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The Amsterdam University College (AUC) Undergraduate Journal of Liberal Arts and Sciences is a biannual, interdisciplinary publication showcasing outstanding undergraduate academic papers. The journal aims to demonstrate the strength of undergraduate scholarship at AUC, reflect the intellectual diversity of its academic programme, and encourage the development of research and writing skills. As an AUC committee, the editorial board of InPrint strives to facilitate collaboration between students and faculty across the curriculum and to provide students with opportunities to gain experience in academic reviewing, editing, and publishing.

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Preface to the 20th issue

InPrint was founded ten years ago as AUC:Press by six people sitting around an old kitchen table in the dorms as a student-run publication with two issues a year: an open submission and a capstone issue. In a large part we wanted to start a journal to showcase our work at AUC, both capstones as well as insightful and well researched papers written for other courses. We asked the teaching staff to tip students who had written an interesting paper to submit their work to us and possibly get published. That way we could provide the outside world a way to see what we were up to on Science Park, but more importantly, we could provide the start of an academic CV for enthusiastic students.

Perhaps the most important reason why we founded InPrint was, however, that we wanted to give our fellow students a way to experience how an academic publication worked in all facets. From submitting a paper to leading the publication as its editor, or the incredibly valuable contribution of peer reviewers. InPrint set out to work as a fully functional journal.

After ten years I can proudly look back at all the work that has been done since then. The only possible conclusion is that all the generations of authors, board members and peer reviewers have made the goals we set a reality. I wish InPrint an excellent second decade.

Henk Nieweg, Founding Editor

Introduction by the Editor

I am very proud to introduce this year's open issue of the Undergraduate Journal of Liberal Arts and Sciences. With it, we do not only want to celebrate the excellent contributions of our six amazing authors but also 10 years of InPrint, as a running student editorial board.

In this issue, we have aimed to make another step towards highlighting the interdisciplinarity within AUC's majors: Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. Each author has identified a topic with high societal or scientific relevance and went beyond disciplinary conventions to point out that today's challenges cannot be solved from one perspective alone. Additionally, this issue showcases a variety of methods and approaches to engage in the academic landscape. As such, we strive to emphasize the importance of the Liberal Arts and Sciences in academia, and society as a whole.

This issue begins with a literature review by Ingrid Sommer about "The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Amygdala Development: An Analysis of Functional Connectivity". Bridging the gap between neuroanatomy and the social sciences, she draws attention to the sensitivity of developing brains toward social environments. Her analysis is insightful, thoroughly researched, and skillfully written. Moving to a molecular scale, Freya Baker discusses the interconnectedness between metabolism and physiology. In her article "Barth Syndrome: Exploring an Ultra-Rare Mitochondrial Disease *Ex vivo*", she combines genetics, biochemistry, and medicine to characterize a detrimental, but often overshadowed, disease. Venturing into the realm of moral philosophy, her highly informative and engaging paper discusses how research into rare diseases can (or has to be?) ethically justified.

In the Social Sciences, we are delighted to publish an outstanding analysis by Esther Hattie Kraemer on "Inter-state Human Rights Monitoring: To what extent is the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism effective in advancing the protection of human rights?" The current war in Ukraine has seen a sudden invigoration of the 'Moscow Mechanism' (MM). By providing a comprehensive overview of current approaches in IR, she uses the MM as a case study to show how states are not able to promote human rights in this context. Importantly, states' biases towards national interest limit their objectivity, which holds especially for Western states. Not only the international order is threatened by recent events, but also the fabric of our democracy itself. Therefore, Anna Micelli has written a fascinating and compelling account of our political status quo. Her article "Conspiracies, Populism and Extreme Ideologies: 21st Century Challenges to Democratic Deliberation" engages with the current academic literature to show how several anti-democratic tendencies amplify each other. Illustrated by recent examples, her text provides a sharp perspective on various converging trends in modern society.

Finally, both of our Humanities authors cast a light to specific (historical) developments abroad. Thus, they aim to sharpen our understanding of long-standing debates in their respective fields. First, Aditi Rai Sia Mei Ann with "Violence in the Veranda of Mecca: Exploring the Implications of Religion and Pancasila on Violence in Aceh." Her analysis opens to us the recent history of Indonesia and how religion can become entangled with violence in the context of regional identities and nation building. Secondly, Marcell Bárdos with "Communist Hyperreality: A Critical Look at the House of Terror". His account of Hungarian society throughout the 20th century is expressive and engaging. Furthermore, he portrays the museum "House of Terror" as a hot memory site and argues that it fails to meaningfully commemorate the political victims of the past. While his study emphasizes the local consequences, he also highlights general problematic trends that go hand in hand with skewed memory work.

This publication would not have been possible without the inspiring efforts by the people who have joined me on this endeavor of InPrint. First and foremost, I want to thank Vojta, Sophia, and Lena who all took over the department head position this semester and filled it with great ideas, initiative, and reliability. I am grateful about having Alice and Martyna on board to keep the administration and promotion running. Without you, InPrint would not be the same. Furthermore, I want to acknowledge Basia, Chynna, and Shree who continued as editors after a stressful capstone issue last semester and now have significantly contributed with their experiences and insights. And finally, I am proud of all our new editors, Polina, Marianna, Matthew, and Camelia, who enriched this board with their curiosity, engagement, and friendliness. I hope we could teach you something along the way and made you passionate about InPrint.

On a personal note, this issue also concludes my time at InPrint. Considering the rich 10-year history of the *Undergraduate Journal*, I feel honored to have come in contact with so many intelligent, creative, and passionate people. Such a student initiative lives from the engagement by its members. For myself, managing InPrint for the past year has not always been easy but in every aspect rewarding. I sincerely hope to have contributed my little share to this great legacy and can't wait to join the celebrations to the 40th issue in another ten years.

Jannik Faierson, Editor-in-Chief

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The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on Amygdala Development:

An Analysis of Functional Connectivity

Ingrid Sommer



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1 Introduction

Current estimates indicate that approximately 356 million children worldwide live in extreme, multidimensional poverty (Unicef, 2014). Socioeconomic status (SES) is a diverse measure of an individual's or group's social and economic standing, typically based on factors such as income, education, and occupation (Ramphal et al., 2020). Studies have shown that children growing up with low socioeconomic status are at increased risk of emotional dysregulation and impairments in their cognitive development (Duncan et al., 1994; Ackerman et al., 2004). Low SES is additionally a risk factor for various mental disorders, especially anxiety disorders (Muntaner, 2004). Although socioeconomic adversity has been linked to a higher likelihood of maladaptive brain development, the neurological processes behind this relationship are still poorly understood (Merz et al., 2017).

The association of low SES with anxiety- and emotion-related difficulties hints at the involvement of the amygdala. Located within the anterior temporal lobe, the amygdala is essential in decision-making and emotional responses, particularly negative ones such as fear, anxiety, and aggression (Kim et al., 2011). The amygdala is connected to many different brain regions, including the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and other limbic structures, and is thought to play a key role in coordinating activity between these regions (Gibson et al., 2016). In maturity, the amygdala has strong bidirectional connections with the previously mentioned brain regions that facilitate the coordination of amygdala inputs and that play an essential role in emotion regulation and processing (Gibson et al., 2016). Thus, broadly speaking, the level of amygdala functional connectivity with other structures, particularly prefrontal cortical structures, is reflective of self-regulation of emotion (Callaghan & Tottenham, 2016).

Increasingly, research has sought to identify correlations between low SES and negative influences on developing brain structures, including the amygdala. However, the majority of the literature has focused on the effect of SES on amygdala volume during childhood and adolescence (Hanson et al., 2011; Luby et al., 2013; Hanson et al., 2015). Less attention has been paid to the effect of SES on amygdala functional connectivity to other brain regions. No literature review so far has synthe-

sised recent studies that have investigated amygdala connectivity with other structures during development. Researching the effects of SES beyond neuroanatomy by examining modifications in brain connectivity thus allows for a broader understanding of transformations taking place at the level of information and emotional processing.

The developmental period is of particular interest as it is a period of prolonged brain plasticity, causing the brain to be more vulnerable to the effects of low SES (Tottenham, 2015). This can highlight the links between SES and connectivity. The phenomenon of brain plasticity, characterised by the brain's ability to change and adapt in response to experiences, may render it more susceptible to the effects of socioeconomic status, as the brain's structure and function can be altered by environmental factors such as stress, nutrition, and cognitive stimulation (Tooley et al., 2021). Thus, the inquiry of focus in this paper is the following: *How does low socioeconomic status impact amygdala functional connectivity in the developing brain?*

This paper provides further insight into the environmental impact on neurobiology during early life, underscoring the importance of socioeconomic well-being in the prevention of mental health issues and disorders. The definition of socioeconomic status is explored, and the brain regions relevant to this topic are identified. Subsequently, the findings from studies that have examined the relationship between amygdala-prefrontal cortex connectivity and socioeconomic status are evaluated. Insights from amygdala connectivity studies have the potential to pave the way for economic and social policies that keep mental wellness in mind and reduce socioeconomic disparities.

2 Methodology

To answer the research question, relevant studies first needed to be identified. A systematic search of the literature was conducted using the databases PubMed, Web of Science, and PsycINFO. The search terms used were SES keywords such as "socioeconomic status," "poverty," "income," "income-to-needs ratio," "social class" or amygdala-related keywords such as "amygdala volume," "amygdala reactivity," "amygdala resting-state/structural/functional connectivity."

Given the current academic knowledge, the paper focuses on amygdala connectivity with prefrontal structures, mainly the ventromedial and the dorsolateral prefrontal cortices. The search was limited to studies written in English and published in the last 10 years. The publishing time limit was set to ensure the quality of the fMRI study.

Potentially relevant studies were screened for inclusion based on the following criteria: (1) use of neuroimaging techniques to measure amygdala connectivity; (2) comparison of participants with varying SES levels; (3) participants were within the age range of 4-24 years; and (4) primary focus on the correlation between SES and amygdala connectivity. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

3 Defining Low Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a theoretical construct that measures an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others within a given group. It is based on factors such as income, education, occupation, wealth, and access to resources (Ramphal et al., 2020). Importantly, these factors are often not independent of each other but further covariate with factors linked to quality of life (Evans et al., 2005). For example, a person with a higher income may also have higher levels of education and access to better job opportunities. Research studying the effects of SES does not always measure the same factors.¹

Low SES can harm one's overall health, as those with lower SES are more likely to suffer from chronic illness and mental health issues (Baum et al., 1999), as well as have fewer opportunities in education and employment (Evans et al., 2005). Low SES can also lead to greater stress levels (Goldmann et al., 2011), a correlation of interest to this paper. In addition, those with low SES often lack access to necessary resources, such as health-care, housing, and adequate nutrition (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

¹e.g. Jednoróg, et al., 2012 use the weighted average of maternal education and maternal current occupation status as SES measure, whereas Hair et al., 2015 use family income adjusted for household size using binary and categorical measures). The SES measures primarily used in studies assessed in this paper are generally family income and occupation.

SES is thus a major contributor to poverty and can have far-reaching effects on an individual's life – both psychologically and physiologically.

4 Defining Amygdala Functional Connectivity and Structure

Amygdala functional connectivity refers to the patterns of communication and coordination between the amygdala and other brain regions (Kim et al., 2011). This concept is typically examined using neuroimaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which allow researchers to measure the synchronization of brain activity between different brain regions (Wang et al., 2014). In the context of emotional processing, functional connectivity between the amygdala and other brain regions is thought to play a central role in the regulation of emotional responses (Gibson et al., 2016). Functional connectivity of the amygdala is an important aspect of the neural mechanisms underlying emotional processing and related functions. Disruptions in amygdala functional connectivity have been observed in individuals with mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, and may contribute to the development and maintenance of these disorders (Cheng et al., 2018).

However, studies have more closely examined the link between measurements of low SES and amygdala or prefrontal cortex (PFC) structure respectively, rather than connectivity (Barch et al., 2016). Noble et al. (2012) importantly express that neuroanatomical differences likely reflect discrepancies in neurocognitive processes, such as socio-emotional processing, thus hinting at impacts of structure on functional connectivity. Indeed, amygdala structure and function are strongly intertwined and may have a bidirectional relationship. Taylor et al. (2022) state that amygdala volume differences indicate alterations in the functional connection between the subcortical and cognitive control networks. In light of these findings, this paper will occasionally discuss the impact of SES on relevant structures individually to substantiate the understanding of functional connectivity.

5 Low SES and Amygdala Functional Connectivity

Because of the strong connectivity between the amygdala and the PFC, recent studies have specifically explored how prefrontal cortical regions play a vital role in amygdala regulation and in reducing its activation via inhibition (Rosenkranz & Grace, 2001). The ventromedial (vmPFC) and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (dlPFC) represent two regions that play major roles in psychological processes and cognitive functions.

More specifically, the vmPFC seems to be involved in the extinction of arousal (Nejati et al., 2021). Through interactions with the amygdala, among others, the vmPFC is essential for the representation of reward and value-based decision-making but also the production and control of negative emotion (Hiser & Koenigs, 2018). In contrast, the dlPFC controls and regulates the valence of emotional events (Nejati et al., 2021). It additionally contributes to working memory (Barbey et al., 2013), decision-making (Rahnev et al., 2016), and executive attention (Vossel et al., 2013)

As such, studies focusing on amygdala-PFC connectivity have generally differentiated between the two structures. Unsurprisingly, dysfunction in either prefrontal regulatory area has been linked to increased psychopathology, such as anxiety disorders, and heightened emotional responses (Shin & Liberzon, 2009). For this reason, it is highly relevant to explore amygdala functional connectivity in relation to socioeconomic status.

