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Text as Object and Ephemeral Art

Logotherapy and Meaning of Life: A Review

Tea Heritage Terminology Translation

Lenilde Freitas: Feminine and Fleeting Moment

Discovering Thoughts, Inventing Future

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Preface

The Global Journal of Human-Social Science (GJHSS) is pleased to present this issue, bringing together a curated collection of high-quality research papers that explore diverse dimensions of human society, culture, and the social world.

This issue features research spanning topics including arts & humanities, sociology, history, anthropology, economics, political science, linguistics, education, and interdisciplinary social inquiry. Each paper has undergone a rigorous double-blind peer-review process to ensure scholarly rigor and originality.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors for entrusting their research with us, to the reviewers for their thorough and constructive evaluations, and to our readers for their continued engagement with the academic discourse.

We hope that the research presented herein inspires further inquiry and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge in the human and social sciences.

The Chief Editor
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Table of Contents

Title	Author	Pages
Copyright		i
Editorial Board		iii
Preface		vii
Text as an Expressive Medium in Contemporary Art. Creative Strategies	Orlova et al.	1-4
Existential Approaches to Existential Questions: An Integrative Review of Contemporary Literature in Psychology	Alencar	5-16
Translating Tea-related Intangible Cultural Heritage Terminology for Heritage Communication: A Case Study of Tea Cultural Landscapes in Tea: Questions and Answers	Wang et al.	17-22
Contemplacao em Lenilde Freitas: O Feminino e o Flagrante Momentâneo em Breve Abordagem	Japiassu	23-27
Interrogating Modernity: Cultural Relativism and the Idea of Civilisation in Satyajit Ray's Agantuk	Musfiq et al.	29-34
Hiba, Lifetime Usufruct and the Question of Shariah Compliance: A Quranic and Legal Analysis of Bangladesh's Transfer of Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026	Siddique	35-41
Breaking the Culture of Silence: Clerical Abuse and Safeguarding in Ghana, A Practical-Theological Reflection in Global Context	Anane Adjei	43-48
Subject Index		49
Author Guidelines		51

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Text as an Expressive Medium in Contemporary Art. Creative Strategies

Online First

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is text as an expressive medium within contemporary visual art. The article aims to identify the key creative strategies of contemporary artists working with text, viewed through the lens of the creative gesture. The topic is timely because, for much of the 20th century, text did not serve as an independent form of artistic expression; initially, its primary function was to articulate an art movement's rationale through manifestos. Today, however, we observe a shift toward using text as an indispensable element of contemporary visual art. Furthermore, renewed interest in zine culture and other forms of editioned publications suggests that this field requires analysis and systematisation. The methodology relies on formal description and comparative analysis, given that the material under study belongs to the contemporary era. The article identifies two primary strategies artists use in this field: text as object and text as an ephemeral element. Within these strategies, the author highlights the work of artists currently developing their practice. This approach makes it possible to trace the evolving relevance of text in contemporary visual art. The study distinguishes between more "classical" works—where artists interpret the alphabet or the image of the book—and cutting-edge forms such as "art & science," where text may be interpreted as a product of machine-generated creativity. This framework allows for the application of philosophical concepts such as "atmosphere" and "auto-curation"—terms that gained prominence in the 1990s and 2010s, respectively—to the analysis.

atmosphere | auto-curation | book art | contemporary art | ephemerality | liminality | Object

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Text as an Expressive Medium in Contemporary Art. Creative Strategies

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is text as an expressive medium within contemporary visual art. The article aims to identify the key creative strategies of contemporary artists working with text, viewed through the lens of the creative gesture. The topic is timely because, for much of the 20th century, text did not serve as an independent form of artistic expression; initially, its primary function was to articulate an art movement's rationale through manifestos. Today, however, we observe a shift toward using text as an indispensable element of contemporary visual art. Furthermore, renewed interest in zine culture and other forms of editioned publications suggests that this field requires analysis and systematisation. The methodology relies on formal description and comparative analysis, given that the material under study belongs to the contemporary era. The article identifies two primary strategies artists use in this field: text as object and text as an ephemeral element. Within these strategies, the author highlights the work of artists currently developing their practice. This approach makes it possible to trace the evolving relevance of text in contemporary visual art. The study distinguishes between more "classical" works – where artists interpret the alphabet or the image of the book-and cutting-edge forms such as "art & science," where text may be interpreted as a product of machine-generated creativity. This framework allows for the application of philosophical concepts such as "atmosphere" and "auto-curation" terms that gained prominence in the 1990s and 2010s, respectively to the analysis.

Keywords: *atmosphere, auto-curation, book art, contemporary art, ephemerality, liminality, Object, Performance, text, video art*

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1. Introduction

Uniting text and image, alongside the creation of new languages, was one of the Russian 'savant-garde's main strategies. G. Klutsis, E. Lissitzky, V. Mayakovsky and others got an amazing amount of freedom because of that. It was not only about creating posters and producing applied art, but also about the freedom to experiment in every creative area, which led to the establishment of the Russian Futurist Book phenomenon.

This movement became the perfect opposition to the bibliophile editions cherished by artists like A. Benois, who called the Futurist books "joker albums". However, the global impact of that short creative outburst is still valued and continues to influence many artists. Avant-garde artists literally revolutionized the image of a book by using new materials, edition numbers, and design approaches. This became a creative boost for future artists who use text as an expressive medium.

Conceptual art, which originated in the 1960s, became the next stage in this development. It fully legitimized text as an independent art medium. M. Duchamp developed the basic ideas of Conceptual art at the beginning of the 20th century. Sh. Shukurov's paper "Marcel Duchamp: The Tactile Depth" [1].

