presents.

We have argued that the phenomenon of consumerism offers a concrete framework through which to understand life in postmodernity and a definite opening to begin facing the multifaceted problems of our contemporary culture. This is so not only because consumerism is a part of the postmodern culture but also because it helped to create postmodernity itself. To confront the debilitating aspects of postmodernity and consumerism, the Church is summoned to live authentically as a distinct community that pursues life-affirming and community-building modes of existence.

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Cultural Paradoxes in Financial and Control Management of Family SMEs: Agenda for Future Research in the Emerging Moroccan Context

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ABSTRACT: **Purpose:** This study aims to investigate the impact of nepotism and cultural effects on the financial management and internal control systems of family businesses in the Moroccan context. **Design/methodology/approach:** Our study covered a sample of 14 individuals of seven firms, through qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews. **Findings:** Our findings indicate that nepotism can have a detrimental impact on financial decision making and resource allocation in family businesses, while cultural values and beliefs play a major role in determining the way financial management and control systems are executed. Our research explains that the effect of nepotism on the effective implementation of internal control systems in family small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is brought about through the presence of familial ties. In many family businesses, accountants are often hired based on personal relationships (favoritism), which is crucial for the effective performance of internal control functions. This is because control is typically maintained informally through trust placed in family members. **Originality:** This study provides a unique perspective on the challenges faced by family businesses in the Moroccan context, highlighting the importance of considering cultural and nepotistic factors when evaluating their financial management and control systems. **Practical implications:** The findings have practical implications for family businesses in Morocco, indicating the need for clear and transparent governance structures, and taking cultural values and beliefs into consideration when developing financial management and control systems. Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of these issues and to develop effective strategies to overcome the challenges faced by family businesses in the Moroccan context.

KEYWORDS: Family Culture, Family dynamics, Financial Management, Family SME

Article Classification: Research Paper, Empirical qualitative research

1. Introduction

For as long as the private sector has existed, family businesses have been present throughout the world. Until today, the characteristics of these businesses have not changed (Hillen and Lavarda 2020). Thus, the family business symbolizes the oldest and most

widespread organizational form in the world. However, the notion of "family firm" is still not clear, since it cannot be defined based on specific legal forms or specific size criteria, or based on mono- or multi-criteria (Yanez-Araque et al. 2021). According to these authors, a firm is family-owned when it bears the family name and is imbued with its values and traditions. The family must also provide managers and own all or a large part of the shares. As for Michael-Tsabari et al. (2020), the family business is "an organization in which two or more members of the extended family influence the direction of the business through the exercise of kinship in management positions or ownership of capital." Three criteria allow us to define a family business. It is characterized by the active participation of the family in the management, the control of the capital by the family, and its transmission to the future generation. For the most part, nepotism adversely affects the company's performance and discourages the recruitment of personnel outside the family (Arzubiaga, Maseda, and Iturralde 2019).

This paper investigates the possible transformations of nepotism for financial management through an informal internal control efficiency mechanism in family SMEs. The topic is new and there is still very little research on the effects of such a strategy in family firms. Moreover, the need to specify the links and differences between nepotism and corruption on the one hand, and the obligation to ensure the control of management risks on the other hand, requires the manager/owner to adopt such a control mechanism.

So far, in the management control literature, the concept of an internal control system is seen as a device appropriate for well-structured companies. The formal internal control management is seen as a management tool suitable for these large companies (Diard and Dufour 2022), while the problem of organizing an internal control system also affects SMEs and VSEs, and even more so those of the family type. As family preference is an inherent culture of this type of SME, the concept of nepotism is rarely appreciated in this context. However, it is more often discussed in public organizations. Nevertheless, several authors have been interested in the problems of internal control within family businesses in developed countries (Basly 2006), relating to the efficiency that is derived from it, to the characteristics of trust, but without addressing the particularities of nepotism. As evidenced, the existence of a dynastic law, the future leader of a large family group is likely to be a family member. As Gersick et al. (1997) have also shown, the firm concerns the members of the founder's family, because it is part of the collective heritage. In fact, it is one of the family's main assets. In this context, nepotism influences the establishment of an effective system of internal control in family-owned SMEs.

As for Moroccan society, they are known for high-context societies where facts are implicitly explained by the underlying culture of control and thus remain unspoken (Hillen and Lavarda 2020). In this context, nepotism in internal control in a family business is one of them. It consists of assigning that internal control responsibility with some importance, honor, or advantage to family members, and to some extent, to friends or relatives, rather than to those who are logically entitled to it or who are the most competent. These competencies (in formal internal control), but not being family members, have implications for the entity's managerial strategies in its social context.

In this perspective and following the work on family SMEs (Hillen and Lavarda, 2020), this paper takes a particular approach. It understands nepotism as an unexpressed/unintended strategy of family SMEs to make their informal internal control system effective. This work demonstrates the importance of analyzing the impact of this phenomenon on the functioning of an effective financial management through the internal control in these SMEs in a developing country context. The necessity of the study lies in the importance of the family link and the socio-cultural factors observed.

For Cappelletti (2006), the internal control system combats organizational inefficiency, and at the same time, it prevents risks at all levels and reduces those likely to degrade performance. Thus, two concepts deserve to be highlighted: nepotism and effective internal control management in family-owned SMEs. To this end, values such as the priority given to the family fiber, favoritism, and direct supervision, constitute variables that preconceive and legitimize nepotism in these family SMEs. The companies concerned are grappling with legitimacy, formality and the norms that impose or frame the practice of corporate governance. More specifically, should the effectiveness of informal or formal internal control practices be legitimized within the family SME?

In order to provide elements of an answer, theoretical benchmarks are first highlighted. Then, the qualitative method by semi-directive interviews is adopted to describe the influence of the family environment of the SME on the effectiveness of the internal control management. Finally, the results obtained and proposals are formulated, leading to discussions of the effects of nepotism on the effectiveness of internal control management in the context of a developing economy.

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of family dynamics in family business culture

Family businesses play a crucial role in the economy and represent a significant portion of all businesses globally. In these companies, the owners often have a deep personal connection to the business, which often results in a unique corporate culture. This culture can have a profound impact on the success of a family business and can shape its future (Bartosik-Purgat and Hadryś-Nowak 2014).

One of the most significant cultural aspects of family businesses is the powerful sense of tradition and history (Bartosik-Purgat and Hadryś-Nowak, 2014). The owners often have a strong emotional attachment to the business and are proud of its heritage. This can lead to a resistance to change and an emphasis on maintaining the status quo. However, this can also create a sense of stability and security for employees, who often view the business as a second family.

Another important cultural aspect is the close relationships that exist between family members. This can create a sense of unity and a shared vision for the future of the business. However, it can also lead to conflicts and power struggles between family members, particularly when it comes to decision-making and succession planning (Boyd et al. 2015).

Additionally, the cultural values of family businesses can have a significant impact on their business practices. For example, family businesses may place a high value on social responsibility and may be more likely to engage in corporate social responsibility initiatives. On the other hand, some may prioritize profit over all else and may be less likely to engage in socially responsible practices.

The culture of a family business can have a significant impact on its success and longevity. Understanding the unique cultural aspects of a family business is essential for those involved in its management and operation, as it can help to navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities. Research in this area can provide valuable insights into the relationship between culture and performance in family businesses, and can inform the development of strategies for enhancing the success of these companies (Bartosik-Purgat and Hadryś-Nowak 2014; Boyd et al. 2015).

Family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the culture of a family business. Family members often bring their subjective experiences and relationships into the workplace, and these relationships can influence the way that business is conducted (Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma 1999). For example, in some families, there may be a

strong sense of loyalty and collaboration, which can lead to a more harmonious work environment. On the other hand, in families with a history of conflict or competition, these tensions may also be present in the workplace and can negatively impact the culture of the business.

In many cases, family members may also have different ideas about the future direction of the business, which can lead to disagreements and difficulties in decision-making. In order to overcome these challenges, it is important for family businesses to establish clear lines of communication and decision-making processes, and to work together to find common ground. The role of family dynamics in shaping the culture of a family business also highlights the importance of succession planning. When a family business is passed down from one generation to the next, it is important to ensure that the values and cultural practices of the business are effectively communicated and maintained (Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma 1999; Boyd et al. 2015). This can be achieved through the development of a shared vision for the future of the business, and by involving the next generation in the day-to-day operations of the business.

The family dynamics within a family business play a crucial role in shaping its culture and success. It is important for family businesses to understand the impact of these dynamics and to take steps to address any challenges that may arise. This can include creating clear communication channels, establishing decision-making processes, and developing a shared vision for the future of the business. By understanding and managing the impact of family dynamics, family businesses can work towards a more positive and productive work environment, and ensure their long-term success (Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma 1999).

Furthermore, effective communication is a critical component of any successful business, and this is particularly true for family businesses. In these companies, the relationships between family members can greatly influence the way that information is shared, and decisions are made (Astrachan and McMillan 2003). In order to promote effective communication in a family business, it is important to establish clear lines of communication and to encourage open and honest dialogue. This can include regular family meetings, one-on-one discussions between family members, and the use of transparent decision-making processes. In addition to promoting effective communication, it is also important to encourage the free exchange of ideas and opinions. This can help to foster a culture of innovation and creativity, and can lead to the development of new and better business practices.

