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Aims and Scope of the Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan University

The Journal of Sociology: Bulletin of Yerevan State University, has a rich history of modernization. First published in 1967, it is one of the oldest and most prominent scientific journals in Armenia, firmly grounded in the fundamental traditions of interdisciplinary academic research and conceptualization. Since 2010, the Sociology Series of the Bulletin has been published as special issues.

The Journal of Sociology welcomes papers that focus on sociological and interdisciplinary analysis of current problems in modern society, without limiting its interests to any particular direction. We are interested in both theoretical and applied research studies. The journal covers a wide range of sociological considerations, including social, economic, political, and military issues as reflected in public perceptions and social life. It also places emphasis on sociological studies of social groups, stratification, dynamics, communication, and interaction. The methodology of sociological studies is one of the core topics of the series. Additionally, we welcome research papers that address contemporary issues in social work and social administration.

The Journal of Sociology is published twice a year, in June and December.

The journal welcomes papers submitted by well-known scholars, as well as those submitted by less experienced researchers who demonstrate excellence in formulating non-standard hypotheses and applying innovative research methods.

The Editorial Board of the journal is committed to expanding the range of authors by inviting researchers from universities around the world. The Journal is trilingual and published in English, Armenian, and Russian as regional languages (please refer to the detailed guidelines at https://journals.ysu.am/index.php/bulletin-ysu-sociology/about/submissions#authorGuidelines). The Journal of Sociology is indexed in DOAJ, EBSCO, CROSSREF, CYBERLENINKA, and is included in the list of peer-reviewed journals approved by the state commission on higher education of Armenia. All published papers are openly and freely accessible to the academic community on the website of Yerevan State University (https://journals.ysu.am/ index.php/bulletin-ysu-sociology/index). There are no charges for the submission and publication of manuscripts.

The Editorial Board comprises scholars from Europe, America, Asia, and Africa. The Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Sociology is Arthur V. Atanesyan (atanesyan@ysu.am).

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THE FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY, YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY, TURNS 20

A Greeting Message to the Professional Community

Lyudmila Harutyunyan*
Professor, Founder and First Dean
of the Faculty of Sociology, Yerevan State University

Dear colleagues - sociologists, social workers, conflict studies specialists,

It is a privilege to have lived long enough to witness this remarkable milestone - the 20th anniversary of the Faculty of Sociology at Yerevan State University. This celebration feels like a sea of flowers, an impressive wave of heartfelt wishes and congratulations, reaffirming the timeless truth of the great Armenian poet Tumanyan's principle: **"Only deeds are immortal."**

Today, we celebrate the **establishment and maturity of the Hearth of Sociological Education.** The Faculty has grown and entered its phase of maturity. On this occasion, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to Yerevan State University and to all my colleagues who have contributed to this journey.

I am deeply appreciative of the fact that you have preserved and developed the Faculty of Sociology, which I helped create with great dedication. This achievement reflects your hard work, vision, and commitment to the advancement of sociology and social education.

However, dear colleagues, let us remember that we cannot rest on our laurels or pause at this stage. The demand for sociologists and social specialists in our society continues to grow, and the challenges we face require relentless effort and determination.

Today's world presents us with new social and institutional challenges that demand immediate attention. Our society expects the sociological community to step forward, mobilize, and take responsibility for addressing these pressing issues.

In particular, there is an urgent need for **in-depth analysis of the factors driving the reproduction of social anomie** and for identifying practical steps to overcome it. Modern societies in general, and the Armenian society in particular, are looking to us for solutions - guidelines on how to restore the vitality of social institutions, halt institutional decay, and strengthen social cohesion.

As professionals, we must also respond to the critical task of **revitalizing our national identity.** It is essential to predict and understand how our people will respond

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to attempts at devaluing traditional identity and to design actionable solutions to mitigate the consequences of negative processes.

I encourage you to develop and implement a comprehensive professional program that addresses these challenges while fostering innovation and resilience within the field.

In conclusion, I wish you, dear colleagues, **a safe professional journey, inspired successes, sharp intellects, and unwavering endurance.** Together, let us continue to make impactful contributions to our field and to society at large.

LONG YEARS OF LIFE, STRONG WILL, AND MANY VICTORIES FOR OUR HOMELAND!

December 1, 2024

ԵՐԵՎԱՆԻ ՊԵՏԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՄԱԼՍԱՐԱՆԻ ՍՈՑԻՈԼՈԳԻԱՅԻ ՖԱԿՈՒԼՏԵՏԸ 20 ՏԱՐԵԿԱՆ Է

Շնորհավորանքի խոսք մասնագիտական հանրույթին

Լյուդմիլա Հարությունյան
պրոֆեսոր, ԵՊՀ սոցիոլոգիայի ֆակուլտետի հիմնադիր և առաջին դեկան

Հարգելի՛ գործընկերներ, սոցիոլոգնե՛ր, սոցիալական աշխատողնե՛ր, կոնֆլիկտաբաննե՛ր, արժեր երկար ապրել այս աշխարհում՝ տեսնելու ծաղիկների այս ծովը, հրաշալի ցանկությունների ու բարեմաղթանքների տպավորիչ ալիքը՝ նորից համոզվելու մեծն Թումանյանի բանաձևած «Գործն է անմահ» սկզբունքի անկասելիությանը։

Այսպիսով՝ սոցիոլոգիական կրթության Օջախը կայացել է։

Այն մտել է հասունության փուլ։ Այդ կապակցությամբ ի սրտե շնորհավորում եմ, նաև երախտագիտությունս եմ հայտնում Երևանի պետական համալսարանին և իմ բոլոր գործընկերներին։

Երախտապարտ եմ, որ պահպանել ու զարգացրել եք նաև իմ ջանքերով ստեղծված սոցիոլոգիական կրթության Օջախը։

Սակայն, հարգելի՛ գործընկերներ, դուք չեք կարողանա բավարարվել ստեղծվածով ու կանգ առնել կամ դադար վերցնել այս հանգրվանում։ Հուրախություն կամ, գուցե, ցավոք, սոցիալական մասնագետների կարիքը մեզանում աճում է, և դուք ստիպված եք լինելու ավելի լարված աշխատել, քանզի ճակատագիրը նորանոր մարտահրավերներ է նետել ու այլևս հանգիստ չի թողնի հասարակագիտությանն ու սոցիալական մասնագետներին։

Գիտոլորտի մասնագետներն այսօր պետք է գործով արձագանքեն հայաստանյան հասարակությանը նետված նոր մարտահրավերներին. մոբիլիզացվեն, պատասխանատվություն ստանձնեն հասարակությանը սպառնացող սոցիալական հիմնախնդիրների ուսումնասիրման և լուծման ուղիները վեր հանելու համար։

Հակիրճ շնորհակալական ուղերձում կսահմանափակվեմ միայն ամենահրատապի հիշատակմամբ…

Այսօր հասարակագիտությունից ու սոցիալական մասնագետներից նվազագույնը պահանջվում է հայաստանյան հասարակությանը պատած անոմիայի բնույթի գործոնների վերարտադրության մեխանիզմի ու հետևանքների խորը վերլուծություն, ինչպես նաև անոմիան հաղթահարելու աշխատող միջոցների ու քայլերի նույնականացում։

Հասարակությունն ակնկալում է ստանալ հանձնարարականներ, թե ինչպես վերացնել սոցիալական ինստիտուտների ամլությունը ու կանգնեցնել ինստիտուցիոնալ քայքայման գործընթացը։ Փլուզումը կանգնեցնելու հրամայականը հնչեցնում են նաև սոցիալական համերաշխության մասնագետները, ովքեր տեսնում են, թե ինչպես է խարխլվում մեր առանց այն էլ թուլացած սոցիալական համերաշխությունը, ու խորանում սոցիալական համերաշխությունը պառակտող ճեղքը։

Վերջապես, մասնագիտական ջանքեր են պահանջվում ազգային ինքնության քայքայվող գործվածքը վերականգնելու համար։ Իսկ դրանից առաջ հասկանալու ու կանխատեսելու համար, թե ինչպես կարձագանքի հասարակ հայ մարդը որոշումներ կայացնողների վարժանքներին՝ ուղղված ավանդական ինքնության արժեզրկմանը։

Մասնագիտական լուրջ ծրագիր է պետք մշակել ու իրականացնել՝ ամոքելու նոր խորը վնասվածքի ցավը։

Ավարտելով հրատապ խնդիրների շարադրանքը՝ մաղթում եմ ձեզ հարգելի՛ գործընկերներ, բարի երթ, հաջողության ներշնչանք, սուր միտք, տոկունություն։ ԵՐԿԱՐ ՏԱՐԻՆԵՐԻ ԿՅԱՆՔ, ԱՄՈՒՐ ԿԱՄՔ, ՄԵԾ ՈՒ ՓՈՔՐ ՀԱՂԹԱՆԱԿՆԱԿՆԵՐ ՄԵՐ ՀԱՅՐԵՆԻՔԻՆ։

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TEACHING ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN CHINA: A NEW UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM

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Abstract: This paper highlights the global issue of academic integrity, particularly in Chinese higher education institutions (HEIs). While policies and classes on integrity exist, comprehensive training opportunities are lacking. To address this, seminars targeting graduate students at one high-level research university in Shanghai have been initiated, aiming to foster competencies for international collaboration and ethical awareness. In the first seminar, various misconduct cases were discussed, including cheating on coursework, exam impersonation, and academic falsification in the Chinese higher education context. Reflecting on the issues and implications this seminar raised, this paper advocates for continued effort towards developing academic integrity training at Chinese HEIs, which would ultimately contribute to enhancing a culture of integrity in Chinese higher education**.

Key words: *academic integrity, cheating, China, curriculum, plagiarism, universities*

Introduction

The institutionalization of academic integrity in Chinese colleges and universities began in the early 1980s, after China had fully implemented the reform and opening-up policy.[1] In 1983, the Chinese education authorities formulated *the Measures for the Management of Student Status in Full-time Ordinary Colleges and Universities*, which clarified the appropriate consequences for dealing with students' academic misconduct, for instance, cheating on examinations. This is seen as the beginning of the

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[1] It should be noted that lack of academic integrity is a global problem (Bretag, 2020; Curtis, 2023; Denisova-Schmidt, 2020; Eaton, 2024), and the recent hype over artificial intelligence (AI) has intensified discussions among scholars, practitioners, and other involved stakeholders (Bearman, et. al., 2023; Crompton and Burke, 2023; Howe, et. al., 2023; Khan, 2024).

institutionalization of academic integrity by China's national education authorities (Du, 2018). Over the last twenty years, China's Ministry of Education (MoE) has issued a series of regulations, opinions, approaches, guidelines, and other policies, which together make up the foundation of China's institutional system for governing academic misconduct in universities. A study focusing on the relevant policy documents issued by the MoE during the period from 2002 to 2016 shows that the effectiveness of China's policies on the governance of academic misconduct in colleges and universities has been continuously improving over the past decade or so. This can mainly be seen in the fact that the boundaries of the definition of academic misconduct have been continuously clarified, identifiability has been enhanced, and the normative requirements of the disclosure system for academic misconduct have been strengthened to incentivize HEIs to actively deal with the whistleblowing of academic misconduct (Hao et al., 2011).

The attention to academic integrity may largely be driven by the expansion and internationalization of higher education: both scholars and policy makers have realized that the further development of China's higher education and research system requires a healthy academic ecosystem (Wang & Cheng, 2014) - an important part of this is regulating academic (mis)behavior in HEIs. Major academic misconduct occurring in Chinese HEIs (in descending order of the number of people involved) includes academic plagiarism, academic forgery, misappropriation of other people's academic achievements, falsification of academic identities/curricula vitae, academic plagiarism, and embezzlement of research funds (Liu, 2018).

Scholars have identified a diverse set of reasons for the emergence of academic misconduct, including the pressure on faculty for quick success and profit as well as faculty members' own impetuousness and vainglory; the dereliction of duty by management and failure to supervise by some management departments and responsible persons; and the lack of sufficiently scientific and reasonable assessment and evaluation mechanisms for dealing with academic misconduct. Some scholars have also identified root causes including "weak professional self-regulation" and "poor academic socialization," noting that academia in China is a state-supported profession (Lo, 1991), dependent on the state as the main sponsor of research. Overall, the construction of an academic integrity system in Chinese higher education has not been an overnight success, but a gradual process towards perfection; this kind of change is always a work in progress (see more in Welch, 2020; Yang, 2022). Policies and regulations have been implemented to improve the understanding and practices of scholars and students in China, including classes on academic integrity and the ethics of AI; however, there are few systematic, organized, and comprehensive training opportunities targeting both undergraduate and graduate students at Chinese higher education institutions.

To address this gap, we are developing training materials on academic integrity aimed primarily at graduate students (both domestic and international) at one of the top universities in Shanghai[2] —that can be considered a starting point to help Chinese universities further develop their curriculums on these issues. We believe these seminars can equip graduate students with the necessary competencies for international

[2] Our case university is one of the 211 Project universities. The 211 Project, along with Project 985 and the Double First-Class Project, is a national initiative to build academic excellence in China, funded by the Chinese government. The universities selected for these projects are considered the leading universities in China (for more on national excellence initiatives in China, see Yang, 2023, and more broadly Yudkevich, et al., 2023).

collaborations and studying or working abroad. Moreover, the proposed seminars offer opportunities for other international stakeholders, including scholars and professors as well as international students, university administrators, and policymakers, all of whom would benefit from insights into academic integrity from the Chinese perspective.

While this is still a work in progress, we would like to share some insights. First, it is crucial to define some common terms, such as *academic integrity*, *contract cheating*, and *plagiarism*, including definitions in the national language of China, that are sometimes taken for granted, especially in the international context. Second, such seminars (if they are well designed and have an appropriate atmosphere) can offer opportunities for critical (self-)reflections and exchanges of ideas. Finally, it is important to bring to the table (recent) local, national, and international cases from different perspectives by considering possible risks in both the short and long term. This paper focuses on local (national) aspects and presents cases of misbehavior in higher education that reflect the perspectives of graduate students at one very selective university in Shanghai.

Academic misconduct from the students' perspective

The first seminar was held in April 2024. Selected graduate students (both international and domestic, majoring in Chinese as a foreign language; n=30) were invited to attend the seminar. After an interactive lecture with many examples, students were asked several questions, including what kinds of cases they had personally observed, heard about from classmates, and/or read about in the media in the recent past. The students were divided into small groups (n=6) and, after intensive discussions, presented these results in the plenum. It should be noted that the entire event took place in English, a foreign language for both the lecturer and the students (see more about English-language instruction in non-Anglophone countries in Unangst, Altbach and Hans de Wit, 2022 and Denisova-Schmidt, 2023). Three takeaways have emerged from this seminar.

Universities struggle to monitor cheating in sport

A 211 Project university in Shanghai, like many other Chinese universities, offers a physical education course that all students are required to take. The assessment requirement for this course is to run 40 km within the campus in one semester, and the weekly running mileage can add up to only 8 km (other Chinese universities require 60 km per month or 2 km per day). The original intention of the university in setting this requirement was to help students develop good exercise habits by running for 4-5 weeks in a row. However, given the size of the campus and the fact that students live in different dormitories, it is difficult to conduct a face-to-face assessment for each student. Therefore, the university adopted electronic devices to monitor students' completion (e.g., using their cell phone locations to check the number of miles they ran on campus). However, because this method of assessment lacked more rigorous monitoring tools, and especially because monitoring the online data did not allow course designers to see how students really exercised, some students rode their bikes[3] on campus rather than running.

[3] This university has wonderful opportunities for bike riders, and many students move around the campus on bicycles. It is possible to rent a bicycle using a special bike-sharing app; the monthly fee is 18 yuan (2.50

This is a kind of cheating in disguise.

The main reason that students are able to get away with fulfilling the requirements of the physical education course using these kinds of tricks is that the focus of the course is encouragement/guidance rather than competition. The universities' aim in offering this kind of course is to encourage students to be physically active. Because the students' daily cycling can be considered a form of exercise, both the universities and students look the other way. This course also does not have a substantial impact on students' grades and GPA. This case is an example of how the level of attention and measures taken by the universities are binding on the students to comply with the relevant rules and regulations and academic requirements.

Vigilance is necessary to guard against evolving academic misconduct

During a final exam, a student (hereafter referred to as Student A) asked a student from another university (Student B) to take an exam for him. Student B entered the exam room with Student A's ID card. Because this incident happened during the pandemic, when all students were wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in China, the invigilator did not initially notice the problem. After the exam papers were distributed, Student B did not fill in the semester information (1st, 2nd, or 3rd semester) because he was not clear about the semester system at that particular university, which is unique among universities in China in adopting a three-semester system. Finally, after being reminded by the invigilator, Student B hesitantly wrote "2nd semester." However, it was already the third semester at the time of the exam, so the invigilator discovered that Student B was a substitute. After this incident, Student A was severely punished by the university for hiring a substitute to take the test.

Unlike the situation described in the previous subsection, this case exemplifies the determination of the university to fight against cheating on examinations. This particular case shows that finding substitutes for exams undermines the fairness of education, jeopardizes the interests of other students, and more seriously, causes a lot of damage to the university's learning culture.

The end of a popular actor's career leads to attempts to mitigate fraud in dissertations

Ronald Zhai is a very talented young actor in China's film and television industry, who has created many affecting and influential screen roles. He is also one of the few highly educated people in this field, having earned a doctorate from the Beijing Film Academy, one of China's most prestigious film and television talent training colleges. In China's film and television industry, a high level of education has never been a top priority. The vast majority only have bachelor's degrees, and many don't even have that.

January 31, 2019: Zhai showed a postdoctoral acceptance letter from the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University (a Top 2 research university in China; ranked T30 globally in ARWU)

February 8, 2019: The authenticity of Zhai's doctorate degree was questioned because he did not know what CNKI (the Chinese version of the WoS literature database) was when questioned by the audience of his live internet show. Almost all academic

USD). Without a subscription, the fare is 1-2 yuan (0.10 USD) per ride.

papers published in authoritative Chinese academic journals are included in CNKI (https://www.cnki.net/), and one of the prerequisites for obtaining a doctoral degree from a prestigious university in China includes the publication of high-quality academic papers in authoritative journals. Anyone with such a degree would know about this database.