Within that practice in the 2nd half of the 20th century. artists like J. Kosuth not only transformed the familiar language of an exhibition tag by adding blocks of text to installations like "One and Three Chairs" (1965), but also offered a theoretical approach. Here we can highlight Kosuth's text "Art After Philosophy" [2], where the artist investigates that the "old" Hegelian methods do not apply to artworks produced in the 20th cen., and that the conceptual element became the main element in such works. He notes that the function of contemporary art changed after Duchamp introduced ready-made objects to the creative community. In Kosuth's view, that is one of the pivotal moments when philosophy ends and art begins in terms of an idea coming first before the realization, hence leading to the creation of conceptual art, where text plays a vital role in visual representation. Another important moment is S. LeWitt's thesis that "Perception is subjective..." [3], which clarifies the nature of many text-oriented pieces of visual art of the 2nd half of the 20th century. These theoretical works helped us identify two main strategies used by contemporary artists: object-oriented and ephemeral. By object-oriented strategy, we mean pieces in which artists work with physical media. By ephemeral, we mean works where artists work with digital code and time-based media.

Although we outline these strategies as separate, they often overlap. Artists who use text as a creative gesture usually present it as an open form of art, which allows viewers to interpret it freely. That is why the ephemeral strategy may include object elements, and object works can include ephemera. Both methods will be reviewed below.

2. Text as an object

This strategy means an artist works with categories like sculpturness/objecthood. By this, we mean that artists use sculptural elements or book elements in their works.

By the term object, we mean a product of contemporary visual art from the area of plastic arts that cannot be categorised as classical

sculpture. However, the term sculpture was once used as an umbrella term for all plastic arts. R. Krauss was one of the first theorists who spotlighted this flaw in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" [4]. There, she notes that sculpture cannot be used as a unified term, so new creative practices need new definitions.

The term object, on its own, developed from ready-made, which M. Duchamp coined at the beginning of the 20th century. Back then, the artist defunctionalized a factory-made urinal by giving it the qualities of an art piece (exhibiting it in a gallery space). In this way, he showed how a common utility item, signed by an artist and placed on a podium in a gallery, can become an art piece. Yet because the artist never crafted the work himself, the ready-made term seemed the most accurate definition. This radical move at the time allowed a revision of practices in plastic art, as well as a broader understanding of what can be defined as a "piece of art" by referring to an item that belongs to a certain category of artefacts [5, c. 244]. This object becomes an independent creative form that continues the logical progression Duchamp started.

"Lexicon of Non-Classics" dictionary gives its own definition to the term object. It states that "O. are usually separate, spacious items of art activity, static compositions and mixed media constructions which include objects <...> and elements of utility use" [6, c. 325]. Of course, we do not need to forget the term art object, which remains an umbrella term used to define pieces of contemporary art in general.

Cans produced by D. A. Prigov, which are covered by typewriter-made text. We can also look at Prigov's "Pit", in which the artist cuts a square hole in the book's paper section as if it were a pit, and in the text itself, he goes over what this word stands for in every language. In this case, we can refer to the "aesthetic neutral" term, which is typical of representatives of conceptual art like L. Weiner. However, we can highlight the lyrical part, typical of the Moscow conceptual art school, that Prigov adds to this piece. He unites text and image as his main expressive feature in this piece, and because of that, the text itself becomes objectified. That method demonstrates that the object part is the main one, when the text is more of an element, which switches the common hierarchical arrangement of an illustrated edition: text is the main, illustration is secondary.

But producing objects that look like a book is not only about cutting through the block of text or presenting it as an independent work of art. For artist Elena Pavlova (Potanina), it is typical to transform the book codex into a sculptural composition. Although the book as an object does not leave the artist's focus, it becomes a sort of soil, a base where the characters appear.

The characters she creates have no portrait features; just vague images that remind us of sketch drawings that may fill a classical illustrated edition. In this case, the so-called illustration sits in the foreground, focusing the viewer's attention on a pivotal moment in the chosen novel. This approach is similar to one Prigov used, but with its own nuances. Pavlova is interested in classical literature, so her method is quite illustrative. For her, the text is more of a starting point for a creative assumption, because the plot is well known to the spectators and does not need extra comment. This points out that the artist uses a tradition in which text is the main source for the image, which sublimates the main scenes.

Polina Nochka's piece «Restoring Perspectives» (2024) works with archival-type language. She offers the viewer a format of "attentive study" of a catalog because word and object coexist inseparably in her work. Although the artist presents the audience with a complete plastic art composition in a chamber format, it refers to the analytical aesthetics of H. Haacke, as presented in his piece "Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971" (1971). Similar to Haacke, she studies a phenomenon connected with real-life events that matter for her, yet in this case we do not see a series of prints that can be hung in a gallery space - she produces an object that can be interacted with and can be exhibited only as a separate item, where images are accompanied by catalog cards.

Objecthood in text-oriented works can be demonstrated differently. Katerina Seryoznaya's series "ABC" (2019) represents a typical visual strategy for this artist. She studies the theme of national identity using glass as a medium. Seryoznaya demonstrates an image familiar to the audience from their childhood: a set of blocks with letters on them, where each letter stands for a word that starts with it (img. 1). In that object series, we can see a citation of Rimma and Valery Gerlovins, the classics of the Russian contemporary underground art scene and a bit of Prigov's oeuvre. However, she adds something new – the fragility of the material she uses. As a result, the creative environment the artist creates is like a house of cards, where any wrong move can demolish the whole structure.



Figure 1. Katerina Seryoznaya "ABC", 2019. Image used with permission of the artist

Seryoznaya also mentions that it is not only the Russian cultural code, but the glitch aesthetic that interests her as well, and she applies it a lot in "ABC." Blocks like "Ya" - I in Russian, "O" - mistake (oshibka) (img. 2), "M" - march demonstrate it. It is quite notable that she uses only the words that are strongly associated with linguistic peculiarities and cultural paradigms of Russia: nonentity (shish), yearning (toska), counting on a miracle (avos'), etc.