5.1 Connectivity with ventromedial prefrontal cortex

Ramphal et al. (2020) demonstrated that neighbourhood socioeconomic disadvantage accelerated the maturation of the amygdala-vmPFC resting-state functional connectivity; they further drew a link between early connectivity maturation and pediatric anxiety. The wide age range in their study (5-25 years) allowed for a longitudinal perspective on the impact neighbourhood SES, as defined by neighbourhood poverty and educational attainment, has on connectivity. Their results suggest that economic factors, rather than educational ones, more accurately explained the observed results. Corroborating such results, Tian et al. (2021) found higher amygdala-vmPFC intrinsic connectiv-

ity mediated by differential cortical secretion in children from lower SES. In contrast, Hanson et al. (2019) discovered that low SES, as defined by lower household income, correlated with decreased amygdala-vmPFC connectivity in adolescent years.

Although it may appear that the findings from Tian et al. (2021) and Hanson et al. (2019) are at odds with each other, that is not necessarily the case. According to the 'stress acceleration hypothesis' put forward by Callaghan & Tottenham (2016), the accelerated vmPFC connectivity maturation taking place in low SES contexts during childhood may have short-term benefits of offering increased emotional self-regulation during early life. The accelerated maturation helps the young individual to more independently cope with stressful life situations. However, as the individual ages, the maturation of the connectivity does not progress at a normal pace, resulting in long-term detriments and difficulties with emotion regulation. It can therefore be hypothesised that the findings of Hanson et al. (2019) are indicative of such negative outcomes later in life, as the pathway associated with the extinction of arousal is disrupted. The findings of Cressman et al. (2010), which indicate that active synaptic pruning of prefrontal-amygdala connections takes place during late adolescence, ought to be also considered regarding such a hypothesis, as they may relate to the changing connectivity during that period.

5.2 Connectivity with dorsolateral prefrontal cortex

Fewer studies have focused on amygdala-dlPFC connectivity in SES, despite their known interaction during successful emotion regulation (Banks et al., 2007). In their cross-sectional fMRI study, Kim et al. (2013) showed reduced dlPFC activity but increased amygdala activation during emotion regulation tasks in children with low SES (measured by family income). They found reduced dlPFC activation compared to control and corresponding decreased inhibition of amygdala activity. However, from their study, it is unclear whether dlPFC-amygdala connectivity per se was impacted by SES. Tian et al. (2021) investigated the amygdala-dlPFC intrinsic functional connectivity. Assessment of SES was done via income-to-needs ratio calculation and comparison to average. The results were consistent with the aforementioned findings

concerning the vmPFC mainly in that the connectivity was heightened in children from lower SES during the fMRI. They found higher functional coupling, particularly during the processing of negative emotions in the lower SES group. This is in line with the role of the dIPFC in executive attention and its top-down regulation of amygdala regions. Finally, Liberzon et al. (2015) found decreased recruitment of dIPFC during emotion regulation tasks in young adults (ages 23-24) that were exposed to poverty in childhood. This is indicative of decreased amygdala-dIPFC functional connectivity, which is also evidenced by the decreased task accuracy in lower SES participants.

Increased amygdala-dIPFC coupling at a young age followed by decreased amygdala-dIPFC connectivity later is a sign of early maturation that follows a similar pattern as the amygdala-vmPFC connectivity.

6 Potential Mechanisms Linking Low SES to Amygdala Functional Connectivity

This literature review supports the 'stress acceleration hypothesis' put forward by Callaghan & Tottenham (2016) by providing evidence that amygdala-PFC connectivity is increased, resembling adult-like signalling in children of low SES, but is decreased compared to peers later in life. The hypothesis states that early life stress activates and accelerates the development of brain structures that are important for emotion, learning, and memory. This process may allow the individual to cope with the stressor, but it may also have negative long-term effects on emotion regulation abilities and increases the risk of developing fear-related issues in adulthood. Callaghan & Tottenham (2016) suggested that this accelerated development may be an adaptive response to help the individual cope with absent or inconsistent parental care. Indeed, mature patterns of connectivity are associated with less anxiety, which may confer short-term advantages in emotion regulation (Gerlach et al., 2021). However, it may also have costs, such as a shorter period for developing behavioural skills and strategies, and a potential decrease in general intelligence (Callaghan & Tottenham, 2016). This theory states that adversity does not necessarily lead to impairments. It in-

stead reprioritises developmental strategies away from ones that favour slow development and towards the ones supporting an adult-like functioning of the system (Frankenhuis & de Weerth, 2013).

The 'stress acceleration hypothesis' has largely focused on the role of the caregiver and adverse caregiving experiences in early connectivity maturation. Factors such as neglect, parental mental illness, and familial violence have been building blocks for this hypothesis. However, my findings indicate that other socioeconomic factors, which have not been investigated as much, may play a role just as important in accelerated connectivity maturation. The findings indicate that low family income, in particular, is associated with patterns of amygdala-PFC connectivity predicted by the stress acceleration hypothesis.

7 Limitations

Although there is a growing interest in understanding how socioeconomic environments impacts the mind, there are several limitations in the existing literature.

Only a few studies have specifically examined the impact of SES on amygdala functional connectivity. In particular, there is a substantial sparsity in longitudinal studies, given the several methodological challenges inherent to such research, such as changes in imaging technologies (Johnson et al., 2016) and significant cost. Additionally, SES is a complex abstraction that can be measured in several ways (e.g. income, education, access to resources). Evaluation of SES can change based on the different measurement definitions and there is no standardised assessment of all SES indicators. Differentiating between the various SES indicators is also relevant for better intervention programs that seek to decrease the effects of poverty in impoverished areas.

8 Implications

I argue there are far-reaching implications that can be drawn from this paper. Firstly, the plasticity of the young brain is a double-edged sword: young individuals are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, but they are also most responsive to interventions (Macintyre et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2016). As

such, it is important to recognise the correlation between socioeconomic disadvantage and brain connectivity, and to provide supportive treatments and services to young people facing poverty. Interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness, and support groups can help to increase the connectivity between the amygdala and relevant structures (Villa et al., 2020). This could allow individuals to better regulate their emotions and behaviours to ultimately escape the cycle of poverty.

Another implication relates to economic and social policy. Findings from this paper converge with evidence from the fields of public health, and developmental and social psychology that evidentiate the role of social contexts in biological development (Sullivan et al., 2006). This knowledge ought to be of particular value to social and economic policy-makers, who aim to reduce socioeconomic disparities and consider the biologically imprinted mental toll of early life adversity.

Finally, this paper extends the stress acceleration hypothesis by suggesting that factors beyond the bond with the caregiver, such as parental educational attainment or income, also play a role in early maturation of emotion regulation circuits.

9 Conclusion & Future Directions

This literature review has sought to synthesise current knowledge on how low SES affects the developing amygdala's functional connectivity with prefrontal cortical regions. Taken together, the studies discussed in this review suggest that socioeconomic adversity is correlated with increased childhood amygdala-PFC connectivity and decreased amygdala-PFC connectivity during adolescence. These findings are evidence for the stress acceleration hypothesis, which states that adversity leads to accelerated maturation of emotion regulation circuits that has negative long-term impact.

Given the novelty and interdisciplinarity of the topic, there are many avenues for further research. Future research could focus on more longitudinal fMRI studies that examine the impact of SES on brain functional connectivity across several developmental periods, including early childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Further studies should assess the costs of early emotion system matu-

ration, and to what extent the short-term benefits of this adaptation are maintained (Tottenham, 2015). Additionally, the neurobiology underscoring alterations in amygdala functional connectivity remains relatively unknown, although it is believed that physiological stress systems (Barry et al., 2017) and sex hormones are involved (Engman et al., 2016).

The implications of this research extend far beyond the laboratory and into the realm of policy and practice, emphasising the urgent need for a more equitable and inclusive approach to brain development research and intervention. Only through continued investigation can we hope to alleviate the detrimental impact of low SES on the developing brain, and ultimately promote healthy outcomes for individuals and communities.

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I take no responsibility for any inaccuracies or outright falsehoods that I may have unwittingly perpetuated.

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Barth Syndrome:

Exploring an Ultra-Rare Mitochondrial Disease *Ex vivo*

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1 An Introduction to Barth Syndrome

There are over 7,000 rare (affecting <1/2,000 people) and ultra-rare (affecting <1/50,000) diseases that affect 400 million people worldwide [1,2]. Receiving a diagnosis can be very challenging and even then, 95% have no, or minimal, treatment options. One such disease, Barth Syndrome (BTHS), is an ultra-rare X-linked recessive mitochondrial disorder [3,4]. It affects one in 300,000-400,000 live births and primarily affects males. However, emerging research suggests that this number is grossly underestimated [5]. This genetic disorder is the result of a mutation in the nuclear DNA-located gene *TAZ*, which codes for tafazzin, a mitochondrial cardiolipin transacylase enzyme [6]. This mutation leads to an overall decrease in cardiolipin, a phospholipid involved in the lateral organization of the internal mitochondrial membrane and intimately associated with the complexes of oxidative phosphorylation (the process of generating energy in the form of ATP). The primary characteristics of BTHS are mitochondrial myopathies (muscle diseases), dilated cardiomyopathy, skeletal muscle myopathy, neutropenia, and growth delay. BTHS has a diverse clinical presentation and although often diagnosed in infancy, it can sometimes go unnoticed until adulthood [5]. This paper will aim to explore the genetic disruption that causes the mitochondrial defect, the biochemical origins of some of BTHS' clinical presentations, and the use of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) to investigate treatment options *in vitro*. Finally, the paper will delve into a general discussion of the ethical dilemma of funding research into ultra-rare diseases.

2 Barth Syndrome at a Glance

BTHS is caused by a mutation of the *TAZ* gene on the X-chromosome [4]. At present, this is the only gene reported to induce the disease. In the case of an X-linked recessive disease, biological males do not have the same protection from the disease phenotype as biological females because they lack an additional X-chromosome. The *TAZ* gene has four predominant splice variants, and point mutations have been found to be causative in 90% of cases, with duplications and deletions of base pairs constituting the other 10% [7,8].

To better understand the consequences of the genetic mutations that cause BTHS, it is helpful to first discuss the roles of tafazzin and cardiolipin in a healthy individual's metabolism. Located on nuclear DNA, the *TAZ* gene codes for an important membrane-associated transacylase - tafazzin. This protein is responsible for the shuttling of acyl groups between phospholipids and the remodeling of cardiolipin, an inner mitochondrial membrane phospholipid [4]. Mature cardiolipin is crucial for maintaining structure in the mitochondrial membrane and, therefore, particularly important in tissues which have a high demand for ATP, such as muscles [9].

3 De-novo Cardiolipin Synthesis

Looking at biosynthetic pathways can reveal insights into disease processes, and elucidate potential avenues for treatment, for example by targeting specific enzymes or proteins in the pathway [10]. The *de novo* cardiolipin synthetic pathway begins with glycerol-3-phosphate (one product of the breakdown of fats) being esterified to create (lyso)phosphatidic acid (See Figure 1). This is followed by various modifying steps until phosphatidyl glycerol (PG) is formed. Immature cardiolipin is then synthesized from PG, facilitated by cardiolipin synthase. Immature cardiolipin is then deacylated, via cardiolipin deacylase to form monolysocardiolipin (MLCL). The final step is the reacylation of MLCL into mature cardiolipin via the tafazzin enzyme [6]. In this process, another acyl chain is added via a phosphatidylcholine acyl chain donor [4]. This gives mature cardiolipin its unique structure of having four fatty acyl chains (rather than the standard two), connected by two phosphate residues.