Another aspect of communication in family businesses is the way that information is shared between different generations. In many cases, there may be a gap in understanding between older and younger family members, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. To address this, it is important for family businesses to promote intergenerational communication and to encourage the sharing of knowledge and experience between different generations. Effective communication is a crucial component of a successful family business (Astrachan and McMillan 2003). By promoting open and honest dialogue, encouraging the free exchange of ideas, and encouraging intergenerational communication, family businesses can work towards a more productive and harmonious work environment.

Moreover, succession planning is a critical aspect of family culture and family dynamics (Ghee, Ibrahim, and Abdul-Halim 2015). This process involves the careful consideration of the future of the business, including the transfer of ownership, management, and decision-making responsibilities from one generation to the next. Effective succession planning is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it can help to ensure the continuity of the business, and to preserve its cultural and historical values. Secondly, it can help to minimize the risk of disputes and conflicts between

family members, particularly when it comes to decision-making and the allocation of resources.

In order to effectively plan for succession, it is important for family businesses to engage in open and honest discussions about their future plans and goals. This can involve the development of a shared vision for the future of the business, and the establishment of clear lines of communication and decision-making processes. In addition, succession planning can also involve the development of leadership skills and the identification of potential future leaders within the family. This can include the provision of training and support, and the creation of opportunities for family members to take on leadership roles within the business (Ghee, Ibrahim, and Abdul-Halim 2015). Effective succession planning is a critical aspect of the long-term success of family businesses. By engaging in open and honest discussions, establishing clear decision-making processes, and developing the leadership skills of future generations, family businesses can work towards a smooth and successful transition of ownership and leadership, and ensure their long-term viability.

2.2. Conceptual discussion on cultural paradoxes in family businesses : a specificity of family nepotism

Nepotism is the attitude of someone (leader) who uses the privileges of his or her position to favor his or her relatives. This practice is widely observed in public institutions and organizations. While the concept of nepotism is widely observed in public structures, it is more important to notice and explain it in small and medium-sized family-owned private structures, where the internal control system deserves to be highlighted.

We state the main outcomes of nepotism, detected by the majority of scientific authors and analyzed in the literature. To this end, we note more specifically: the management of human resources, trust, and the complexity of the control system in the family SME. Nepotism is much more prevalent in family businesses than in others (Bauweraerts and Colot 2014). This is due to employment based on personal relationships between a prospective employee and a family member rather than recruiting qualified and competent personnel (Sirmon and Hitt 2003). Miller et al. (2010) discuss the structural contradictions between the family and the firm, and the various human resource problems that may arise from this, including: problems in selecting a family member, compensation, problems in evaluating a family member's performance, although family involvement may lead to negative actions. Nepotism means that the founder shows great tolerance for family members who are more or less competent. The particularities of personnel management in the context of family businesses are greater motivation, a better retention rate, the existence of two categories of employees, and problems in recruiting qualified personnel. Finally, almost everything is based on preference, in particular, trust in a family member.

Moreover, according to several authors (Fares and Bitar 2022), the concept of trust can explain the superiority of family businesses in terms of performance over other types of businesses. The concept of trust would come from the nature of the links between the company's managers and its environment.

Family businesses are more complex in terms of governance than their counterparts because of the presence of an additional variable: the family. The addition of emotions and family issues to the business increases the complexity of the internal control challenges that these businesses face. For Salloum, Schmitt, and Bouri (2012), this type of strong interpersonal conflict can be fatal to the company. For example, when descendants lead and exercise power in the company and other family members have to obey their orders, it can lead to conflict within the family and within the company.

In this context, family businesses are poorly defined; most of the literature is produced by consultants, and research methods are not very diversified. The particularity of these family businesses lies in the indissociably of the subsystems. The difficulty of their analysis stems mainly from the fact that their dynamics integrate several subsystems: the owner-manager, the individuals and their aspirations, the family life and its rules, the business and its realities (Dyer and Handler 1994). Particular problems are dedicated to family businesses, for example, the difficulty of attracting competitors, the weakness of management training, succession problems, motivation problems, delegation problems, organization problems, little use of external expertise, sharing of assets, nepotism, fairness towards employees and external managers. At the same time, the main success factors of family SMEs are (Allouche and Amann 1997): work-family balance, decision-making process, and parental responsibilities. Especially the family dynamics, emotions, and conflict resolution seem more personal and include the search for balance between family and business concerns.

2.3 Managing the professional transition in family businesses: Mosaic of factors promoting the efficiency of financial management through the internal control system in family businesses

The owner/manager of the SME has a very strong influence on the management system of his company, both on its structure and its functioning (Wamba and Hikkerova, 2014). For this reason, several issues reveal the consequences of nepotism, which are characterized by a poor management: unclear legislative framework, inadequate judicial system, lack of transparency and accountability, and by a lack of any preventive policy and awareness that sheds light on the importance of issues related to professional ethics, conflicts of interest, and lack of reflex. Moreover, a lack of preventive policies and awareness related to professional ethics, conflicts of interest, the lack of reflex to disengage from certain decisions, the granting of benefits that end up creating troubled or badly perceived relationships (Wamba and Hikkerova 2014). Furthermore, this management system is characterized by a managerial and corporatist culture that is not very conducive and that generates fears and discourages any denunciation (or simple questioning of a system that has been affected and denounced) by those who have integrity or who simply wish to apply the existing rules; a spirit of revenge on the part of the group and its superiors that imposes disguised sanctions instead of promoting integrity. Among the evils that undermine accountability in family-owned SMEs is tribalism, which is another face of nepotism. One of the striking consequences of nepotism is tribalism, which leads Moroccan leaders to appoint people to positions they do not deserve without worrying about the serious consequences that such decisions can have on professional unawareness.

Two variables specific to family-owned SMEs can determine the effectiveness of the internal control management: direct supervision by management and the importance given to formal internal control. Internal control is a continuous process implemented by all stakeholders in the company in order to control the risks related to the achievement of the objectives for which this process is designed (Rodriguez Serna et al. 2022). Internal control is therefore an essential process in the control of risk and management of a company. It is a set of measures representing a means to an end, and far from being an end in itself. In most family-owned SMEs, it is conducted directly and informally by the manager. In contrast, it is quite rare for a formal internal control system to be implemented in these companies. It should be remembered that the effectiveness of internal control as a risk management system "is a process implemented by the board of directors or by the manager(s) and staff of an organization used for the development of strategy, which is transversal to the company. The analysis of the effectiveness of an internal control system in an Moroccan family-owned SME consists

in removing the ambiguity between its existence and non-existence, its formal/informal character, and the influence of family preference on the effectiveness of the said system (Rodriguez Serna et al. 2022).

By analogy, the cultural areas of the profiles of the managers of Moroccan family SMEs are essentially manifested by the family link and by the existence of informal control through the internal service of keeping an embryonic accounting system. The realities experienced in SMEs show that more importance is given to these characteristic variables (Rodriguez Serna et al. 2022). In the internal control management, the cultural shelters of the SME influence its effectiveness. In addition, the three characteristic variables (importance of the family link, direct supervision, effects on internal control management effectiveness) are explaining the essential strength of the family business culture playing their complementary role in the internal control system within an SME.

3. Methods

In the second stage of this work, 14 individuals were interviewed, including 7 managers, 5 internal controllers and 2 employees. The employees were interviewed to confirm or deny the statements of the first two types of individuals. They are therefore called upon when managers and internal controllers state that nepotism does not influence the internal control system. We constructed an interview guide to be used with these three types of individuals according to their degree of involvement in the implementation of an internal control management (more or less effective) in the family business and the perception of this policy (trends and feelings).

In order to ensure a balanced comparison of analysis according to the sectors of family-owned SMEs existing in the territory, we deemed it necessary to include in our sample companies from different sectors of activity. It was at the end of the interviews that these people agreed to share their experiences with us, and naturally made the link between the phenomenon of nepotism and the internal control system set up in the family business. We would like to emphasize the characteristics, manifestation, dimension and consequences of nepotism on the effectiveness of the internal control system, since the concept of nepotism was clearly presented at the beginning of the work. Following the trust previously shown, these 14 individuals (7 managers, 5 internal controllers and 2 employees) agreed to make themselves available to allow us to conduct the interviews. In total, we have a sample of 3 industrial companies, 2 commercial company and 2 service companies. These companies were selected by reasoned choice, while ensuring the existence of an internal control department. At the end of our interviews, out of the 7 cases, 4 admit that nepotism influences the internal control management implemented, while the other 3 affirm that this phenomenon has no influence.

Of the 7 SME managers interviewed, four have a family relationship with the owner(s) (shareholder(s)) of SMEs, while the other four have no family relationship. Of all the internal auditors interviewed, only 2 have family ties with their manager. The other five have no relationship with their manager. Employees (other collaborators) are interviewed only because of the negative responses from internal controllers regarding the influence of nepotism on internal control.

The interviews were collected by means of recordings. The transcriptions took about 23 hours of work. The transcripts are on average 8 to 11 pages long for each case. The transcripts were also reread by us and by the interviewees.

A qualitative and cross-sectional method was adopted for the study of the life courses of seven family-owned SMEs. This method favored field interviews with

managers, controllers and employees, selected according to the reasoned process. It is inspired by the grounded theory (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). The design of this process puts into perspective the particular place given to internal control in SMEs. We specifically identify first-order data (directly from verbatim passages) as well as second-order data (concepts are developed through the coding of our interviews).

4. Results analysis and discussion

The empirical results from the analysis of the interviews are presented along three lines. First, the manifestations of nepotism in relation to the internal control system. Second, the consequences of the interaction between nepotism and the internal control system. Finally, proposals and resolutions on the contingency of the notion of effectiveness of the internal control system in family-owned SMEs in a developing economy.