February 11, 2019: The Beijing Film Academy, the university where Zhai obtained his doctoral degree, set up a committee and launched an investigation in accordance with relevant procedures. Peking University's Guanghua School of Management issued a statement saying it would wait for the findings of the Beijing Film Academy before deciding whether it would continue to offer Zhai a postdoctoral position.

February 15, 2019: The Chinese Ministry of Education expressed concern over Zhai's alleged academic misconduct and urged the relevant authorities to speed up the verification process.

February 16, 2019: Peking University issued a statement on its investigation of the hiring of Ronald Zhai as a postdoctoral fellow, confirming that Zhai committed academic misconduct, agreeing that Zhai would give up his postdoctoral post, and instructing the Guanghua School of Management to profoundly review its recruitment process.

February 19, 2019: The Beijing Film Academy released a statement on the progress of the investigation of "Zhai's suspected academic misconduct" and other issues, announcing the revocation of Zhai's doctoral degree and cancellation of his doctoral thesis advisor's (Prof. Chen) supervisor qualification (which disqualified him from recruiting new doctoral students for the next few years).

This incident has had long-lasting effects: The Chinese Ministry of Education has further strengthened its review and supervision of the dissertations of Chinese university graduates, including those graduates who have been out of university for a few years, and enacted repeat spot checks to ensure that plagiarism and other academic misconduct no longer occur. This demonstrates the seriousness of China's universities in combating academic misconduct as well as their zero-tolerance for academic thesis forgery. This incident has exposed, to a certain extent, loopholes in the enrollment and talent cultivation of some universities. It has also raised critical questions about whether the professional institutions involved, as degree-granting units, conducted a standardized assessment of Zhai's academic performance and what kinds of criteria they used to grant him a doctoral degree and provide him with a postdoctoral position.

Reflecting on the seminar, it was noteworthy that the students actively engaged in discussing this specific case. This highlights the value of incorporating real-life experiences into our seminars, as they not only stimulate student participation but also help them connect critical issues to their own understanding.

Conclusion and outlook

Our ongoing exploration of academic integrity in the context of higher education, particularly at one top university with rapid development in Shanghai, has yielded several noteworthy insights. First, the need to clearly define common terms such as *academic integrity*, *contract cheating*, and *plagiarism*, especially in an international context where interpretations may vary, cannot be overemphasized. Establishing common understandings is fundamental to fostering a culture of academic honesty. Second, these arrangements also provide opportunities for both students and faculty to

review the evolving nature of academic misconduct and reflect on the necessary actions and oversight. Finally, as exemplified by our examination of misconduct cases at one top university in Shanghai, the presentation of recent local and national (and even international) cases provides practical insights into the challenges facing institutions. These real-world examples underscore the importance of addressing academic misconduct from both a short- and long-term perspective. Our ongoing efforts underscore the multifaceted nature of academic integrity and the importance of ongoing dialogue, reflection, and proactive measures to safeguard the integrity of higher education institutions. By addressing these challenges head-on and implementing robust strategies, we can attempt to foster an environment conducive to genuine learning and scholarly excellence.

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The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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TRAUMATIC PAST AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY: WHAT SHOULD BE AND SHOULD NOT BE THE ARMENIAN APPROACH?

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Abstract. Armenia has a history marked by traumatic and harrowing events. In the 20th century, it endured the Armenian Genocide, recognized as the first genocide of such magnitude committed against an ethnic group by a state government with the intention of erasing all existence and memory of it from the land where the Armenian people originated. A nation that has endured genocide must learn lessons to prevent such atrocities from happening again. Failure to draw the right conclusions and implement appropriate policies in a timely manner can result in similar threats reemerging. Every nation must remember its traumatic events in a manner that enables and encourages necessary policies and actions. If similar risks and threats reappear, it may indicate that the nation has either failed to remember its traumatic past in a way that serves it instrumentally and pragmatically or has not remembered it at all. Have Armenians adequately remembered their Genocide? If so, why is there a resurgence of the risk of another genocide affecting the Armenian population, not only in Karabakh but also in Armenia, in modern times? Do Armenians need to reconsider their politics of memory in this context, and if so, are they doing it correctly? This paper critically addresses these questions, accompanied by a brief conceptual exploration and case studies.

Key words: *Culture of memory, models of memory, politics of memory, identity, Genocide prevention, Armenia*

Three Levels of National Memory

A nation's past, especially its traumatic history, often directly shapes its future, particularly in the aftermath of tragic events like wars, genocides, and disasters. This influence persists even when people choose not to recall or remember those events. This is why when younger generations, and even children, claim that they are descendants (and perhaps even victims) of a genocide that occurred a century ago, they are correct: their lives would have been different if that genocide or Holocaust had never taken place.

Not delving deeply into theoretical disputes concerning the issue of memory and the politics of remembering/forgetting (Nascimento, Sepúlveda dos Santos, 2009; Verovšek, 2016), the politics of memory "considers how political debates can be generated by disturbing dominant understandings and narratives of the past, and how these hegemonic

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views of historical events can be modified for new sociopolitical settings. The politics of memory concerns how political and social elites often make appeals to the past to justify their actions" (Ranger, Ranger, 2023: 456). In other words, the politics of memory is about transforming the past into the present and future.

Every memory is selective, implying that forgetting is an integral part of remembering and its representation. Remembering and forgetting are not neutral; individuals remember or forget to take certain actions today and in the future. Otherwise, memorization becomes futile, as in **the case of an elderly person who continually recalls their past but regrettably can do nothing to shape their future**.

In this context, we would like to emphasize three levels of memory related to a nation. The three levels of memory are interconnected and mutually influential, reflecting the three levels of existence in a national context:

1. **Individual Memory:** This pertains to how an individual perceives, knows, understands, and accepts their connection with a nation and its history.
2. **Group Memory:** This involves how a group experiences, preserves, explains, and accepts certain narratives related to the nation it belongs to.
3. **National Memory:** This encompasses the collective history of a nation, represented in historical museums, history books, memorials, monuments, artworks, and other cultural expressions.

The macro-level of national memory affects the lower levels through institutions designed to keep/protect/construct/reconstruct and broadcast historical facts and events for domestic and international audiences. Schools are among those institutions maintaining and transferring national history through teaching. Museums exhibit national history in the form of material objects. Memorials and monuments convey history through architecture.

Most often, such monuments are constructed at the locations where significant historical events occurred. They serve both as a means to commemorate these events and to emphasize their symbolic significance (Maurantonio, 2014). Art exhibitions and films that depict history contribute to remembrance through an artistic and sometimes even entertaining approach, following the idea that 'We don't remember; we rewrite our memories' (Scotini, Galasso, 2015: 15). Without storytelling, visual representation, and educational efforts, the process of constructing, reconstructing, and passing down memories between generations would be incomplete.

The institutional level of memory is the only one that allows for the involvement of larger groups of people in storytelling and the interpretation of historical facts consistently. A shared or similar interpretation of common history, as embraced by the majority of a group's members, is essential for memory's functionality. When shared and understood similarly, collective memory can unite and mobilize people. Common memory plays a crucial role in the construction of national identity. Questioning common memory and its interpretation may challenge the primary adhesive that binds members of a group, including ethnic ones. Groups not only transmit common memory from top to bottom, acting as intermediaries between the macro level (the state and its institutions) and the micro level (individuals), but they also generate memory.

Without these groups, many historical facts would be lost. Each group has its unique stories connected to the overarching narrative, as well as specific details. For instance, every family possesses its distinct history preserved in photographs within family

albums, displayed on walls, or recorded in family videos. This history is passed down through generations, from grandparents and parents to their children and grandchildren. These material objects and family narratives are partially related to the country's history and partly unique to each family. Despite the national level of memory being the most influential due to institutions and state mechanisms, its impact on individuals would be incomplete without the group level. Families, friends, classmates, colleagues, neighbors, and relatives all contribute to the preservation, absorption, interpretation, and assessment of the constant and ubiquitous information that surrounds us.

The politics of memory designed at the top of the pyramid relies on information sources from the lower levels of groups and individuals who live their lives and provide their nation with facts, stories, and objects. On an individual level, memory accumulates through education and experience and is reproduced either exactly or with some modifications. When attending school or university classes and responding to questions related to the past, pupils and students 'recall' in a manner akin to real participants in these stories. Memory transports us to the past.

Memory serves not only a retrospective but also a proactive function. It can guide us toward the future as well. For example, when reading about national heroes, individuals might seek to demonstrate their own heroism by attempting to replicate the lessons learned, thus adding another chapter to the history of their group or nation.

Remembering the past can help us avoid certain actions in the present and future that were painful, unsuccessful, or wrong in the past. This involves learning not only from theoretical and literary lessons but also from practical experiences at the levels of strategies (national memory), tactics (group memory), and everyday behavior (individual memory).

For instance, if factors such as domestic political conflicts, misunderstandings among national parties, corruption at all levels, misconduct, poor organizational practices, incorrect human resource management, lack of cooperation among community members, and egoism among its members contributed to the past threat of genocide to a nation, then these and similar characteristics of individuals and groups within the same nation must and should be discouraged at the national, group, and individual levels to prevent the nation from facing the threat of genocide once again.

The Armenian Case

Remembering traumatic events and national tragedies doesn't always suffice, and neither does forgetting if a nation, encompassing its various groups, communities, and people, doesn't invest adequate energy, resources, and efforts into preventing similar risks in the present and future. Are Armenians effective in their politics of memory?

An effective politics of memory must be built and executed at the highest level of governance and within groups and institutions. It should work to prevent the repetition of past mistakes, extract lessons from bitter experiences, and unite the nation's representatives for constructive and proactive cooperation. **An effective politics of memory must serve the future**. Just as a family album loses its significance over time when it comes to an end with no more children to add their photos, the politics of memory should keep the flame alive, providing warmth and light without causing everything to burn or be extinguished.

Have Armenians managed their politics or culture of memory correctly? When we use the word 'correctly' here, we mean that **the national politics of memory is**

developed and passed down to future generations in a manner that helps prevent the recurrence of past mistakes and secures a brighter future for the nation through the collective efforts of individuals and groups.

Among the paradoxically rare attempts to self-assess Armenian politics of memory, including memory of the Genocide (Dadrian, 1995; Kévorkian, 2011), I would like to highlight one made by a non-Armenian scholar, providing an early and objective external perspective. The Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, who was a child during the Holocaust, dedicated his book "The Ethics of Memory" to his parents, whom he introduced at the beginning of the book by reconstructing their dialogue (Margalit, 2004). His parents discussed their family members being gradually destroyed during the Second World War.

When explaining the ritual of lighting candles in memory of those Jews who were destroyed, Avishai's mother used to say:

"The Jews were irretrievably destroyed. What is left is just a pitiful remnant of the great Jewish people [which, for her, meant European Jewry]. The only honorable role for the Jews that remains is to form communities of memory – to serve as 'soul candles' like the candles that are ritually kindled in memory of the dead" (Margalit, 2004: XIII-IX).

This discussion touches on an approach to the politics of memory. However, consider how Avishai's father addressed it:

"We, the remaining Jews, are people, not candles. ***It is a horrible prospect for anyone to live just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead. That is what the Armenians opted to do. And they made a terrible mistake***[1]*. We should avoid it at all costs. It is better to create a community that thinks predominantly about the future and reacts to the present, not a community that is governed from mass graves"* (Margalit, 2004: XIII-IX).

As an Armenian, I understand what Margalit means and what his father meant by saying that Armenians made a terrible mistake with their approach to the memory of the Genocide and their national memory in general. Since my childhood, like all other representatives of my highly literate nation, I have been surrounded by an abundance of information about Armenian and world history. The history of each century and each period of our history has been taught in detail in schools and universities, broadcasted on TV, depicted in movies, and sold in bookstores. Every Armenian knows their national history, at least its major events, both heroic and tragic. The memory of the Genocide is a key element of Armenian national identity.

However, since my childhood, I have been asking myself and others: What should we do to prevent becoming victims again, to avoid losing our statehood again, and to avoid making the same mistakes again (if there were mistakes)? A logical question to the authors of textbooks on Armenian history has always been: Why don't you conclude each chapter about specific parts of our history, including the traumatic ones, with lessons on what was correct and what was mistakenly wrong, what we should and should not do to avoid a similar tragedy in the future? Indeed, “Historians were not always so willing to see memory’s potential to enhance historical practice” (Maurantonio, 2014: 5), and this is not only an Armenian phenomenon. **Continuously discussing our**

[1] Highlighted by A. Atanesyan.

traumatic past without providing solutions keeps the traumas collected during our long history inside us, making us gradually weaker, misguided, and unwell.

Again, forgetting is an alternative to remembering (Kaasik-Krogerus, Čeginskas, Sääskilahti, 2020). But as the phrase mistakenly attributed to Winston Churchill states, "A nation that forgets its past has no future" (Cornejo, 2020). Indeed, many representatives of various diasporas in the world, including Armenians, chose to forget their past and have already forgotten it to avoid living with national trauma. However, as representatives of their nation, they have no future. Therefore, forgetting is not the answer, and the majority of Armenians still remembers and carries their heavy history, with its heroic and traumatic past, on their shoulders. How can we move forward without forgetting our ancestors and preserving their memory with pride? How shall we learn the lessons properly, be strong and positive, and move forward? To paraphrase Avishai Margalit's father, how should Armenians light their candles in memory of the dead, spreading the light forward and brightening our present and future?

For the Armenian nation, including Armenia itself, the Armenians from already lost Armenian Karabakh (Artsakh), and the Armenian Diaspora, learning from the approaches taken by others regarding their traumatic past and politics of memory might help uncover the Armenian model(s) that are already in practice and formulate a potentially more effective approach. This is especially crucial in light of current developments concerning security in Armenia, as the threat of genocide is once again becoming a real concern (Lemkin Institute, 2024). We must acknowledge that the previous efforts to prevent vital threats to the Armenian nation have, at least partially, failed due to the reappearance of similar problems (Von Joeden Forgey, 2023). To apply the **"Never again"** (Guterres, 2020) formula to these threats to our security, we must first admit that the national politics of memory regarding the Armenian Genocide of the last century and similar traumatic and tragic events in other nations did not mobilize Armenians in Armenia, Karabakh, and the Diasporas in the necessary way and intensity to collaborate effectively and formulate an Armenian politics of memory grounded in realpolitik.

Models of memory

In her works, Aleida Assman introduces four approaches to collectively address a traumatic past (Assmann, 2011). These approaches are potentially adopted by governments and national institutions at the highest level, as well as by groups and individuals who may later elevate them from the micro and middle levels to the national politics of memory, if they are accepted and embraced by the majority. The central idea here is that every traumatic event in the past is to be framed within collective memory, both by the victim and the perpetrator. Otherwise, the politics of memory will not be shared and will fail to contribute to reconciliation. These models, used either individually or in combination with each other, either consciously or unconsciously, reflect the experiences of many countries, particularly in post-World War II Europe and Israel. They are highly applicable to the Armenian traumatic past as potential options for adoption or rejection.

The models of memory proposed by Aleida Assman include:

1. **Dialogic Forgetting:** This model describes an approach practiced by parties involved in previous conflicts who are not interested in further violence and contradictions. Instead, they choose to remain silent to pave the way for a shared future. This model was embraced by European countries after both World War I and World War II. The vision of a "European family" and the European Union necessitated and allowed former adversaries to reconcile and open state borders for free trade and travel. A similar approach was employed within the Soviet Union among republics that had previously held territorial claims. For this model to be adopted effectively, all parties involved must have equal and robust guarantees.
2. **Remembering in Order to Never Forget:** This model is relevant to situations in the history of two nations where one committed unprecedented and asymmetric violence against the other. In such cases, the victim remembers in order never to forget, ensuring that the past is not erased from memory to prevent a recurrence ("Never again"). However, implementing this model can be challenging because the perpetrator may either accept or continue to deny their guilt. Consequently, the victim must carry the burden of trauma and pass it down through generations.
3. **Remembering in Order to Forget:** This model can be applied when a perpetrator of crimes confesses their guilt, and the victim accepts their sincere apologies as a form of absolution. Both parties revisit the tragic events of their past, not to remember them anew, but to ultimately forget. This model is considering an approach to overcoming a traumatic past and moving forward.
4. **Dialogic Remembering:** In cases where both parties share guilt for tragic events in the past, they may engage in discussions and analyses of what transpired. By accepting their own culpability as part of the tragedy, both parties contribute to each other's reconciliation.

Now, let's examine the Armenian experience and approach to framing its traumatic past in the context of the memory politics models proposed by Aleida Assman.

The Armenian Way

As demonstrated by the Soviet example, the model of "Dialogic Forgetting" has been effective as long as all parties uphold the agreement and refrain from revisiting their traumatic past with claims against others. During Soviet times, Armenians succeeded in preserving the memory of the Armenian Genocide, using it as a compelling argument in negotiations with Soviet elites to construct a memorial complex. This complex would serve as a symbol of remembrance for the Genocide and Armenia's role in uniting Armenians worldwide.

After extensive diplomatic efforts, the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex was inaugurated in Soviet Armenia in 1967[2], quickly becoming a central site of remembrance for the Armenian Genocide, not only for Armenians but also for other nations. **Soviet Armenia became a unique example by fostering a model of *Dialogic Remembering* despite operating under conditions of officially enforced *Dialogic Forgetting***, embodying the pursuit of truth and justice for all oppressed nations. Across the Armenian Diaspora, museums and memorials dedicated to the victims and survivors of the Genocide have been established

[2] Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex: Description and History. "The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute" Foundation. URL: http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/Description_and_history.php (accessed 23.11.2024).

worldwide[3], often with the support of nations that acknowledge the genocide committed against Armenians in Ottoman Turkey - an atrocity that remains unacknowledged by its perpetrators.