The structure of cardiolipin is inherently related to the functions it carries out [11]. The remodeling through de- and acylating cardiolipin through the conversion to and from MLCL allows for a specific fatty acid composition to be achieved, whereby the remodeled cardiolipin is largely unsaturated. This richness in (poly)unsaturated fat, particularly linoleic acid, is important because in contrast to saturated cardiolipin, unsaturated cardiolipin can undergo peroxidation [12]. Peroxidation occurs in response to oxidative stress caused by increased levels of reactive oxygen species (ROS) from the

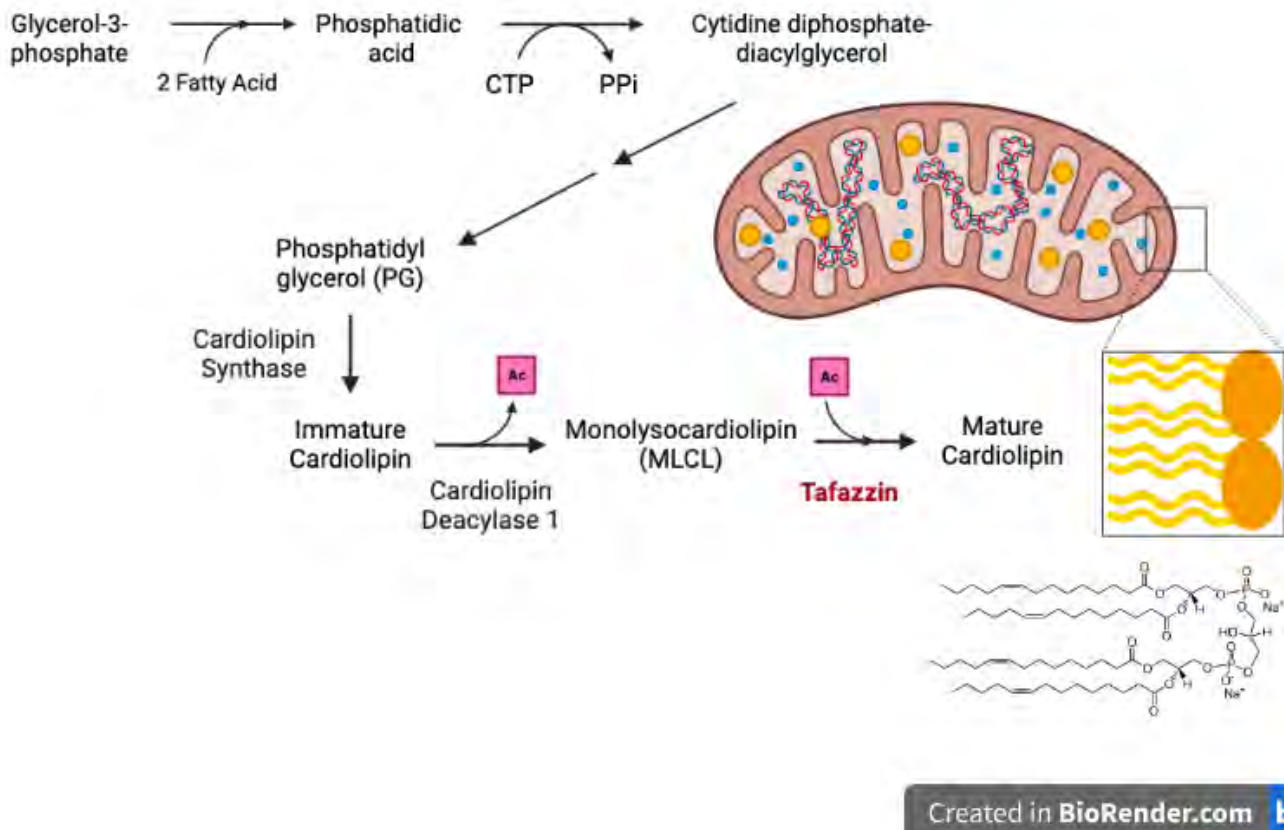


Figure 1: Diagram of the Synthesis of Cardiolipin [6], highlighting the role of the tafazzin protein and its relation to Barth Syndrome. Cardiolipin structural formula taken from [16]. Made on BioRender.com

electron transport chain (ETC), taking place in the mitochondrial membrane. Furthermore, cardiolipin plays a pivotal role in the regulation of mitochondrial proteins, such as the electron transport complexes that make up the ETC, carrier proteins, and phosphate kinases [13]. Another reason why cardiolipin is essential is that it can be broken down, back into phosphatidic acid [13]. The reverse of the process can be seen in Figure 1. Phosphatidic acid is a lipid molecule that not only stimulates mTOR (mammalian target of rapamycin), a protein kinase that regulates cell growth and metabolism but inhibits mitochondrial division and stimulates fusion of the outer mitochondrial membrane. By fusing with other mitochondria, their contents (metabolites, enzymes, and mitochondrial DNA) are mixed, allowing small damages that occur to be remedied [14]. A lack of mitochondrial fusion leads to an accumulation of mutations and is a hallmark sign of aging and disease [15].

4 The Biochemical Background of Select BTHS Symptoms

Now that the undisturbed synthetic pathway of cardiolipin has been established, the consequences of mutations that affect the *TAZ* gene will be discussed. As previously mentioned, the clinical presentation of BTHS is heterogeneous. Some symptoms include but are not limited to: increased ratio of MLCL to cardiolipin, dilated cardiomyopathy, lactic acidosis, and increased organic acids in blood and serum. The biochemical pathways of many symptoms of BTHS have not been elucidated [4]. However, some mechanisms of (in)action can be deduced through biochemical reasoning. Symptoms and diagnostic parameters will systematically be explained in relation to their biochemical origin to make the relationship between the malfunctioning pathway and their manifestation clear:

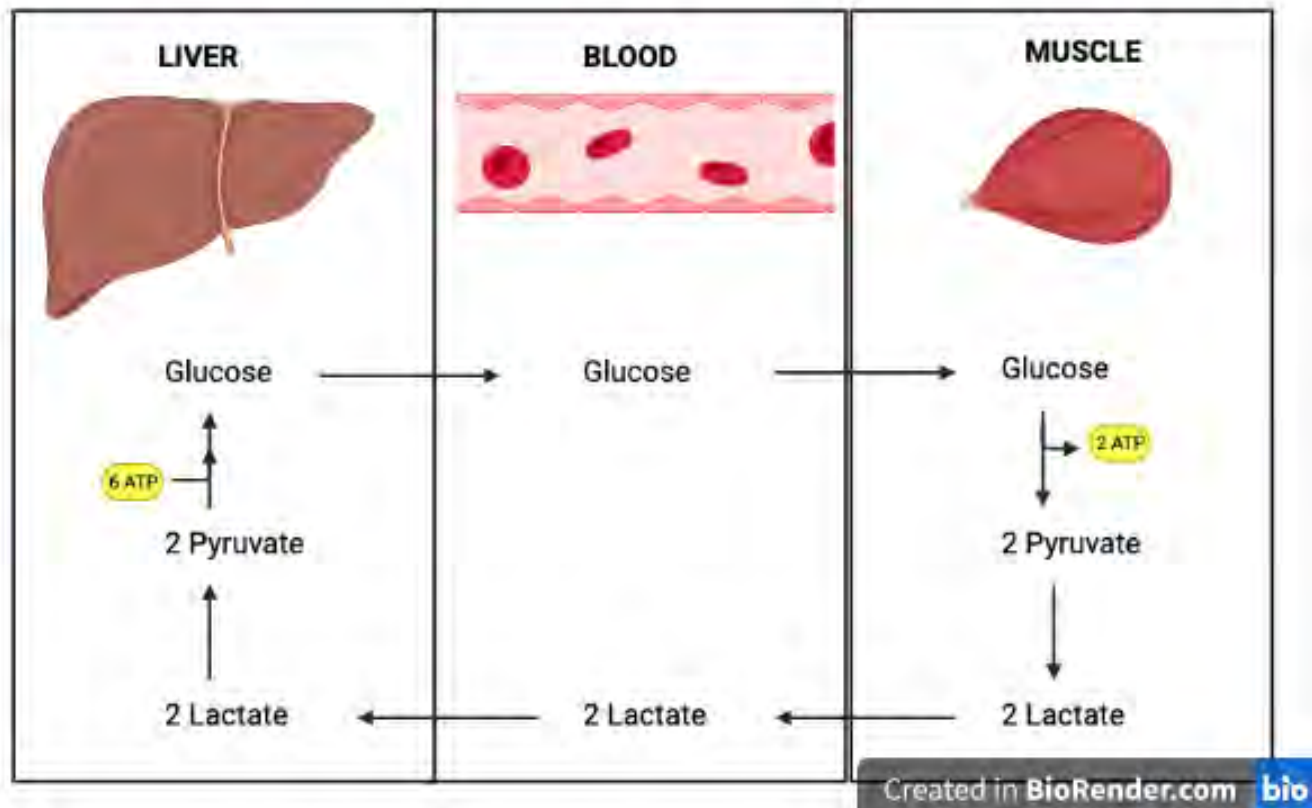


Figure 2: Diagram of the Cori Cycle whereby anaerobic glycolysis increases, pyruvate is generated and converted to lactic acid [17]. Made on BioRender.com.

•Increased Ratio of Monolysocardiolipin to Cardiolipin: As made apparent in the previous section and through Figure 1, a key indicator of BTHS is an increased ratio of MLCL to cardiolipin (MLCL/CL). This follows the biochemical principle that if there is a defective enzyme that prohibits conversion, the substrates accumulate, and the products diminish. As MLCL increases, it is exported from the mitochondria into the blood stream, making it detectable via a blood test [4].

•Dilated Cardiomyopathy: Dilated cardiomyopathy is a condition affecting the muscles of the heart. It causes the ventricles of the heart to become thin and weak, making it more difficult for blood to be pumped out and circulated around the body. Cardiomyocytes, like all muscle cells, have a high demand for ATP, and given BTHS' status as a mitochondrial disease, these demands are hard to meet. It is suggested that due to a limited supply of ATP, cardiomyocytes are unable to sustain muscle contraction, which results in the aforementioned heart condition. Muscle contraction is facil-

itated by the activity of actin and myosin proteins and powered by ATP hydrolysis. Thus, when there is a deficit of ATP, sarcomeres, the basic smallest contractile units of muscle, cannot yield movement to their full potential [17].

•Lactic Acidosis: Given the decreased availability of ATP, and its sustained demand from muscle cells, the organism needs to heavily rely on anaerobic glycolysis and the Cori cycle (See Figure 2) [17]. In a healthy patient, pyruvate from glucose is converted via pyruvate dehydrogenase to acetyl-CoA which can then enter the Tricarboxylic Acid Cycle (TCA Cycle) and be used for energy production with carbon dioxide as its byproducts. When the cell switches to anaerobic glycolysis, pyruvate is converted via lactate dehydrogenase in the cytosol to lactic acid. This dependence on the Cori cycle is dangerous because lactic acid builds up in the blood and causes acidosis, lowering blood pH and increasing risk of organ damage, respiratory failure and shock [18].

●**Increased Organic Acids in Blood and Serum:** The compromised function of the ETC in the mitochondrial membrane has many run-on effects. One of these is that the TCA cycle slows down due to the build-up of the electron carriers NADH and FADH₂. This leads to the accumulation of acetyl- and propionyl-CoA, precursors of the TCA. Once a certain threshold of acetyl-CoA is breached, a multistep enzymatic cascade occurs. The end product of this cascade is HMG-CoA, which is then converted to 3MG-CoA. Finally, 3MG-CoA is hydrolyzed to produce 3-methylglutaconic acid (3MGA), an organic acid found prolifically in the urine of individuals with BTHS, and thus is used as a diagnostic metric [17].

5 Using Induced Pluripotent Stem Cells to Model BTHS Outside the Body

Using iPSC is a fascinating and rapidly developing technology in biomedical research used to model a disease outside of the body. In the case of BTHS, there is a gap in understanding between the causes of the disease (genetic mutation and the resulting biochemical aftermath) and the phenotypes that are displayed. Studying BTHS and other ultra-rare diseases in clinical trials is difficult due to several challenges. For example, finding enough participants to draw meaningful conclusions, limited understanding of disease mechanisms, lack of funding, and the ethical considerations of giving a placebo control to critically ill patients [19]. Therefore, using iPSCs to model diseased tissue, particularly heart tissue, is an exciting and plausible way to gather insight into the intermediate steps that are currently poorly understood [20].

Wang et al. (2014) studied the pathophysiology that underpins cardiomyopathy in BTHS. In their research, iPSCs were taken from the somatic cells of two unrelated individuals with BTHS and 'genetically reprogrammed' to differentiate the cells into cardiomyocytes. These were referred to as BTHH and BTHC respectively. Before the analysis, they were cultured on a galactose medium. As mentioned, the ratio of MLCL to cardiolipin is a diagnostic tool for BTHS. Specifically, a ratio of 0.3 is used as the diagnostic threshold [20].

Figure 3a shows the mass spectrum of the iPSCs of a control (left) (non-BTHS) and of someone with BTHS (right). As demonstrated on the spectrum, the cells generated from the BTHS patient have a significantly higher ratio of immature cardiolipin (MLCL) to mature cardiolipin (CL). This is quantified in Figure 3b, where the dashed line represents the diagnostic threshold of 0.3 for the MLCL/CL ratio. It is evident that both cell lines far exceed the ratio, thus providing evidence that the iPSC culture accurately models the impaired cardiolipin genesis found in BTHS patients. Figure 3c further strengthens the reliability of the *ex vivo* model in that the expected trends in terms of ATP production are also matched. BTHH and C both have markedly less ATP content per μg of protein. This supports the hypothesis that mitochondria do not produce energy efficiently, thus confirming the origin of several of the clinical manifestations found in BTHS patients [20].

Currently, there are no established treatments for BTHS. However, the technique of working with diseased human tissue outside of the body allows for various treatments to be tested with considerable generalizability to a BTHS patient, given the close mimicry of cardiac cells. The researchers experimented with three treatments: Linoleic acid (LA), bromoenol lactone (BEL), and arginine + cysteine (A/C). As can be seen in Figure 4a, LA and BEL were most effective in reducing the MLCL/CL ratio, even within a normal range (indicated by *nl*). Figure 4b demonstrates that LA and A/C were most effective in increasing the ATP content, relative to the Wild Type (WT1). Overall, LA was considered the most promising treatment solution because it invoked the best restoration of the MLCL/CL ratio, whilst simultaneously increasing the ATP content in muscles. LA is an essential unsaturated fatty acid and the precursor to mature cardiolipin since it composes most of the acyl chains. Wang et al. (2014) also found that supplementation of LA could improve sarcomere organization and the contractile deficits in the BTHS-iPSC cardiomyocytes. The authors also suggest the potential ameliorating effects that LA could have on scavenging ROS, which are known to play a role in heart failure [20].