4.1 The cultural reality of family businesses: a high level of nepotism impacting the efficiency of management and its financial control system

The manifestations of nepotism can be explained first of all by the importance given to the family fiber, whose indicators of perception are: kinship, trust and filiation. With regard to the importance given to these signs, the influenced internal controller tells these realities in the following way: *"[...] As the chief trusts you his internal controller, that is how he also trusts the family members who control you informally, so in a way, "a controlled controller", especially if you are not a family member".*

Second, nepotism is characterized by bias, indifference and preference. Obviously, these elements have an impact on the objectives and missions of the (non-family member) internal controller. In this case, that impact was marked by the reaction of the non-family member internal auditor: *" [...]. In our company, the problem is that you're just given part of the responsibility, but the other part or even the bulk of it is in the hands of another person close to the family, who is actually another controller of the controller."*

In addition to the reactions to the manifestation of nepotism, including the importance placed on the family fiber and its characteristics, the main consequences of nepotism observed are an emotional impact and a feeling of frustration. When the individual, the internal controller, is confronted with the shock and undergoes these behaviors, he adopts, at first, observant mechanisms, and then considers an attitude that allows him to preserve his job.

4.2. The interactions between the cultural aspect of nepotism and the management control system: the constraints of the boundaries between them

There is an implicit conflict between nepotism and the effectiveness of the internal control system that can be described as a bi-frontality between two antagonists in interaction. The antagonism is identified, on the one hand, by the perception of nepotism and, on the other hand, by the internal control policy set up by the manager of the family business.

Firstly, the perception of nepotism is explained by indices such as: injustice, favoritism and frustrations. This social climate, unfavorable to the effectiveness of the internal control system, is accompanied by affliction, which settles in and develops throughout the life of the internal controller: *"My colleague, the controller, takes advantage of this "favoritism" to protect his own "protégés, friends". He also seeks to have relationships, affinities to protect, for example, his former comrades, friends, brothers, ..."*

Secondly, the internal control policy set up by the manager or the owner of the family business, is translated at the origin and at the signature of the work contract, by

the determination, the conformity, the device in the control and the management of the risks. This case of figure relates the reality of SMEs in which nepotism does not influence the controller: *"When it comes to doing my job as an internal controller, I do it without any qualms, I produce my report and I pass it on."* There are also procedures, strategic action plans provided by the director of this company that allow the internal controller to be guided in his duties.

The abandonment of the monitoring or implementation of this internal control policy can be justified by convincing reasons of the internal controller. The commitment to the decision responds to the dimension of the impasse experienced by the individual committed to internal control: *"Commitment is indeed a source of experience of interactions in the process of self-reconstruction. In addition, a resolution, a consensus, and proposals must be made to restore the internal control system to its original effectiveness in a family-owned SME."*

The influence of culture on financial management can also be seen in the way that family businesses are structured and managed. In some cultures, decision making is highly centralized, with a single family member or a small group of elders making all financial decisions: *"This can result in a lack of transparency and accountability and can limit the ability of the business to respond to changes in the market."*. In other cultures, decision making may be more decentralized, with multiple family members involved in financial management. This can result in more efficient and effective decision making but can also lead to conflicts and disagreements.

Another aspect of culture that can impact financial management is the relationship between family members. In some Moroccan cultures, there is a strong sense of family unity and solidarity, and family members may be more likely to work together in the business and make decisions that are in the best interests of the family as a whole. In contrast, other cultures may place a greater emphasis on individual achievement and independence, which can lead to conflicts and competition within the family. Consequently, culture plays a significant role in shaping the financial management practices of Moroccan family businesses. Understanding the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that influence financial decision making can help family business owners and managers to make informed decisions and to navigate the challenges of financial management. By taking a culturally sensitive approach to financial management, family businesses can improve their performance, foster economic growth, and preserve cultural heritage.

4.3 The dilemma between efficiency and heterogeneous reality: a cultural aspect driving the mindset of family businesses

In the sphere of resolution of the problems, to understand an instruction consists in requiring the reconstruction of the formal and effective internal control in the family company by the representation of a situation between the ideal and the real. For this the contribution of the theory of moral feelings, for the development of the disposition to admire, and almost to venerate the rich and powerful, as well as to despise, or at least, to neglect the poor and humble conditioned people although necessary both to establish and to maintain the distinction of the ranks and the order of the society, is at the same time the greatest and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral feelings. From this theory, the perspective of solving similar problems in Moroccan family SMEs is considered. To this end, resolutions and proposals are solicited. In the dynamics of reconstruction of the social apparatus specific to the Moroccan family SME, the process of influence of nepotism on the effectiveness of the internal control system is resolved by the following statements: *"Man is suspicious by nature, and it is often said that the goat grazes where it is tied, you know how our companies are, don't you? They are the image of the country."*

To conclude, in this company, nepotism exists but only to a small extent, it does not influence the objectives for which the internal control is designed, the nepotistic spirit is purged more, it tends to be eradicated.

Today, when confronted with the facts and advances in other disciplines (notably finance), the results of this work merge with those of the positive theory of agency. Control and nepotism do not always prevent a consensus. It is appropriate to investigate, first of all from a theoretical point of view, whether the nepotism manifested by management can influence that of the employees, in this case, on the possibility of making the internal control system effective.

In this sense, family businesses are a significant part of the economy in Morocco. They play a crucial role in creating jobs, fostering economic growth, and preserving cultural heritage. However: *"the unique characteristics of family businesses also pose specific challenges in terms of financial management. One such challenge is the influence of culture on financial decision making."* Culture refers also to the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices of a group of people. It can have a profound impact on financial management in family businesses, shaping attitudes towards money, risk-taking, and investment. For example, in some Moroccan cultures, there is a strong emphasis on community and intergenerational wealth transfer. This may lead to a reluctance to invest in new business opportunities that could generate higher returns but may also involve greater risk. In contrast, other cultures may place a higher value on individual achievement and encourage risk-taking and innovation.

4.4. Discussion of results: The influence of culture on financial management in Moroccan family business contexts

The term nepotism is very often negatively appreciated. It is used, by extension, to designate the tendency to favor one's or close friends at the expense of ordinary selection processes, merit or the general interest, thus designating favoritism or cronyism. This appreciation is justified by the reality that, in politics for example, nepotism is characterized by the favors that a person in power shows to his or her family or friends, regardless of merit or fairness, ability or capacity. For this to happen, nepotism must disappear from traditional government (Hatch and Cunliffe 2012, 24-25). This practice can be either completely legal or completely prohibited depending on the country or legislation.

Based on the theory of agency and the theory of moral sentiments, which deals with the essential ethical problem of simultaneously formalizing relations between individuals with different interests (Jensen and Meckling, 1976), we agree that the presence of internal control in a family business plays a "paradoxical " and a decisive role in the transmission of information. Exercising control implicitly means influencing someone or something, such as the personnel of the organization, of a unit, or of the company as a whole, with a view to progressing towards the achievement of objectives. It is in this sense that the influence of the concept of nepotism on the effectiveness of internal control management is highlighted and discussed in our study context.

Based on our qualitative results above, the implementation of an effective internal control management is positively influenced by cultural variables across two environments of this system. Family or ethnic cohesion influences through informal control albeit with informal and rudimentary accounting. We also find that SMEs that are able to implement an internal control management have more consideration for family solidarity and clannish, and, with more informal control, influencing formal internal control, especially if the controller is not part of the owner/manager family circle. These constructs indicate that corporate culture determines organizations and systems, as does the implementation of an internal control system. In its first and most common sense, the word control means "verification". In its second sense, it means

"control" and it must enable managers to run their company effectively. The concept of control in an organization appears to be a state of affairs that exists in the company but that must, through human intervention, become deliberate, and constitute a transformed control system.

Internal control has two dimensions. The first is the so-called "formal control", which may be conducted by a competent agent, not necessarily a member of the family, whose implementation sometimes replaces a control of convenience. The second is called "informal control" conducted by a member of the family, notably the manager. However, there will be only one dimension of control when the controller is a member of the family, with all the necessary skills. In all respects, having an accounting policy and procedure manual is sufficient to dispense with a formal internal control department. Usually, and by analogy, the accountant or manager is already an internal controller. It is true that having a family member to function as an intermediary in the department is an assurance, a guarantee and a security for risk management, but this mentality has its limits. For this reason, nepotism has a positive influence on internal control management in family-owned SMEs.

The elements of answers collected explain the influence of nepotism on the effectiveness of internal control. Indeed, the importance given to the family link ensures, in a way, just the trust or rather ensures the security of assets, the predisposition of good family collaboration. This result confirms the work of Hernandez (1997), where the corporate culture is built by the trust and advice of family members. Indeed, the traditional practice of internal control falls within the competence of the internal audit or management control function, as far as the implementation of an internal control management can be interpreted as a challenge to the trust of the company's personnel management (Cappelletti 2006). Thus, internal control is both a state and a process that includes financial and accounting matters, but also controls intended to improve the effectiveness of internal control, rather through relational resources in order to strengthen adherence to the company's strategic policy. The internal control system will only be implemented in Moroccan family-owned SMEs when it allows for the detection of anomalies in social operations and promotes their correction. Moreover, if the efficiency objective was included in their statutes (more or less clear obligation to achieve certain results), it was rarely taken into account in measuring the quality of their management. This is because, in this type of enterprise, there is a "strong primacy" of the individual and the family bond over business. It is on the strength of the above that nepotism influences the organizational effectiveness of the informal control system in family-owned SMEs.