The last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, opened the door to breaking the silence by introducing another approach to collective memory - Glasnost, which encouraged open and critical discussions on every issue. However, history shows that this approach did not lead to effective solutions. In essence, by advocating for open dialogue, Gorbachev replaced dialogic forgetting with asymmetric remembering. Under this model, every party to previous conflicts began asserting claims against others and against the Soviet Union as a whole. The voices from Soviet Armenia were among the most prominent in this regard. Consequently, many armed conflicts, including the Karabakh conflict, erupted with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The victory of Armenia in the first Karabakh war (1991-1994) can be interpreted as a stage in the transformation of memory from dialogic forgetting to remembering in order never to forget, which proved effective for Armenians at that time.

The model of "Remembering in Order to Forget" has long been on the agenda. However, despite Armenia's and Armenians' worldwide efforts to compel Turkey to acknowledge the genocide committed against 1.5 million Armenians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, 34 countries around the world, but not Turkey, have officially recognized this historical fact and crime[4]. Turkey has neither expressed remorse nor offered apologies for the deliberate destruction of Armenians, as well as Greeks, Assyrians, and other minority groups within the Ottoman Empire. For this model of memory, these actions by Turkey fall far short.

Instead, Turkey has sought to engage Armenia in discussions about their "mutual guilt and violence during WWI,"[5] sidestepping the use of the term "genocide" and attributing the mass crimes against ethnic minorities in the Ottoman Empire to the context of war. This aligns with what Aleida Assman refers to as "Dialogic Remembering." As part of this politics of memory, Turkey has proposed that Armenian historians collaborate with Turkish counterparts to jointly analyze the historical events.

Before the "Velvet Revolution" and the new government led by Pashinyan in Armenia, the Armenian elites and the Armenian Diaspora worldwide had rejected this proposal. Turkey's attempt to erase the term "genocide" and reframe the politics surrounding the annihilation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, not only from Turkish memory but also from the collective memory of Armenians, including descendants of genocide victims, was met with strong resistance and could not be accepted.

The model of "Remembering in Order to Never Forget," as defined by Aleida Assman, is most likely the approach Armenians adopted after the Genocide of 1915, both at the state, group, and individual levels. Countless individual and family stories have been recorded, displayed in museums and documentaries, supported by official statements, factual evidence, depicted in books, and explored in research papers. However, the pivotal question remains: What should be done, and what should be

[3] For example: Armenian Genocide Museum of America. URL: http://www.armeniangenocidemuseum.org/#home (accessed 24.11.2024).
[4] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia. Recognition. URL: https://www.mfa.am/en/recognition/
[5] The Events of 1915 and the Turkish-Armenian Controversy over History: An Overview. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkiye. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-events-of-1915-and-the-turkish-armenian-controversy-over-history-an-overview.en.mfa

avoided, to prevent the recurrence of similar events? This is the fundamental query that must be framed and addressed by the politics of memory.

The Genocide Memorial and Museum in Yerevan (Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex) features an exceptionally informative and meticulously curated collection on the Armenian Genocide. It vividly illustrates the cruelty and calculated nature of the Genocide, as well as the unbearable fate endured by its victims—not only Armenians but also Assyrians, Greeks, and Yezidis living in Ottoman Turkey. The exhibits are well supported by contributions from international scholars and legal experts, emphasizing the importance of preventing any act resembling genocidal conduct against any group of people. As visitors ascend the hill holding flowers purchased at the entrance, ascending hundreds of steps reminiscent of Jesus's journey to Golgotha, burdened with the weight of tragic thoughts about life and death, they eventually place the flowers at the eternal flame beneath the steles symbolizing Armenia divided into Eastern (modern Armenia) and Western parts, including twelve lost Armenian provinces now in Turkey. This journey evokes immense pain and sorrow, often accompanied by tears.

However, after this emotional experience, visitors exit the monument without a clear sense of what actions should be taken or avoided to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy. The crucial question remains: What should Armenians and other nations do to prevent such a tragedy from occurring again? Regrettably, there is no answer.

When we leave the Complex, we are left adrift and isolated with the weight of collective trauma and the haunting memory of the Genocide (Atanesyan, 2016). It becomes evident, even palpable, that for millions of visitors every year, including Armenians and international guests, there is no concrete answer to the vital question encapsulated within the "Remembering in Order to Never Forget" model, with its resounding motto, "Never again." There is no answer regarding what actions we should take or avoid to prevent a return to such a tragedy. Instead, there lies ahead a long descent down the hill through the park, where there is no information about our destination or what to anticipate next. Eventually, we reach the bustling heart of the city, marked by intersections, bus stops, and traffic. **This journey offers no response to the pressing question of how to coexist with this harrowing collective memory while ensuring that similar tragedies do not befall Armenians or any other group**.

There is an absolute absence of any continuation in the exhibition regarding the post-genocidal history of Armenia and Armenians worldwide. Nothing is presented about the hundred years that followed the Genocide, during which Armenians painstakingly rebuilt their country in Eastern Armenia. They reconstructed old cities and erected new ones, developed agriculture, established universities and schools, and nurtured and educated their children.

A continuation of the exhibition dedicated to the theme of recovery and rebuilding could be represented by a series of posters gradually unfolding along the path leading down from the Armenian Genocide Memorial. These posters would chronicle the subsequent history of the first Armenian Republic, followed by Soviet Armenia, and culminating in the current third Armenian Republic. They would showcase the heroic endeavors of the Armenian nation in battles, nation-building, reconstruction, creation, and cultural dissemination following the Genocide.

The question arises: Why haven't Armenians exhibited any information beyond the culminating point represented by the eternal flame of the Tsitsernakaberd Memorial Complex, commemorating the victims of the Genocide and the lost territories? **Why**

have we not showcased the remarkable recovery and revival of the Armenian nation? Why haven't we shown ourselves and the world that we stand among the nations that emerged victorious in World War II, and subsequently, emerged triumphant in the first Karabakh war? Why have we not continued to tell the tragic story of the Genocide while also imparting inspiring lessons from those Armenians who displayed heroism, and who have propelled the Armenian nation to prominence once more? However, this time, it would not be for our tragic past, but for our dedication to hard work, contributions to classic and folk art, music, painting, culinary arts, sports, and military achievements in the present era. This is precisely what we all should have done, and still have the capability to accomplish together.

On the contrary, among most Armenians, the Genocide Memorial is informally referred to as "Yeghern,"[6] so on April 24th, people often say, "we are going to Yeghern," which essentially means **"we are going to the Genocide."** It's a ritual repeated year after year. However, **instead of moving away from the threat of genocide, Armenians are moving toward it**. **This mentality is not conducive to preventing another genocide.**

The pragmatic and patriotic answers that serve the interests of the Armenian nation within the framework of the "Never again" approach and in the context of the current security challenges facing Armenia after the 2020 Karabakh war (Ocampo, 2023) are still lacking.

Instead, the prime minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan and his government, following the Velvet Revolution (Atanesyan, 2018), seem to be erasing core elements of Armenian identity, including territory, history, and symbolism. The territorial losses suffered by Armenia and Artsakh are significant in comparison to the size of the country, and the threat of further losses looms large. Moreover, Pashinyan has initiated a public discourse that downplays the significance of these territories. He even referred to the city of Shushi as "a bleak, dark, and dreary city" unworthy of defense[7], while Azerbaijanis call it their "cultural capital." By relinquishing historical Armenian territories, Pashinyan and his government accompany their actions with populist critiques of statehood. One recent example is Pashinyan's public statement that the symbols depicted on Armenia's coat of arms no longer hold meaning[8]. This is how post-revolutionary elites in Armenia, as well as their supporters, both within the country and in the diaspora, are implementing another politics of memory, which I would describe as **"Forget as if it never happened."** The so-called "peace negotiations" with Azerbaijan and Turkey are also conducted within this framework, and this model of memory is subordinated to the real politics.

The proposal of forgetting the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian Karabakh/Artsakh issue, and other significant milestones in Armenian history and identity, as if they never occurred, is presented as a 'healing' approach - 'no memory, no pain' - and as a means of 'reconciliation' with Azerbaijan and Turkey. It is logical that the process of 'Armenian

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[6] Another version of the word "Genocide" in the Armenian language, also used in the annual statements of the presidents of USA commemorating the Armenian Genocide – "the Meds Yeghern - the Armenian genocide." Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day. TheWhite House, April 24, 2024. URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/ (accessed 24.11.2024).

[7] **Khachatourian, A**. (2021) Pashinyan Doesn't Comprehend Shushi's Vital Importance. *Asbarez*, January 22. URL: https://asbarez.com/pashinyan-doesnt-comprehend-shushis-vital-importance/

[8] See, for example: Sassounian, H. (2023) PM Pashinyan disparages Armenia's coat of arms and national anthem. *The Armenian Weekly*, June 20. URL: https://armenianweekly.com/2023/06/20/pm-pashinyan-disparages-armenias-coat-of-arms-and-national-anthem/

forgetting' would entail a reevaluation of Armenian history and the rewriting of textbooks. The model of forgetting is primarily advocated by Armenia's post-revolution government. However, public polls demonstrate that the majority of the Armenian population does not support this approach, as they realistically consider Azerbaijan and Turkey as the primary security threats (Atanesyan, Reynolds, Mkrtichyan, 2023; Atanesyan, Mkrtichyan, 2023).

The current politics of memory promoted by the Armenian government reflects a model of **Dialogic Remembering**, initially proposed by Turkey but now transformed into **Dialogic Forgetting**: Turkey has largely forgotten the events concerning Armenians, and it suggests that Armenians should do the same 'for the sake of peace.' However, the application of the Dialogic Forgetting model by the current Armenian government is not only due to insufficient national efforts to remember but also a response to the use of force and the threat of force by Azerbaijan and Turkey if Armenians continue to remember their history. We should not follow this path: even in the Nazi German concentration camps, where people of various nations were imprisoned and devastated, they still remembered their names, nationality, and history.

Conclusion

Any new political environment can pose either an opportunity or a threat to collective memory, potentially healing or deepening psychological wounds. Modern times present a complex array of examples that demonstrate collective efforts to either confront a traumatic past or neglect it in favor of the interests of a nation - whether perpetrator or victim.

The case of the Armenian Genocide, along with its political, socio-psychological, cultural, economic, demographic, and other consequences, remains unresolved. The painful past continues to echo in the present, with new events - such as the 2020 Karabakh War - rekindling memories of historical trauma. Armenian society and the Armenian diaspora are being encouraged, both by Turkey and their own government, to adopt a model of collective forgetting. This approach, shaped by pragmatic considerations following the defeat in the Karabakh War, conflicts with the deeply ingrained national identity of Armenians, which has been forged through coping with external threats, including the Genocide and similar risks.

Accepting a model of collective forgetting, especially in the absence of acknowledgment or accountability by the perpetrator, risks enabling future genocides and similar crimes - not only against Armenians but against others as well. Conversely, the model of "Remembering in Order to Never Forget" must evolve to balance the interests of all parties involved while reflecting the Armenian nation's responsibility to advocate for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide in the interest of all nations.

Armenians, historically seen as exemplars of coping with a traumatic past, must equally commit to constructing a vision for the future - balancing tragedy with optimism. In this regard, self-assessment (but not self-blaming) should be the cornerstone of reconstructing their collective memory, transforming it into a proactive force for reasonable resilience and reconciliation.

Nonetheless, the model of "Remembering in Order to Never Forget" can be applied in Armenia and among Armenians in a more pragmatic and effective manner. We must collectively reevaluate our public policies and behavior at the national, group, and individual levels, always with the goal of preventing another genocide or disaster from

befalling the Armenian nation. Any divisions between Armenia, the Armenian Diaspora, and Artsakh Armenians, provoked by words or actions, should be regarded as threats to the nation and addressed accordingly. Hate speech, name-calling, bullying, and similar social ills as representations of self-blaming, unfortunately prevalent among Armenians, must be actively discouraged as they erode the unity of the nation. Any instances of corruption, especially within public institutions, should be met with severe consequences, as they directly undermine the functionality of the state security apparatus and pose a threat to the Armenian armed forces. Additionally, we must not only teach history, including the history of the Armenian Genocide, but also impart knowledge about how to prevent genocidal actions against ourselves and other nations in the future. We have all dreamed of a stronger Armenia, but dreams can only come true through individual, collective and institutional efforts.

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Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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EXPLORING SOCIAL PROTEST POTENTIAL IN MODERN ARMENIAN SOCIETY: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND SOCIAL-DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This study investigates the potential of protests in contemporary Armenian society. Considering the global rise of social protests evolving into significant social movements worldwide and the ongoing movements in Armenia, it is crucial to investigate the protest potential within modern Armenian society. The article is based on secondary data analyses gathered using representative sampling for Armenia and implementing face-to-face interviews conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia (CRRC). The article aims to understand the potential of protests and the factors influencing individuals' inclination toward protest activities. One of the article's main findings is that more than half of the respondents show a propensity for engaging in protest actions. Additionally, several key variables emerge as significant factors influencing this inclination. Sex, education, and marital status are critical factors influencing individuals' decisions to participate in anti-government protests. Furthermore, place of residence appears to be a determinant, with urban dwellers exhibiting a greater predisposition toward participation in anti-government protests compared to their rural counterparts. There are several reasons why rural inhabitants tend to participate less in protests. Geographical distance, and cultural peculiarities, such as differing social values and community dynamics, may lead to less participation. Additionally, distrust toward main state institutions contributes to the perception that individuals should participate in anti-government protests. Moreover, the study demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of state unfairness and institutional disregard are more significant drivers of potential protest activity than economic conditions.

Key words: *Armenia, social protest, social movement, social conflict, secondary analysis*

Introduction

In the last two decades, the world witnessed an explosion of various mass protests that often began as responses to specific grievances within particular groups, catalyzed by various factors such as political repression, economic inequality, or social injustice. Some of these protests, emerging as typical, calm street demonstration quickly evolved into powerful movements involving violence and clashes with authorities with a broader societal upheaval. According to Carnegie's Global Protest Tracker (Carnegie's Endowment for International Peace, 2024), last year 83 countries, from China and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Iraq and North Macedonia, faced major social protests growing into

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powerful social movements. A notable example of a single protest developing into a robust social movement is the Black Lives Matter movement which started as a protest action against the killing of George Floyd, a Black man, by a police officer in Minneapolis, in 2020. The protests rapidly grew and spread across the country transforming into a broader movement against systemic racism, police brutality, and social injustice. In the wake of these protests, several US cities proposed changes to police funding and practices, and the movement influenced a global conversation about race and justice. Another such case emerged in Georgia. The protests were sparked by a controversial draft law on "foreign agents" in 2023. This law was perceived as a direct threat to media freedom and civil society, drawing significant protest among a wide range of Georgians. The protests began as peaceful demonstrations outside the Parliament in Tbilisi, with citizens expressing their discontent over government actions. The protests grew and turned into larger gatherings, with thousands of people participating. Demonstrators called for the government to withdraw the proposed law, still, the government defended the law, leading to clashes between protesters and police. Following sustained pressure and international condemnation, the Georgian government eventually withdrew the proposed legislation.

Theoretical studies in sociology suggest that these singular protest demonstrations can and usually do progress into powerful social movements when individuals unite around the general goal of seeking a meaningful social change, shared values, beliefs, and identity. Social movements emerge as a type of collective action that arises in response to state policies of inequality and oppression due to unsatisfied social, political, economic, and cultural demands (Horn, 2013: 19). The existence of social movements is characteristic of democratic states and is a mechanism for ensuring civil participation. For ordinary citizens, joining social movements is the most attractive mode of political and social participation, one of the reasons for which is distrust of formal institutions (Azatyan, 2022: 107). Meanwhile, protests might be defined as a short-term collective action directed to the expression of certain demands without any further development. According to Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, social protest is a form of collective action in which a group of people publicly expresses its disagreement with policies or conditions (Tilly, Tarrow, 2015).

In contemporary Armenian society, public protests and movements are relatively new social phenomena but not unique; demonstrating mainly the same characteristics as the rest of the movements all over the world, they reflect collective sentiments in the society toward state power and the social-political changes it brings.

Over the last two decades, Armenian society has experienced a variety of protests and social movements addressing issues such as human rights, environmental concerns, and urban development. Some of these protest demonstrations successfully mobilized the public. They evolved into significant social movements that achieved their goals. In contrast, others couldn't mobilize a wide range of the public, remaining isolated as single protest actions on the streets, demonstrating their grievances and dissolving after a short period. The reasons behind the failure of the establishment of the movements are different in each case. Still, the main reason for the failure of social movements often lies in their inability to address their core objectives effectively. Social movements typically arise in response to societal changes that do not meet the needs of the community which happens

because of unrealized functions of the systems, mainly state structures, leading to the emergence of social causes. Thus, the main function of social movements is the compensation function that addresses gaps in the functioning of the state structures. In other words, social movements have a compensation function that is resolving issues raised because of inadequate functioning of state structures. However, if the public does not perceive a necessity for the realization of certain functions, protests may not evolve into a full-fledged movement because they couldn't mobilize enough of the public and pressure decision-makers to see the desired change. Instead, they may remain as temporary demonstrations that quickly dissolve. The mentioned movements were sparked by various issues, including rising electricity prices, pension reforms, mismanaged environmental concerns, and the neglect of the city's cultural heritage. Consequently, the primary grievances were directed at the governmental officials, who were perceived as the main ones responsible for the existing problematic situation. The condition was worsened by the fact that the officials were mainly seen as corrupt (Andreasyan, Derlugyan, 2015). The emergence of social movements in Armenia is informed by and articulates much broader concerns around corruption, the absence of rule of law, the lack of democracy, the rise of oligarchic capitalism, and the failure of formal political elites to address the concerns of ordinary Armenian citizens (Ishkanian, 2015). So, demonstrating insufficient efforts in solving public issues state officials take on themselves the whole burden of social grievances. From this point of view this varied experience of movements in modern Armenian society points to the relevance of the study and understanding the public's attitude and readiness to participate in anti-government protest actions. For several reasons, studying anti-government protests is essential for acknowledging a society's potential to engage in collective action. Firstly, studying the participants in protests - demographics, motivations, and organizational affiliations - provides insights into who is most likely to engage in collective action. Secondly, recognizing the factors that lead to mobilization can help identify the real triggers for society. Finally, examining anti-government protests is essential for diagnosing the "health" of society and its potential to influence policy and shape the future political landscape.