Figure 2. Katerina Seryoznaya "ABC", 2019. Image used with permission of the artist

From this, we can conclude that strategy in text-oriented artworks often involves using works that resemble codexes and archival materials. Furthermore, artists appeal to objects associated with

learning the alphabet in a game form. Because of these approaches, the synthesis of the terms "text" and "object" becomes more visible and precise in creative gestures.

3. Text as an ephemera

The other strategy observed in this paper focuses on artists who work with new media, where text is only a provisional physical component. Such pieces can use certain text transmitters and be more technological. From an analytical point of view, these artworks require not only formal methods but also categories like atmosphere and auto-curation, coined by contemporary philosophy of art.

The term "atmosphere" was offered by the German philosopher G. Böhme [7]. He pointed out that it was necessary because the term "aura", created by W. Benjamin,[8] can only be used in reference to non-reproducible and non-copyable pieces of art. Yet, atmosphere actually deals with works that were produced with the use of new media; hence, it is correct.

The paper by B. Chattopadhyay [9] uses the term auto-curation. In his opinion, auto-curation allows the viewer to build the missing elements of a demonstrated piece. Auto-curation is a separate term from A. Badiou's inaesthetics [10], which holds that an artwork generates its own ideas and senses. In this case, we refer to an open dialogue, inviting the viewer to create a chain of senses in an open art form.

In the video piece by Alexander Tarasenko from his ongoing series "It is Stronger Than You" (2019/2025) (img. 3), text is an ephemeral element. The 20-minute work contains a powerful message about OCD. In this case, we can point out that the artist uses an approach that shapes personalized perception in the future. D. O. Martinova and A. A. Ageev's opinion on that states that it "unpacks the horrible in the existential case as a destroyed border between the viewer and something terrifying" [11, c. 30]. The text here is the baseline of the liminal process that Tarasenko studies.



Figure 3. Alexander Tarasenko "It Is Stronger Than You", 2019/2025. Image used with permission of the artist

The artist remains in the sequence, repeatedly writing text on a chalkboard and erasing it. This absurdist tactic also appears in certain video art pieces, e.g., Bruce Nauman's early works. However, unlike his predecessor, Tarasenko fills his project with dramaturgy that illustrates fixation on an action from a moral-suffering perspective. The text here not only serves a processual function but also illustrates a psychological disorder the artist researched.

The ephemera strategy here appears in two moments: in Tarasenko's piece, the text has no fixed form, so the artwork is constantly transforming. The other moment is the format itself: the video file can be edited and transformed as well, if needed for an exhibition, which also highlights a hypothetical materiality.

The atmosphere concept that the piece creates is filled with anxiety that the artist transfers to the viewers. However, the video file itself is a more stable art form, which the artist clearly understands, so in 2025 he did a performance in Glasgow as part of the series in order to give more volume to the piece. This way he managed to combine Benjamin's aura and Böhme's atmosphere in an exhibition space where both works were demonstrated at the same time (img. 4).



Figure 4. A fragment of a video documentation of the public performance by Alexander Tarasenko on 15 November 2025 at 25PES (Glasgow). Image used with the permission of the artist

Dmitry Kavarga's work "Absorbing the Concepts. Selfreflecting Mystificator of Sokal" (2017) can also be interpreted as book art, even though in the description the artist does not manifest it. The appearance of his art piece presents a complex construction with many tubes, which spill some paint on a canvas once in a while. The annotation to the work at the exhibition "Daemons in the Machines" (Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2018) offers to "'observe' a sheet of text". The artist developed software that can analyze academic concepts. The more interesting and richer with concepts a text is, the more colorful the reaction it gets, spitting paint out of the tubes. In this case, we see a futuristic model in which the artist delegates the analysis of a human-created text to the AI by making it the reader and consumer of knowledge. That is why we can talk about the reverse usage of the A. Badiou's inaesthetic model here. This is because the aesthetic neutrality connected with the appliance in the work, with a non-human agent as a mediator, functions to generate text-based expression. Hence, we see an inversion of a book, a possible scenario of a machine uprising, which has been described not once in sci-fi literature and cinema.

The physical part of the piece is necessary to illustrate the artist's idea. It is an obvious crossover with the object strategy described above. However, text is the basis of the technological piece and is absent in its final form, as is familiar.

Another example of collaboration between text and technology is Medina Mammakhmedova's "Emotional Processor" (2023). Here, the artist offers the viewer/reader the choice to choose an emotion and ask a question about it. In this way, the artist creates an illusion of empathy within technological art. This strategy is typical of artists working in the field of robotic art. The artist packages a familiar emotional experience into a machine to create a unique experience, adding a section where the viewer can write a commentary. This interactive element allows viewers to visualize the auto-curation construct: the uncontrollable perception and interpretation of a piece of art. By writing their thoughts on the paper, the viewer becomes an object and a subject at the same time. Unlike her predecessor, Sol LeWitt, Mammakhmedova does not offer certificates signed by her as a creator of the idea. Every printed piece is to be taken by the viewer as a memento or destroyed later. This way, she highlights that the ideas produced during the 1960s by Conceptual art representatives, where every piece, even the one where the audieces are involed, needs to be signed by an artist, can become the viewers' personal item when the new media is involved.

As another example, we chose a work by the art group Where Dogs Run? "The Day After Tomorrow (2017-2018). This installation offers a look at a literature piece in a technological context.

The supporting text at the "Daemons in the Machines" exhibition (Moscow Museum of Modern Art, 2018) states: "Dante's 'The Divine Comedy' is transformed into an electronic scheme, which consists of three parts: hell, in-between and heaven. This is a container of the lost in the world of knowledge written in a forgotten language. Cargo internet people cannot read it, but can observe it. The verse still supplies the cargo internet.