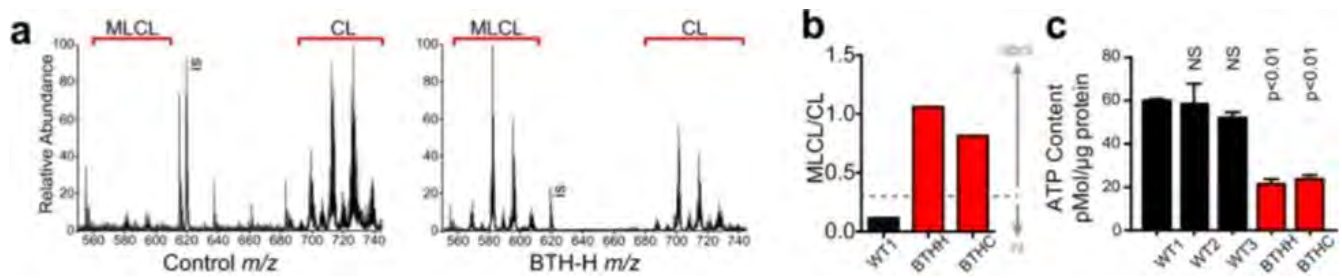


Figure 3: Consisting of three sections, 3a, 3b, and 3c. Demonstrating the difference between wild-type and BTHS cell lines, in terms of ratios of MLCL/CL and ATP content. Taken from Wang et al. (2014) [20].

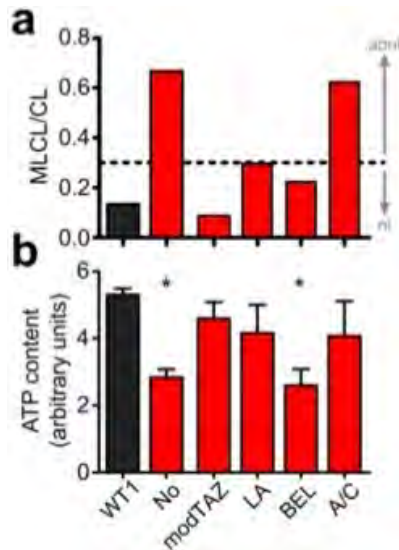


Figure 4: Showing the effect of various treatment options in terms of MLCL/CL ratio and ATP content, compared to wild type. Adapted from [20].

6 Ethical Considerations of Research into Rare Diseases

The limited funding for medical innovation causes an uneven allocation among different research areas. Those deciding how the available funds are distributed also decide which diseases are worthy of research and which are not. Investing primarily in research of diseases which affect the most people is in line with a simple ethical theory: utilitarianism.

This theory considers the most ethical choice to be that which provides the most “good” for the largest number of people [21]. But what if researching rare and ultra-rare diseases, like BTHS, which has a recorded incidence of approximately 150 males, can indeed provide insight into the diseases that affect the masses [2,22]? Rare disease research can make impactful contributions to drug

development or to the mechanistic understanding of pathophysiology, which can be relevant and beneficial in the understanding of common diseases [15]. For example, the mechanisms which underpin its pathologies are also found in many leading causes of death, such as ischemic heart disease [23]. Research into homozygous familial hypercholesterolemia was pivotal in understanding cholesterol metabolism and has resulted in the development of pharmacological agents used to treat and prevent cardiovascular disease [24].

As outlined above, rare disease research can be the stimulus for novel treatment strategies that may be applicable to a wider set of diseases [25]. However, in my opinion, this should not be the sole metric that labels rare disease research as valuable. When discussing disease on a grand scale, it is easy to look through the lens of statistics and forget that these numbers are associated with people who are suffering [26]. To be able to improve their quality of life, to me, is reason enough to advocate for research into these types of diseases, with the aforementioned supporting arguments as an added benefit. Nevertheless, there is the ethical dilemma in rare disease research of questioning whether it is morally correct to withhold potentially suitable medication in the form of the ‘placebo group’. Deontology, the ethical position argued for by Kant, says that humans should be treated, “always as an end, and never as a mere means” [27]. For someone to be treated as ‘mere means’ denies them of their value and autonomy, and instead focuses on where they can best be of service, for example as a placebo in a clinical trial.

To reach a compromise between the moral dilemmas posed by prioritizing one disease over another and the obvious financial limitations, prioritizing research that is highly generalizable to many types of disease may be the most viable option.

7 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, Barth Syndrome, although rare, is a pertinent example of one genetic mutation leading to biochemical malfunction, and thereby to an entire array of physical symptoms. Its symptoms are expansive and highlight the breadth of influence and interconnectedness of the human metabolism.

This paper has illustrated *de novo* cardiolipin synthesis, the malfunctions that cause various symptoms, and the potential for iPSCs to functionally model BTHS *ex vivo*, elucidating the potential to research (ultra-rare) diseases outside of the body to better understand them inside of it. Research funding is limited, and diseases affecting the majority are largely prioritized under utilitarian ethical theory. However, the investigation of (ultra-)rare disease can provide insight into the pathophysiology of common diseases and lead to the development of new treatments. While rare disease research raises ethical dilemmas, such as the use of placebo groups, prioritizing research that is generalizable to many diseases may be a feasible solution.

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Inter-state Human Rights Monitoring

To what extent is the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism effective
in advancing the protection of human rights?

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1 Introduction

One of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation's (OSCE) rather unknown tools for monitoring human rights, the Moscow Mechanism (MM), has unexpectedly been revived since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine. While the tool was used only rarely since its establishment in 1991 (nine times in the course of thirty years), it was activated three times within a period of six months in 2022, and the number of invoking states was significantly higher than ever before. This sudden invigoration merits an academic inquiry into whether inter-state human rights monitoring in general—and the Moscow Mechanism in particular—constitutes an effective method for protecting human rights. While the role of human rights in international relations has been discussed at length by scholars in the past,¹ the more specific issue of *inter-state human rights monitoring* remains almost untouched by the academic community. In order to fill this gap and find an answer to the posed question, I employ a two-fold approach: after providing a brief overview of the current state of the international human rights regime, I develop a theoretical framework by applying existing theories of human rights and their role in international relations to the phenomenon of inter-state monitoring. Subsequently, the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism serves as a case study to support and illustrate the hypothesis that inter-state monitoring is applied by states exclusively when it is in line with—or does at least not harm—their own national interest. Due to the narrow scope of this study, which examines only a single monitoring mechanism in detail, it should be acknowledged that the results are not suitable to be generalised without additional research.

¹See for example: Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 303; Jack Donnelly, 'International human rights: a regime analysis' [1986] 40(3) *International Organization* 599-642; Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003); RJ Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

2 The International Human Rights Regime: From Norms to Implementation

Since the establishment of the Universal Declaration in 1948, an elaborate international regime of human rights has evolved.² As Ramcharan put it, "[t]he 20th century made human rights a worldwide cause"³ and with the International Bill of Human Rights at its heart,⁴ a comprehensive codification has taken place. In addition to the near universal endorsement of the key human rights documents, every state has ratified at least one legally-binding human rights convention.⁵ Finally, where states have not accepted (parts of) international human rights law, it can be argued that there nevertheless exists a binding effect due to the *jus cogens* status of human rights norms.⁶ Yet, it appears to be a universal truth that states around the globe fail to fulfil their commitments, some even on a regular basis. Almost 75 years after the first milestone of the international human rights regime was set, human rights violations are still widespread. Donnelly termed this phenomenon the "possession paradox": while formally speaking all humans possess fundamental rights, in reality it is often not possible to exercise them.⁷ In order to understand the existing discrepancy between well developed human rights law on the one hand, and the omnipresent non-compliance by states on the other, it is useful to analyse the issue area of human rights through the lens of international regimes.

In terms of regime development,⁸ it should be

²Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 309

³Bertie G. Ramcharan, *Human Rights in the 21st Century*. In G. Alfredsson and J.T. Möller (eds), *International Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms: Essays in Honour of Jakob Th. Möller* (Brill & Nijhoff, 2009), 3

⁴Composed of the Universal Declaration, the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

⁵Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 27

⁶Andrea Bianchi, 'Human Rights and the Magic of Jus Cogens' [2008] 19(3) *The European Journal of International Law* 491-508

⁷Jack Donnelly, 'Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice' (Cornell University Press, 2013), 9

⁸As categorised into the following stages: 1. Declaration, 2. Convention, 3. Implementation, 4. Enforcement. In Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 10

noted that even though the United Nations as a key actor has been working on the implementation of established norms since the mid 1960s,⁹ the task has still not been accomplished. What Donnelly in 1986 described as “a relatively strong promotional regime composed of widely accepted substantive norms, (...) some general promotional activity, but very limited international implementation” unfortunately still holds true today.¹⁰ Even though a small number of additional implementation mechanisms have been introduced in the meantime, the international human rights regime clearly stagnated somewhere between *strong promotion* and *weak implementation*.¹¹ Of course, at this point it needs to be acknowledged that systematic and partly successful *enforcement* does in fact occur on a regional level (in the form of human rights courts). However, when looking at the global picture, it is no surprise that human rights implementation constitutes the key challenge of the 21st century.¹² One of the main tasks for scholars is to examine and understand why implementation has been unsuccessful throughout the last decades. Even though the issue has seemingly been addressed by states and international organisations, the overall results of their efforts remain sparse. I will now turn to briefly outlining relevant aspects of the existing theoretical framework for regime implementation mechanisms.

To begin with, it is important to realise why comparing implementation mechanisms and their effectiveness is a genuinely challenging task. Rather than representing “a structured and harmonised system of international human rights protection”, they constitute the result of “reactive and event-driven human rights policies”.¹³ When considering implementation, we are in fact looking at a patchwork of different procedures leaving some areas with significant overlap and others with substantial

gaps.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the academic community has attempted to create a comprehensible order through applying the following four-fold categorisation: (1) *State reporting*, (2) *Inter-state complaints*, (3) *Individual complaints*, and (4) *Inquiry procedure and other fact-finding mechanisms*.¹⁵ While the first three predominantly create a separation based on who monitors a particular situation, the latter refers to the employed methodology and hence does not quite fit into the logic. In fact, *inquiry procedures and other fact finding mechanisms* occur as a subcategory of *inter-state complaints*,¹⁶ which is why this fourth category should in my view be disregarded. A separation based solely on actor does not only appear more logical, but is also useful for identifying certain advantages and disadvantages, which are inherent to the type of initiating actor. As will be shown below, while states for example are the most powerful actors to monitor human rights situations, they at the same time appear to be inherently biased due to their own national interest considerations.

Individual complaints indeed always take on the form of actual complaints, and *state-reporting* always entails that states submit a self-reflective report. However, the category of *inter-state complaints* appears to comprise a variety of methods that states have devised, which is why I deem it more appropriate to denote this category with the more neutral term ‘*inter-state monitoring*’. I consider it to be solely distinguished by the aspect that one state (or more) considers a human rights situation in another. The term ‘monitoring’ can therefore encompass a number of procedures, including (but not being limited to) reporting, inquiry procedures, fact-finding missions, and official complaints.

⁹Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 309

¹⁰Jack Donnelly, ‘International human rights: a regime analysis’ [1986] 40(3) *International Organization* 599-642, 613

¹¹For an overview of the different types of international regimes see: Jack Donnelly, ‘International human rights: a regime analysis’ [1986] 40(3) *International Organization* 599-642, 603 Figure 1

¹²Bertie G. Ramcharan, *Human Rights in the 21st Century*. In G. Alfredsson and J.T. Möller (eds), *International Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms: Essays in Honour of Jakob Th. Möller* (Brill | Nijhoff, 2009)

¹³Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 273

¹⁴Geographically speaking, a strong overlap exists for example between the European Court of Human Rights and the OSCE’s Moscow Mechanism. Cuba in contrast constitutes a geographical gap of human rights implementation. It has not ratified any overarching human rights treaties, and even for the issue-specific treaties that it is party to, it does barely accept any form of monitoring. (See United Nations OHCHR, ‘Ratification Status for Cuba’ (UN Treaty Body Database) <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=44&Lang=EN> accessed 21 April 2023)

¹⁵*ibid.*; Yunxin Tu, ‘On the Normative Structure of International Human Rights Treaties Monitoring Mechanisms and Its Legal Challenges’ [2019] 18(4) *Journal of Human Rights* 511-536

¹⁶See for example the UNHRC special procedures, which include inquiries and fact finding. Similarly the OSCE Moscow Mechanism employs such methods.

To round off this section, I would like to note that the actual effectiveness of both *individual complaints* and *state reporting* have been examined academically, albeit only to a small extent.¹⁷ *Inter-state monitoring* on the other hand remains largely unaddressed. Admittedly, Prebensen has provided a valuable empirical analysis of inter-state complaints under the European Convention of Human Rights.¹⁸ However, a comprehensive theoretical examination of the inevitable tension between human rights and international relations, which comes to light when states are to assess each other's compliance, is still lacking. In the following, I aim to fill this research gap by using existing theories about the role of human rights in foreign policy to explain the ineffectiveness of inter-state monitoring.