This is especially important in the current political situation in Armenia, where a decline of public sentiment towards the current authorities is present. Recently, the general picture of the political processes in Armenia is the low loyalty of the Armenian society to the country's political developments and the low level of trust in the party system (Manukyan, 2023: 7). Meanwhile, a new movement called the "Sacred Movement" led by Archbishop Bagrat Srbazan is starting to gain weight in the political landscape of Armenia and demand the resignation of the prime minister to foster a safer and fairer society[1]. This conflict situation can be described as a decline of trust toward state power and state institutions and the emergence of a new movement that has already gained enough power to collapse traffic in the capital city for several days due to organized demonstrations and rallies, urges to investigate the potential of social protest in modern Armenian society because the protest actions are evolving into structured

[1] See Hetq, "The Prime Ministerial candidate should not be a member of a party or group", https://hetq.am/hy/article/166461 accessed 08.12.2024.

social movements illustrating disagreement with the state decision-makers and willingness to change the set agenda.

To sum up, this paper seeks to understand how various social, demographic, and institutional factors shape citizens' inclination towards antigovernment protest activities. To achieve this aim, the following objectives have been set:

1. To examine the relationship between institutional trust and protest potential, focusing on citizens' trust in key state institutions.
2. To analyze how socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, etc., influence individuals' approval to participate in anti-government protests.
3. To investigate the relationship between social attitudes toward one's own life and the state and the antigovernment protest potential.

The choice of variables from the Caucasus Barometer vast database was primarily driven by theoretical background and empirical insights gained from previous research. Institutional trust frequently serves as an important factor in facilitating antigovernment protest behavior. Social-demographic variables represent various social positions and interests that may impact protest participation. Meanwhile, attitudinal variables reflect perceptions that could provoke protest actions.

Methodology

The Caucasus Barometer surveys are an important source of data that examine various social, political, and economic issues in Armenia. Conducted by CRRC Armenia, the surveys provide insight into public opinion, trust, and perceptions of key societal processes. The most recent Caucasus Barometer survey was conducted between 2021 and 2022, with earlier datasets from 2015-2016 and 2019-2020 also used in this research due to the lack of available data from other sources for those years (CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2022). The study focuses on various topics, including trust, social processes, and political views, making it a critical tool for understanding public sentiment and trends in Armenia.

The rigorous survey methodology ensures that the data collected is representative and accurate. It targets the adult population (18+) of Armenia, utilizing multi-level, cluster sampling to ensure diverse coverage across different demographics. The 2021-2022 survey sample size was 1,648 people, with representation across Yerevan (the capital), other urban settlements, and rural areas. This design helps to capture a broad spectrum of views from different regions of the country.

The data collection process is conducted through face-to-face interviews, a method that helps ensure more accurate responses, especially in regions where access to digital tools or telephone-based surveys may be limited. The margin of error for the survey is ±2.4%, which is typical for large-scale national surveys and ensures the reliability of the results. The consistent methodology across surveys makes it possible to compare trends over time and track changes in public opinion and perceptions on key issues.

Overall, the Caucasus Barometer surveys serve as an essential resource for understanding the social and political landscape of Armenia, providing valuable insights into public attitudes and the dynamics that shape the country's development.

The data were analyzed using the licensed version of SPSS 21. During analysis, in some cases, some variables (age, marital status, life satisfaction) were recoded and some (approval to participate in antigovernment protest) were presented as dummy variables to simplify the analysis. Additionally, some variables were analyzed through the Caucasus Barometer online data analysis (ODA) tool, which provided further insights into the data.

Exploring the potential of social protest: demographics

Before diving into the specifics of the data, it's important to examine the demographics, as they are pivotal in this research. Among the surveyed population, 45% were male and 55% were female. The largest age group among respondents was 50 and older (41%), followed by those aged 18 - 34 years old (32%), and 35 to 49 years (27%). Regarding education, 43% had secondary or lower education, almost one-third of respondents (28%) had secondary technical education and another one-third (29%) had higher than secondary education. The majority of the respondents self-evaluated their wealth as fair (72%), with smaller numbers rating themselves as "good," (16%), "poor," (7%), very poor (3%), and "very good" (2%). See Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics

Criteria	Percentage
Gender	
Male	45
Female	55
Age	
18-34	32
35-49	27
50+	41
Education	
Secondary or lower	43
Secondary technical	28
Higher than secondary	29
Economic status	
Very poor	3
Poor	7
Fair	72
Good	16
Very good	2

The potential of anti-government protests in Armenian society

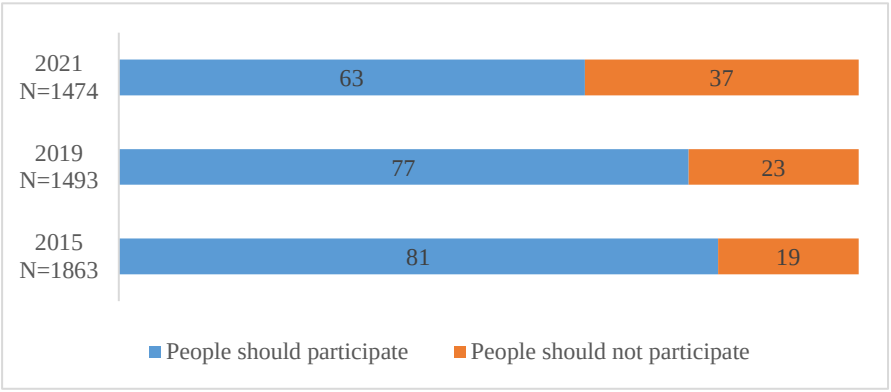
The purpose of this analysis is to understand how people in Armenia relate to participating in antigovernment demonstrations and what factors are associated with that decision, with the hypothesis testing that people tend to participate in antigovernment protest actions due to low trust toward state structures and institutions.

According to the research results, the data reflects a declining protest potential from 2015 to 2021, with a significant decrease in the percentage of individuals supporting

protests over time[2]. See Figure 1. The quantitative finding may have several explanations. Firstly, the devastating consequences of the war with Azerbaijan in 2020 resulted in psychological fatigue and trauma leading to resignation among the population, making them less likely to engage in protests. Besides, fear of instability in the country may also inhibit collective action. Secondly, the new powerful protests emerging right after Armenia's capitulation don't have any positive results. So, if people feel that protests are unlikely to lead to meaningful change, they may be less inclined to participate. Still, even in this case, more than half (63%) of respondents mention that people should join in antigovernment protest actions[3].

Figure 1

Should people participate in anti-government protests or not? %[4]



Research analysis indicates that there is a significant statistical association between the decision to participate or not in antigovernment action in 2021 and the gender of the respondents. Specifically, males are more likely to express readiness to participate in antigovernment actions than females. This phenomenon is noted by various researchers. Despite the increasing participation of women in various fields of social and political life, they remain less politically engaged than men in certain aspects (Dalton, 2008).

[2] The analysis doesn't include "don't know" and "refuse to answer" options. Also, those who disagreed with both answers were excluded by grouping them into the "Don't know" option for datasets 2021, 2019, and 2015.

[3] To be quite precise, the initial questions were formulated by The Caucasus Barometer in the following way: which of the following statements do you agree with? Statement 1: people should participate in protest actions against the government, as this shows the government that the people are in charge. Statement 2: people should not participate in protest actions against the government, as it threatens stability in our country. *Note:* The question was recoded as follows: 1. Participation in protests - Strongly agree 2. Participation in protests - Agree 3. Non-participation in protests - Agree 4. Non-participation in protests - Strongly agree 5. Agree with neither. Options 1 and 2 were grouped to "People should participate" 3 and 4 to "People should not participate", and 5 to DK. So, we follow the logic of the recoded version.

[4] The chart was created using the CRRC Caucasus Barometer ODA tool. See The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, 2021, CB regional dataset, retrieved via ODA - http://www.caucasusbarometer.org/ on 01.09.2024.

Table 2

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by gender, %, N=1474

Criteria	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Male	66	34	**X^2 P<0.05, df=1**
Female	61	39	

Similarly, there is a significant association between whether to participate or not in antigovernment actions and respondents' educational level. Namely, those respondents who have a higher level of education are more likely to participate in the protests against the government than those without it.

Table 3

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by education level, %, N=1474

	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Secondary or lower	60	40	**X^2 P<0.05, df=2**
Secondary technical	62	38	
Higher than secondary	69	31	

According to the analysis, the age of respondents weakly correlates with the decision-making to participate or not in the antigovernment protest (r=0.057, sig= 0.000). Taking into account the weakness of correlation and the crucial necessity to explore this further in future studies, still, some trends may be seen that younger respondents are more inclined to participate in antigovernment demonstrations than older respondents. This phenomenon, when young people show higher participation in political processes, is specific to Western societies. One explanation for the latter is that young people are more closely related to their peers, share the same identity, and are more willing to participate in collective action than adults or senior citizens who do not share the same level of identification with their peers (Trachtman et al., 2023: 1). This is especially relevant because modern definitions of social movements consider shared identity as a key characteristic. For example, such definitions can be seen in the works of famous sociologists Donatella Della Porte and Mario Diani. According to them, social movements involve conflict relations, where opponents are clearly defined, they operate through dense informal networks and share a particular identity (Della Porta, Diani, 2006: 20). Alberto Melucci also emphasizes the factor of identity, because the individual, being included in collective actions, "connects" to the various resources of the movement, through which at the same time he participates in the construction of both his own identity and that of the general (Melucci, 1988). This fact seems to reaffirm the importance of the identity factor in the study of social movements and public protest.

Interestingly, according to the quantitative data, there is no significant association between the decision to participate or not in the antigovernment protest actions and the economic situation of the household or respondent’s employment status. The absence of an association between economic status and readiness to participate in non-governmental

protests might be explained due to various reasons. Firstly, the broader political and social context can significantly influence the readiness to participate in anti-government protests. In times of general political instability individuals from all economic backgrounds may feel compelled to participate due to the beliefs and values they share, for example, about environmental or urban causes. Secondly, protest participation is often influenced by peer influence. Individuals might be encouraged to join protests through friends and family, irrespective of their economic status. Finally, the type of social protest matters. Some protests are targeted at specific economic reforms for certain groups, for instance, the reduction of benefits for pregnant women, as it happened in Armenia in 2014, but due to public pressure, it was resolved in favor of pregnant women. This kind of movement generally attracts individuals from certain economic statuses. However, protests for other causes, such as environmental or urban heritage protection or human rights might involve diverse participation across different economic classes, making it a less influential factor in participation. So, this quantitative finding suggests that factors beyond economic position, such as political beliefs, social networks, personal values, or the broader context of antigovernment protest movements, play a more significant role in determining protest participation.

It is also interesting to observe the distribution of this question depending on the respondents' place of residence. Analysis indicated that there is a significant association between settlement type and agreement to participate in antigovernment protests *(X2, P<0.05, df=2).* ***According to test results, respondents living in the capital are more likely to agree with the statement to protest against the government than those of other urban and rural settlements. See Figure 2.***

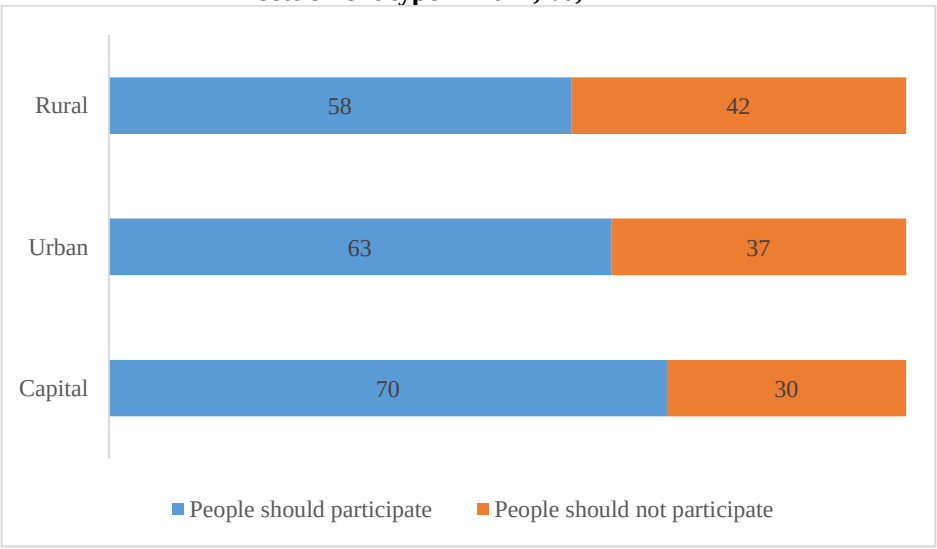
Taking common sense into account, it can be assumed that depending on the respondent's place of residence - the capital, a city, or a village - the person's attitude towards participating in antigovernment protests depends. It is interesting that if we look at the social movements that arose in Armenia in the last twenty years, then all of them arose in the capital itself, even if the zone of influence was in other regions of Armenia. One of the explanations for this phenomenon is that, first of all, the size of the population in the capital and the presence of various heterogeneous groups contain the greatest risks of dissatisfaction. Compared to other cities of the country, the capital city, being a place of accumulation of relatively advanced professionals, forms a larger mass of people with a critical mindset, from which the core of the protesters is formed and evolved to a movement. For the same reason, the capital also has more resources, thanks to which it is possible to form a social movement and maintain its existence than in regional cities or villages. Therefore, the conflicts that arise between the representatives of the state authority and the citizens in the capital have a greater chance of being manifested than, for example, in the regional cities. Besides, in rural areas, people often live farther from protest sites, and long travel times and limited transportation options can discourage individuals from raising their voices. Additionally, the physical distance may contribute to a sense of isolation from the broader social context, leading to less engagement overall.

However, an important question is why movements do not arise in other cities, which will aim not to prevent the planned changes, but to contribute to the desired social changes. One of the obstacles to the formation of a social movement in small towns is civic apathy, or, in other words, the lack of an active civic mass, as a result of which

citizens dissatisfied with a problem do not want to take any action due to mistrust, fear or simply indifference, preferring to show conformist behavior or look for alternative solutions to the problem. With a lack of active citizens and scarce resources in small towns, it is easier to suppress any civic initiative than in a large city. In small towns, relationships are personalized, the in-law-acquaintance-friend principle has a more significant impact on solving problems, because in community-type cities, individuals are much more dependent on each other than residents of large cities, where relationships between individuals are not personalized. Therefore, the mechanisms for solving social problems in small towns are different; they often involve the use of informal mechanisms. In this way, any civil uprising can be suppressed, because the uprising will be directed against an "acquaintance", which is impermissible from the point of view of community morality, or it will be solved by the same "acquaintance". Thus, in both cases, social protest and especially social movements become an ineffective solution to social problems for small community-type cities.

Figure 2

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by settlement type in 2021, %, N=1474

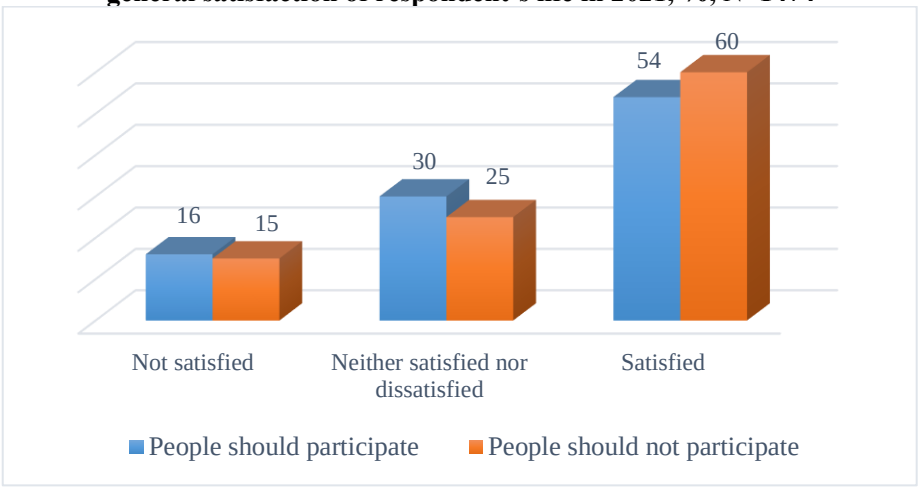


Interestingly, there is an association revealed between respondents' marital status and acceptance of participation in the anti-government protests. Namely, those respondents who are married are more likely to participate in the anti-government demonstrations than those who are single (have never been married, widowed, divorced or separated) **(X2, P<0.05, df=4).** The idea that married people might be more inclined to antigovernment protests compared to singles can be understood through several socio-psychological factors. Firstly, marriage is often associated with longer-term planning. Concerns about child care, housing policies, health insurance, safety and retirement policies may motivate married individuals to protest for policy changes that are not aligned with their long-term goals. Besides, married people tend to prioritize the quality of public services such as education and healthcare, and the overall economic climate that affects the stability of their households.

It is also interesting that the respondents' attitude towards participating in protests against the government is associated with their general dissatisfaction with life (X2, P<0.05, df=1). Namely, those respondents who are generally satisfied with their lives are less likely to participate in the antigovernment protests than dissatisfied respondents. In other words, it can be assumed that people who are generally dissatisfied with their lives associate their dissatisfaction with the state and the government, expressing it by participating in anti-government protests. This finding can also be explained within the framework of the theory. Thomas's theorem claims, "If people define a situation as real, it means that it will also be real in its consequences." In other words, if the citizens believe that the authorities are the cause of their general dissatisfaction with life, for objective or subjective reasons, they will still act based on that belief and take measures directed against the authorities.