From that, we see a context that forms this way: a request is sent before the apocalypse, and the search material is the poem's text. An answer in the form of a screenshot was printed on a slide. The result was a collection of 100 screenshots as if it were a full capacity of cargo internet in a post-apocalyptic world.

The artists offer the viewer a "product" of cold media (M. McLuhan's term), and a literature piece became its basis. The exterior of the artwork is presented as a finished item, even though we can trace the elements of an open art form within it.

Firstly, the microschemes produced by the artists already demonstrate an auto-curation context to the viewer because they create an atmosphere that can be compared with the atmosphere of hell described by Dante, according to the authors of the paper. Secondly, the internet, as a space of personalised search, can also be characterised as an open form.

From this part, we can conclude that the image of text present in new media gains more "volume" and complexity, because it allows work with more categories and concepts. It is also important to mention that the complex nature of installation artworks sometimes makes viewers part of a piece, with which they interact, and thus gain the qualities of both object and subject at the same time.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to note that text in contemporary art had an applied function at first. Today's situation shows that it can take various forms. In this way, the classical formula "text and image" is no longer a fixed model in a general overview of contemporary creative practices. This has been analysed through two main strategic blocks, where text can be a part of an object environment and an ephemera as well. Although the strategies are divided, there are cases where they interfere with each other. This is especially clear in technological art. Text there can become a formality or a product of generative software, hence a piece produced by a non-human agent, in which artists add object elements.

This variety of strategic approaches demonstrates that by the middle of the 21st century. we can see a tendency toward a total synthesis of art, presented in text-oriented artworks. Using the historical background, we can highlight that these processes started to form at the beginning of the 20th century. They have since become fully developed creative strategies.

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Existential Approaches to Existential Questions: An Integrative Review of Contemporary Literature in Psychology

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Abstract

This study analyses articles published in the field of psychology between 2000 and 2023 on existential void and the meaning of life, focusing on the theoretical framework of logotherapy and its epistemological and practical contributions to the science of the psyche. Building on previous systematic reviews, which mapped the psychological literature on existential void and the meaning of life, with a broad focus and quantitative and qualitative analyses, this article conducts an integrative qualitative review, deepening our understanding of these constructs. A total of 34 qualitative and mixed-methods articles were selected from the following databases: CAPES portal, APA PsycArticles, SCOPUS, SCIELO and PEPSIC, with particular emphasis on 20 studies applying logotherapy. The search terms used related to existential void and the meaning of life, with inclusion criteria centring on topics related to logotherapy. The analysis categorised the studies according to their theoretical core, conceptual structure, variables associated with existential void and the meaning of life, and resources for addressing existential issues. The results highlight the importance of this approach in psychology as both a science and a profession, due to its trans-theoretical nature, which systematises theoretical foundations, such as the triad of values, and therapeutic resources, such as bibliotherapy and Socratic dialogue. This research contributes to epistemological and practical advancement and to the treatment of the existential dimensions of the individual in psychology, delving deeper into the constructs of existential void and the meaning of life, within a landscape dominated by empirical research.

existential void | Logotherapy | meaning of life

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Existential Approaches to Existential Questions: An Integrative Review of Contemporary Literature in Psychology

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Abstract

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Keywords: *existential void, Logotherapy, meaning of life*

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1. Introduction

Existential questions are themes intrinsic to human nature. Throughout human history, people have questioned constantly the meaning of life. Anthropological evidence supports this idea of giving meaning to life, which is evident in the rock art and funeral rites of ancient civilizations, as markers of existential rather than necessarily utilitarian actions. Seeking the meaning of life appears to be a fundamental task experienced within this process.

But how might one go about seeking this meaning? From a religious perspective, by seeking mythical explanations or transcendental revelations that could be followed as unquestionable oracles? Or, perhaps, would it be better to be guided by the thread of reason, through which one could conduct a thorough analysis of arguments for or against the justification of the problem? Or might there be, through the channels of subjectivity, experiences, emotions and feelings, a more direct, sensitive and concrete path to finding meaning?

Such questions, originally of a philosophical nature, have spilled over into the field of psychology and, despite the vicissitudes, have become a focus of this field of scientific knowledge throughout its history. Along this journey, notions linked to the meaning of life and existential dilemmas have at times been more obscured, as in the birth of experimental psychology, and at other times more evident, as in the emergence of post-war humanistic psychology, depending on the context and the paths taken by psychology in its journey as both a science and a profession.

In the contemporary era, these have taken on specific contours with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic (Yıldırım & Arslan, 2021; Lin, 2021; Tsibidaki, 2021), when the flow of everyday life was interrupted and the vertigo of uncertainties about existence became a reality. What seemed to be fictional literature – the spread of a lethal virus that would wipe out humanity – took on substance and became reality. This circumstance forced contemporary humanity to turn towards its existential situation, revealing its concerns about existence, beyond objective and pragmatic issues.

A systematic review of the literature previously conducted, focusing on the theme of existential issues in psychology and their treatment in articles published over the last 23 years, shows that, generally speaking, the literature produced during this period tends to prioritize discourse centered on *logos* (Alencar & Freitas, 2023a). There was a predominance of descriptive research, focusing on the distribution, scope and quantification of the phenomenon studied (*e.g.,* Wilt, J. et al, 2018; Li & Wong, 2020; Yoon et al., 2020), prioritising the nomothetic and quantitative

approach (72% of the articles retrieved, according to Alencar & Freitas, 2023).