3 States as Human Rights Monitors

*"The key dilemma of human rights protection is that states are the only actors powerful enough to advance human rights, while also being the greatest human rights abusers."*¹⁹

A key problem of the international human rights regime is the inherent tension between the universality of human rights and state sovereignty.²⁰ While human rights are intended to empower individuals and to provide them, inter alia, with protec-

¹⁷Krommendijk for example looked at the domestic effectiveness of state-reporting. In Jasper Krommendijk, 'The domestic effectiveness of international human rights monitoring in established democracies. The case of the UN human rights treaty bodies' [2015] 10 The Review of International Organisations 489-512

¹⁸Søren C. Prebensen, *Inter-State Complaints under Treaty Provisions – The Experience under the European Convention on Human Rights*. in G. Alfredsson and J.T. Möller (eds), *International Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms: Essays in Honour of Jakob Th. Möller* (Brill | Nijhoff, 2009)

¹⁹Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 312

²⁰Addressed for example by: Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 303; Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 33; RJ Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 129; Thomas Lindemann and Franck Petiteville, *The Case of Human Rights and Humanitarian Norms*. in Laure Delcour and Elsa Tulmets (eds), *Policy Transfer and Norm Circulation* (Routledge 2019)

tion from their respective governments, states still assert, whenever they deem it necessary, that the principle of sovereignty entitles them to regulate the life of their citizens without external interference. This remains true for both non-democratic and democratic states alike. In academia, this problem has been explored for several decades, but still, a viable solution has not been found.

As one of the few scholars who have attempted to resolve the fundamental discrepancy, Vincent claimed that in fact it is little more than a theoretical misconception, which can be resolved through mere re-framing.²¹ In his book "Human Rights and International Relations" he asks us to view "human rights not as a challenge to the system of sovereign states, but as something which has added to its legitimacy".²² He argues that governments should first and foremost concern themselves with the provision of subsistence rights, in order to be recognised as legitimate and sovereign actors in the society of states. Why, however, he chose the fulfilment of certain positive obligations (i.e. provision of nourishment and medical care) to be more worthy of compliance than for example abstaining from the employment of torture, remains unanswered. A similar approach has been taken by Deng, who re-framed 'Sovereignty as Responsibility' and thereby set the foundation for the concept of an international 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P).²³ However, contrary to what Deng claims, the idea that sovereign power not only consists of rights, but also entails certain duties, is not "a significant innovation" of recent origin.²⁴ Rather, it revives the social contract theory. According to Deng, 'Sovereignty as Responsibility' has two important dimensions: Firstly, "sovereignty obliges the state to protect and assist its citizens if that state wishes to qualify as a legitimate and respected member of international society". And secondly, 'sovereignty as responsibility' comprises accountability, and therefore an obligation for the international community to intervene in case of severe violations.²⁵ Despite R2P gaining increasing global attention in recent years, it appears that

²¹RJ Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

²²*ibid.*: 151

²³Francis M. Deng, 'From Sovereignty as Responsibility to the Responsibility to Protect' (2010) 2 *Global Resp Protect*, 353-370

²⁴*ibid.*: 354

²⁵*ibid.*: 354/5

the underlying theory of 'Sovereignty as Responsibility' rests on an incorrect conflation of internal and external sovereignty. While a government's sovereignty internally depends on its legitimacy, which is established by its ability to provide welfare to its citizens, it appears that the fundamental flaw in both Vincent's and Deng's reasoning lies in the false presumption that the same holds true for external sovereignty. This is not the case, neither in legal nor in political terms. According to international law, an entity is a state (and all states are sovereign) if it possesses a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.²⁶ Neither legitimacy, nor, for that matter, compliance with international human rights law, form part of this list. Additionally, while it is not uncommon for states in the international arena to criticise each other's human rights abuses, it is usually the governments that are being questioned, not the states (and their sovereignty) as such. Of course, it is hard to disagree with Vincent that the provision of subsistence rights increases a government's legitimacy significantly. However, while this is relevant for a state internally, the provision of these rights does not affect the state's external sovereignty. Hence, the attempt to resolve the inherent tension between human rights and sovereignty by introducing the concept of legitimacy as a mediator between the two is not convincing.

The existing tension makes inter-state human rights monitoring problematic. Because states are torn between different interests, their assessment of human rights violations becomes politicised.²⁷ In addition to legal and potentially moral concerns, they also take into account their own national interests,²⁸ which leads to a selective application of human rights law. As Heywood accurately described, "human rights failings on the part of one's enemies receive prominent attention, but are conve-

²⁶Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (adopted 26 December 1933 at the Seventh International Conference of American States, entered into force 26. December 1934), Article 1

²⁷This phenomenon has been observed in regard to the UNHRC and OHCHR in: Petter F. Wille, *The United Nations' Human Rights Machinery: Developments and Challenges*. in G. Alfredsson and J.T. Möller (eds), *International Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms: Essays in Honour of Jakob Th. Möller* (Brill | Nijhoff, 2009)

²⁸Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 314

niently ignored in the case of one's friends".²⁹ The United Nations Human Rights Council, UNHRC, (and up until 2006 its predecessor, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, UNCHR) has been the focus of criticism for decades and constitutes a prominent example of this practice.³⁰

Nowak emphasises another interesting aspect of the problem: in arguing that states' incentive to monitor compliance with international human rights law is particularly low, he claims that the principle of reciprocity does not apply to these kinds of multilateral treaties.³¹ According to him, while adherence to international law generally is ensured by mutual expectations of converse "(re-)actions" to potential failings of compliance, this logic does not persist in the case of human rights obligations.³² He writes: "While it is true that states enter multilateral treaties with other contracting states – committing themselves to respect human rights – in reality it matters little to them whether or not the other parties actually adhere to them".³³ Developing this argument even further, it appears that the principle of reciprocity is not just absent in the adherence to international human rights law, but actually creates a counter-effect by disincentivising states from monitoring each other. States have good reasons to fear that complaining about their counterpart's human rights violations would lead the accused state to employ a strategy of issue-linkage, in which for example trade relations are used to pressure other areas of contact. Accordingly, launching an official human rights complaint against another state carries the risk of triggering a reaction, which might negatively impact one's own national interest.

Based on this reasoning, we would expect allegations of human rights violations to come up in two kinds of situations only: either when they do not endanger other interests of the monitoring state, or when they in fact serve their national interest.³⁴ As early as 1986 Vincent made this prediction and, in a shockingly timely manner, he then used the example of instrumentalising human

²⁹*ibid.*: 314

³⁰The UNHRC is accused of largely overlooking human rights violations that have been carried out by Israel.

³¹Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the international human rights regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003)

³²*ibid.*: 35

³³*ibid.*: 35

³⁴RJ Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 136

rights as “stick to beat the Russians”.³⁵ Today, thirty-six years later and more than half a year after Russia started its war against Ukraine, the statement has become painfully relevant again. Since the launch of the war, human rights complaints by states against Russia have increased dramatically, despite the fact that Russia’s human rights record had already been questioned by non-state actors for years. As Demir-Gürsel wrote in a recent commentary regarding the Council of Europe’s reaction: “This shift from the CoE’s prolonged inertia towards Russia’s severe breaches of the Statute to its swift suspension and expulsion represents a sharp and sudden turn on the part of the CoE, rather than a change in the patterns of Russia’s breaches of international law and human rights over the years”.³⁶ As the following case study will show, a similar shift has occurred within the context of the OSCE.

4 Case-study: The OSCE Moscow Mechanism

Before turning to the most recent developments at the OSCE, it is necessary to briefly lay out the main characteristics of the so-called ‘Moscow Mechanism’ (MM). This tool, aimed at strengthening the implementation of the OSCE Human Dimension Commitments, can be invoked if a minimum of ten participating states request a report over alleged human rights violations in another participating state.³⁷ Hence, it falls into the category of inter-state monitoring. Importantly, the OSCE’s Human Dimension Commitments are quite unique, because despite their purely political character (they are not legally-binding), they cover a very broad range of topics, going beyond any other human rights treaty.³⁸ Another noteworthy aspect is that upon establishment of the mechanism there was an aim to surpass sovereignty, as stated by the Preamble of the Moscow Document:

³⁵*ibid.*

³⁶Esra Demir-Gürsel, ‘The Council of Europe’s Sharp Turn’ (Verfassungsblog, 25. March 2022) <<https://verfassungsblog.de/the-council-of-europes-sharp-turn/>> accessed 15 November 2022

³⁷Moscow Mechanism (MOSCOW 1991 (Par. 1 to 16) as amended by ROME 1993 (Chapter IV, par. 5)), §1 and 12

³⁸Arie Bloed, Monitoring the Human Dimension of the OSCE. in G. Alfredsson and J.T. Möller (eds), International Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms: Essays in Honour of Jakob Th Möller (Brill | Nijhoff, 2009), 551

the participating states

“categorically and irrevocably declare that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”³⁹

Upon invocation, the requested report must be written by a mission of experts consisting of either one or three rapporteurs (depending on whether the alleged state is willing to cooperate) within the short time-frame of two weeks.⁴⁰ The report will then be discussed at the following meeting of the Permanent Council⁴¹ and published on the OSCE’s website.⁴² Further consequences with respect to the report’s findings, as well as a follow-up on the rapporteurs’ recommendations, are not specified by the Moscow Document itself. Accordingly, the MM is of a purely monitoring nature, and does not impose any sort of enforcement measures, which is why the threshold for activation should be relatively low for participating states. Yet, in contrast to what one might expect, the table below shows that participating states of the OSCE have overall been rather hesitant to activate it.

The table demonstrates that after a long period of limited application (only two invocations between 1994 and 2019), the tool has recently seen a revival. Since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine, it was invoked three times within only six months and the number of states supporting it was 45 and 38, which is significantly higher than ever before. There are different explanations for this sudden invigoration, one being that an increased use of the MM could compensate for Russia’s recent blockage of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.^{42,43}

³⁹Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 03. October 1991], Preamble

⁴⁰Moscow Mechanism (MOSCOW 1991 (Par. 1 to 16) as amended by ROME 1993 (Chapter IV, par. 5)), §11

⁴¹*ibid.*

⁴²Wolfgang Benedek, ‘The Use of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism and its Potential’ [2021] 22 Graz Law Working Paper Series

⁴³Harry Hummel, ‘How to rescue the OSCE human dimension’ (Security and Human Rights Monitor, 04. October 2021) <https://www.shrmonitor.org/how-to-rescue-the-osce-human-dimension/> accessed 18 November 2022

Invocations of the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism 1991-2022			
Year	Issue/State	Number of invoking states	Further Impact
1992	Atrocities and attacks on unarmed civilians in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina	13	
1992	Follow-up Croatia	10	The report "contributed to the realisation of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in 1993" ⁴⁴
1992	Estonian legislation and its comparison with universally accepted human rights	Self-invoked	
1993	Moldovan legislation regarding inter-ethnic relations and the implementation of minorities' rights	Self-invoked	
1993	Human rights violations in Serbia and Montenegro , particularly the cases of Vuk and Danica Drašković	A consensus decision of the OSCE Committee of Senior Officials	
2003	Turkmenistan : Examine human rights concerns in the wake of the reported attack on President Niyazov and subsequent investigation and arrests.	10	"The report and recommendations were directly promoted by the United Nations in several General Assembly Resolutions, including 58/194(2003), 59/206 (2004), and 60/172 (2005), as well as several Commission on Human Rights resolutions, including 2003/11 and 2004/12" ⁴⁵
2011	Concerning human rights in Belarus following presidential elections in December 2010	14	"The report was subsequently referenced in the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 17/24 in 2011, and fed into the establishment of the UN Special Rapporteur on Belarus in 2012" ⁴⁶
2019	Russia (Chechnya)	16	
2020	Human rights violations in Belarus during rigged elections	17	Supported the establishment of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB)
2022	Report On Violations Of International Humanitarian And Human Rights Law, War Crimes And Crimes Against Humanity Committed In Ukraine	45	
2022	Report on Violations of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity Committed in Ukraine ⁴⁷	45	
2022	Report on Russia's Legal and Administrative Practice in Light of its OSCE Human Dimension Commitments	38	

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Benedek, OSCE Moscow Mechanism: Situation of Human Rights in Chechnya. in European Yearbook on Human Rights (Intersentia 2019) 419-437

⁴⁵ US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe 'IN BRIEF: The OSCE Moscow Mechanism' (Helsinki Commission Report, 18.07.2017)

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ Even though the first two invocations of the Moscow Mechanism in 2022 were with regard to Ukraine, the detected violations (and this was expected by the invoking states) are mainly attributable to Russian troops on Ukrainian territory.

This idea appears plausible when considering that recently Russia has also vetoed an extension of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. In practice, the OSCE's consensus rule has led to a paralysis of the organisation's scope of actions, and the MM, requiring only ten states to agree, has apparently turned into a measure of last resort. Yet, when considering what is *not* written in the table, it becomes clear that this is not the whole story. The latest MM report itself states: "[t]he repression [in Russia] has gradually intensified since 2012",⁴⁸ which raises the question of why the OSCE's par-

⁴⁸ Angelika Nußberger, 'Report on Russia's Legal and Administrative Practice in Light of its OSCE Human Dimension Commitments' [2022] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHRGAL/58/22/Rev1

icipating states took action only ten years later. It appears likely that political considerations played a significant role in this hesitation. Only after Russia had initiated its war against Ukraine and thereby overthrown the world's geopolitical status quo did the participating states' national interests change fundamentally. It finally became convenient to actively monitor a human rights situation, which had been building up for at least a decade. Furthermore, as Nowak observed in 2003 and what remains true today, "[t]here has not been a single case of a Western state taking an initiative against another Western state".⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Manfred Nowak, Introduction to the international human rights regime (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 226

In fact, there has not been a single invocation against a Western state at all, despite more than one noteworthy human rights violation.⁵⁰ It is therefore no surprise that the MM has in the past been deemed to be “as ineffective as other comparable mechanisms of traditional human rights protection”.⁵¹ The present analysis of the tool affirms this assessment. From the overall small number of invocations, there appears not to be a single instance in which the invoking states risked triggering negative consequences for their own national interest.