Despite the challenges posed by cultural influences on financial management, there are also many benefits to be gained from understanding and embracing cultural differences in Moroccan family businesses. One such benefit is the ability to tap into new market opportunities and to better understand the needs and preferences of different customer groups. For example, by being aware of cultural differences in attitudes towards risk-taking and innovation, family businesses can make informed decisions about investment and product development, leading to increased competitiveness and growth.

Another benefit of culturally sensitive financial management is the ability to build stronger relationships with stakeholders, including employees, customers, and suppliers. By respecting and embracing cultural differences, family businesses can foster a more inclusive and supportive working environment, which can lead to improved morale, greater productivity, and increased loyalty among employees. In addition, by understanding and accommodating cultural differences among customers, family

businesses can build stronger relationships with these key stakeholders, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In order to fully realize the benefits of culturally sensitive financial management, family business owners and managers must take an active and proactive approach. This includes understanding the cultural influences on financial decision making, being open to new ideas and perspectives, and seeking out opportunities to learn from other cultures and business practices. By embracing cultural diversity and adapting to changing market conditions, family businesses can improve their financial performance, increase their competitiveness, and build stronger relationships with their stakeholders. The influence of culture on financial management in Moroccan family businesses is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach. By understanding the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that shape financial decision making, family businesses can improve their performance, foster economic growth, and build stronger relationships with their stakeholders. By embracing cultural diversity and adapting to changing market conditions, Moroccan family businesses can continue to play a vital role in the development and prosperity of their communities.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided a comprehensive examination of the influence of nepotism and cultural effects on the financial management and internal control systems of family businesses in the Moroccan context. Our findings reveal that nepotism can have detrimental effects on financial decision making and resource allocation, leading to conflicts of interest and reduced effectiveness of the internal control system. Meanwhile, cultural values and beliefs play a key role in shaping the way financial management and control systems are implemented.

The feeling of belonging to a family, a tribe and doing everything for it, characterizes the values of responsibility of the owners/managers of family businesses. However, the harmonious development of Morocco suffers from this competition of interests. Tribalism indeed extends its shadow over the life of the family SME and explains the negative influence on the behavior of citizens in both the democratic and economic game, as is the case in public organizations.

First, our analysis shows that the influence of nepotism on the implementation of an effective internal control system in family-owned SMEs is realized through the existence of the family fiber. Indeed, in most family businesses, several accountants are recruited on the basis of social ties (favoritism). It becomes essential in the exercise of the internal control function. This is because control is preferably ensured in an informal manner, through the trust placed in family members. In other words, if a family-owned SME has an accounting department, the implementation of an internal control department no longer becomes a priority.

The organizational control effectiveness of SMEs is influenced by the endogenous environment through the variables: "ability to formalize the accounting information system", and "ability to change the informal internal control mechanism". In other words, the internal control system of the family-owned SME can only be effective if there is a competent internal controller who is a family member. If this condition is not met, an internal controller who is not a member of the family is influenced by the phenomenon of nepotism, and therefore by the existing informal internal control mechanism. To this end, we can say that in the context of our study, family-owned SMEs with an internal control management would perform better than those without one. Given the importance of family businesses in the Moroccan context, it is crucial to

take these cultural and nepotistic factors into consideration when evaluating their financial management and control systems. Nepotism can undermine the credibility and transparency of financial decisions, leading to a lack of trust from stakeholders and a reduced ability to attract investment. Cultural values and beliefs can also shape the way in which financial management and control systems are designed and implemented, leading to suboptimal results if not taken into account.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that family businesses in the Moroccan context implement clear and transparent governance structures, with checks and balances to mitigate the negative impacts of nepotism. In addition, cultural values and beliefs should be taken into consideration when developing financial management and control systems, to ensure that they are effective and aligned with the values and beliefs of the local community.

Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of the impact of nepotism and cultural effects on family businesses in the Moroccan context and to develop strategies to overcome these challenges. By taking these steps, family businesses in Morocco can ensure their financial management and control systems are effective, transparent, and aligned with the values and beliefs of their stakeholders.

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A Historical and Contextual Case for Modular and Transnational Education: The Baptist Theological School in Serbia

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ABSTRACT: Modular and transnational educational delivery are two types of structures for theological schools that often are found together, especially in theological schools outside of the West. Many examples of positive and negative aspects of each of these have been presented in literature and research. Some of these examples have come from the experience of educators at non-Western schools, while others have approached the subject from a contextual and theoretical basis. This article seeks to show the need and usefulness of modular transnational education by analyzing the history and context of a theological school. To this end, the example of the Baptist Theological School in Serbia will be considered with the goal of evidencing the natural suitability and benefits of modular lay education as well as transnational instructors.

KEYWORDS: history, Baptist Theological School, Serbia, modular, transnational, Oncken

Introduction

In 1834, Johann Oncken was baptized into the Baptist faith at midnight on an island in the Elbe River near Hamburg (Saxon 2015, 7). He would go on to become one of European Protestantism's most fruitful reformers, sending missionaries and establishing churches throughout Eastern Europe (Detzler 1993, 227; Randall 2000, 316-331). This was not without hardship and persecution, even from his own country. Hamburg, like most of Germany, was under the dominance of the Lutheran Church, the established church at that time (Saxon 2015, 9). Therefore, Baptists did not find ready acceptance. Illustrations of the zeitgeist of the area are anecdotal stories, passed down into near legend. It is said that Oncken was arrested multiple times in Hamburg for evangelism, with the Burgermeister warning him, "As long as I can lift my little finger, I will put you down from preaching this gospel." Oncken replied, "As long as I can see God's mighty hand above your little finger, I will preach this gospel" (Wood 1970, 273). It is opined that the local chief of police had determined to extinguish the Baptists, "root and branch" (Rushbrooke 1915, 9). Stories in the history of the church are many, but persecutions and imprisonments throughout Oncken's life and ministry were a reality, in spite of the fact that the persecutors theoretically held to the same gospel message as Oncken. Yet Oncken's motivation in persevering lies in his oft-recited belief that every Baptist is a missionary (Todorović 2011, 267). He became known as the father of European Baptists because of his commitment to planting churches across Europe. His efforts spread much further, though, impacting church planting in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Turkey, Austria, Australia, W. Africa, France, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Baltic States, China, and Serbia (Rushbrooke 1915, 2). While his passion was missions, it was expressed in various ways. The first hint of the need for modular education in Serbia was seen in Oncken's drive to increase theological education through Sunday Schools and establishing theological college in Hamburg. If every Baptist is a missionary, and therefore a theologian, then the testimonies of Baptists would necessarily have to be

supplemented by trained service (Rushbrooke 1915, 28). Oncken had personal reasons to want Christian workers trained. Hamburg was a very religious city, but foundational Christian doctrines had been abandoned including belief in the deity of Christ (Saxon 2015, 4). What began as a simple six-month theological instruction to small groups of men continued for years until a permanent four-year college was established on October 1, 1881 (Rushbrooke 1915, 30). Yet his theological ethos was predicated on the need to train lay workers from different cultures with a model consistent with their abilities.

In November of 1875, Heinrich Meyer, one of Oncken's appointed missionaries and colporteurs, was sent by him to Novi Sad, Serbia to a group of ex-Nazarenes who were holding regular meetings (Donat 1958, 435). At this meeting, several people were baptized as adult believers, thereby marking the beginning of the Baptists in Serbia. The theological school in Hamburg served as a source of constant supply for ministry and education for Eastern Europe, and specifically for Serbia (Armitage 1887, 829-830). In 1892, the Novi Sad group became an independent congregation. They invited Julius Peter, a Prussian native, to be their pastor. Peter had himself finished the Hamburg school which Oncken started and brought his educational perspective to influence the Baptists of Serbia (Wardin 1995, 267). Like his mentor, he immediately started mission work in Serbia in the villages of Šajkaš, Bečej, Feketić, Crvenka, Torža, Sekić, Belo Blat, and Gregurevci, putting Hamburg's theological education to practical application for the kingdom of Christ, focusing on regular lay ministers (Bjelajac 2010, 95). The Novi Sad church became the center of missional and educational work for the province of Vojvodina in Serbia and beyond (Hopper 1977, 30). Lay workers would continue to be the backbone of the Christian endeavor along with the need for practical, accessible theological education.

This story is interesting for those who desire to understand Baptist history in Serbia. However, its importance lies in the fact that it sets the stage for the future of theological education, springing from Oncken's Hamburg school and influencing not only the initial work, but subsequent pastors and mission work. The Lord would build an organized educational movement in Serbia on the foundation Oncken and his men laid down. Not long before Pastor Julius Peter's death, the Baptist World Alliance met in 1920 in London and determined to offer missionary support to the Baptist movements in Yugoslavia and other newly established works with the partnership of the Southern Baptists in America (Bjelajac 2002, 188-189). In the same decade, American Everett Gill was sent by the Alliance to Romania, and two American-based Europeans to Yugoslavia, Czech Vinko Vacek and Serbian Nikola Dulić (Bjelajac 2002, 188-189). While Vacek would help organize the Baptists of Serbia into a formal union, it was Dulić who would be instrumental as the successor to Peter to carry on the work of theological education in Serbia.