Specifically, a gap was revealed in theoretical studies in psychology, accounting for only 17% of the results; among these, integrative reviews were found to be moderately explored, comprising 13% of the total, compared to literature reviews, which accounted for more than half of the sample. These integrative reviews focused on the study of the meaning of life in relation to other variables, such as human relationships (*e.g.*, O'Donnell et al., 2014), life satisfaction (*e.g.,* Sameer et al., 2023), spirituality (*e.g.*, Silva et al., 2020), mental health in teachers (*e.g.,* Santos & Silva, 2022), as well as the investigation of topics such as logotherapy and clinical supervision (*e.g.,* Nassif et al., 2010) and the revitalisation of humanistic psychology (*e.g.,* Wong, 2017).

In other words, most studies of this type, although scarce in general, have addressed the dimension of meaning in relation to other variables, whilst a small proportion have analysed epistemological attributions. Thus, through the observation of the prevailing paradigm in psychology, which bears echoes of the positivist tradition, certain gaps are revealed, signalling the need to further explore qualitative approaches that are in line with the object of study.

That is to say, for subjects of a dynamic nature, such as human beings and their need for meaning, there is a lack of approaches that capture this nature and offer consistent and creative alternatives for dealing with meaning. Therefore, this research aims to shed light on these gaps (the lack of qualitative research, with an integrative theoretical approach and epistemological focus) and to contribute to psychology and its treatment of existential issues, focusing on logotherapy. The aim is thus to gain a better understanding of the existential phenomenon and its meanings, in accordance with the concepts of existential void and the meaning of life, as well as its relationships with psychological distress and mental health, based on the studies reviewed.

Whether in the past or the present, the science of the psyche sometimes leans towards the language of *logos*, understood as objectivist and prioritising rationality, as seen, for example, in Behaviourism and Cognitive Psychology, and at other times, towards the language of *mythos*, understood as subjective and favouring intuitive reason, as seen in Analytical Psychology, Humanism, Existentialism and Phenomenology. The present study aims to conduct an integrative review of the psychological literature published between 2000 and 2023, focusing on the framework that leans towards the language of *mythos*, with an emphasis on logotherapy, to analyse how existential void and the meaning of life are addressed, highlighting epistemological contributions and practical applications for psychology in addressing these existential issues. In this article, the following are taken as parameters for the analyses: the theoretical core, indicating the concepts employed in the aforementioned studies; the relationships established between the meaning of life or existential void and other possible variables; the resources used to investigate or work with such themes in people's lived experience and in psychological practice. Finally, we tend to list the main recommendations, contributions and limitations of this body of work, taking into account its constructs, methodological implications, techniques and practices derived from a critical assessment of this bibliographic landscape of logotherapy based research.

2. Method

This integrative review is derived from systematic reviews previously conducted in earlier studies (Alencar & Freitas, 2023a). The first systematic review provided an overview of the literature on the meaning of life and existential void in the contemporary context of psychology, employing a quantitative analysis to identify general trends, statistical data and predominant research approaches, revealing an emphasis on empirical research procedures. The second systematic review, derived from the first, was of a quantitative and qualitative nature, delving deeper into the theoretical frameworks used in the articles, as well as the concepts and themes employed in relation to existential void and the meaning of life, with particular emphasis on logotherapy as a theoretical framework and further discussions on the theme of meaning.

Therefore, the present integrative review was developed based on these previous studies, initially using the same procedures as a systematic review, gathering, organising, analysing and synthesising the results found in different studies. However, unlike the systematic review, which sought to map, in depth, different pre-established variables, using meta-analysis and statistical analysis, as well as categorising concepts and themes across the different articles, with a more qualitative-quantitative analysis of the data, this integrative review qualitatively analyses the available body of knowledge regarding existential issues from the perspective of logotherapy, focusing on the concepts of existential void and the meaning of life, aiming for a deep understanding of the phenomena studied.

Thus, as derived from the systematic review detailed previously (Alencar & Freitas, 2023a), this study covered five databases: the CAPES portal, APA PsycArticles, SCOPUS, SCIELO and PEPSIC. The selection of these databases followed the following criteria: a) geographical scope – national, Latin American and international; b) scientific relevance, considering the quality of the indexed sources and journals with a relevant impact factor in the field of Psychology; c) standing within the scientific community, particularly in Brazil, the location of this research; and d) inclusion of the fields of psychology and health in general, to ensure a diversity of studies in terms of scope and content.

The main search terms used were "existential void" and "meaning of life", associated with the concepts of "mental health" and "psychology", involving various combinations with related expressions, as detailed in the search protocol previously outlined in the first article (Alencar & Freitas, 2023a, p.8). As this process was rigorously detailed in previous studies, this review presents the stages described above succinctly, highlighting the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the present study, as follows.

2.1. Eligibility Criteria

As inclusion criteria, the preliminary screening involved: a) the theme of existential void and the meaning of life as the central focus of the research; b) the contemporary period spanning 2000 to 2023; c) restriction to articles published in Portuguese, English and Spanish; and d) the subject area of psychology, as strictly detailed in Alencar and Freitas (2023a, p.10 to 12). In this integrative review, the following inclusion criteria were also considered: d) articles with a qualitative and mixed-methods approach, detailed rigorously in Alencar and Freitas (2023b, p.9 to 10) and e) articles with theoretical framework influenced by phenomenological, existential and humanistic approaches, with a focus on logotherapy for this present article.

These approaches share common roots in sciences aimed at understanding phenomena, placing value on the individual's subjective experience, although they exhibit fundamental distinctions. Phenomenology is based on the rigorous description of lived experiences, seeking to capture the essence of phenomena as they manifest themselves to consciousness, through the suspension of prior assumptions. The existential approach, in turn, focuses on the analysis of existence as an act of freedom, emphasising issues related to freedom, responsibility, anxiety, the search for meaning and finitude (Figueiredo, 2013). The humanistic approach, on the other hand, emphasises the capacity for agency, highlighting human potential, self-knowledge and self-actualisation. These approaches maintain epistemological and methodological links with phenomenology, sharing a focus on subjective experience and the description of phenomena as they are experienced by consciousness. Logotherapy, founded by Viktor Frankl (1978), is an approach with links to existential and phenomenological traditions and emphasises the search for meaning as the primary motivation in human life.