5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that inter-state human rights monitoring is not effective in advancing the protection of human rights. The established theoretical framework of inter-state human rights monitoring suggests that this type of procedure is deemed to be ineffective by its very nature. States are bound by political concerns and their duty to pursue their own national interests, which prevents them from conducting impartial assessments of human rights situations in other states. This finding was confirmed by the analysis of the OSCE’s Moscow Mechanism. Nevertheless, it is important at this point to highlight again that the results of my case-study are not easily transferable to other inter-state monitoring mechanisms. Despite a number of commonalities, which allow for a joint categorisation, the institutional design of each inter-state monitoring procedure is so unique that conclusions cannot be drawn from one to the other without further, detailed examination. In future research, similar analyses of other mechanisms from this category (e.g. the UNHRC Special Procedure) could be conducted, in order to establish whether the claim of this paper can persist under further empirical scrutiny. The results of this study are

⁵⁰To name just a very small number of examples: Turkey has been criticised extensively for human rights violations and still was never under scrutiny; the number of EU border deaths, in particular around the Mediterranean Sea, also calls for investigation; the United States’ practices in Guantanamo are commonly known and still overlooked. Any of these and many other severe human rights violations in the OSCE area could have caused an activation of the MM, but as we can see, the participating states did not stand up to their monitoring commitment.

⁵¹Manfred Nowak, *Introduction to the International Human Rights Regime* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2003), 226/7

not only significant scientifically, as they add to filling an existing research gap, but they are also of societal relevance: For the sake of transparency and public accountability, it is necessary to understand whether or not the governmental resources spent on inter-state monitoring do in fact constitute a valuable investment. Ultimately, the goal of assessing the effectiveness of human rights monitoring mechanisms is a necessary step in advancing the protection of human rights on a global level. Recognising that certain types of existing mechanisms are not suitable to further this goal allows for the development of alternatives. The results of this study highlight that future efforts should focus on human rights monitoring, which is conducted by independent bodies, rather than actors that are bound by their own interests.

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Conspiracies, Populism and Extreme Ideologies:

21st Century Challenges to Democratic Deliberation

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1 Introduction

On the 7th of December 2022, the German police arrested dozens of people for organising a coup d'état against the Bundestag, the German parliament (Bennhold & Solomon, 2022). Those accused belonged to a group called "Reichsbürger", formed around the belief that the German Republic is an illegitimate corporation set up by the Allies after WWII and that the world is secretly ruled by the "deep state", a "globalist" elite that engages in Judaic practices and paedophilia. In the past decade, populist leaders and conspiracists like the Reichsbürger have increasingly grown in number. Consequently, scholars began to investigate the psychological predispositions and ideologies that lead citizens toward conspiracy theories and populism (Imhoff & Bruner, 2014; Erisen et al., 2021; Krouwel et al., 2017). Populism is defined as the political rhetoric mentality that construes society as an ongoing struggle between the "corrupt elites" and the "noble people" (van Prooijen et al., 2022). On the other hand, conspiracy theories refer to the supposition that some social groups "collude in secret agreement to pursue goals that are widely seen as malevolent" (Sutton & Douglas, 2014, p.256, as cited in Castanho Silva et al., 2017). Political distrust poses major challenges to democratic practice. This paper therefore addresses the question: *How do populists, conspiracy theorists, and political extremists' psychological predispositions and beliefs challenge citizens' ability to engage in the democratic process?*

The paper will argue that populism, conspiracy belief, and ideological extremism pose a challenge to collective deliberation through the antagonisation of social groups and the polarisation of political viewpoints; all of which are further amplified through social media. To support this thesis, the paper describes the psychological predispositions shared by conspiracists and populists. Additionally, it explains how such predispositions lead to extreme political ideologies that destabilise representative democracy. Finally, this paper will examine the democratic consequences of overconfidence and hostility towards other social groups — shared traits of populists, conspiracists, and citizens adhering to extreme political ideologies — and the role of social media in fostering these processes. Beyond the Reichsbürger case, examples from Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's political

campaign, the storming of the US Capitol on January 6th, and the Cambridge Analytica scandal will help illustrate these arguments.

2 Psychological Predisposition of Populists and Conspiracists

Scholars have found that populists and conspiracists share distress, stronger susceptibility to simplistic solutions, anti-elite sentiments, and a tendency to derogate other social groups. First, research has shown that higher stress levels correlate with both belief in conspiracy theories (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013; Swami et al., 2016) and adherence to populist parties (Favaretto & Masciandaro, 2021). In these studies, stress is operationalised through questions on how "unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives." (Swami et al., 2016, p.73). Stress is, therefore, highly linked to a sense of control over one's life which is potentially undermined by a precarious working condition or health status, for instance. This lack of control instills in people a desire to reestablish a sense of order in other ways (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015; Swami et al., 2016). This is exemplified, for instance, by the fact that conspiracy beliefs gain popularity in the aftermath of "impactful societal events that are likely experienced as control threats by citizens" (van Prooijen & Acker, 2015, p.753), such as terrorist attacks or the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, populist supporters have been found to be generally more gullible: they are more likely to hold supernatural beliefs, and trust "bullshit statements"¹ and their intuition (van Prooijen et al., 2022). Gullibility and simplistic thinking further the appeal of conspiracy theories and populist narratives, which offer simple and intuitive explanations for complex or stressful realities. Third, Erisen et al. (2021) and Krouwel et al. (2017) have found a correlation between a populist attitude and a conspiratorial mindset—a "monological belief system" whose main pillar is mistrust towards the powerful elites "responsible for negative political and economic events" (Goertzel, 1994,

¹In Prooijen et al., (2022), "bullshit receptivity" indicates the "tendency to perceive nonsense statements that consist of randomly chosen buzzwords [...] as profound" (p.1067). In other words, it measures people's susceptibility to believe in nonsense statements stated with sophisticated, yet vague, terminology.

p.26). Populists' rhetoric and conspiracy theories, like QAnon², share a strong anti-establishment sentiment and instrumentalise the antagonism between the "elites" and the "people" (Stanley, 2008) to gain support and political legitimacy. Simultaneously, the political extremes are more likely to cluster social groups into oversimplified, homogeneous categories and make inferences based on these categories (Lammers et al., 2017). Through these Manichean³ categorisations, populists and conspiracy believers shift their source of distress onto other social groups. Imhoff and Bruder (2014) found that individuals that scored high in conspiracy mentality disliked and felt "threatened by powerful groups" (p.39). They also found that far-right respondents had lower liking for feminists, gay men, artists, poor people, and religious minorities, such as Muslims, Foreigners, Roma, and asylum seekers (Imhoff and Bruder, 2014). Distress, susceptibility to simplistic solutions, anti-elite sentiments, and hostility towards social groups intersect with fundamental traits of extremists' political ideologies.

3 Popular Sovereignty and Scepticism Towards Representatives

Anti-establishment sentiments lead populists and conspiracists to seek simplistic solutions in extreme political ideology, often in ways that challenge the very basis of representative democracy. Van Prooijen et al. (2017) have shown that members of far-right and far-left parties are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories. Furthermore, van Prooijen and Krouwel (2019) found that political extremists, like populists and conspiracists, opt for simple solutions to political issues, tend to be more intolerant, and susceptible to psychological stress than moderates. The overlap between populists',

²QAnon is a conspiracy theory and political movement started in the United States in 2017. It revolves around the belief that a secret Satanic group rules the world while engaging in paedophilic practices. QAnon attracts individuals "from diverse ideological backgrounds, based on the common denominator of anti-establishment resentment." (Ebner et al., 2022, p.63)

³Manichaeism is an ancient major religion developed in the third century AD. It was based on a dualistic cosmology – the belief that there are two opposite and fundamental concepts – describing the struggle between the "good" and "evil."

conspiracists', and political extremists' psychological predispositions unifies these groups under a common cluster of citizens that address complex political issues through simple intuitive solutions and mistrust in political leaders. Distrusting politicians because they represent a form of powerful "elite" undermines the functioning of representative democracy because political authorities may be regarded as illegitimate. Populists are "suspicious of any constitutional restraints to the democratic principle and [...] advocate the absolute primacy of popular sovereignty" (Rico et al., 2017, p.448). For example, during Italy's latest elections, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni gained significant support by proposing to introduce a presidential system—the direct election of the President of the Republic and greater concentration of powers in the hands of the elected President—to finally have "a president elected by the people" (Merlo, 2022, p.1). In Italy, the Republic's President does not have executive power, but they function as guarantors of the constitution, meaning that they ensure the distribution of powers among bodies takes place in accordance with constitutional ruling. Hence, the President's role is quite a technical one but, more importantly, it ensures that the judiciary, executive, and legislative bodies keep working within their jurisdictions and do not overpower each other. This system was developed in the aftermath of World War II with the intent of preventing the rise of dictatorship. Direct election of this figure convinces populists that sovereignty is finally returning to the people, but it endangers the balance of power that safeguards democratic institutions.

The combination of overconfidence and out-group hostility erodes citizens' capacity to have constructive discussions over political issues, leading to polarisation. Toner et al. (2013) tested the ideological-extremism hypothesis, which states that "extreme views predict dogmatism" (p.2454). The authors found that members of the American far-left and far-right are more likely to judge their beliefs to be superior compared to those of moderates, but that conservatives had greater tendency towards dogmatism. Scholars contend whether it is truly possible to cluster both political extremes under a common umbrella. Studying Hungarian politics, Jost and Kende (2019) found that far-right citizens were less tolerant towards discriminated groups. However, in 2021, Harris and Van Bavel (2021) replicated Toner et al.'s study on a repre-

sentative US sample and found that the greater or lower belief superiority depended on the topic. They also confirmed Toner et al.'s findings on the political extremes having higher belief superiority, as well as on conservatives' tendency to exhibit higher dogmatism than liberals. Ultimately, believing that an opinion is inherently better than others constitutes a first barrier to the democratic process since it inhibits peaceful debate and discredits contradicting opinions regardless of political affiliation. Simultaneously, political extremists on both the right and left were found to derogate other social groups more than moderates (van Prooijen et al., 2015). Out-group derogation is particularly dangerous for democratic deliberation because it delegitimises a portion of the electorate and, eventually, the deliberation outcome. The storming of the US Capitol on January 6th 2021, after the Elections of President Joe Biden, is a clear example of how populist rhetoric can delegitimise democratic processes. Van Prooijen et al. (2015) also found that socio-economic fear mediated the derogation of social groups (p.493). Socially and economically vulnerable groups are generally more susceptible to the political narrative that blames foreign social groups for societal malfunctionings. Simultaneously, their adherence to extreme political ideologies increases their political isolation. Paradoxically, the far-left and far-right share analogous sentiments and manifestations of their political views, but their ideological extremism and antagonism towards other social groups lead the political extremes to further polarise and isolate. A functioning democracy requires exposure to and dialogue between different ideological viewpoints in order to understand contradicting opinions, find a compromise, and deliberate legitimately. Once these processes vacillate, authority loses legitimacy when it belongs to an opposite party, as in the Capitol building attack, and polarisation sharpens.

4 Fake News on Social Media

To maintain their user's attention, social media perpetuate partisan news, worsening polarisation by limiting exposure to diverse political viewpoints. Social media are commercial companies and they depend on users' attention as their source of profits. Vosoughi et al. (2018) investigated the spread of 126,000 true and fake Twitter stories posted between 2006 and 2017. The authors found that fake news spread much faster than truthful news. The novelty of fake news captures the audiences' attention and is, for this reason, profitable content. Simultaneously, news consumption has been found to be positively correlated to perceived polarisation (Yang et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2021) found analogous results studying the correlation between political polarisation and social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) use in Japan and the United States. In both countries, social media usage, with the exception of messaging tools (e.g. Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp), was associated with political polarisation. This shows how when users consume political news on social media, the hyper-personalisation of their content and the creation of echo chambers will likely create a distorted perception of political debates (Kaltwasser, 2021). Social media companies are commercial companies with their own financial interests, hence they should not be regarded as neutral platforms. The Cambridge Analytica (CA) scandal is a great example of this. In 2015, CA harvested Facebook data of eighty-seven million users to feed them personalised political advertisements (Isaak & Hanna, 2018), jeopardising the US elections (Laterza, 2021). CA applied the same applied method during the Brexit campaign. Facebook was aware of the massive breach already in 2015 but it took limited measures to secure its users (Graham-Harrison & Cadwalladr, 2018). Social media platforms strive for profits that come from users' attention, advertisement, and personal data. If attention derives from fake or partisan polarising content, these platforms have very little incentive to limit their spread.

5 Conclusion

Political polarisation poses a major challenge to democracies across the world. Common traits of conspiracy belief, populist rhetoric, and political extremism emerge to threaten the legitimacy of democratically elected authorities and deliberation. Simplistic thinking aims to solve complex issues through intuition, often depicting other social groups as the source of societal dysfunctions. Representative democracy is predicated on the legitimacy of its representatives; as such, the rejection of this elite undermines its functioning. The "people" versus the "elite" narrative risks damaging the robustness of the democratic system, as we have seen in the Italian case. Demanding more dialogue with political institutions should not be in disagreement with recognising representatives' expertise. Psychological factors such as overconfidence and derogation further hinder citizens' capacity to engage in political dialogue since they dismiss contradicting viewpoints. Conspiracy theories, populism, and extreme ideologies are coping mechanisms to make sense of realities over which individuals have limited or no control, and social media's hyper-personalisation of individual content strengthens these beliefs. The Reichsbürger scandal proved that the Capitol attack in Washington D.C. was not a problem affecting only US democracy. Social media gave these groups a chance to grow over national borders and to organise collective revolts. As these platforms will likely become, if they are not already, the major space for political communication, it is crucial to address trends inhibiting political dialogue to safeguard democratic deliberation. To prevent incidents such as the attempted Reichsbürger coup from being carried out in the future, the issue of ideological polarisation needs to be addressed. This should begin with understanding and tackling the vulnerability and lack of control that these citizens perceive. Avoiding alienation and dehumanisation must remain in the interest of all sides.