When Dulić came to Yugoslavia in 1923, he organized a two-week course for Sunday School teachers, much like Johann Oncken did in Hamburg (Bjelajac 2002, 189). This two-week course soon became four-week courses with both men and women as well as different nationalities present. One attendee of the lectures expressed the attitude of every participant there,

> "Brothers", he said, "let us conclude today so that we do not deny it tomorrow. Let there be no Serbs, no Croats, no Germans, no Hungarians among us from now on. Neither male nor female. Let's be Christ's!" (Bjelajac 2003, 164)

These seminars would spread out over the next few years to villages in Serbia like Bački Petrovac, Crvenka, Belgrade, Severin, and Mačkovac (Lehotski 2010, 264). This was a continuation of the vision of Oncken that education is necessary and should be

designed with lay workers in mind. Additionally, theological education taught by and delivered to mixed ethnic groups would be a common theme running through the future of theological education in Serbia. The combined need to teach lay Christian workers of various nationalities would prove to be the logical rationale for modular transnational education.

The Baptist Theological School

In keeping with the cross-cultural aspect that theological education had in Yugoslavia from the start, American missionary John Allen Moore was appointed in 1938 as a representative to Yugoslavia by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (Wardin 1995, 268). At that time, there were few trained Baptist preachers in Serbia for several reasons. Reading of books besides the Bible was considered by some to be sinful, especially by those from a Nazarene background. Additionally, a trained preacher was considered unspiritual and worldly and thus disqualified for ministry (Klem 1952, 88-89). Despite the previous declarations coming out of Dulić's courses, unity in mission work and the provision of theological education was still difficult to organize in areas where the work was young and different nationalities, languages, and convictions co-existed (Klem 1952, 88-89). Vinko Vacek had managed to unite five language groups into a formal denominational alliance in the early 1920s, establishing the contextual model for a cross-cultural partnership among Baptists in Serbia (Lehotski 2004, 17). While Vacek furthered the cause of unifying nationalities under one Baptist umbrella, it was Moore who led the establishment of a theological institution. He founded the Baptist Theological School (BTS) in Belgrade and gave birth to the current school existing in Novi Sad now. Moore formalized and organized the work that Vacek and Dulić had pioneered in the previous decade. A seminary, however, was considered at the time a revolutionary work, and as such, one that was attended with some trepidation and persecution just as the original Baptist work had been (Moore 1941, 176). The world and political scene were chaotic with the onset of World War II, and some feared that an educated populace would cause trouble with government officials (Torbet 1963, 189). Regardless, Moore's vision was shared by all the leaders at the seminary and stated most vocally by him in a letter published at the opening of the school (Bjelajac 2010, 266). Reflection on it illustrates the faithfulness of men and women who, faced with the most dangerous of situations, still press on because they believe in the work God has called them to. Moore stated,

> "We must not postpone action indefinitely just because the entire road has not been inspected. We do not know what awaits us in the future. It is quite possible that within a few weeks or months, we will be scattered on several fronts. We do not know the future. We only know that we are bound by the duty and love to the Lord to be faithful in the present and to work while the day lasts, as the night will come. We hope to have one long day of doing the works of Him who sent us, but whatever day or night, nothing is required of a servant but to be found faithful." (Bjelajac 2010, 265)

In this original Baptist school, subjects were designed to address both the theological and practical and demonstrated a contextual desire on the part of the school to meet the realistic needs of the men and women who attended. According to an unpublished personal letter written by J.A. Moore, which this author possesses, eleven subjects were offered, including New Testament, Church Organization, Bible Geography, Missions, and Evangelism, which were also taught alongside Business, History, and Hygiene. The teachers were transnational even at this time, coming from American, German, Serbian, Czech and Slovak backgrounds, male and female (Moore 1940, 317). Students were aged between 19 and 60 years old. Seven nationalities were represented

among students: Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak, German, Slovenian, and Russian. They were not ordained ministers but were lay preachers who were in fact mostly farmers (Moore 1940, 317). There could not have been a more cross-cultural, colloquial educational program. The second world war would see the closing of the school only six months after it started, along with the shattering of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia. Both would eventually be reestablished in due time. However, it is important to emphasize that not only was a theological school started, but that it was marked by two foci, that is, working with a variety of nationalities and reaching lay leaders. These two factors would continue to mark the nature of BTS and would determine the modular transnational direction of the school.

The goal of reopening the seminary to help the average Christian laborer was realized on March 1, 1954, when BTS reopened in Zagreb, Croatia, with its president Franjo Klem. Klem was a key figure in the renewal of theological education work among the Baptists in Yugoslavia, of which Croatia was a part at that time (Lehotski 2010, 267). He, along with others, had a desire that the school provides more education to people than just the basic courses that had been the norm up until then. Klem carried on the vision of the founders of BTS and revealed in his inauguration that there is a great need for the theological preparation of workers, basing this on the fact that only three men in positions of leadership among the Baptists had any theological education (Lehotski 2010, 268). Indeed, Klem's contribution was transnational, that is, the continuance of permanent theological education that served the ethnically diverse Balkan population. After Klem, Josip Horak, a lawyer and economist, brought a more administrative direction to the vision of the school. He was experienced and competent, and in his directorship of BTS, which lasted until 1957, he was instrumental in keeping theological education organized in post-war Yugoslavia (Lehotski 2010, 269). This concentration will continue progressively in the direction of meeting the educational needs and life situations of lay workers, up to the present situation of being a modular school.

Unfortunately, the desire for a permanent solution to the lack of theological education and a direction toward more serious study was not attended with the financial means to accomplish it. It was still a post war time, and Yugoslavia could not rely on financial help from other parts of the Baptist world. This would lead the school to relocate briefly to Daruvar, Croatia, and soon thereafter to Novi Sad, Serbia, returning to the founding place of the first Baptists in Serbia. The first building was on Mičurinova Ulica 1, and then it would move into a new building on Koruška 24. That street is now Kolo srpskih sestara (Lehotski 2010, 268). In moving to Novi Sad, the school would embrace once again its roots, physically, spiritually, and philosophically.

A young scholar named Adolf Lehotski, who attended a course for preachers in 1923 at the same school started by Johann Oncken in Hamburg, followed his predecessors in seeking to improve biblical preaching among lay pastors in Northern Serbia (Lehotski 2010, 272-273). Lehotski believed that these lay preachers could not take time to attend school in Hamburg or anywhere else if it required full-time dedication. Therefore, BTS was designed to have courses short in duration. Lehotski would lead BTS in this manner for 14 years until he was replaced by Stjepan Orčić, a graduate of the school itself. Orčić's vision would maintain the view that theological education be brought within reach of ordinary Christians unable to accommodate the commitments required by most residential schools. Orčić declared,

> "The idea of the new school is to be much closer to the people. We abandon the concept of a school for preachers, and we accept the idea of becoming a school for biblical and theological training. A school should be closer to the real needs of churches and community." (Lehotski 2010, 272-273).

This sustained the idea that theology was for everyone and that if the kingdom of Christ in Serbia was staffed by lay leaders, they too needed to be thoroughly equipped in teaching the word of God [2 Timothy 3:16-17]. The passion for accommodating theological education for the common person with jobs, families, and responsibilities continued to hold the focus of BTS' line of leaders. Johann Oncken had this in mind when he stressed the value and importance of Sunday Schools for all ages in the churches he planted. Orčić shared his understanding that everyone needs theological education and that there must be educated teachers to accommodate the demand. This was a continued emphasis on a trained laity, but now more intentional and developed.

BTS was directed by additional men who sought a connection with the community of Christians. James Williams was the first missionary to get permission from authorities for a permanent VISA to live in Yugoslavia (Bjelajac 2010, 274). He creatively revised regular curriculum by creating the Extensive Theological Organization (ETO), which had the mission of providing theological education to pastors and Christian workers who did not have the ability to attend a residential school (Lehotski 2010, 274). In his efforts, a formal work was established dedicated to the laity. In 1987, a professor at the school named Želimir Srnec became director. He renamed the school "Logos" and divided the program of the school into two parts. The first part would be a one-year program designed as a preparatory school for lay workers, which could be followed by an additional three years of pastoral studies. In this way, the basic needs of lay workers were addressed, in addition to the more advanced needs desired by full-time pastors (Lehotski 2010, 275). Srnec' vision for theological education echoed Franjo Klem from earlier years of the school and sought to "do everything to continue the vision of the founders of theological education, as there was an extraordinarily great need for educated Christian workers." At the same time, Srnec' desire was to train "well-educated successors for the future" (Lehotski 2010, 275). The first titular dean of BTS was Dimitrije Popadić, elected in 1999. Popadić established a charter for the school to be a Faculty of Theology and designed a program consisting of six degrees that could be attained (Lehotski 2010, 275). He sought to meet the needs of a wide group of students with varying backgrounds and ability for study. His vision for BTS was for it to be a "faculty of theology for the academic, spiritual and practical" (Lehotski 2010, 275). Popadić continued directing BTS, at that time under the name Protestant Theological Faculty, until 2007.

Finally, in 2010, the school was given to the directorship of Ondrej Franka, also acting President of the Union. (The information from this point onward regarding BTS is from the direct knowledge of the author, who worked as an associate with Ondrej Franka at the Baptist Theological School from 2013 to present). Having been educated in the West, Franka believed in the need not just for theological education for everyone, but that which is as thorough and comprehensive as possible. He desired that the teaching at BTS be respected and recognized on an international level, as the people of Serbia deserved the best education, yet that it also be available to the general populace. As the school had been paused for several years, Franka determined to hold monthly courses for laypeople in order to accomplish two goals, that is, to keep momentum of the school going and to train pastors, preachers, and Christian workers without removing them from their ministries or jobs. In this way, he continued the tradition which came before him. BTS would operate this way until 2015.