As exclusion criteria, we initially list those already considered in previous articles (Alencar & Freitas, 2023, p.9 to 11), namely: a) the theme of existential void and the meaning of life addressed only tangentially or secondarily; b) grey literature, that is, documents such as dissertations and theses published outside conventional publication channels; c) articles not available in full; and d) articles with a quantitative approach. To the criteria already established, the criteria of excluding articles that use theoretical frameworks other than those derived from logotherapy was added for the specific purposes of this article. It should be noted here that positive psychology, despite its humanistic foundations, was not included in the studies, as it has a more pragmatic than existential appeal, focusing on the promotion of the positive aspects of human experience. The initial focus on logotherapy aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of subjective experience, focusing on meaning in life, regardless of any prior judgment as to whether that experience is classified as positive or negative. At the same time, approaches from other fields, such as sociology and philosophy, although they also contribute to understanding the complexity of the phenomenon, were excluded, both for methodological reasons: as a narrower focus is necessary to conduct a more targeted analysis, and for reasons of delimiting the area of study, centring on the epistemology of psychology. Similarly, studies based on two theoretical orientations, such as psychoanalysis and existentialism (*e.g.*, Ratto, 2014) and existential positive psychology (*e.g.,* Vieira & Dias, 2021), were also excluded from the sample, as the aim was to identify therapies explicitly of an existential-phenomenological nature, with a focus on logotherapy, in order to limit the scope of the research. Although existential positive psychology engages with themes such as meaning, suffering, death and flourishing, its origins and epistemology stem from positive psychology, which constitutes a distinct epistemological field. According to Wong (2010, p.2), humanistic existential psychology "broadens the definition of Positive Psychology as the qualitative and quantitative study of what enables people to survive and flourish, individually and collectively, in all of life's circumstances". Furthermore, by also drawing on the traditional scientific paradigm, with quantitative empirical methods emphasising measurement and statistical evidence, this methodological commitment differs from the phenomenological- existential approach, which prioritises an in-depth description of subjectivity. As this study focuses on the phenomenological-humanistic tradition, which prioritises a qualitative understanding of lived experience, including positive psychology and existential positive psychology in the research would require broadening the scope to encompass distinct methods and concepts, thereby affecting the study's internal coherence.

2.2. Selection of Studies and Data Processing

The criteria considered relevant to the selected sample were identified by reviewing the title, methodology and introduction of the articles, the section where the theoretical framework was predominantly presented.

In order to systematise this data identification process, the articles were organised into spreadsheets created in Excel, identifying the following variables: article title, theoretical framework or epistemological approach, variables studied, abstract and objective, theme, reference and year, as illustrated in Table 1. The reading and selection of the sample was carried out by the first author of this review, under the supervision of the co-author, including external searches for articles where the selected studies did not explicitly state the theoretical framework employed.

Table 1. Data Extraction

Article title	Theoretical Framework	Variables studied	Abstract	Topic	Reference and Year
Talking about death and finitude in the school environment: a study in the light of the meaning of life.	Logotherapy	Meaning in life Death and finitude	The aim of this study was to identify adolescents' conceptions of death and its implications for the meaning of life. To this end, an action research study was conducted to address the theme of finitude based on Viktor Frankl's conception of the meaning of life and death... The results highlighted the importance of addressing the theme of finitude within the school setting.	Meaning in life and death	Aquino et al., 2014

Based on this process, only those articles that adopted the logotherapy framework were selected; following a full and exhaustive reading, these were classified and analysed according to the following categories, which are summarised in Table 2:

a) Theoretical core of the articles, comprising the following subcategories:

> a1. philosophical anthropology, that is, the way in which the theoretical foundation of the articles conceives of human beings and their existential questions, and how it positions itself regarding human nature and the way in which it is constituted;
> a2. conceptual structure, that is, how the main paradigmatic concepts of the theory adopted in the articles are defined and interrelated;

b) Variables related to existential void and/or the meaning of life, also divided into two subcategories:

> b1. axiological categories: *e.g.*, psychological distress, mental health, psychotherapies, amongst others.
> b2. contexts investigated and associated with the theme of each article.

c) Resources to address existential issues.

The classifications used in the integrative analysis described here were inspired by Laurenti et al. (2016). In this work, different levels of conceptual analysis are described, among which the most restricted level was chosen, seeking to explore the core concepts of the theories and their meanings (Laurenti et al., 2016, p.43).

Furthermore, as psychological theory and the respective psychotherapies involve the study of humanity and are centred on humanity, it was also decided to include the category of philosophical anthropology, to better understand how psychological schools of thought conceive of the human being. Philosophical anthropology is a branch of philosophy that seeks to understand humanity in its entirety and its relationship with the world. It considers their bio-psycho-social-cultural dimensions and their differentiation from other living beings (Cassirer, 1997). It's important to consider that philosophical anthropology underpins clinical practice, as all psychological practice, whether implicitly or explicitly, presupposes a conception of the human being with whom one is working, providing care for, or studying. When applying therapeutic resources or techniques, it is essential to ask oneself to which subject one is offering the possibility of care. Thus, philosophical anthropology offers a conception of the human being, and clinical psychology, in turn, grounded in this conception, proposes a therapeutic approach. For example, if we consider a conception of the human being determined by their biology, the patient will be viewed as an organism, for whom clinical strategies aimed at correcting and regulating symptoms will be sought. On the other hand, if the image of the human being centres on a self-determining perspective, with an intentional, situated, relational consciousness that seeks meaning, clinical practice will focus on strategies to understand how the individual lives and makes sense of their lived experience. From this perspective, clinical practice is not restricted to a set of technical procedures, but is rather a practice grounded in an anthropological and epistemological understanding of the human being.