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Violence in the Veranda of Mecca:

Exploring the Implications of Religion and Pancasila on Violence in Aceh

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1 Introduction

Aceh, located in the northwestern most region of Indonesia, is deeply connected to a history of violence. In this paper, I investigate the violence that transpired from 1945 to the 1970s after Indonesia's independence and the creation of Pancasila (Indonesia's core principles which include religious pluralism). During this time, there existed two main pillars of conflict: the Aceh rebellion that occurred immediately after independence, from 1945-1962; and the Free Aceh Movement, or the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), from the 1970s. These conflicts have resulted in a tremendous amount of violence and catastrophic loss of life, with numerous assassination attempts on Indonesian political leaders, and over 15,000 lives lost in the decades of conflict (BBC News).

This paper attempts to answer the question: *How do the varying factors (history, Pancasila, identity and religion) shape violence within Aceh?* This question enables an examination into the various elements that shaped conflict in Aceh, but unlike much of the literature that focuses solely on Aceh, independent of the Indonesian subcontinent, this paper engages in a novel analysis by studying Aceh's violence relating specifically to its intersections with Pancasila. Rather than exploring the historical detail of violence, the focus is directed towards the causality and historical complexity of the region. In doing so, I draw upon connections between violence, identity, and religion. I begin by outlining elements of the intricate history and identity that have been shaped in Aceh. After which, I explore President Sukarno's introduction of Pancasila and its core tenets. Finally, I analyze the violence in the region, using existing literature on Aceh, paired with the theoretical frameworks put forth by Appiah and Fukuyama that focus on religious identity and fundamentalism. Thus, this paper argues that Pancasila served to catalyze existing conflicts and religious-motivated tensions in the region.

2 History of Violence in Aceh

"Memorize your History! It has been written, not by ink over your papers, but by your forefathers' blood over every inch of our beautiful valleys and breathtaking heights."

Hasan di Tiro, founder of the Free Aceh Movement, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) (Hedman 122).

Di Tiro, in his lecture on Acehnese history and the core aims of GAM's separatist stance, casts a light on the long history of violence that plagues the region. To understand the significance of his speech, I first examine Aceh's distinct characteristics as a region. This geographically accessible location served as a trading port for Arabs and Indians, and like most of Indonesia, became an ethnically diverse region (Aspinall 18-29). With the large volume of trade and movement of people came religious influences. Soon, Aceh was called the Veranda of Mecca, as it was uniquely positioned as an Islamic stronghold. With a large population of Muslims, Aceh was notably the first Islamic kingdom on the archipelago (Großmann 107). Edward Aspinall further posits that the key differentiating factor between Aceh and the rest of the region was their stronger and deeper ties to Islam (23). As religious movements took centuries to travel across the archipelago, the Acehnese identity was already strongly intertwined with Islam, more so than other regions of Indonesia (Andaya 63-65).

3 Introduction of Pancasila

Indonesia's post-independence boundaries merged groups with distinct cultures and religions, making it a nation that was unified by a map rather than by identity (Anderson 120). At the same time, it is undeniable that Indonesia had a large Muslim population, the second biggest at the time. However, instead of declaring Islam as the state religion, President Sukarno presented Pancasila, the five core tenets and principles of Indonesian identity. The first 'sila' (*principle*), is "Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa" (*A Divinity that is an ultimate unity*). This principle that heralded religious pluralism was based on President Sukarno's personal belief that "...freedom of mankind [includes] freedom

of religion” (Bishku 104). Thus, Indonesia, in the eyes of the law, was not a Muslim state and did not impose Shariah law. The use of religious pluralism as a form of nation-building was enacted in an attempt to prevent religious minorities from feeling ostracized or oppressed by the Muslim majority. While the religious pluralism put forth by Pancasila attempted to foster unity and peace by designating all religions on the same level in the eyes of the law, this caused unrest amongst several regions with more fundamental Muslim values who wished for the implementation of Shariah law.

4 Violence in Aceh after Independence

Broken Vows

During the Indonesian National Revolution, Indonesians were fighting the Dutch for freedom, and a group of fighters in West Java banded together to fight for Islamic Indonesia. This group sparked the birth of Darul Islam, a movement based on the Islamic theology of *Dār al- Islām* (“Home of Islam”) with the ultimate goal of making Indonesia an Islamic state (Fogg 112–26). Darul Islam were armed by the Japanese against the Allied forces, and thereby were in a position of military power. Aceh was eventually free from colonial rule, becoming part of the larger Indonesian republic in 1945. However, the presentation of Pancasila in 1944, while Indonesia was still under Japanese Occupation, contradicted the Darul Islam’s fundamental goal. They claimed that President Sukarno had previously promised the implementation of Shariah law in Aceh, but refused to do so when the time came. This broken vow thus became a core element of Darul Islam, and the violence that followed was in response to the religious pluralism enacted as they fought for Indonesia to become an Islamic state (Kloos 66). The Darul Islam insurgency was not meant as a separatist effort, but rather to unify Indonesia under Islamic law.

Religious Identity

While the breaking of a vow served as a contributing factor to the violence that ensued, and some also credit it as the final straw that caused the conflict, it is important to clarify the significant

impact of religious identity in Aceh, which laid the fundamental groundwork for violence to readily ensue.

I will analyze aspects of religious violence in Aceh using Appiah’s concept of fundamentalism as discussed in the chapter *Creed* (33–68). He posits that fundamentalists are consumed with the primary purpose of pushing everyone to follow a single version of the religion (Appiah 56). This is echoed in Aceh, as the Darul Islam possessed the goal of making Indonesia an Islamic state under the same Shariah law. This is based on the premise that the more fundamental version of Islam practiced by Aceh is ‘correct’, and as such, placing followers of this belief in a position of power to spread the ‘correct’ practices of Islam. Fundamentalists, as Appiah introduces, especially focus on bringing people with the same religious label, in this case Islam, to the same “One True Way” (56). The historical piousness that Aceh was imbued with due to their history, served as a contributing factor to their perception of religious superiority, and as such, the religious violence Aceh engaged in was to convince the Indonesian state to enact Shariah law across the nation.

Interestingly, while a core characteristic of fundamentalism is its aim to return to the old, it is a fairly new reaction to the modernization of the world. In this sense, fundamentalism does not usually occur when there is nothing to greatly oppose. Pancasila in Indonesia served as the contrasting creed (replacing the oppressive Dutch), providing fundamentalists with the necessary impetus for violence. Isa Sulaiman aligns with the sentiment that part of the conflict rose due to the clash between the traditionalist and modernist *ulama* (religious leaders), making the conflict more violent (292; Aspinall 32). The wave of modernizing ideology that Pancasila represented resulted in a rise of fundamentalism due to the perceived danger to their religious identity. The notion that rapid shifts in ideology can cause sharp increases in violence also aligns with Fukuyama (72–73). In summary, the core elements of religious fundamentalism were present, and Pancasila served to exacerbate the effects, catalyzing religious violence.

Nationalism and Violence

The Free Aceh Movement (GAM) or *Aceh Merdeka* was unlike previous movements (i.e. Darul Islam) as the GAM was a secessionist movement, aiming to separate Aceh from the Indonesian republic (Aspinall 60). Many members of the GAM used to be part of the Darul Islam, and it is interesting to analyze the evolution from fighting for unification to secession. This shift is credited to the apparent mistreatment of Aceh (Aspinall 49 and 64). Barter and Zarkin-Osburn posit that the formation of the GAM was a result of the inability to gain more local control within Aceh, considering that when natural gas was found in North Aceh, the lucrative financial deal for the liquid natural gas was not given to locals, thus centralizing control (187-201). The conflict shifted from a religious fight to one of national identity (Svensson 186). Over the years, the importance of religion in the conflict diminished, and growing concerns brought on by the state's mistreatment grew, specifically the centralization of political power away from Aceh and unfair exploitation of natural resources in the region (Aspinall 49). Other scholars believe the conflict is mainly or solely religiously-charged, citing Hasan Di Tiro (founder of GAM) who himself admitted to the violence stemming from a religious origin (Svensson 186; Kloos 67). I argue that all these factors were intertwined, with religion playing an instrumental role in Aceh's identity, and the state's systematic removal of Aceh's identity: religious, political, and economic, all serving as a combination of factors that led to conflict.

5 Conclusion

In Hasan di Tiro's speech, he stated the collective history of Indonesia "has been written, not by ink over [their] papers, but by [their] forefathers' blood" (Hedman 122). The investigation into the causes of violence in Indonesia serves to bolster the understanding of post-independent Indonesia. By analyzing violence through the lens of varying theoretical frameworks, I show that religion is deeply intertwined with violence in post-independent Aceh. Furthermore, I highlight that Pancasila, as a contrasting ideology and national identity to the Acehnese Islamic identity, served as a catalyst for religious violence. Religious pluralism, while meant as a method to build national

unity through a common identity that all Indonesians could share, served to cause fissures within the nation instead. In order to understand the violence in Aceh, it was also essential to look into their history of violence. However, the post-independent Aceh's violence was not wholly religiously charged, as elements of political and economic strife emerged after the 1960s.

A subtle theme present within the majority of the literature discussed was the importance of highlighting a multi-faceted and well-rounded investigation into violence. In the case of nations with complex backgrounds and distinct identities, there is rarely a single cause of conflict. While in the case of Aceh, religious violence is a significant factor which shaped its history, the nuance brought about by exploring the historical identity, and existing economic and political factors serves as an example that highlights the complexity of research on violence.

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Communist Hyperreality:

A Critical Look at the House of Terror

Marcell Bárdos



Figure 1: "Múzeumok Éjszakája - Terror Háza Múzeum - Budapest." *Szallas.hu*. <https://szallas.hu/programok/muzeumok-ejszakaja-terror-haza-muzeum-budapest-p9713>.

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Hungary, like most Eastern European nations, has a troubled past, which turned especially gruesome and tragic in the 20th century. Between 1944 and 1989, the country was subjected to the rule of two foreign-backed totalitarian regimes, one Fascist and one Communist. Still, Hungarian society had its own share in the perpetuation of injustice, supplying each regime with domestic collaborators, ideologues, and bureaucrats. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and the Eastern European satellite states of the Soviet Union proclaimed their independence in short order. What followed was an uneasy transition to a democratic system and a free-market economy in Hungary. This entailed an ideological decolonization of the country's history which opened up the possibility of reckoning with its tragic past. Naturally, there was substantial memory work done in the period between the system change and the present, manifesting in a range of symbolic events, memorial sites, artworks, and institutional changes aimed at helping Hungarian society process the memories of the dictatorships. These included the inauguration of new statues, monuments, and historical museums (e.g. the Turul Statue, the Shoes on the Danube Bank memorial, and the Holocaust Memorial Center), the proclamation of remembrance days (e.g. the Memorial Day for the victims of the Communist Dictatorships), symbolic ceremonies (e.g. the reburial of Miklós Horthy in 1993), and the publication of books dealing with 20th-century historical trauma (e.g. Gábor Zoltán's *Orgia*) for example. However, the process also saw competing political parties co-opting and instrumentalizing cultural memory, and suffusing it with ideology, in order to align voters with their differing interpretations of history.

Although the democratic system seemed to function for some time, Viktor Orbán and his right-wing conservative party, Fidesz, manufactured a semi-autocratic regime starting in 2010 lasting to this day. The manipulation of cultural memory is a core pillar of their political agenda and over the years, the party put substantial effort into weaving Hungarian sites of memory into their ideologized historical narrative through institutionally coordinated memory work. One such example is the House of Terror in Budapest. The building, situated on Andrásy Avenue, one of the busiest areas of the city, is a museum commemorating the victims of the totalitarian regimes of 20th-century Hungary. It is a mnemonically charged site with a grim history

and great symbolic importance, carrying memories of the cruelty of both regimes.

In this essay, I will critique the House of Terror, and contemporary cultural memory at large, from two directions. First, I will situate the House of Terror within the mnemonic landscape of Hungarian culture using the theory of Pierre Nora and an article by Hedvig Turai. I will posit that the museum showcases how Hungarian cultural memory is fragmented into sites of memory, which makes it incapable of producing a collective identity and vulnerable to ideological manipulation. Then, I will critically examine the permanent exhibition itself as a medium of cultural memory. In reference to Péter Apor's article on the exhibition and Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, I will analyze how the House of Terror turns history into an ideologized spectacle, in which the reality of the past dissolves into a media simulation. Overall, I will diagnose some common pathologies of contemporary cultural memory exemplified by the House of Terror.