The purpose of presenting the history of the leaders of BTS is to demonstrate that the missional vision in Serbia, since the founding of Baptist churches there as well as the inception of the school, was theological education made accessible to all nationalities as well as to those who could not attend residential school. This capitalizes on the benefits

of the community of Christians in the interchange of theological instruction from mixed cultural backgrounds (Wall 1982, 39-52). BTS has always been a multicultural school for the general population of Christians in Serbia and the Balkans. This is a remarkable character trait for a school to carry for 80 years. In Eastern Europe, in general, lay people are not historically involved in church affairs or ministry and do not hold office due to the background of the highly hierarchical Orthodox Church (Ilić 2008, 468). This often leads to a distancing effect people feel with regard to church. BTS has strived to break this paradigm by educating as many people as possible who desire to know God more. To have the ability to serve in the church as laity also brings the laborer a felt need to be educated. It is not an easy task as the majority religion is Serbian Orthodoxy which has different doctrines and theology than Evangelicals (Volf 1996, 27).

The multicultural nature that BTS has always held to is reflective of the land. Situated between the countries of Romania, Hungary, and Croatia, it hosts many groups of ethnicities. Having transnational teachers makes sense in this context. It is also reflective of Evangelicalism itself. Evangelicals are (or should be) against any nationalism in Christianity because they consider all genuine Christians to be their spiritual brothers and sisters, and hold to the idea of a new nation of people, a heavenly and holy one [1 Peter 2:9] (Milovanović 2016, 10). To this end, Ondrej Franka recruited an American, Dwayne Baldwin, to come to Serbia and help to renew the ministry of theological education with the contextual principles that marked BTS from its genesis. In applying new pedagogy to its historical impetus, the school was formally designed and structured as a transnational, modular bachelor's program in September 2015.

Modular Education as a Contextual Structure

BTS has long been under the governance of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia. In considering how the structure of the redesigned school would best suit the needs of the average Christian, many forms were considered. Originally, the Union had the desire for the school to be a full-time, residential school in order to match a common model seen globally. This would necessitate the use of multiple resources such as accommodations, school/kitchen /housekeeping staff, and resident faculty, none of which BTS had or could financially develop. Residential theological schools in the Balkans have found it difficult to recruit students who were willing and able to attend school full-time, requiring them to be dependent on parents or family for support, with the prospect of no financial compensation in Christian ministry once they graduate. Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Marshal Josip Tito, operated with a unique communist government. Churches, and hence theological schools, were allowed to operate if they kept a very low profile and conducted themselves quietly within the walls of the organization. While not repressed per se, BTS was not a government-recognized facility and has only recently been able to be registered in Serbia. Given this history and the cultural stigma associated with Evangelical groups, it is exceedingly difficult for students and graduates of BTS to maintain a decent standard of living based solely on ministry. Even in an existing modular setting, the financial aspect is difficult, as employment remains one of the most frequent reasons for student drop out at BTS.

It was determined that the needs of the community were best served by the school being structured in a modular format. Modular courses typically cover either single subjects or a group of content which comprise a coordinating unit (Sadiq 2014, 105). To match the needs for contact hours with the limitations of potential students, the format was to be one-week modules, four times a year, with two courses per module. Teachers would be brought in who fulfilled the qualifications needed to maintain integrity of the school. Staff would be self-supported, which would initially lessen the need for so many resources from BTS. This format has remained the structure of the school since that time.

The overall program is four years in duration for the earning of a bachelor's degree. The initial cohort in 2015 started with 20 students, and new enrollment averages about ten students per year. Many similar schools in Eastern Europe have fewer, sometimes not surpassing ten students in the entirety of the school. To date, BTS has graduated 27 students with a Bachelor of Arts degree and hosted students from Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, the United States, Indonesia, and Canada. The school desires to represent even more countries as it grows. There are certainly challenges that exist within a modular structure of education. A decrease in student focus and a tendency to be highly task-oriented have been observed when physical interaction with teachers is lessened. Further, less interaction time with other students can lessen the learning experience as well (Agarin 2021, 326-327).

However, the modular structure has served BTS well and is now recognized by the staff of the school as the best form of theological education possible for the Evangelical needs in Serbia. This is reflective of many parts of Europe where non-residential schools that operate in either a modular or online format are gaining in popularity due to the need for students to have employment and ministry outside of school (Penner 2010, 541). As the body of Christ is served in the community, removing men and women for several years to study in the "rarefied air" of a theological residential school isolates them and creates barriers between the educational institute and the church (Claydon 2005, 11). In modular schools, students must work hard to balance school, life, and ministry, which in itself helps develop and strengthen biblical character attributes. In short, education in modules allows students to continue their ministry and not move physically into the ofttimes expensive environment of a residential school. They also can immediately apply what they have learned to their contexts between modules, and bring timely questions raised in their contexts back to the school setting. Another advantage to modular theological education is a financial one. Monetary capital for hiring staff is almost nonexistent in Serbia as in other Eastern European countries. Modules enable the theological school to recruit transnational teachers who are able to come in for a short-term module to teach, most times on raised support or personal financing. Most of these teachers are from the West. This practice has become very common in Eastern Europe and is one of the most utilized forms of theological education outside the West (Sadiq 2014, 105).

Practically speaking, BTS has six criteria for an instructor to be considered as a professor. They must be:

1. Academically qualified (minimum of a Masters' level degree);
2. Capable to teach theology (pastor or prior teaching experience);
3. Willing and able to teach (time, energy and willingness to prepare notebooks and syllabi);
4. Doctrinally sound (general agreement with BTS Statement of Faith);
5. Morally sound in life and ministry;
6. Financially independent (requiring little to no honoraria and willing to fund themselves in travel and accommodations)

These qualifiers can be quite limiting and difficult to find in totality in the local setting, especially where past opportunities for theological education have not contributed to credentials or experience, and where teachers need or even demand payment. Additionally, some aspects of this list, such as qualified teachers, are likely more available for general or secular education in Serbia, but not in theological education. The issues of cost, credentials, and ability remain a prohibitive factor in the goal of many purely national teaching facilities. This does not mean it is nonexistent, but that the pool of candidates must naturally be expanded to include foreign educators.

Modular Education and Character

Research has borne out what BTS has seen experientially. Not only in Europe but also globally there is a growing prevalence of modular or distance education. Baptist schools alone are estimated to train over 50% of their ministers in non-residential courses (Andronovienė 2010, 691). In addition to biblical and theological knowledge, there is the subject of character education, long thought to be limited to schools in which student/teacher interaction is prolonged. In literature highlighting the issue of virtue education in theological schools, the question is asked about whether short term programs can truly impact a student's character. Answers to the positive are becoming increasingly more common (Cook 2009, 31). For the purposes of character education, there are benefits of modularly structured schools that can actually encourage virtue building. Even pastors in Eastern Europe have expressed the opinion that part-time theological education, such as is found in modular education, provide the most optimal conditions for character as they maintain students' relationships with the local churches (Dyatlik 2009, 104). In this way, the local worshipping community engages with the student, helping shape character by providing a laboratory in which to test what is being learned in school (Andronovienė 2010, 691). This approach has been determined to be significant in formation of character as it ensures that character is being developed in a way that actually serves the community, and not simply as an abstract subject (Andronovienė 2010, 691).

Modular types of programs often serve to advance 2 Peter virtues, such as brotherly kindness and love by fostering relationships between local churches and seminaries (Dyatlik 2009, 99). Character education is a driving force at BTS. Part of the actions necessary to achieve character development is being active in the garishness of "real" life and ministry, and implementing knowledge and skill in actual life circumstances. Modular courses, therefore, help BTS to achieve its goal in developing virtue in students. Most students also work or take care of families. This necessity is not likely to change, as ministry roles in Serbia and the Balkans usually do not provide the income needed for proper family sustenance. This may be what distinguishes BTS as a school that encourages the development of men and women with godly character as opposed to the production of men and women who merely have much knowledge (Kelsey 1992, 92). Studies have shown that students in modular programs actually experience better overall formational development than those in residential settings (Nichols 2015, 121). Likely causes for this are the fact that modular students are more mature and have jobs and families with the responsibilities that attend to those duties. At the very least, modular and distance students are certainly not disadvantaged with regard to spiritual formation compared to residential students (Nichols 2015, 132). Students who are residential for four years may miss out on opportunities for virtue that only happen in the challenges of local life, and hence they not only suffer in cultivating character, but also can become a stranger in their own communities.

Throughout the history of BTS, all of the school's leaders contributed with their own vision for the school. In God's sovereignty, these visions were not independent but part of a golden thread throughout the years, tied one to another in a common goal. The desire at its core was to always have an institution that would be designed to train everyday people who would impact everyday people. A theologically elite class of people has always been anathema to the intention of BTS, yet the necessity for thoroughly equipped Christian workers has remained the motivating purpose behind the school. This has contributed to the role of modular education.

Transnational Ethos as an Operating Principle

In addition to a focus on lay Christian workers, the history of the Evangelical work in Serbia has always been centered around the idea of the global community of faith working together. Heard in the cross-cultural voice of the quote at the beginning of this article, "Let's be Christ's!", there has always been an effort to join forces with other races and nations for the cause of Christ in Serbia. BTS was started, and continues, as a result of Serbians, Slovaks, Czechs, Germans, Americans, and others. Transnational education in Serbia has always worked best because global members of Christ's body, though diverse in theological background, can work in a co-belligerent manner against ignorance of God's word.