Furthermore, an attempt was made to identify the variables related to existential issues, whether of an axiological or contextual nature, in order to map out what and how research is being conducted in this field of study. The research plan concludes by describing the resources employed in the work on existential issues. These resources were presented in the articles in at least three forms:

a) Described- where the research sets out the characteristics and details of the technique or other variant, as in the case of the study on Socratic clinical practice, in which the author details what the technique is, its guidelines and stages, as reproduced below:

> The first instance of Socratic dialogue is characterised by the therapist adopting a position that is both naive and ironic; Frankl consistently recommended this approach (Freire, 2002). However, these positions must be used with caution to avoid appearing disrespectful to the client... Once a safe environment has been established, the therapist listens in silence so that the client can openly express their problems to the therapist. (Martinez & Florez, 2014, p. 5)

b) Employed- when the resource is presented in the form of practical application, as in the case of action research or experience reports. For example, in the study by Santos (2019), which aimed at a type of education that promoted personal and existential development, the strategy of literary expression was used with university students. Therefore, in the research, reading Viktor Frankl's work *Man's Search for Meaning* was employed as a resource, describing the respondents' perceptions of the meaning of life.Table 2 presents the research plan.

c) Proposed- when, based on the scope of the research, the author presents proposals for addressing existential issues. For example, in the study by Bolmsjö et al. (2019), which aims to develop a definition of the concept of existential loneliness, methods are suggested that include existential dialogues in education and, as an additional proposal, creating space within the healthcare system to address existential issues.

Table 2. Research Plan

Categories investigated for each approach		
	Theoretical framework	
a	1	Philosophical anthropology
	2	Conceptual framework
	Variables related to existential void and the meaning	
b	**of life**	
	1	Axiological categories
	2	Contexts investigated
	Resources for addressing existential issues	
	1	Described resources
c	2	Employed Resources
	3	Proposed resources

3. Findings

Following a preliminary search before this study (Alencar & Freitas, 2023a), a total of 264 articles were initially identified, focusing on existential void and the meaning of life, published over the last 23 years. From these articles, in a second stage (Alencar & Freitas, 2023b), a total of 73 articles employing qualitative and mixed-methods approaches were selected. Of these, applying the inclusion criteria adopted in this integrative review, a total of 34 articles were selected, comprising 10 on existentialism, 4 on phenomenology and 20 based on logotherapy, which is the focus of this study. The flowchart shown in Figure 1 briefly illustrates the search process.

Despite this systematic refinement, the relatively small number of articles focusing on logotherapy (only 20) highlights a limited sample size. This limitation may restrict the generalisability of the findings and the scope of contemporary phenomenological-existential psychology. Consequently, to gain a broader understanding of this field, future studies with more diverse samples are required. It should be emphasized, however, that this study focuses on understanding the existential phenomenon based on the concepts of existential void and meaning of life, as well as their relationship with mental health from the perspective of logotherapy, distancing itself from generalizations and the formulation of laws.

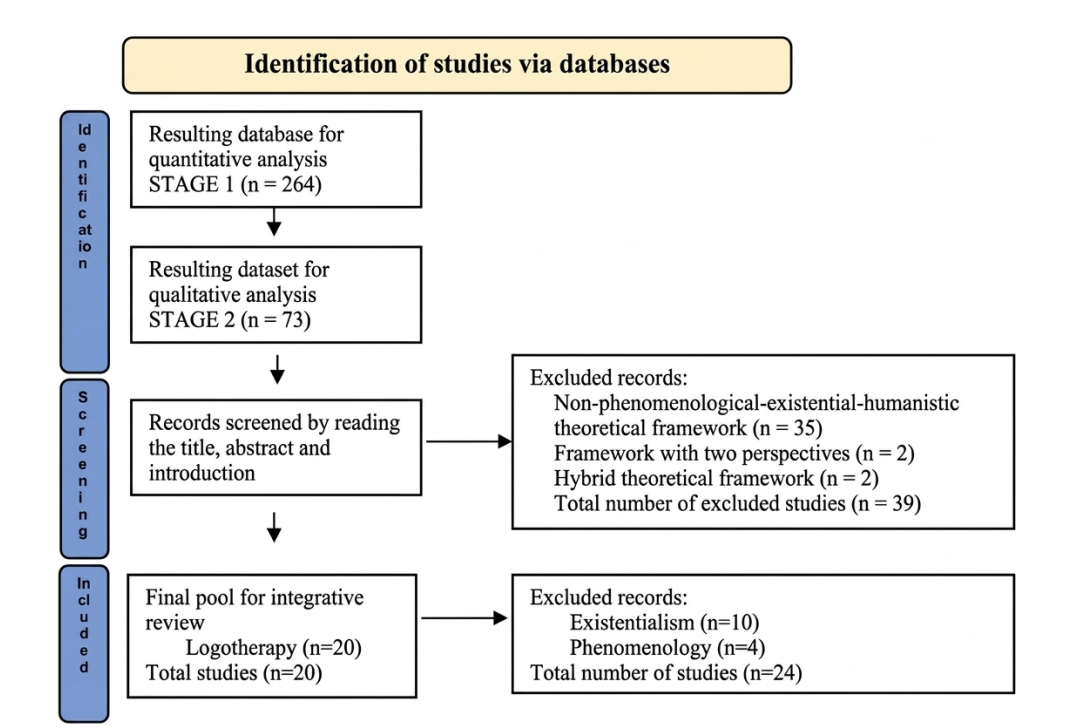


Figure 1. Flowchart - Procedures for Identifying and Selecting Articles
Note. Model adapted from the PRISMA flow diagram. (Page et al., 2020).