Figure 3

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by general satisfaction of respondent's life in 2021, %, N=1474



According to data, there is a significant association between readiness to leave Armenia for a short period and their readiness to participate in anti-government protests. Those respondents who are ready to leave the country are more likely to participate in the protest actions than those who are not. This quantitative finding brings ideas about coping mechanisms. Individuals who have grievances with the government may see both protest and emigration as coping mechanisms.If they perceive that protesting while staying in the country will not lead to positive change, they may consider leaving the country as a form of silent protest which is a very common situation. When people feel that election outcomes or the changes in the policy of the state don't align with their values anymore, they may choose to leave the country as a form of silent protest without direct confrontation. As an example, the escalation of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine led many, especially young Russian families, to relocate to countries like Armenia, Georgia, and others. This emigration reflected their opposition to the Russian government's foreign policy and the war itself.

Table 4

Attitudes towards participating in anti-government protests disaggregated by readiness to leave the country for a short period

	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
No, I am not ready to leave the country for a short period	58	42	X2 P<0.05, df=2
Yes, I am ready to leave the country for a short period	65	35	

The study indicates that there is a significant association between respondents' attitude to participate in antigovernment actions and the dispositions that "Public officials don't care much what people like me think" and "People like yourself are not treated fairly by the government". These quantitative findings suggest that individuals are more likely to protest when they feel neglected or marginalized by their state. Such sentiments often drive civic engagement, as individuals seek to voice their frustrations and demand change when they perceive that their concerns are not being acknowledged by authorities.

Table 5

Public perceptions and attitudes toward anti-government protest participation, %, N=1474

Criteria	Should participate %	Should not participate %	Significance test
Public officials don't care much what people like me think	65	35	X^2 P<0.05, df=1
People like yourself are not treated fairly by the government	71	29	X^2 P<0.05, df=1

It should be noted that trust toward various state bodies is also quite low among the respondents (scale of 1-5, where 5 means "fully trust"), which, according to the hypothesis, should condition the formation of protests and contribute to creating fertile ground for social movements. Namely, those respondents who perceive the government's attitude as not fair toward people like them are twice as likely to participate in the antigovernment protests and actions as those who don't have such beliefs.

The research findings show that the highest level of trust toward institutions is shown to the Army, Ombudsmen and the religious institutions, but taking into account that Armenian society is mainly a monoethnic society, we can assume that this is trust toward the Armenian Apostolic Church. This is especially important in the context of a developing "Sacred Movement", which began its journey by employing the rhetoric of the Armenian Apostolic Church and resonating with its imagery, such as incorporating the violet color in its distinguishing symbols—archbishop and bishops traditionally wear this color as a sign of honor. In this context, it will be interesting to observe how this movement transforms. See Table 6.

Table 6

Level of trust toward state bodies, N=1474

Variables	Average	St. deviation
Army	4	1
Ombudsmen	4	1.1
Religious institution	3	1.3
Educational system	2.9	1.4
Health system	2.9	1.4
Political parties	2.9	1
NGO's	2.6	1.2
Banks	2.6	3
President	2.5	1.1
Local Government bodies	2.3	1.1
Court system	2.1	1.2
Police	2.1	1.3
Parliament	1.8	1.1
Prime Minister and ministers	1.8	1.1
Media	1.8	1

According to statistical tests, there is a significant association between low trust in the mentioned structures and people's willingness to participate in demonstrations against the government. Namely, those respondents who rated their trust as "fully distrust" are more likely to participate in the antigovernment actions. Thus, the research findings support the first hypothesis, which claims that the decision to participate in anti-government protests is indeed associated with distrust toward state institutions. In addition to the aforementioned quantitative findings, the table shows a lack of significant association between trust in health systems, banks, and local government bodies and the approval to participate in anti-government protests. This could imply that trust toward these institutions doesn't relate to protest behavior and there may be other factors. See table 7.

Table 7

Level of trust toward state institutions and approval to participate in anti-government actions

Institutions	Fully distrust	Rather distrust	Neither trust nor distrust	Rather trust	Fully trust	Significance test
Army	5	6	9	27	54	X2 P<0.05, df=4
President	48	14	14	17	7	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Political parties	28	14	18	28	11	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Police	54	11	17	12	5	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Ombudsmen	8	4	6	23	60	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Educational system	26	15	16	32	11	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Health system	29	12	17	30	13	X2 P>0.05, df=4
Court system	45	17	20	16	3	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Parliament	60	15	13	10	2	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Prime Minister and ministers	60	15	13	10	2	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Banks	32	13	18	29	9	X2 P>0.05, df=4

Media	56	17	19	8	1	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Religious institution	35	14	19	22	10	X2 P<0.05, df=4
Local government bodies	33	19	29	17	2	X2 P>0.05, df=4

The theoretical approaches confirm this quantitative finding. According to different research, social movements are one of the signs of a decline in political trust in democratic countries (Grande, Gonzatti, 2024: 2). Moreover, trust is an essential factor in shaping social movements (Weipert-Fenner, Rossi, Sika, Wolff, 2024). According to Luhmann's concept, modern societies generally need trust to reduce social complexities and enable cooperation (Luhmann, 2017). In the current situation in contemporary Armenian society, when there is a low level of trust toward state institutions, people often become more willing to participate in protests for several reasons:

- **Perceived/real ineffectiveness of formal institutions**: When members of the society believe that their concerns and needs are not being addressed through formal political institutions, they may turn to protests as a more direct way to make their voices heard.
- **Increased Frustration**: Low trust in institutions can lead to heightened frustration. When members of the society feel that the system is failing to meet their needs or is corrupted and unsafe, they may be more motivated to take action through protests as a way to express their dissatisfaction.
- **Lack of Representation**: When marginalized groups realize that their needs and opinions are not being represented by elected officials or institutions, they may see protests as a way to fill this gap.

Conclusion

Social protests are a form of political participation that seeks to bring different levels of change in society. The most influential social protests develop into long-lasting social movements that, built on a shared identity and common objectives, compel decision-makers to achieve the desired outcomes. From this point, investigating the potential for antigovernment protests provides valuable insights into the emergence and dynamics of social movements in contemporary Armenian society.

Secondary data research indicates that people in contemporary Armenian society mostly believe that it is necessary to participate in anti-government protest actions. This decision is associated with different factors such as sex, age, marital status, and place of residence.

The research indicates an association between a low level of trust toward state institutions and approval to participate in antigovernment protest actions. Thus, the main hypothesis of the paper that the low level of trust in state institutions is associated with people's desire to participate in demonstrations, is confirmed.

The quantitative findings also reveal that, while the protest potential in contemporary Armenian society shares many similarities with other societies, it also exhibits distinct characteristics that set it apart. It's interesting to note that collective perceptions about the state's inner image, such as the belief that the state does not treat ordinary people fairly or that public officials disregard the opinions of individuals like them, are more strongly linked to the desire to participate in antigovernment protests than economic conditions. This highlights the importance of the social-psychological aspect of motivation, which plays a more significant role than economic factors in Armenian modern society.

In summary, the association between low institutional trust and protest approval, coupled with the significance of perceived fairness and state responsiveness, suggests that addressing protest potential requires a comprehensive approach focused on rebuilding trust and improving state-citizen interactions. This insight challenges traditional approaches that prioritize economic conditions and suggests the need for more nuanced strategies in addressing protest potential concerns in transitional societies.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEM IN ARMENIA

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Abstract. There are many approaches in the literature that describe the integrated social services concept and analyze the processes, mechanisms and purposes of integrating social and/or other multispectral services. The models of integration are also the object of some analysis, but still there is a lack of description of the services' integration models, and a necessity in clearly defining and describing them. The article comes to fulfill this gap, and also to analyze the experience of the Republic of Armenia in integrating social services. The reform lasted almost 10 years, and still the country struggles with the difficulties in ensuring the effectiveness and accessibility of those services. Hence, the article is aimed at revealing the main problems and omissions that have occurred and still exist within the frame of the reform. For achieving the main goals proposed for the article, the following research methods have been used: documentary analysis, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The main results of the research make it obvious that Armenia passed two main phases for integrating social services. During the first phase, the country was able to ensure only the co-location of the state agencies that were responsible for the provision of social services, locating them in one building with one reception, but no more. For fulfilling the reform, the second phase of integration was launched in 2021, and during that phase the integration was performed with the usage of the principles of structural and functional changes as a model of integrating social service. Meanwhile, for making the whole system work, Armenia needs to go forward and achieve the integration of the procedures, protocols and databases of the services, as well as ensuring the change in the cultural and organizational norms of the newly established system, enhancing cooperation and partnership between the staff of integrated services. This will certify the implementation of another model of integrating social services that is a full integration model.

Key words: *integrated social services, models of integrating social services, case management, structural and functional integration*

Integration of services and models of integrating social services

The integration of social services is usually defined as a range of approaches or methods for enhancing greater coordination and effectiveness between services. It is mainly referred to joint procedures and integrated working practices and norms (Munday, 2007). Integration of social services also considers joint objective setting and decision-making, as well as shared commitment between actors (Scoppetta, Sandu, 2022).

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Various forms of service integration are outlined in the literature, depending on sectors, target groups, governance, objectives and the level of integration between two or more public services. Hence, some approaches assure that integration can be achieved by having a single accountable agency responsible for commissioning services (Hutson, 2004). Others emphasize improving cooperation and enhancing co-working processes between professionals from different sectors who work with the same client (Montero, Duijn, Zonneveld, Minkman, Nies, 2016). Within this approach the term "integration of the services" is used as a synonym for coordination, cooperation, partnership and collaboration, inter-professional or joint working (Munday, 2007).

Another approach emphasizes the role of case management and multidisciplinary teams in integrating social services. Within this approach the importance of the communication and information channels is emphasized for providing clarities about roles and responsibilities and facilitating cooperative work (Montero, Duijn, Zonneveld, Minkman, Nies, 2016).

According to Brian Munday, the services can be integrated either vertically or horizontally. Vertical integration considers the integration of the services at national, regional and local levels. Meanwhile, horizontal integration refers to "bringing together" different services at the same level, for instance, social and health services for children and their families or for the elderly in the community. The horizontal integration can also be organized by integrating wider services, for example, health and social services at the community level envisaged for all groups of population, based on the need of services they have.

The integration of services can also be implemented for the services of the same sector, for instance, social services for children and families, as well as for the services from different sectors, like health and social services, or educational and social services. The international practice shows that the integration mostly refers to health and social services, social and employment services, especially at the local level (Montero, Duijn, Zonneveld, Minkman, Nies, 2016).

The integration of social services can envisage also mixed economies integration. This means that the social services integration can be implemented by integrating public, private non-profit and commercial services.

Based on the results of the research, being conducted for analyzing the European experience in integrating social care and support, the European Social Network has identified the following categories or models of integration:

1. no specific policy or legislation on service integration,
2. policies promoting coordination or resource transfer,
3. policies promoting full structural integration,
4. combination of these three (European Social Network, "Integrated social services in Europe", 2016).

Co-location as an integration is another model that is suggested in the professional literature for fulfilling the integration of services. This model considers a single point of entry and co-location (Hutson 2004) and mainly refers to the integration of the agencies that provide social services. In many cases integration is not limited only to placing the agencies in one building or creating for them one same location. Effective integration also considers structural and functional changes, which is another model of integration of services. The structural and functional model of integration refers to bringing together

staff and resources in one single organization under a single unified structure. In this model the services that are integrated are provided by the single organization with one entry, integrated procedures, and the same administration and budgeting.

Analyzing the main theoretical approaches to social services' integration, we can assume that the integration of social services can be undertaken by:

1. Integrating agencies or organizations that are responsible for providing services, and/or
2. Integrating services provided by different organizations or entities.

While integration of agencies or organizations may refer to co-location, as well as to structural and functional changes or implementation of the structural-functional model of integration, the enhancement of cooperation or co-working envisages the integration of social services for different groups of the population.

For full integration of social services, it is necessary to implement both models of integration, ensuring integration of both agencies and organizations, as well as the integration of the services provided by them.

Hence, we can assume, that integration models can be distinguished from **completely fragmented ones,** which means keeping agencies or organizations as independent entities that maintain their own procedures, coordination and bureaucracy, but with the style or culture of co-working and partnership, to **locating services in one building** with a one-stop-services provision approach, as well as **fully integrating services systems** by integrating both the agencies, and the services they provide. The last is also defined as a stage of integration when the "whole system works as one".

For achieving full integration, the process should pass the following phases:

- integration within the same entity with one-stop services provision: all agencies that provide services we intend to integrate should be located in the same building, so the service user only needs to go to one place for support,
- structural changes or structural reorganization,
- functional changes or integration of the service planning, delivering, monitoring processes and the development of the joint procedures,
- formal mechanisms for partnership based on the cooperation and co-working norms,
- integration of the coordination and management processes, single administration and decision-making authority, with other aspects of the service planning and management being integrated as well.
- investment of the case management methodology in assessing, planning, delivering and coordinating personal social services,
- integration of the resources,
- collaborative information/consultation exchange platform for professionals: a professional platform with an emphasis on sharing knowledge and information.

Hence, based on the studies of the theoretical approaches that describe or interpret the integration of social services, we suggest that the abovementioned steps or phases are necessary for ensuring the establishment of the fully integrated system. These phases can independently be interpreted as the different models of integration as well. But they are necessary for achieving the full integration model.

The Experience of Armenia in Integrating Social Services

Since 2021, Armenia has adopted the policy of integrating social services. Before

this, those services were provided by 4 separately functioning and weakly cooperating state agencies. The Government of the RA, fixing the need to respond to societal challenges and making the assistance to vulnerable families' complex, more effective and reachable, chose the way of integrating the main social services for vulnerable families. Thereon, the central initiative had been implemented at the local level, and therefore governmental action was required at both central and local levels. After that, the reform of the development of integrated social services system in Armenia passed many stages and processes and finally in 2021 the reform entered its crucial stage which brought about the comprehensive integration of the social services in the employment and social security sectors.

Research methodology

For analyzing the experience of Armenia in developing an integrated social services system and for revealing the main problems still existing in that system, the following research methods have been applied:

1. Documentary analysis, particularly:
   - *Content analysis of the main documents related to the reform and integrated social services. Those documents were current legal regulations and strategies adopted by the RA government in the social protection sphere*[1]*,*
   - *Secondary analysis of the research and reports implemented for studying the integrated social services system in Armenia*[2].
2. Focus group discussion with the experts involved in the reform of integrating social services in Armenia. Those experts presented different organizations, starting with the main one responsible for the reform body, that is, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as non-governmental organizations that deal with or work with the integrated social service, and the organizations that have conducted research for analyzing the integration processes. Within the research 3 focus-group discussions have been organized, with more than 15 participants.
3. Participant observation method has also been implemented by the author, who was being involved as an expert in the reform of the integrated social services system in Armenia during the second phase of the reform.

The main stages of the integrated social services development in Armenia

Armenia, like other countries, faced the necessity of reforming the social services' delivery processes during the last decades. The main aim of those reforms was to address more effectively the complex social needs of different groups of population. For the main mechanism of realizing that aim has been chosen: the integration of employment, social security (pensions and social security benefits), social welfare services for families and

[1] Decision of the Government of RA (2012) *On the approval of the project on the program for introducing the integrated social services system in Armenia* N 952-Ա, 26.07.2023, Decision of the Government of RA (2015) *On multisector cooperation* N 1044, 10.09.2015 , RA Government, Integrated social services system investment trial program basic legal acts Assembly, 2013, Order of the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs (2021) *On the acceptation of the charter of the unified social services,* 37-L, 17.03.2021., RA Law (2014) *On Social Assistance*, 05.12.2014. RA Law (2016) *On Local Self Governance*, 16.12.2016.

[2] Social Economic situation in Armenia in 2023, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, January-February, 2023. Social Economic situation in Armenia in 2023, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, January-November, 2022. UNICEF (2021) *Core diagnostic of the social protection system and the impact of COVID-19 on households in Armenia*. *https://www.unicef.org/armenia/media/9301/file*

social-medical services for people with disabilities.

Our research showed that the establishment of an integrated social services system in Armenia passed two main stages.

First started in 2012. That was the time, when the Government of Armenia adopted a new strategy of integrating main state social services. While serving the inhabitants of the same territory they functioned separately, with weak links and few linkages or occasions of cooperation (Antonyan 2014). Moreover, they were located in different places, making the possibilities of provision of the joint services more difficult. As it was mentioned in the strategy of the establishment of integrated social services (RA Government 2012) this situation brought about the low effectiveness of social services, the predominance of the administrational work and activities over real social services' provision that should be directed towards the satisfaction of the needs of the beneficiaries. Besides, before the establishment of a new approach in the social services system, the social work and social case management methodologies, as well as the complex assessment of the beneficiaries' needs were not enough emphasized (Minasyan 2013). Those were the main reasons for the RA Government starting the reform of existing social services integration and establishment of the new centers for provision of the mentioned.

Within this reform, in more than 16 communities of Armenia, new territorial centers of integrated social services were established, and it was planned to have this kind of service in all communities of Armenia during the upcoming period. The new approach considered:

1. locating the main state social agencies in one center and construction of proper buildings,
2. adoption of the one-stop shop principle by creating the general, joint reception for all social services,
3. investment of the social case management methodology as the key element for coordinating the provision of social services to beneficiaries,
4. integration of the databases and informative systems of the social services (Minasyan 2013).

But the analysis soon showed that the first stage of the reform directed towards the development of the integrated social services' system was not able to achieve all main objectives defined by the Government. Particularly, during the first stage of the reform that lasted from 2012 to 2021:

- not all agencies were integrated,
- there was no real integration between 4 social agencies, and they continued to act as separately functioning organizations, without any joint procedures or shared protocols,
- the only integration referred to locating those agencies in one building, particularly in the territorial centers of integrated social services,
- though one of the important achievements of that phase of integration was the creation of joint receptions in territorial centers, the functional division between the staff of the reception remained even long after the establishment of the territorial centers,
- the practice of separate functioning remained not only in the territorial level, but also on the policy-making and social services coordination levels,

- the integration of the databases and informative systems was not committed, though the use of information exchange platforms could have an important influence on the comprehensive integration of the services.