Technically, transnational or cross-cultural theological education can be seen as a practice in which learning in the host culture is conducted by teachers from a different culture and institute (Council 2001, 2). However, the word is used by BTS to refer to its practice of intentionally using foreign educators to supplement national teachers. This form of education has gained popularity in recent years, especially in schools located in non-Western contexts, as it enables educators to teach at multitudes of locations where resources may be scarce. It allows the educator to utilize his skills, and gives the host schools a wealth of potential adjunct professors, increasing the overall quality and breadth of education at the school. The practice has also been considered very helpful by those receiving it because it is a biblical demonstration of the community of faith participating in the edification of other believers. In this way, it can be considered a benevolent act of sharing amongst global believers.

In Eastern Europe, transnational schools exist partly due to nationalist religions, primarily Orthodoxy. Evangelical schools such as BTS offer something to the student of theology that national religions often fail to offer, that is, a theological perspective outside of the national religion. For the Evangelical, it is a hope of salvation in Christ's work alone and a life lived in surrender to His word alone. Unfortunately, for Evangelical schools, the majority of credentialed Evangelical instructors and resources are still located in the West. The problem of lack of resources, teachers and faculty, literature, and funding are all limitations that are difficult to alter, making reliance on transnational teachers increasingly frequent.

Aside from the dependence on cross-cultural teachers and resources, research has borne out that mixing cultures when it comes to education is actually beneficial for the student for a more ecumenical reason. The student sees theology from more than their own context and enables them to see themselves not only as a native in their country, but as Christian pilgrims whose spiritual nationality transcends borders (McGill 2014, 227). When John Allen Moore came with the FMB to open a Bible school in Belgrade in 1939, he did not know the culture or the history of Serbia (Lehotski 2010, 264). Yet, his initiative did not produce a failed work, or an aberrant Western Christianity in the Balkans. It instead started a work that was continued by many nationals after him. Investigation has shown that transnational interaction contributes critically to a student's education (Astin 2011, 145). It could be that transnational schools in the final analysis are also structurally better than national schools in the area of critical character development. Biblical character results from knowing oneself before God, and this involves self-assessment as well as community assessment. Therefore, having a blend of a Western teacher's individualism with Serbian collectivism can be synergistic.

Reflection for Other Theological Schools

The approach to education outlined in this case study can be used with some benefit in other theological schools. A reflection on a school's cultural and historical tradition may yield

critical pathways for the future of the institute that are possibly unconsidered. The vision and purpose of the school must be examined to determine what benefit is available from a case study such as this. The purpose of this case study is not necessary to advocate for change in schools, whether they are modular, transnational, or neither. However, evaluating how a school can improve to better match the dynamics of the students as well as the context is always a best practice. Recommendations for consideration are largely dependent on the status of the school, that is, whether it is a newly structured school, an existing modular institute, or a residential program.

For some global schools seeking to design a structure, a modular format may be a best solution. Additionally, there are many ways for a school to function modularly. Modular education can operate in unit fashion, focusing on a single course for a short period of time, often two the three weeks. Other modules can be done in repeating bursts of short duration, such as only on weekends for a month. BTS has a separate program that is held on only one Saturday a month on a particular topic. Students who cannot attend the more demanding program at BTS find this useful for theological education, though there is no degree offered for it. In fact, if a degree is not part of the consideration, modular programs can be tailored to fit almost any situation. An existing residential program can benefit in a similar way by adding a modular component to its educational offering, specifically for those students who cannot participate in a full-time program. Institutions already functioning in a modular fashion can expand their modular approach, not only for unreached student demographics but also in order to focus on specific educational goals such as a program for counseling or worship arts. All modular schools can be encouraged to reconsider how character development can take an elevated place in the function and ethos of the school. Contrary to a mentality that character instruction is only possible in residential schools, students may benefit from virtue education in modular courses in ways that surpass that of other structures.

The other aspect of BTS, that of being transnational is more typically found in schools existing in non-Western contexts. For these schools, the relationship between teacher and student is a primary concern for contextualization and character instruction. Faculty can be encouraged to do simple things that contribute to contextualization, even in brief time frames, such as asking students how a presented lecture can be applied in the local contexts and allowing for discussion. Seeking ways to foster relationships is important, such as intentional lunches or dinners with teachers in students' homes. Some global schools seek to become fully national as an ideal goal, with no influence or teaching from the West. This may be necessary because Westernism is a barrier to students' education. However, a fully national school may not be the consummate endpoint for all schools. Transnational schools are often attractive to the local population as they can be seen as a more international education. In fact, schools that are taught in English, with or without translation, can be a draw to surrounding countries. From a biblical perspective, theological education is a community activity. If one community has an abundance of resources, it can legitimately be seen as a Christian duty to share those resources with other needy communities, in this case, transnational schools (The Scriptures detail the practice and responsibility of one church giving for the financial support of other churches [2 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8]. While this is an ecclesial reference, it can be argued that the principle of the Christian community sharing resources with each other should be an intentional focus of Christian ministries as well, including theological education. There is, of course, the danger of becoming overly dependent on sending countries. This threat should be a consistent source of conversation and reflection. However, the benefit of transnational schools is not entirely on the side of the receiving school. Incoming teachers can profit spiritually from interacting with other communities of Christians.

Above all, the school is the expert and knows best how the history and context need to be met in the geography in which it operates. It is difficult for a transnational school to maintain autonomy when so many resources are required from the West, but this must be a priority. The school must be uncompromising in its vision, policies, and functions, with the resolution that it will do so even at the risk of the school closing if necessary. If this risk is acceptable, it frees the school to operate as independently as possible.

Concluding Remarks

Theological education in Serbia, since its beginning, has had characteristics with proclivities to modular and transnational education. These have been manifested in two ways, a desire to reach the laity and the need to work along multicultural lines present in Serbia. The Holy Spirit has galvanized a vision for these goals in the people He placed in theological education in Serbia throughout the last 100 years, supplying what was needed for the Serbian context. For Serbia, continuing in the path acknowledged first by Oncken as well as each subsequent leader of BTS has necessitated modular, transnational education. More than that, having the most natural and fitting impact on the community for the gospel demands modular, transnational education. It has been demonstrated in reviewing the history and context of BTS that it would actually be contextually wrong for the school to be structured in any other way. This case study can serve as an illustration for all theological schools considering how best to match the needs of their students.

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Ethics of Holy War

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the war in Ukraine, the concept of "holy war" has come to the fore. In fact, the enemy turned against the victim precisely for reasons of spiritual purification, at least in a declarative way. This paper aims to present the concept of holy war and its ethics, not from the Christian conception but from the Islamic conception, where war and fighting have been a modus vivendi throughout the ages. For Muslims, war has been the chosen way they used from the beginning to proliferate the Islamic movement. It has also been used as a form of defense for one's own faith or even culture. Can war, at some point, be part of the solution no matter what problem arises? This paper aims to present the concept of war in the Islamic religion.

KEYWORDS: ethics, war, holy, Islam, jihad

Introduction

A condition of human development throughout human history has been the protection of one's values against the attempt to conquer or annihilate them by certain political, social, economic or religious circumstances. In the context of the religious survival of a tradition, war or more advanced thought and culture have been means of survival. In other cultures, these means have been replaced by economic and social development, which has allowed the transmission of values and their enrichment over time for many generations. Each particular culture depends on a set of traditions, religious, social, economic, and cultural, which are protected and enriched by passing them on to the next generation and defending them from assimilation in the event of clashes between cultures (Rotaru 2021, 87-92). The concept that more clearly defines this protection of religious values that are shared by a group or groups that form a people may be called holy war. In this context, holy war is a war that has religious connotations (Contamine 2000, 99).

Moral Problem

Considering the importance of the moral direction in which the subject is framed, one can highlight several patterns from which one starts to achieve the goal, which in turn is influenced by the lens through which it is viewed. Ethics and virtue, utilitarianism, hedonism and other patterns of thought can change the trajectory as well as the end point of the discussion. One of today's fashionable issues is terrorism, which tends to become the most effective way for certain groups to achieve their goals. In most cases, these revenges are based on the idea of just revenge for a previous violation of rights. What is the solution when looking at things from an Islamic perspective or is there perhaps something in the Islamic tradition that could give guidance on how to respond to a terrorist attack?

Dr. Farid Esack, professor and specialist in Islam at Union Theological Seminary, emphasizes that, similar to Christianity, Islam also parallels the concept of just war. As opposed to the particular case of responding to a terrorist attack, the Islamic position would be a long-term look at the causes that induced this destructive effect, which does not necessarily come close to an immediate and unconditional response to the attack. The question arises as to how we can hope to create a more just and peaceful world in the long term versus how you can have a particular victim in a particular space or state of affairs (Religion 2005, 23).

Consideration of Factors

The need to defend one's own culture comes as a response to the cultural and religious invasion that nowadays has as an ally, the highly developed system of communication and transmission of information. The generally highly developed West has the power of assimilation but not indefinitely and an uncontrolled openness to the import of information leads to saturation and even domination. At the other extreme, a country situated at the confluence of great cultures may be subjected to a flood of information, and the need for development may be assimilated. If there is no possibility of protection, it can lead to cultural war, closure, and repression.

Defending justice (Rotaru 2014, 61-63) can often cause ethically correct war but with devastating consequences beyond repair. Since any violation of justice constitutes immorality, why does it take another immorality to stop one already committed, or how far is one willing to go to the evil of revenge through war to protect justice and morality? The need for freedom is the issue generally evoked by those who are in favor of war, but considering that the war once won designates a victor who will claim some rights violates the very principle for which the conflict was started.