To begin my analysis, I will briefly introduce the House of Terror and place it within its historical context. As I mentioned in the introduction, the museum occupies a building that is imbued with substantial symbolic meaning due to its history. In October 1944, during the final phase of the Second World War, the then-regnant autocratic leader of the Axis-aligned Kingdom of Hungary, Miklós Horthy, was forced to abdicate by Nazi Germany in favor of the ultra-fascist Arrow Cross Party. The new regime orchestrated countless atrocities against the general population and oversaw the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Jews. Their six-month rule ended with Hungary's defeat and occupation by the Soviet Union (Macartney and Várdy par. 7). Then, during a brief transitional period from 1945 to 1949, the country saw the democratic election of a coalition of left-wing parties, only to be replaced by a communist regime after a series of political maneuvers including kidnappings and manipulated elections (Macartney et al. par. 2-3). As a result, Hungary became a satellite state of the Soviet Union under the de facto dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi. His rule, lasting until 1956, was the most brutal period of communism in Hungary, characterized by political purges, internments to labor camps, and expropriations, among other things (Macartney et al. par. 4-6). Both the Arrow Cross Party and the ÁVH, Rákosi's secret police, used the

building on 60 Andrásy Avenue (the House of Terror) as their headquarters.

Under their occupation, countless innocent Hungarians, be they Jews or enemies of the Socialist state, were tortured and executed in the building (Turai 102). Hence, the name is no exaggeration; the House of Terror is a haunting symbol of the horrific aspects of the country's past. During the remainder of the communist rule, the traumatic memories of the Holocaust and the Rákosi regime were considered taboos and kept repressed in Hungarian society. However, after the fall of communism in 1989 and the subsequent transition to a pluralistic and democratic system, Hungary finally had the opportunity to work through its traumatic past.

It was in the context of this new-found freedom that 60 Andrásy Avenue transformed into the House of Terror. Viktor Orbán's first term in office between 1998 and 2002 signalled an important shift in Hungarian memory politics towards active remembrance and the creation of coherent narratives about the past. First, his government declared memorial days for the victims of both the Holocaust and the communist regime. Then, they conceived of the idea to finance the establishment of a museum commemorating the crimes of 20th-century dictatorships. Thus, the House of Terror was established in 2002 and inaugurated by Orbán himself just before the end of his term (Hungary Today par. 4, 6). On paper, the museum was unprecedented in its multidirectional approach of commemorating the victims of both communism and fascism. It was also exceptional in its use of new media technologies to "present the chronology of the Hungarian totalitarian dictatorships" through an impressionistic blend of "Atmospheric displays, inscriptions, pictures, audio documents and short video footages [*sic*]" (Hungary Today par. 9). However, the House of Terror came to be embroiled in controversy from its very inception. This is because the permanent exhibition concentrates overwhelmingly on the terror of the communist regime, barely giving space to representing the crimes of the Arrow Cross Party, and not even mentioning the dictatorial right-wing regime of Horthy, which carried out numerous atrocities prior to 1944. Neither does it call attention to the role of the larger society in the perpetration of these barbarities, instead portraying all Hungarians as passive victims of foreign-backed dictatorships (Apor 335). As Péter Apor

points out, in its close association with Orbán's right-wing party,

"The House of Terror was founded to disseminate the message of anti-Communism, to convince Hungarians that the political left was dangerously associated with the potential of a brutal dictatorship, and to regenerate national identity and pride as an antidote within society" (334).

It is more than reasonable to argue, then, that the museum failed its purpose to help Hungarian society work through its historical traumas in a meaningful way. Therefore, I pose the following research question: *How is it that the collective memory of 60 Andrásy Avenue became so quickly suffused with ideology? And what does this say about contemporary cultural memory? Furthermore, what features of postmodern media culture allowed the museum to become a powerful tool of ideological manipulation?*

Pierre Nora, the most important 1980s pioneer of cultural memory studies besides the Assmanns, theorizes his concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, in his eponymous seven-part work published between 1984 and 1992. Acting as a sort of diagnostician of contemporary memory culture, Nora makes the critical claim that there is an unhealthy 'memory boom' in present times rooted in a lack of collective memory. He posits that "There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" (Nora qtd. in Erll 23). This is because society is in transition, and as such, there is a breakdown of coherent narratives about the past. A fragmented landscape of isolated memory sites replaces a cohesive, natural collective memory, as the gap between past and present ever-widens (Erll 23).

Nora traces this phenomenon back to two major historical developments: the *acceleration* and *democratization* of history. For one thing, the modern (or rather postmodern) world is characterized by constant change and the fundamental unpredictability of the future, which erases the sense that history progresses linearly. For another thing, it has seen the *international, domestic, and ideological* decolonization of history in the second half of the 20th century, which undermined the authority of the historian in interpreting history and gave space

to many co-existing historical narratives (Nora 438-439). These combined developments resulted in memory taking precedence over history, shattering collective identities based on a shared understanding of history. As a result, the landscape of cultural memory fragmented into a collection of distinctive memory sites left to the whims of the market and politics (Nora 441). I argue that these observations hold true for the landscape of collective memory in Hungary after 1989 and explain why the House of Terror became so easily co-opted by Fidesz.

In her article titled "Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary," Hedvig Turai analyzes the cultural context in which the House of Terror emerged. Her description hints at a mnemonic landscape in Hungary which reflects Nora's observations about contemporary cultural memory. She uses the metaphor of 'hot' and 'cold' memory to describe how the imprints of fascism and communism operate and compete in Hungarian cultural memory. Hot memory requires continuous, active memory work, which is usually accompanied by intense feeling. Conversely, cold memory entails a neutral and passive relationship to the past, which makes memories difficult to work through. According to her, it is actively disputed whether the memory of the communist regimes is hot or cold in Eastern Europe, but one thing is clear, the region's societies have a confused attitude towards it. Moreover, they do not possess the proper vocabulary to recollect it, whereas remembering the crimes of fascism has its 'etiquette' provided by the West where the collective memory of the Holocaust is ever-lingering and subject to constant memory work (Turai 99). Therefore, in the landscape of Hungarian cultural memory, remembering communism takes on many forms that can be both hot and cold, depending on the given memory site. Turai showcases this cultural fragmentation by comparing two memory sites in Budapest, the Hungarian Statue Park and the House of Terror. In her reading, the Statue Park has a cold, intellectualizing attitude towards the memory of communism, as it decontextualizes communist statues, potent symbols of the dictatorial regime, and "leaves them as no more than the mementos of a former era" (Turai 101). In contrast, the House of Terror is a site of hot memory with an exhibition designed explicitly to rouse negative emotions, more so towards communism than fascism. The museum relies on the display of artefacts and personal accounts, such as documen-

taries, images of the victims and the perpetrators, torture devices, and other objects representing the regime. These direct full focus on the horror and brutality of communist ideology without providing sufficient historical context. As such, it creates a sensationalized version of history with the intention of maintaining hostility towards communism, which is perfectly in line with the memory politics of Fidesz, the party that finances it (Turai 102).

So, while the Statue Park and the House of Terror represent different attitudes toward remembering the past, neither of them encourage healthy memory work because they stand as separate memory sites within the fragmented mnemonic landscape of Hungarian culture that lacks a shared understanding of history. Nora's theory provides an adequate explanation to this larger fragmentation of cultural memory that allowed the House of Terror to be easily instrumentalized by politics. After 1989, Hungary experienced both an acceleration and democratization of history. The former was the result of its integration into the global order of late capitalism, and the latter was connected to its transition to democracy, which entailed a domestic and ideological decolonization of its history. These are reflective of global trends, so the story of the House of Terror represents a general pathology of contemporary cultural memory. However, I am also interested in those traits of postmodern media culture that allowed the museum to easily become a powerful tool of ideologically motivated mass manipulation. To analyze this, I will engage closely with its permanent exhibition.

As I mentioned earlier, the curators of the House of Terror took an unconventional approach to exhibiting Hungarian history. They turned to new media technologies to create atmospheric representations of the past with multi-sensory impact with the supposed intention to make it more tangible and engaging for younger generations. The museum has three floors and a basement, each of them boasting a range of innovative representations of the totalitarian regimes' violence. A good example is a large room in the basement called the "Hall of Tears," completely lit in red, displaying a number of metal crosses with lamps, and the names of those who were executed for political reasons between 1945 and 1967 on the walls (House of Terror Museum, "Hall of Tears").



Figure 2: "Hall of Tears." *House of Terror Museum*, <https://www.terrorhaza.hu/en/allando-kiallitas/basement/hall-of-tears>.

This installation showcases the museum curators' method of using technology and symbols stripped of context to create an atmosphere that moves the visitor emotionally but does not enrich their knowledge of history. The combined sensory impact of the red lights, the dense cluster of crosses, and the room's overall barrenness results in a feeling of terror and anger, directed at a vague image of communism. As such, the exhibition can be viewed as problematic not only because of its disproportionate focus on communism, but also because of its *means* of representation. In his article, Apor takes a starkly critical approach towards the House of Terror and examines how it manipulates history through new media technology. He describes the permanent exhibition as an "irrational mystical visualization about the past" and claims that "the purpose of the display is to produce general experiences and impressions and to discourage systematic interpretation of the events evoked" (Apor 330-331). Later, he briefly mentions Jean Baudrillard's theory of postmodern media culture to label the exhibition as a hyperreal simulation of history (Apor 338). I want to expand on this point and engage more closely with Baudrillard's theory to critique the museal practices manifested in the House of Terror.

In *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, Andreas Huyssen mentions Baudrillard's simulation theory of musealization as one

of the existing explanations for the exhibition mania in contemporary culture. He argues that,

"For Baudrillard, musealization in its many forms is the pathological attempt of contemporary culture to preserve, to control, and to dominate the real in order to hide that fact that real is in agony due to the spread of simulation" (Huyssen 30).

I argue that the museal practices seen in the House of Terror serve as a powerful argument in favor of this explanation. While I do not believe that Baudrillard's highly pessimistic theory holds true for all practices of musealization in contemporary cultural memory, I do hold that it pinpoints some pathological trends. So, how does Baudrillard define the most important concepts of his theory: simulacra, simulation, and the hyperreal?

His basic claim is that in postmodern culture, which is characterized by the omnipresence of media images, the real world has been replaced by a system of signs without any origin in reality. These signs of the real, which he calls *simulacra*, create a simulation of a *hyperreality* that overrides the material world through an endless play of images and spectacles in the realm of technological and media experience (Kellner par. 35, 39). In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard differentiates between four



Figure 3: "Everyday Life." *House of Terror Museum*, https://www.terrorhaza.hu/en/allando-kiallitas/first_floor/everyday-life.

stages of simulation. First, the image is a direct reflection of reality. Second, it “masks and denatures a profound reality” but still hints at its existence (Baudrillard 6). Third, the image “masks the absence of a profound reality” by pretending to be a faithful copy without an original, and finally, the image is a copy of a copy and “has no relation to any reality whatsoever” (Baudrillard 6). It is in the last stage of pure simulacra and simulation that hyperreality is produced.

I argue that the House of Terror goes through all these stages of simulation, ultimately creating a hyperreality in the permanent exhibition. Take the “Everyday Life” room, for example, located on the first floor. As the museum describes on its website,

“In the room contemporary posters and objects conjure up the communist workaday. The mind-set suggested by the crudely garish posters was just as mendacious and miserable as the ideology behind it” (House of Terror Museum, “Everyday Life”).

Due to its design, the room is engulfed in a vortex of visual representations, most of which have no reference to an existing reality by virtue of being propaganda posters. Together they create a totally self-referential system of signs which are copies of copies without an original, a hyperreality of the supposed “everyday life” in communist

times. This hyperreality is an ideological tool, as it is explicitly intended to represent the daily mind-set in communist times as “mendacious and miserable.” Baudrillard famously describes Disneyland, another site of media spectacles, as a simulation that “exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that is Disneyland” (12). Similarly, I would describe the House of Terror as a simulation which exists to hide the fact that Hungarian society has no real understanding of its history. The mediatization of cultural memory in Hungary enables institutions to appeal entirely to emotions and sensationalize historical disasters rather than interpret them meaningfully. Healthy memory work would encourage empathy for the victims and their descendants, help society acknowledge and come to terms with its role in the perpetration of crimes, and foster the understanding of the causes of traumatic events, so that they can be prevented in the future. Instead, the collective memory of Hungarian society falls prey to media spectacles that appeal to repressed emotions and pre-existing political viewpoints. Again, I hold that my critique of the museum points at more universal pathologies of contemporary cultural memory. The psychological impact of media’s omnipresence in our postmodern present forces museums to curate their exhibitions in a way that is more sensational. While this does not necessarily lead to bad results, the shift of emphasis from comprehension to spec-

tacle in museal practices makes cultural memory naturally vulnerable to manipulation, as seen in the case of the House of Terror. If the museum-goer is encouraged to passively consume history rather than actively engage with it, the museum can become a tempting tool of ideological control.

Overall, the story of the House of Terror is a tragic one. First, the headquarters of two organizations of dictatorial terror, housing indescribable brutality for more than decade. Then, an ideological instrument in the hands of the country's ruling political party. In my critical engagement with the museum and its context at large, I showed that the House of Terror, as a memory site, was created to manipulate public perception through a false simulation of history. My analysis led me to conclude that the museum serves to provoke negative emotions towards communism, and the entire political left by extension, by means of a sensational media representation of the communist dictatorship relying on traumatic collective memories. Furthermore, I argued that the House of Terror's dysfunctional memory work is enabled by the fragmentation and mediatization of Hungarian cultural memory that reflect pathological trends on a global scale. Therefore, the House of Terror embodies not just the horrors of the 20th century, but our current predicament in failing to remember the past in meaningful ways.

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