There were many reasons and justifications for not fulfilling the whole scope of the reform, which are not in the focus of our analysis. The most important fact is that the reform has stopped in the "middle" of integration and considered only physical relocation and one entity establishment for provision of main social services to the population. It has not gone through all the steps of the integration for fulfilling the comprehensive integration which was possible by integrating not only organizations but also social services they provide.

Hence, based on analysis of the results for the first stage of social services' integration we can assume, that in the first phase the integration was linked to the co-location of the state agencies with the establishment of the one-stop service with a single location and one entry point. But not more.

The first stage of the reform has not been continued and has not made the whole system work.

This situation continued to remain until the new Government of RA made a decision to go forward with the integration of social services and complete the reform that didn't reach its final stage during the last phase. That was the time when the 2nd phase of social services integration was announced. After that on 1st April, 2021, the Government of RA adopted a new decision on the new "Charter of the Unified Social Services". Based on that decision the new system of integrated social services was established. It was renamed and called the "unified social services system". The main goal of that phase is announced to be the full integration with integrating both agencies and services provided by them.

According to the new stage of the reform, 49 territorial centers of unified social services have been formed for providing social services in an integrated manner in the whole territory of the country.

The main changes in the structure of those centers refer to the creation of the new divisions or departments. In contrast to the previously existing territorial centers, which have had 4 different divisions for providing 4 different services without real emphasis on integration, the new centers have only 2 structural divisions*: reception and the division of social work and employment services.* This fact comes to prove that the integration on the structural level has been implemented. Moreover, the reception is responsible for receiving all kinds of social protection applications. And the division of social work and employment services is responsible for providing social assistance and employment-integrated services with close cooperation between the specialists. By this, functional changes have been launched as well.

The new phase of the current reform also refers to the integration of coordination processes. For that purpose, an agency has been established. It is the head office of unified social services that is responsible for coordinating the work and activities of 49 territorial centers.

Before this stage of the reform, main state social services had been coordinated by separate agencies. After the new stage of the reform, the coordination and administration of the territorial centers is conducted by the same entity.

The new reform has also allowed for the clarification of the functions of

the ministry and the administration body of social services. Within the reform it has been clearly defined that the functions of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Armenia are as follows:

1. development of the social policy of the country,
2. development of the legal regulations and strategies,
3. creation of the standards for the social services and social protection programs, etc.

The unified social services with administration and territorial centers have their main functions in planning, providing, monitoring and evaluating the integrated social services (RA Government, 2021).

The new stage of the reform differs from the previous one also with the fact that the integration is based on social case management methodology. The social workers of the previous social assistance services are functioning as case managers, ensuring the teamwork and coordination of services' delivery to the clients by other specialists or partner organizations.

Case management is important in delivering integrated support (European Social Network, "Integrated social services in Europe", 2016). Armenia has adopted this approach as well.

Taking into account the main results of the analysis of the reform on integrating social services in Armenia, we can assume that our experience is based also on the main peculiarities of the vertical and horizontal models of integrating services, as the reform considers:

1. Integrating the decision-making, coordinating and services' delivery procedures from the "up to bottom" (decision-making body: as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, administrational body: as the head office of unified social services, and territorial centers as providers of the services),
2. Integration of main social services is envisaged for the vulnerable families at the local level,
3. Integrating the agencies, responsible for the provision of those services.

The Armenian experience of integrating social services is not touching only the mixed-economy integration model, as it refers to integrating only state or governmental services, excluding from the integrating processes non-governmental or private organizations. Still, the model considers the "integration" of those services based on the close cooperation and partnership with them, also within the case management methodology.

The problems of the new stage of the integrated social services system establishment

Though the second stage of integrating social services in Armenia has recorded very important changes and achievements, which mainly refer to the structural and functional changes and integration of coordination processes, there is still a need for many other changes to make the whole integrated system work.

The integration of social services includes mechanisms and procedures that streamline the establishment and use of information exchange platforms for ensuring effective cooperation and teamwork.

One of the main obstacles to the new stage of the integration of social services in Armenia is the absence of the shared platforms and databases. The social services that have been integrated still have the separate databases they have had before the integration and have no real and effective information-sharing mechanisms.

It might be difficult to form an effective inter-professional team without having social services planning and delivering joint or shared protocols. This is an important perspective that still should be achieved during the second phase of the integration of social service in Armenia. The lack of protocols and not fully invested integration approaches in every phase of the social services planning and delivering procedures, as well as in case management, cause the difficulties in full integration of the services.

As we can assume, *though the roles and responsibilities of the staff members of the integrated social services are clearly defined and presented in the job descriptions of the specialists, the mechanisms of their cooperation and teamwork are still not clear and need to be defined.*

Within the integrating approaches, it is emphasized that besides focusing on structural, functional, coordination and administrational arrangements, many difficulties in inter-professional teamwork can be linked to existing organizational cultures and social norms. Hence, the collaboration does not always run effectively due to a lack of knowledge about one another or a lack of mutual understanding or knowledge about one another. This is the situation that occurs in the Armenian practice of social services' integration.

Based on the mentioned we can assume that *one of the main obstacles to the further development of the integrated social services system in Armenia remains the old or "used to" practices of the staff members within the newly established unified social services system*. In some cases, specialists of previous services simply continue their traditional way of working in silos, rather than through collaboration and teamwork. These obstacles and issues still affect the process of continued development of the integrated social services system in Armenia and cause difficulties in achieving the full integration of the services.

Summary

Considering the main results of the theoretical and empirical studies, we can summarize the article with the following postulates.

1. The integration of services is a very important reform in modern societies, as it helps to address the multidimensional risks and problems in a complex and cooperative way.
2. Based on the international practice of the integration of services, we can determine 3 main models for that, which describe the integration from fragmented work to full integration. Those are:

- separate organizations with strong partnerships and co-working while providing the services that are considered to be integrated. This means that integration is focused on the processes and on the work with the clients,
- co-location of the services while maintaining the structural and functional, in some cases also coordination and budgeting independence of the services,
- full integration by integrating both the agencies, and the services they provide.

Full integration of social services also considers:

- ✓ integration of the coordination and management processes,
- ✓ integration of the service planning, delivering, monitoring processes and the development of the joint procedures
- ✓ integration of the resources and budgeting,

- ✓ investment of the case management methodology in assessing, planning, delivering and coordinating personal social services,
- ✓ multidisciplinary teams and inter-professional teamwork,
- ✓ shared toolkits and plans,
- ✓ collaborative information/consultation exchange platform for professionals: a professional platform with an emphasis on sharing knowledge and information.

Based on the results of the analysis of the practice of Armenia in establishing the integrated services system, we can assume, that during the first phase of the integration it was not the full integration of the services that was initially planned, but was limited only to the relocation of existing state agencies in the same building, with a general reception for all services.

The second phase of the reform went deeper into ensuring integration and brought to the structural, functional, coordination integration. Meanwhile, to ensure the whole system works, we need to go on with the reform and continue the establishment of the integrated social services system by:

- ✓ development of the collaborative information exchange platforms,
- ✓ development of the integrated procedures and toolkits,
- ✓ enhancement of the new organizational norms creation that values cooperation and integration more than acting based on the previous norms and with the old practices. This might be achieved via learning, leadership and innovations that make the work and activities easier to conduct within the integrated social services.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF NGO STAFF IN BANGLADESH, FOCUSING ON STRESS AND COPING

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Abstract: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played a pivotal role during the COVID-19 pandemic by being at the forefront of responding to the global upsurge in humanitarian needs. The purpose of this study is to find out the factors associated with stress among NGO staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study employed qualitative phenomenological research design and the data were collected using in-depth interviews from fifteen NGO staff. Thematic analysis technique was adopted for the data analysis. This study identified numerous stressors, including challenges of work-life balance, social isolation, and access to treatment facilities. Seven out of fifteen respondents stated that the extended hours they worked during COVID-19 had an impact on their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. The majority of the respondents felt anxious about getting access to treatment facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic due to higher treatment costs and limited treatment facilities. The respondents used a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with these stressors, including communicating and spending time with friends and family members, and engaging in fun activities such as watching movies, crafting, gardening, and reading. NGO staff's daily lives and their mental health were severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This study recommends the need to assess the stress of NGO staff so that early measures can be taken by concerned NGO agencies, such as employers, to take proactive measures to mitigate their stress during pandemics or other emergencies

Key words: *COVID-19, mental health, stress, anxiety, work-life balance, Bangladesh*

Introduction

The worldwide catastrophe brought on by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has led to short-term and long-term psychosocial and mental health implications on several segments of society (Banerjee et al., 2021; Shuvo & Mondal, 2022; Singh et al.,

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2020). Different occupational sectors have been impacted differently by the economic and productivity effects of the pandemic. While some staff played a significant role in combating the spread of COVID-19, others were compelled to cease working owing to lockdown regulations or actual job loss (Giorgi et al., 2020). COVID-19 caused a decline in the quality of life around the globe, particularly, mental health in many countries and across occupations is getting worse (Naser et al., 2020).

The prevalence of many mental and physical ailments is seen to vary significantly between men and women, suggesting that one's gender has an impact on one's general health (Verma et al., 2011). A study found poor mental health to be associated with being a woman, living without family, lower income, and unemployment (Das et al., 2021). In addition, the lockdown also affected the mental health of working women due to the stay-at-home measures (Uddin, 2021).

Furthermore, the paucity of job opportunities has left many people worried. Although some positions may allow for remote work, there is a risk that employees' mental health may suffer if they are unsure of how long they will have this choice (Osborn et al., 2022). Moreover, inadequate working space, split focus, high workload, unreliable internet connections, caring for children and the elderly, and the necessity of striking a balance between staff and home responsibilities all pose stress for employees who work from home (Giorgi et al., 2020). Apart from the fear of contracting this highly contagious virus, the fear of losing loved ones, the spread of false information about COVID-19, the lack of medical care, as well as the lack of necessary equipment to treat the patients, and lockdown-related issues are being investigated for links to mental distresses (Atanesyan, Hakobyan, Reynolds, 2021; Islam et al., 2020).

Stress is experienced as a combination of mental and physical discomfort that occurs whenever our homeostasis is disrupted (Rehman et al., 2021). It is perceived differently in different cultures. While in Eastern cultures, stress has long been associated with a lack of inner tranquility, in the West, it is associated with a loss of control (Verma et al., 2011). A person who has previously had psychiatric problems and those who have never exhibited any signs could be at a potential risk at present (Rajkumar, 2020). This implies that people who are at risk are likely to experience poor mental and physical health in the near future (Islam et al., 2020). An individual's reaction to stress is contingent upon the intensity of the stress encountered. Certain individuals excel when faced with pressure, whereas others resort to maladaptive coping strategies. Consequently, the significance of coping strategies in determining one's psychological well-being cannot be disregarded (Huang et al., 2021; Kabir et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the mental health conditions of different groups of people during this pandemic period. The majority of COVID-19 studies conducted around the world are concerned with infection control, the development of an effective vaccine and treatment, as well as the disease's spread and projections (Islam et al., 2020). Many of these studies focus on Western populations (e.g., Adams-Prassl et al., 2022), though some studies do focus on Asian and South Asian populations (Banerjee et al., 2021; Repon et al., 2021), the mental health component is being largely overlooked or disregarded in the developing world (Islam et al., 2020).

This is especially true when considering the situation in Bangladesh, where prior studies have been conducted with a focus on the mental health aspect. These include studies on healthcare workers (Repon et al., 2021), working mothers (Uddin, 2021), and the general population (Das et al., 2021), and to the best of the authors' knowledge, no research has been conducted with a particular focus on non-governmental organizations

(NGOs). While numerous studies focused on the mental health of different professions, no studies have addressed NGO workers' mental health and the strategies they have adopted to cope with the challenges during COVID-19.

NGOs played a pivotal role during the COVID-19 pandemic by being at the forefront of responding to the global upsurge in humanitarian needs (Hasnath & Baser, 2024). During these challenging times, NGOs play critical roles in multiple areas, namely humanitarian aid (such as the distribution of food and essential supplies), health, advocacy, diplomacy, and global governance. However, the world has overlooked and failed to recognize the impact of the pandemic on NGOs and professionals.

Rohingya people who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017 live in densely populated refugee camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh (Labannaya & Mondal, 2024). As "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals," Rohingya people are not allowed to go or work outside of the camps. Therefore, the entire Rohingya population in Bangladesh is dependent on local and international NGOs for food and other essentials. Several national and international NGOs (INGOs) are actively working on the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar. Against this background, this study aimed to reveal the factors associated with stress among NGO personnel working for the Rohingya response projects during COVID-19.

In this study, we define NGO staff as employees who are working in either national non-governmental organizations or international non-governmental organizations. The NGO staff has been working as contract staff for their organizations. This contractual nature of employment in NGO sectors evokes a feeling of insecurity and frustration among employees (Mikołajczak, 2021). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought stressful conditions that negatively impacted the mental health of employees. Facing these two challenges at the same time may increase the stress of NGO staff.

Since stress can hinder a staff member's performance and their service quality, it is also likely to affect their day-to-day family life. The quality of performance of NGO staff also depends on their psychological well-being. This study will fill this gap by exploring the factors that cause stress among NGO staff due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question of the study was: What factors cause stress among NGO staff during COVID-19? The study findings can be helpful to the concerned organizations and authorities in considering mental health issues from the beginning and adopting preventive measures that can help reduce the psychological morbidity of NGO staff.

Research methods and sampling approach. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore insights into the mental health experiences of the participants. The target respondents were NGO staff who are working with NGOs as well as international NGOs. We selected NGO staff as the respondents of this study (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic profile of the respondents (Source: Interview Survey, 2021)

Participant ID	Age (years)	Gender	Marital status	Number of children	Type of organization	Job location	Educational background	Position in organization
P1	26	Female	Married	0	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Mid-level
P2	33	Female	Married	2	INGO	Dhaka	Post-Graduate	Mid-level
P3	28	Female	Married	0	INGO	Cox's Bazar	Post-Graduate	Mid-level

Participant ID	Age (years)	Gender	Marital status	Number of children	Type of organization	Job location	Educational background	Position in organization
P4	26	Female	Married	0	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Mid-level
P5	26	Female	Married	0	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Mid-level
P6	24	Female	Married	0	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Junior-level
P7	28	Female	Married	0	INGO	Cox's Bazar	Post-Graduate	Mid-level
P8	50	Female	Married	1	INGO	Dhaka	Post-Graduate	Mid-level
P9	27	Female	Unmarried	0	INGO	Cox's Bazar	Higher secondary	Junior-level
P10	45	Female	Married	2	NGO	Dhaka	Post-Graduate	Senior-level
P11	56	Male	Married	2	INGO	Dhaka	Post-Graduate	Mid-level
P12	42	Male	Married	1	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Post-Graduate	Senior-level
P13	47	Male	Married	2	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Post-Graduate	Mid-level
P14	41	Male	Married	1	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Senior-level
P15	36	Male	Married	2	NGO	Cox's Bazar	Graduate	Mid-level

Using convenient sampling, first, we selected five participants who were known to us, and then we employed a snowball sampling technique to identify potential respondents even if he/she did not belong to our known network. Each of the interviewees was requested to recommend another person who would also be willing to participate in this study. This technique helped us get the optimum number of participants in a short period of time. We conducted interviews until we achieved "data saturation," and fifteen people made up the final sample for our investigation.

The agreed participants were sent a set of questions via email to allow them to prepare themselves for the interview. The interviews took place from November to December 2021 at the participant's convenience. The interviews were conducted online (e.g., Zoom call, Skype call, phone call) to avoid face-to-face meetings and to ensure social distancing. Interviews were audio/video recorded with prior consent from the respondents. Each of the interviews took around 45 to 60 minutes.

The respondents were from five national and six international NGOs. These NGOs were providing support to the Rohingya people at the time of our study. All the respondents were working in the Rohingya response projects in Dhaka (head office) and Cox's Bazar district (field project office). Regardless of their job locations, the respondents had to travel to the Rohingya response project sites.

Data Collection tool and data analysis approach. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to administer the interviews. The questionnaire includes several sections. The first section asks about respondents, age, gender, education, marital status, family size, and employment details. The second section asks about the challenges of the respondents' work-

life balance during COVID-19. The third section focuses primarily on their stress due to the pandemic. The fourth section includes their responses to coping with stress.

All participants shared their demographic and staff information voluntarily. We also asked the respondents to share how they spend their day on an hourly basis. The questionnaire was developed in English. The interviews were conducted in Bengali.

In this study, we adopted a data-driven thematic approach to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the data collection, the first author transcribed the interviews in Bengali. The first author translated the interviews into English and shared recorded interviews along with the transcripts (both Bengali and English) with the authors to check the quality and accuracy of the data. The transcription and translation were randomly checked by the third author to maintain the quality and accuracy of the data.

The authors (first and third authors) read the transcripts of each interview and initially coded the data individually. In this stage, we generated as many codes as possible using comments in the Microsoft Office Excel files. We then combined the codes into groups according to commonalities. For the categories that were coded differently by the first and third authors, we discussed the differences, and the second author helped to come to a consensus. Finally, by reviewing the codes, several subthemes and themes were developed that are aligned with the key research questions of this study. The findings of our study have been presented under key themes and sub-themes aligned with the research questions.

Ethical Considerations. The study protocol was approved by the Department of Social Relations, East-West University, Dhaka. Electronic informed consent was obtained from each of the participants. The participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and sought their consent and time for the interview. Accordingly, a consent form was sent to each of the participants. By signing the consent note, the participants confirmed that they had understood the nature and scope of this research, voluntarily agreed to take part in it and answered the questions to their satisfaction. The consent form included that the participants could withdraw from the interview anytime without providing any justification.