Tradition, Creation and Natural Law

In the context of creation, war did not exist on Earth until man committed the first sin. From that moment, life was invaded by holiness, and the person of God found no pleasure in the actions of sinful man; in view of this fact in the pre-creation context, there was a war between Satan as a rebel against the reign of Yahweh. Because of the rebellion, man lost his prerogatives as master steward over God's creation and nature was no longer as before - subject to positive human actions (Contamine 2000, 110). In the context of tradition, war also had a religious connotation, all the more so as the interpretation of a victory was closely linked to the god of the victorious people. Scripture, the Old Testament, the covenant, the law, the prophets all speak of the context of the covenant between God and man, the war which involved God's defense of justice and this not infrequently meant the use of the pagans for the Trinity's discipline of the Jewish people, but also the other way around if we refer to the occupation of Canaan after the exit from Egypt, God used Israel as an agent of the application of His justice. (Waldo 1988, 142).

In the historical context, holy war meant protecting Christian values, which also required political exercises such as the liberation and protection of the country of Israel by Christian Europeans. For many, however, adherence to this form of enforcing justice had a purely economic motivation, escape from poverty, e.g., the Children's Crusade, in which most participants left the plough and the cattle, in the context of medieval life torn by discontent, poverty, and despair (Contamine 2000, 62-4).

Early Church Century

If, in the context of the Old Testament, war was an expression of the fulfillment of God's justice as well as justice in human relations, in the New Testament, things are different. The Bible is, at first glance, contradictory with regard to God's instructions to people about war. The following verses can be taken as an example: "But as for the cities of these people which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you must not leave alive anything that has breath. You must annihilate them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they may not teach you to do all the sinful things that they do for their gods..." (Deut 20:16-17).

On the other hand, some verses are often quoted in defense of the pacifist position. "You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other." (Matt 5:38-39). Defending justice or exterminating evil are both causes that have led to many more or less holy wars. The concepts are found in the Bible in different circumstances and, therefore, need to be understood contextually. For example, in the case of Joshua, these concepts have played an important role in many religions. The Crusades are the best examples in Europe, while in Islam, the concept is called Jihad; wars that prioritize religion second or third are not generally defined as religious (Britannica.com 2005).

Under the Protection of Sanctity and Tradition

With the development and expansion of Christianity, the war was waged between non-Christian peoples, who were not necessarily pagans, and those who fought under the sign of the cross. Since the state and the church were very close as institutions and even merged in some cultures, political wars were also religious wars and religious wars were also political wars. The example of the persecution of the Mennonites in the Low Countries is a real fact. All those who did not agree with the religious discipline of the state church could only be enemies of the state and therefore had to be eliminated (Gill 1985, 219). In the international context, the wars against the Jews in the first place and in the second against the Muslims, defined as crusades, showed what man can do under the cover of the name of Christian and "In the Name of God.". The non-Christian peoples' image of Christians is seen through the lens of the non-Christians' conquest and the Christians' exploitation of the wealth of the conquered, in the case of the Spanish conquistadors. What guidance can tradition offer about responding to something as horrific as a terrorist attack?

Dr. Lisa Cahill, Professor of Ethics, Department of Theology, Boston College, says that the solution of violence should be the last of those adopted and that in the case of Christianity the response to war would be rather negative (Vicini 2020, 65). Thomas Aquinas asked in the 13th century,"Is it always a sin to start a war?" The tradition of the justness of war developed because of the exception that can be made for self-defense. One of the most important directions in the war against terrorism is the adoption of war as a last resort.

Another issue raised is whether more harm will be caused by the methods by which the good is to be achieved and what is the reasonable expectation of success. If the goal is clear and can be achieved, what is worth considering is the criterion of non-combatant immunity, civilians should not be subject to direct attack. In terms of the Christian tradition, says Professor Cahill, it is not known whether it specifically refers to terrorism as a traditional problem, but the view of most religious thinkers is focused on the need to clearly define who the enemy is, in a way that is separate from other enemies who are more vaguely mentioned, having some kind of clear and persuasive evidence that the adversary we identify is really guilty of the crimes of which he is accused (Religion 2005, 124).

Other Opinions

What does international law have to say about war? Dean Michael Young of George Washington University Law School says that international law recognizes the inherited right of self-defense and really links this to notions like proportionality and the needs of a nation. This must be necessary, and actions must be proportional to the risk to be eliminated or the action to be stopped. If what international law says about this situation is important, says Dean Young, it is certainly important in two senses:

1. we want to continue to build an international society in which each country acts in a way that international law considers appropriate and does not act simply by virtue of the power it possesses.
2. in particular, this war will require enormous cooperation between allies. The legitimacy of how this is done will matter to those who are against the allies (Religion 2005, 125).

Alternatives and Choices

Christianity versus Islam

The apparent violence of Islam in relation to other cultures and religions is rooted in its historical, but not its religious, foundations. The rupture between Christianity and Islam occurs at the very moment of its foundation. Jesus reached the height of his popularity when he preached to 5000 people and performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Then the Galileans wanted to make him their king, welcoming him as a king at the entrance to Jericho, but Jesus refused the people's offer, just as he had previously refused the devil's offer in the desert - to be master of the world. In the end, Jesus chose the way of the cross. Contrary to this, when Mohammed suffered persecution in Mecca, the city of Medina offered him a throne, an army and a kingdom. Mahommed said YES to this offer.

Another major difference would be the denial of the dignity (Rotaru 2016, 29-43) that the Christian Bible gives to women. Also, Islamists see marriage and sex as only procreation, children as a measure by which manhood and wealth are judged, and the idea of love is barely mentioned in the Koran.

Yet we would be hypocrites if we judged Muslims for these seemingly bizarre, hostile or counterproductive things. Christians are no strangers to deviant behavior either. Let us remember the year 1054 when a schism occurred between the Church of the Western Roman Empire and the Churches of the Eastern Roman Empire, degenerating into what we now call Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and also into the diplomatic rift between the kingdoms of Europe at that time, which subsequently allowed further degeneration of the shadow of the former empire, and in the future the final conquest of Constantinople by the Muslims, and even later - the rise of Russia's influence and cancer it always managed to spread over Eastern Europe (Chapman 2002, 98).

Also, the crusades were not always a form of defense against Islamic fanaticism. These things must be considered a natural social phenomenon, because the emergence of sects and religious derivatives is only a form of manifestation of the desire to diversify. However, splitting the difference four ways loses its essence. But the masses of people will never keep track of the essence of things, as can always be seen.

Jihad

This word is often used in the media. Whether Christians or Muslims, most are under the impression that "JIHAD" means holy war. Jihad does not mean holy war but rather represents an individual path, the spiritual quest of every Muslim. A solitary quest. Jihad can be understood as the use of all energies and resources to establish the Islamic system of life, in order to obtain the favor of Allah - hence the impression that this is the Holy War, an obvious mistake, in the context find is about the individual and not the society.

Jihad is an Arabic word that means to test your own limit. It is a continuous process. In its first phase, a Muslim learns to control his own evil desires and intentions. He has to strive hard to achieve this. This Jihad is within the individual and is the basis of the deeper Jihad, which involves establishing Maruf (righteousness) and the removal of Munkar (evil) from the lives of individuals and then from society.

Thus, individuals skip the most important stage - cleaning the evil from their souls – and set about cleaning the evil directly from society. A kind of - "Washing the glass on the outside." More hastily, the term "Intifada" comes closer to what Muslims call Holy War. Muslims are now experiencing what Christians went through hundreds of years ago. Following this analogy, we could say that they will have passed this stage by the time their political system is separated from the religious one. If a few hundred years ago, the Christians made crusades in the name of God or the Pope, with an excommunication, could overthrow a king, being a kind of king of kings; in the same way, the Muslims fight now in the name of Allah, and not long ago the Imam could overthrow a sultan with a fatwa (a kind of religious decree) (Musk 1997, 143).

Looking from a broader perspective, it is inconceivable the similarity between all major religions, which are nothing but social formulas, or rather institutionalizations of the religious instinct existing in each individual. Islamism and religions in general are a more complex problem than I try to present here, but in the end, the problems always come from the mediocrity of individuals, their lack of education, their indoctrination. I am talking about the REAL problems, namely the harmful consequences that religion can have on human society, and the individuals of which it is composed.

It is not the fault of Muslims, it is not the fault of Christians, it is not the fault of divinity – it is just the fault of man who, lacking sufficient integrity, needs society to guide him, to exist, to make sense of the apparent nonsense of reality. Individuals who feel empty inside, who feel lost in existence as in an ocean, seek to grasp something, to identify with something, to give a meaning to their existence - and for them ,there are always religions, represented by churches, and controlled by people.

Conclusion

Finally, based on what has been written above, we see the need to live in justice (Rotaru 2019, 269-271), and for man, this state of affairs is defined more as an ideal than an accomplished fact. Attempting to solve the problem of the spirit in a physical and terrestrial way is a mistake from the start; the results are visible and easy to understand. The only one who can give an objective and reliable answer to this problem is God. The only one who has the right and fights a holy war is God and those who are in His camp are at war with a corrupt cosmos in which, for the moment, a fallen angel wants to be the boss. The last word, as is to be expected, as well as the first will be given by the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the only truly just judge who can decide the spiritual, moral and physical good of mankind.

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