Research results

Respondents' profile. Fifteen NGO staff from eleven NGOs (five national NGOs and six international NGOs) were interviewed between November and December 2021. Respondents were between the ages of 24 and 56 (mean age 35.67 years) and were predominantly represented by female respondents. The majority of the respondents (n=14) were married, lived with their families (n=13) and had children (n=8) (Table 2). All of them were currently employed in the NGO sector. The majority of the respondents were working for national NGOs (n=9) and the rest of them (n=6) were in international NGOs. Around three-quarters of the respondents (n=11) were working in Cox's Bazar district. The average family size of the respondents was 3.9 (range 2-8). Only six respondents had health insurance coverage and all of them were working with INGOs (6 INGOs) at the time of the interview (Table 2).

Table 2

Respondents characteristics (Source: Survey, 2021)

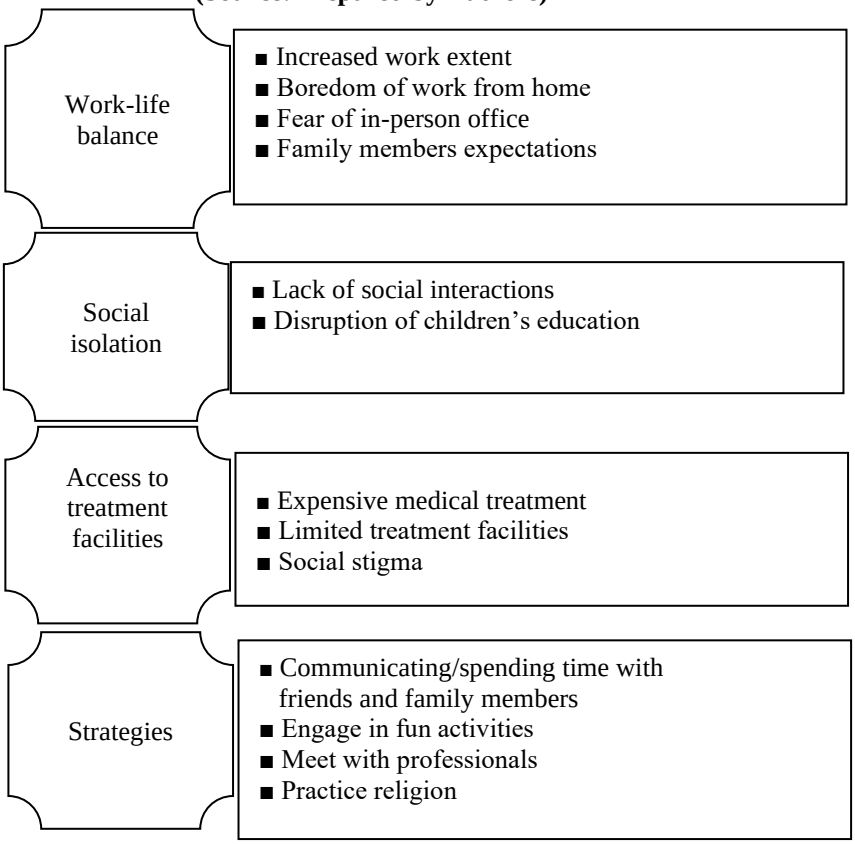
Characteristics	n (%)
Sex of the respondents	
Female	10 (66.7%)
Male	5 (33.3%)
Marital status	

Characteristics	n (%)
Married	14 (93.3%)
Unmarried	1 (6.7%)
Job location	
Dhaka	4 (26.7%)
Cox's Bazar	11 (73.3%)
Types of organization	
NGOs	9 (60.0%)
INGOs	6 (40.0%)
Educational qualification	
Graduate	14 (93.3%)
Undergraduate	1 (6.7%)
Health insurance coverage	
Yes	6 (40.0%)
No	9 (60.0%)

Factors contributing to a deterioration in mental health. To identify the factors associated with mental health, we first generated codes. Then, by reviewing the codes, several subthemes (e.g., increased work extent, boredom of work from home, lack of social interactions, engaging in fun activities, and so on) and themes (work-life balance, social isolation, access to treatment facilities, strategies) were developed that are aligned with the key research questions of this study. Figure 1 summarizes the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews. Themes, subthemes and corresponding respondents' quotes are described in this section.

Figure 1

Common reported themes about stress and the strategies to cope during COVID-19 (Source: Prepared by Authors)



Work-life balance

Increased work extent. The respondents spent around 9.5 hours a day on office work. Female respondents spent slightly less time a day on office work compared to male respondents, but the former spent more time on domestic and care-related work (Table 3). Moreover, females spent less time on recreational activities. Seven respondents mentioned that their work hours were extended during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is interesting to note that over half of female respondents (5 out of 9) mentioned that their work hours have been extended, while just one-fourth (1 out of 4) of male respondents reported the same.

Table 3

Average time spent by the respondents on daily activities (Source: Survey, 2021)

Sex of respondents	The average duration of office work (hours)		The average duration of domestic and care-related work (hours)		The average duration of recreation (hours)		The average duration of rest (hours)	
	NGOs	INGOs	NGOs	INGOs	NGOs	INGOs	NGOs	INGOs
Male (n=5)	10.0	12.0	2.5	2.0	3.2	2.0	6.2	7.0
Female (n=10)	8.6	9.6	3.4	4.4	3.2	2.2	7.2	6.2

One-third of the respondents (n=5) mentioned that they continued to 'work from home' mode due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 4). However, six respondents mentioned that they need to go to their workplace regularly, while the remaining respondents (n=4) need to visit their offices only when necessary (Table 4).

Table 4

Perception of increased workload (Source: Survey, 2021)

Working modes	Increased workload		Total
	Yes	No	
Work from the office regularly	1	5	6
Work from home	4	1	5
Work from the office sometimes	2	2	4
Total	7	8	15

Stress due to work from home: The majority of the respondents who were working from home or needed to visit the office on demand mentioned that their working load increased a lot. The respondents agreed that the transition from working in an office environment to working from home has brought with it an unprecedented demand for digital networking and meetings. The number of online meetings significantly increased because of the work-from-home context. As a result, they have limited time to complete their required tasks as per the work plan, which necessitates additional working hours. Respondents who worked from home stated that they woke up in the morning, turned on their laptops, started working, and did not stop until the day's end. One male respondent from an NGO shared his situation:

"I have to work and engage in office work for a longer time, sometimes on an interval basis. Such as online meetings in the morning, afternoon, and even at night (sometimes webinars at night). Considering these issues, my work extent increased during that time" (P-14, Male, 41 years).

When respondents were asked whether they enjoyed the work-from-home mode, the majority (4 out of 5) mentioned that even though it was enjoyable initially, it became uncomfortable for them after a few days. There was no longer any separation between time allotted for office work and one's personal time at home, as they needed to keep their computers switched on to be reachable. In addition, a home office setup requires better infrastructure (desk, chair, computer equipment), which is costly. One of the respondents mentioned:

"My work hours have been increased as an additional need of the organization, not related to or due to COVID-19" (P-11, Male, 56 years).

However, regardless of the type of organization (NGOs/INGOs), working mode (remote/in-person) and job location (Cox's Bazar/ Dhaka), this study revealed that nine respondents reported having severe anxiety, whereas the rest of the respondents (n=6) had mild anxiety.

Fear of in-person office. Those who needed to go to the office felt mental pressure and fear of being affected by COVID-19. Respondents who worked in Cox's Bazar district mentioned feeling anxious when they needed to visit field offices or beneficiaries. Visiting field offices or beneficiaries puts mental pressure on them and causes fear of being infected by COVID-19. One of the respondents who was working in Cox's Bazar district mentioned:

"I am worried because I am living alone here (Ukhia, Cox's Bazar). There is no one who will take care of me if I get sick" (P-1, Female, 26 years).

The respondents also informed us that if any of their co-workers tested COVID-19 positive, others also became worried about getting infected with COVID-19. Another respondent mentioned:

"When any colleagues in my office were diagnosed with COVID-19 positive, I was worried about my family's health. I could get infected by my colleague and spread the disease to my house" (P-5, Female, 26 years).

The repeated lockdowns and restrictions, combined with uncertainty about the situation, were very stressful. In addition, some offices were pressing to reopen without any clear safety evidence. The majority of the respondents felt worried as they had to go outside to perform their fieldwork and the possibility of spreading COVID-19 to their families. This is because the respondents were concerned about the safety of their family members. One respondent had a feeling that if something bad happened to her loved ones because of her activities outside the home, she would never forgive herself *(P-3, Female, 28 years).*

Another respondent who is working with a national NGO mentioned:

"All the members of my family have been infected with COVID-19 before, and we passed a very difficult time. Now, my fear is whether I will be infected with COVID-19 again" (P-15, Male, 36 years). He also mentioned that *"our office did not follow any health regulations related to COVID-19 restrictions, so I was more likely to be infected" (P-15, Male, 36 years).*

Family members΄ expectations: Working from home also affected family and personal life to a great extent. One of the respondents, who got married at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, mentioned that working remotely hampered her family and personal life. She further elaborated on the reason:

"I was newly married at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, so my husband and in-laws' family want me to spend time with them during the weekend and also want me to

stay at my in-laws' house during the nationwide lockdown period. As a humanitarian worker, I am supposed to be at my workstation during the lockdown period. Sometimes I have to work during the weekend or after office hours and report back to my supervisor, which was disturbing for my in-laws' family" (P-3, Female, 28 years).

Additional expectations and demands of the family members to prepare a variety of foods as they are staying at home longer. This puts pressure on females, as traditionally, they are responsible for doing household chores. One of the female respondents, who is a lactating mother, said:

"Family members' expectations have increased a lot. I have to finish my office work at night after my child has fallen asleep" (P-2, Female, 33 years).

Some of the female respondents also mentioned that the entry restriction on housemaids has put extended pressure on the female members. The reason behind the increased workload among the female respondents was additional health care activities to prevent COVID-19, particularly washing and cleaning. One of the female respondents said:*"I could not concentrate on work properly due to household work" (P-2, Female, 33 years).*

Another respondent mentioned: *"I feel that working from home resulted in additional hours of work. I could not maintain the timetable to have a break, which resulted in less work efficiency" (P-6, Female, 53 years).*

Social isolation

Lack of social interactions: Watching or hearing news of several deaths every day was very stressful. One of the respondents mentioned that she experienced a number of episodes of mental breakdown during the course of the pandemic *(P-5, Female, 26 years)*. As the COVID-19 infection rate continued to rise, she became worried about her family's well-being as well as their physical and emotional security. Moreover, she felt vulnerable in public places by seeing people wearing no masks *(P-5, Female, 26 years)*.

Disruption in children's education. More than half of the respondents (n=8) reported having children. These respondents expressed greater concerns about their children's education, the isolation of their children from their peers, and their mental health. One of the respondents explained:

"My son's education is affected by the pandemic. My children did not maintain good practices routinely, which upset me. They did not feel an urgency to wake up early as school was closed. I did not like it as they wake up late" (P-11, Male, 56 years).

Another male respondent noted: *"As mostly the classes were held online, the interaction with peers was minimized" (P-13, Male, 47 years).*

It was also very difficult from the perspective of the parents of young children who were supposed to be enrolled in school for the first time in their lives but got delayed by more than a year. One of the respondents mentioned: *"My only daughter just started her school life but had to stop" (P-12, Male, 42 years).*

Access to treatment facilities. The majority of the respondents (13 respondents out of 15) mentioned they felt anxious about getting access to medical treatment facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The notable reasons for their anxiety about treatment include the high cost of treatment, limited intensive care unit (ICU) facilities in hospitals and social stigma. The pandemic caused anxieties that led to increased stress and depression, which resulted in frequent physical weakness, as reported by one respondent (P-7, Female, 28 years).

Expensive medical treatment and limited facilities. There was a doubt whether

one would get admission to the hospital as the number of affected people was huge and surging. The respondents said they could not afford the cost required for the COVID-19 treatment, particularly in private hospitals.

Limited treatment facilities. Moreover, because there were few ICU facilities, there was ambiguity around access to such services. Consequently, one of the female respondents did not take her husband to a hospital when he tested positive for COVID-19 (P-8, Female, 50 years).

Some of them even did not visit a doctor's chamber during the pandemic unless it was absolutely necessary. One of the respondents said: *"I did not go for a checkup during my pregnancy, that's why my delivery and post-delivery complications were life-threatening" (P-2, Female, 33 years).*

Social stigma. Social stigma was identified as one of the critical issues to get access to COVID-19 treatment. Therefore, households restrained themselves from going for medical tests or treatment for fear of disclosing their infection with COVID-19. One of the respondents mentioned: *"My wife was affected twice with COVID-19. I was also afraid, thinking that we might be socially isolated if we disclosed her COVID-19 infection with our neighbors" (P-12, Male, 42 years).*

Strategies to cope with stress. The respondents used a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with the stress brought on by COVID-19. Most of the respondents adopted multiple strategies to reduce stress. One effective method for managing stress was to communicate with friends and family members (P-1, P-4, P-6, P14). One of the male respondents mentioned that *"to reduce stress, I regularly communicate with other family members and relatives and listen to music occasionally" (P-14, Male, 41 years).* Respondents also highlighted the role of spending time with their friends and family members as a means of reducing their stress (P-4, P-7, P-8, P-11, P-12). In addition, engaging in fun activities, such as watching movies, listening to music, crafting, gardening, and reading, are key techniques used to manage stress (P-1, P-5, P-9, P-10, P-14).

The findings also suggested that, regardless of their health insurance coverage, all respondents expressed concern about having access to treatment facilities. Only two respondents went to professional health care providers for advice or treatment to reduce stress during COVID-19, and both were working with the INGOs. None of the male respondents and NGO staff sought professional healthcare providers' support to manage stress.

Unexpectedly, two male respondents who did not have health insurance reported not being worried about the virus or its treatment (P-12, Male, 42 years; P-13, Male, 47 years). One of them mentioned: "By the grace of almighty Allah, I or my family members didn't need to go to the treatment center" (P-13, Male, 47 years). Some mentioned they would perform prayer to reduce stress (P-5, Female, 26 years; P-7, Female, 24 years).

Discussion

This study sought to explore the stress experienced by NGO staff in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of our study suggest that COVID-19 has posed greater challenges for NGO staff. These findings are consistent with those of other frontline professionals, such as healthcare professionals (Giorgi et al., 2020; Khatun et al., 2021; Repon et al., 2021). Our study identified numerous stressors, including challenges of work-life balance, social isolation, and access to treatment facilities.

The findings suggested that all the respondents felt stressed during the COVID-19 pandemic regardless of their age, sex, job location, type of organization, working mode,

and insurance coverage. This may be due to the fact that conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have led to more career ambiguity and less tolerance for uncertainty about career choices (Osborn et al., 2022).

Workload can significantly affect employees' mental health, with a greater workload causing more worry (Khatun et al., 2021). Our study revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, overall work hours increased among the respondents; however, it was more prominent for the female respondents. Healthcare requirements and additional expectations of family members put pressure on the female respondents as they are staying longer at home. Transitioning from working in an office environment to the 'work from home' mode was challenging and has an impact on work-life balance, especially for females. This may be because women have to perform a disproportionate number of domestic activities. These findings are consistent with others who reported that the household duties of working women compelled them to work harder for extended hours, which affected their overall well-being (Adams-Prassl et al., 2022; Khatun et al., 2021; Uddin, 2021).

Previous studies reported that the nationwide closures of educational institutes have negatively impacted school-going children (Lee, 2020) due to the disruption of their education, physical activities, and opportunities for socialization (Jiao et al., 2020). Our study revealed that the nature of worry among the parents is different, which includes their children's internet addiction, poor mental health conditions due to mobility restrictions, disruptions in education, and so on.

While technology's accessibility may provide some people with a way to escape isolation (Osborn et al., 2022), our study identified social isolation as one of the critical issues. Repeated lockdowns and restrictions, combined with pressures to open some of the offices, made a few respondents stressed. The respondents who lived without their families at workstations felt worried in case they got affected by COVID-19. Moreover, people who lived with their families worried that if they were the disease's carriers, their family would contract it as well. These findings are consistent with Das et al., (2021), who reported a higher prevalence of loneliness among the people who were living without their family members during COVID-19. This indicates that having social support is crucial to managing stress (Papandrea, 2020), which is in line with our study findings.

Moreover, the findings of our study suggest that almost all the respondents were apprehensive about getting access to treatment facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The cost of treatment, the availability of hospital facilities, and the potential threat of contamination were the major concerns of the respondents. As a result, the respondents felt afraid of bringing their family members with COVID-19 cases to health centers for treatment.

Our finding that religious practices help to reduce stress is consistent with Okafor et al., (2022). Our study also identified that only females went to professional health care providers for advice or treatment. Perhaps males had more opportunities and availability of time to talk or chat with friends and family members. On the other hand, females mostly had to perform household chores and family duties after completing office work, which contributed to poor mental health. The findings are consistent with the existing literature, including studies done in Australia (Power, 2020) and Bangladesh (Das et al., 2021; Khatun et al., 2021; Uddin, 2021).

While this study explores the mental health experiences of the NGO staff, it has some limitations. Face-to-face interviews were not possible due to strict restrictions on COVID-19. We had to trust participants' self-reported information; however, face-to-

face interviews might produce some additional information that is missing in this study. The sample size was small, and the survey was carried out purposively. There was also no scope to compare the information with the pre-COVID-19 situation. As a result, the level of anxiety and stress in our study may be overrepresented or underrepresented. Another drawback of this study was the calculation of the time budgeting of the respondents. There may be simultaneous activities that were not explored in detail in the current study. Despite these potential limitations, we have managed to contact 15 NGO staff for this study during a time of social distancing. This study investigated the immediate stress factors caused by COVID-19 on NGO staff. However, there might be long-term effects. These need to be investigated in due course to establish a relationship between the immediate and long-term effects.

Conclusion

This study identified numerous factors that contribute to the stress of NGO staff which are negatively linked to mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly affected respondents' normal lives, which has caused an increase in their workload. Higher levels of stress are found among the NGO staff regardless of the type of organization they are working in. To conclude, the findings revealed that female NGO staff workload was increased during COVID-19 by conventional gendered attitudes and societal and family norms. Development agencies may consider the findings of this study for the welfare and proper stress management of their staff during any pandemic or emergency.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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FACTORS PREDICTING PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ENLARGEMENT IN SETTLEMENTS OF ARMENIA

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Abstract: In 2022, the elections of local self-government bodies in the Republic of Armenia ended the process of community enlargement, which was started in 2011.The community enlargement process deviated several times from the initial implementation methodology, and was conceptually revised in 2018 after the velvet revolution. Currently, multiple deviations and changes from the prescribed approaches have created a situation where a number of communities have been enlarged using the pre-2018 methodology and the rest using the post-2018 methodology. As a result, there was no coincidence that complaints arose, especially among the population of small rural settlements related to the possible deterioration of the socio-economic condition of settlements, the weakening of local self-governance and the disproportionate increase of dependence on large settlements. Illegitimate communal enlargement implies an uncontrollable increase of mistrust among the population towards the policies implemented at the local level and those who implement them, which can lead to the disruption of public life. In this context, the lack of knowledge related to the public perceptions of the changes implemented in the enlarged communities, especially in the context of the discussed problems and the risks arising from them, makes the implementation of research aimed at clarifying the abovementioned issue more than relevant. In April-June 2024, a survey was conducted in the enlarged communities of RA, with the aim of identifying, in addition to a number of research problems, public perceptions of the impact of community enlargement in individual settlements and the factors affecting them. As a result of the ordinal regression analysis carried out in this context, it becomes clear that among a number of research variables, only social capital, place leadership and population dispersion index in enlarged communities meet the statistical assumptions for inclusion in the specified regression model. The odds ratios calculated in the later stages of the model construction show that in the case of social capital, place leadership and dispersion index, the transition to each next category increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of community enlargement among the population. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is also confirmed, according to which: *Each 1-level increase in social capital, place leadership and dispersion index in enlarged communities increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of community enlargement impact among residents.*

Key words: *community enlargement, social capital, place leadership, dispersion index, ordinal regression, comparative probability*

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Relevance of the research problem

In 2022, the elections of local self-government bodies in the Republic of Armenia ended the process of community enlargement. The legal start of community enlargement was perhaps given by the amendments on the administrative territorial division of RA adopted in 2011 and the concept of "Enlargement of communities and formation of inter-community associations"[1], where the new roadmap of territorial reforms was outlined. However, as it became clear later, the community enlargement process deviated several times from the initial implementation methodology, and was conceptually revised after the velvet revolution in 2018. Thus, after the enlargement, there are 71 communities in RA, of which 64 are enlarged, 5 are separate communities inhabited by different national minorities and 2 urban units (Yerevan and Gyumri). Currently, multiple deviations and changes from the outlined approaches have created a situation where a number of communities have been enlarged using the pre-2018 methodology (for example, Kapan, Odzun, Ani and Byureghavan enlarged communities) and the rest using the post-2018 methodology. At the same time, according to the "Law of the Republic of Armenia on Amendments and Changes to the Law "On Local Referendum" approved by the RA Government in 2019[2], the results of the community unification or secession vote would now have an advisory nature, which implied maintaining an insufficient level of local democracy and decision-making. As a result, complaints arose, especially among the population of small rural settlements. The main concerns were related to the possible deterioration of the socio-economic condition of settlements, the weakening of local self-governance and the disproportionate increase of dependence on large settlements. Illegitimate community enlargement implies an uncontrollable increase of mistrust among the population towards the policies implemented at the local level and those who implement them. Socio-spatial practices reproduced with similar relations turn into dysfunctional units of public life. The listed problems, which lie at the basis of the functioning mechanism of spatial reproduction in enlarged communities, can disrupt the stability of social relations, leading to social, economic and political upheavals, if their causality is not clarified and necessary steps are not taken. In the context of assessing the impact of community enlargement in RA, there are a number of studies that reveal the changes in the socio-economic (Khachatryan, 2020; Petrosyan & Khachatryan, 2021; Hovakimyan et al., 2021), and political (Khachikyan et al., 2021) life of the society. Although they provide comprehensive knowledge about the impact of community enlargement in RA, the lack of knowledge related to public perceptions of the changes implemented in enlarged communities, as well as the identification of socio-spatial practices of territorial management, especially in the context of the discussed problems and the risks arising from them, make the implementation of research aimed at clarifying the abovementioned problem even more relevant. In this context, the research, carried out in April-June 2024, the purpose of which was to find out the socio-spatial practices of territorial management in the enlarged communities of RA. The research also referred to the public perceptions regarding the impact of community enlargement in individual settlements and the identification of the factors affecting them. To address this research problem, a predictive analysis was conducted, including a number of variables such as sense of place, social capital in the context of territorial reforms, place leadership, population dispersion in enlarged communities, etc. In

[1] https://www.e-gov.am/u_files/file/decrees/arc_voroshum/11/qax44-18_1.pdf
[2] https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=137889

the preparation stage of data analysis, only place leadership, social capital and the dispersion index were selected, which met the initial conditions for ordinal regression calculation (exclusion of a large number of critical cases, 20% or less proportion of zero cells in combinations of categories of the independent variable with the dependent variable).

Based on both the discussed approaches and the results of the selection of independent variables determined by the preliminary data analysis, the following research hypothesis is proposed: *Each 1-level increase in social capital, place leadership, and dispersion index in enlarged communities increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of community enlargement impact among residents.*

Research sample

For the implementation of the research, a multidimensional random sample was built, covering all marzes of the Republic of Armenia. In the first stage, a stratified proportional sample was constructed according to the permanent population of RA marzes, then a cluster sample was formed, setting the size of each cluster to 14. Taking into account the lack of information on the variations of the investigated variables due to previous similar studies, for the calculation of the sample size, the coefficient of the design effect 1.55 was chosen, which is in the widely used range (1.5-2) for the construction of similar samples (Mashayekh-Amiri et al., 2023). Assuming a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% prevalence of the phenomenon, the sample size formed by the design effect is 600.

Descriptive data analysis and testing of key assumptions of regression

Before conducting the analysis, the variables of perceptions of the impact of community enlargement, as well as local leadership, social capital and dispersion index were rescaled for inclusion in the ordinal regression. In particular, the 5-point scale of perceptions about community enlargement was converted into a 3-point scale ("completely negative" and "rather negative" options together, and "completely positive" and "rather positive" options together) and a 4-point ordinal scale of local leadership was formed on the basis of the arithmetic mean of the sum score, where 1-leadership with insufficient skills and democracy, 2-leadership with low skills and democracy, 3-leadership with sufficient skills and democracy and 4-leadership with high skills and democracy. In the case of social capital, an ordinal scale was also formed based on the results of the arithmetic mean of the sum score (1-low, 2-medium, 3-high). Finally, in the case of the dispersion index, a binary scale was formed based on the median of the ordered distribution of index values (in this case, the median is 4, so all results not exceeding 4 were recoded as low values and those above 4 as high).

As a result of the crosstab analysis of the variables included in the regression, it becomes clear that by moving to each subsequent category of place leadership, social capital and dispersion index, the proportion of the population who believe that community enlargement has had a positive impact on them and on other residents of their settlement is rising. In particular, only 9.1% of residents indicating the presence of leadership with insufficient skills and democracy in their settlements indicated that enlargement had a positive impact, while among residents indicating the presence of leadership with high skills and democracy, this indicator is 50%. In the context of social capital, among those recording low, medium and high levels, the percentage of perception of the positive impact of community enlargement is 10.3%, 27.2% and 54.7%, respectively. Finally, in the context of the dispersion index, residents who live in enlarged communities with high population dispersion are more likely

to think that enlargement has had a positive impact (37.9%) than those who live in more concentrated enlarged communities (26.5%) (Table 1).

Table 8

The crosstab analysis of variables

Variable	Variants	Negative %	Neutral %	Positive %
Place leadership	Leadership with insufficient skills and democracy	54.5	36.4	9.1
	Leadership with low skills and democracy	33.3	50.9	15.8
	Leadership with sufficient skills and democracy	26.2	44.7	29.1
	Leadership with high skills and democracy	15.0	35.0	50.0
Social capital	Low	40.2	49.6	10.3
	Medium	29.9	42.9	27.2
	High	11.7	33.6	54.7
Dispersion index	Low	33.7	39.8	26.5
	High	14.8	47.3	37.9

Before performing the regression analysis, a number of assumptions were also checked. In particular, in order to rule out possible multicollinearity between independent variables a correlation analysis was performed using Kendall's correlation coefficient. The obtained results prove that the only significant relationship is between social capital and place leadership, which, however, records an average result (Tau b=0.56) (Table 2).

Table 9

Correlation coefficients of independent variables

Variables	Indicators	Place leadership	Social capital	Dispersion index
Place leadership	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.557	-.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	<.001	.715
	N	546	546	546
Social capital	Correlation Coefficient	.557**	1.000	.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	-	.449
	N	546	546	546
Dispersion index	Correlation Coefficient	-.014	.031	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.715	.449	-
	N	546	546	546

The hypothesis of parallel lines was also checked, according to which the coefficients describing the interactions between independent and dependent variables are the same, regardless of the thresholds (cutoff points) of individual categories of the dependent variable. The non-significant result of the calculated Chi-square test ($p<0.05$) supports the null hypothesis that there is parallelism (Table 3).

Table 10

Test of Parallel Lines

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.

Null Hypothesis	147.972			
General	137.596	10.375	6	.110

The construction method and accuracy of the regression model

Based on the ordinal scaling of the dependent variable, the method of ordinal regression analysis was used (Denham, 2016). According to the descriptive coefficients of the distribution of the dependent variable (skewness=-0.37, kurtosis=-1.271), as well as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality (Test statistic=0.211, df=546, p<0.001) the distribution of the variable is non-normal. Additionally, looking at the weights of the individual categories in the overall distribution, it becomes clear that 42.1% of the received data is centered around the "Neutral" option, while the weights of the "Negative" and "Positive" options are 27.8% and 30.0%, respectively. Due to the abovementioned distribution, the logit function was chosen for the construction of the relationship of the variables. The choice of this function is also due to the possibility of simpler interpretation of the coefficients and, consequently, the relationships of the variables.

Within the framework of the constructed regression model, the significant differences of the latter from both desired and null models were checked. The difference recorded in the case of the null model was significant and the p-value of that difference from the desired model exceeded the value of 0.05. The discussed results state the applicability of the constructed ordinal regression model and the possibility of further interpretation of the obtained data (Table 4). In parallel, the explanatory power of the model was also calculated, according to which about 19.7% of the variation of the dependent variable is predicted by the independent variables included in the model.

Table 11

Model Fitting Information & Goodness-of-Fit

Test	Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Model Fitting Information	Intercept Only	252.634	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Final	147.972	104.662	6	<.001
Goodness-of-Fit	Pearson	N/A	29.863	36	.755
	Deviance	N/A	34.099	36	.559

Discussion of the main results of the ordinal regression model

The log-odds of the thresholds of the dependent variable, which were calculated by comparison with the highest threshold, were distinguished by the ordinal regression analysis. Specifically, the log-odds of being in the "Negative" category is -2.993, while the log-odds of being in the "Negative" and "Neutral" categories is -0.902. Generalizing, the following ordinal regression model is constructed.

$$logitP\big((Y \le j)\big) = B_j + \beta_{CL} * X_{CL} + \beta_{CM} * X_{CM} + \beta_{L1} * X_{L1} + \beta_{L2} * X_{L2} + \beta_{L3} * X_{L3} + \beta_{DL} * X_{DL}$$

where B_j is threshold's, and are β_{CL}, β_{CM}, β_{L1}, β_{L2}, β_{L3}, β_{DL} logarithmic coefficients of individual categories of social capital, place leadership, and dispersion index, respectively. It is noteworthy that the coefficients assigned to all categories of both dependent and independent variables are significant (p<0.05), which allows to accept the results of further calculations.

As a result of the exponential transformation of the abovementioned log-odds, the odds ratios are formed. Since the application of the calculated coefficients is in the context of

comparison with the categories of each independent variable and a specific fixed category (for each variable, it is their highest possible level), the exponential transformation of the log-odds gives the odds ratios with respect to the fixed category. So, moving on to the independent variables, let's look at social capital. As a result of the analysis, it becomes clear that being at each subsequent level of social capital increases the probability of recording positive perceptions about the impact of community enlargement. Since the odds ratios of the variables are less than 1, the $1 - EXP(E)$ ratio is most useful for describing comparisons with fixed categories. For example, in the case of belonging to the "Low" category of social capital, the probability of recording positive perceptions about the impact of community enlargement is 0.66 times lower, compared to the "High" category. For those in the "Medium" social capital category, the odds are 0.59 times slower. A similar picture exists also in the context of place leadership. In particular, among the respondents who indicated that leadership in their settlements is implemented with insufficient skills and democracy, the probability of recording positive perceptions of the impact of enlargement is 0.79 times lower than among those respondents who indicated the presence of leadership with high skills and democracy. However, in the category of "Leadership with sufficient skills and democracy", the abovementioned ratio drops sharply to 0.41. Finally, if we look at perceptions of the positive impact of enlargement, according to population dispersion in the enlarged communities, then it becomes clear that the probability of recording positive perceptions about enlargement among the population of settlements of enlarged communities with a low dispersion index is 0.56 times lower than among the population of settlements of enlarged communities with a high dispersion index (Table 5).

Table 12

Parameter Estimates

Type	Variables	Estimate	Exp (E)	1-EXP (E)	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.
Threshold	[Dependent = Negative]	-2.993	-	-	.264	128.583	1	<.001
	[Dependent = Neutral]	-.902	-	-	.230	15.383	1	<.001
Location	[Capital=Low]	-1.079	0.34	0.66	.314	11.834	1	<.001
	[Capital =Medium]	-.883	0.41	0.59	.243	13.168	1	<.001
	[Capital =High]	0	-	-	-	-	0	-
	[Dispersion= Low]	-.828	0.44	0.56	.183	20.534	1	<.001
	[Dispersion= High]	0	-	-	-	-	0	-
	[Leadership= 1]	-1.547	0.21	0.79	.339	20.830	1	<.001
	[Leadership =2]	-.953	0.39	0.61	.283	11.331	1	<.001
	[Leadership =3]	-.531	0.59	0.41	.236	5.061	1	.024
	[Leadership =4]	0	-	-	-	-	0	-

As a result of the performed analysis, it becomes clear that although the odds ratios of the categories of independent variables are smaller than 1, meaning that belonging to a given category reduces the likelihood of reporting positive perceptions of the impact of enlargement, however, paying attention to the dynamics of coefficients of individual variables, we can claim that the belonging of residents to each subsequent level of social capital, place leadership and dispersion index increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of the impact of community enlargement among these residents.

Generalizing the obtained results, we conclude that the proposed hypothesis is

confirmed: *Each 1-level increase in social capital, place leadership and dispersion index in enlarged communities increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of community enlargement impact among residents.*

Conclusion and recommendations

As a result of the conducted ordinal regression analysis, it became clear that social capital, perceptions of place leadership and the index of population dispersion in enlarged communities predetermine the dynamics of perceptions regarding the impact of community enlargement among the population of the enlarged communities of RA. Accepting the accuracy of the built model, the level of explanation of the variation of the dependent variable, as well as considering the odds ratios and their high significance, we can confirm the proposed hypothesis that: *Each 1-level increase in social capital, place leadership and dispersion index in enlarged communities increases the probability of recording positive perceptions of community enlargement impact among residents.*

For the further improvement of the model, we suggest carrying out similar studies, where the influence of other independent variables on the results, explanatory potential and accuracy of the model will be checked.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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Pazos Alonso, C. (2022). *Francisca Wood and Nineteenth-Century Periodical Culture: Pressing for Change.* Cambridge: Legenda (Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Cultures, 35), 250 pp. ISBN 978–1–78188–799–8.

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Most probably, Francisca de Assis Martins Wood is not the first feminist we have in mind. However, her Anglo-Portuguese trajectory deserves to be more integrated in future manuals of women's history. Cláudia Pazos Alonso offers us the first monograph on her. Previously, she had written book chapters and refereed articles in the *Journal of Romance Studies* and *Angelaki. Journal of the Theoretical Humanities,* so it illustrates that the professor has integrated commentaries and other perspectives for her synthesis work. The structure chosen for the chapters is chronological: classical but andragogic. We may be disappointed by the fact that the images are not numerous and that no one represents Francisca, her texts, the archives of the National Library of Portugal where they are protected or the recent symposia in which Cláudia dealt with this memorable figure.

Another fly in the ointment: we find no mention of Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, who theorized the concept of cultural transfers. It would be very relevant for this Portuguese woman who married an Englishman and after a long stay in England returned to Portugal to import ideas from the English-speaking world. The book is valuable not only for scholars of social history, but also of literature, translatology and media, as Francisca was a journalist, her main occupation, and a close novelist and translator. As a journalist, she directed *A Voz Femenina* (literally, 'The Female Voice') which was later called *O Progresso* (literally, 'Progress'). She succeeded in disseminating in Portugal the evolution of women's civil and political rights abroad. In her newspapers, she also published letters from the Francophonie in this field, for example from Anne-Marie Caron. She criticized the Church for confining women to a narrow vision. A true forerunner, she supported the protection of animals and paved the way for the start of the Portuguese Society for the Protection of Animals.

Her impact as a novelist is more discreet but tells *Maria Severn*, dedicated to her nephew Clarimundo Martins, a Freemason who leaves the doubt of his membership in Freemasonry. As our scholar explains, it is not appropriate to sharply separate journalism from creative writing, since both were more connected as today: for example, *Maria Severn* appeared first in *A Voz femenina* and its theme, the abolition of the death penalty in the case of civil offenses was in both. Perhaps, the creation of the Virgínia Sofia Quaresma Award at the University of Aveiro in 2021 distills an interest in the history of Portuguese female journalists. However, it is strange that Virgínia does not appear in the monograph while other daughters of Francisca's spirit are evoked such as Josephina Neuville, Carolina Michaëlis or Adelaide Cabete.

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