Table 3. Characterisation of the selected articles

	Logotherapy	
Article	Title	Reference
L 1	Spirituality and Health in Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy	Carrara, 2016
L 2	Religion, spirituality and health: a logotherapy perspective	Aquino, 2021
L 3	Revisiting Viktor Frankl's ideas on the centenary of his birth	Roehe, 2006
L 4	The contributions of Viktor Emil Frankl's thought to the formation of evaluative consciousness	Telles et al., 2022
L 5	Clinical Supervision and Logotherapy: Discovering Meaning in the Supervisory Relationship	Nassif et al., 2010
L 6	Meaning-Centred Psychotherapy: A Socratic Clinical Practice	Martínez & Florez, 2015
L 7	Prostitution and the meaning of life: relationships of meaning	Corrêa & Holanda, 2012
L 8	Viktor Frankl's contributions to the public health movement	Silveira & Gradim, 2015
L 9	Ways of being: the search for meaning in life.	Carneiro & Abritta, 2008
L 10	Meaning of life and mental health in teachers: an integrative review	Santos & Silva, 2022
L 11	Logotherapy: a perspective on psychotherapy.	Kroeff, 2011
L 12	Logotherapy: understanding the theory through a concept map	Santos, 2016
L 13	The meaning of life in accounts of discontinuity in criminal careers: a qualitative analysis of two cases	Jiménez-Ribera & García-Alandete, 2021
L 14	The meaning of life for the relatives of critically ill patients.	Lima & Rosa 2008
L 15	Talking about death and finitude in the school environment: a study in the light of the meaning of life.	Aquino et al., 2014
L 16	Evaluation of a proposal for the prevention of existential void among adolescents	Aquino et al., 2011
L 17	The meaning of life for mothers with children in the neonatal ICU	Silva et al., 2021
L 18	Description of the meaning of life among juvenile offenders in the city of Medellín	Horacio, 2011
L 19	Education for meaning in life and values: university students' perceptions based on Viktor Frankl's book "Man's Search for Meaning"	Santos, 2019
L 20	Variables associated with the meaning of life	Noronha et al., 2018

Table 3 presents the list of articles found with a reference to logotherapy, followed by their analysis according to the three categories of analysis adopted in this study: a) theoretical core; b) variables related to existential void and the meaning of life; and c) resources for addressing existential issues.

3.1. Methodological Features of the Included Studies

This review found that the majority of the studies analysed adopt a theoretical qualitative approach, comprising procedures such as literature and documentary reviews of the works of Viktor Frankl and other relevant authors who discuss the Austrian psychologist's work (*e.g.* Carrara, 2016; Aquino, 2021; Roehe, 2006; Telles et al., 2022; Nassif et al., 2010). In these studies, the concepts and constructs relating to the meaning of life, existential void and related phenomena were identified through conceptual reflections, literature reviews (*e.g.* Aquino, 2021; Corrêa & Holanda, 2012; Kroeff, 2011; Martínez & Florez, 2015; Silveira & Gradim, 2015), integrative reviews (*e.g.* Nassif et al., 2010; Santos & Silva, 2022) and concept mapping (*e.g.* Santos, 2016).

On the other hand, other empirical qualitative studies have predominantly used semi-structured interviews and interventions in specific contexts (*e.g.* Aquino et al., 2014), enabling values to be understood through the experiences reported by participants. The Life Story Interview II (McAdams, 2008) was also used for data collection, a model of semi-structured interview and content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Herzog, 2016) (*e.g.* Jiménez-Ribera & García-Alandete, 202) and semi-structured interviews and content analysis in the style of Bardin (1977) (*e.g.* Lima & Rosa, 2008; Aquino et al., 2014).

Furthermore, studies employing a mixed-methods approach combine standardised instruments, such as the Purpose in Life Test, with quantitative analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and qualitative analysis using discourse analysis (*e.g.* Horacio, 2011); also free association tests and analysis using the semantic networks technique (*e.g.* Silva et al., 2021); and reading reports and questionnaires using a likert scale for data collection and content analysis (Bardin, 2000), supported by NVivo 10 software (*e.g.* Barreto dos Santos, 2019). These studies combine statistical analyses with qualitative strategies, offering a more comprehensive understanding of values from the perspective of logotherapy.

3.2. Theoretical framework

As described in the methodology, the characterisation of the approach according to its theoretical framework was based on philosophical anthropology and conceptual structure, with an emphasis on how each article understands the 'meaning of life' and 'existential void'. Consequently, the presentation of the analysis results will follow this same sequence, as set out below.

3.2.1. Philosophical Anthropology

Some articles emphasised the philosophical anthropology present in the approach, citing the concepts of freedom and responsibility as central to the logotherapeutic perspective (Roehe, 2006; Telles et al., 2022). From this perspective, the human being is seen as a free and responsible being capable of making their own decisions. However, this freedom has its limitations, as there are genetic-physiological and social constraints (culture, economy, education) (Jiménez-Ribera & García-Alandete, 2021). These variables influence, but do not determine the human beings. Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, rebelled against pan-deterministic perspectives, which viewed human beings as entirely determined by other reductionist factors, conceiving of humans solely in their biopsychic dimension; and against nihilistic views, which denied values such as freedom (Aquino, 2011). Thus, man is seen as a self-determining being, as it is he who responds to the conditions that arise. His consciousness (Rhoe, 2006), regarded by Frankl as the organ of meaning, with its characteristic of intentionality, is what guides him.

Another important point regarding the conception of man in Logotherapy and Existential Analysis relates to dimensional ontology. Its key distinguishing feature is the inclusion of a new dimension, termed noetic, in addition to the psychophysical (Rhoe, 2006; Correa & Holanda, 2012; Aquino et al., 2014; Silveira & Gradim, 2015; Santos & Silva, 2022; Telles et al., 2022; Nassif et al., 2010). The somatic dimension corresponds to physiological and biological aspects; the second, of a psychic nature, corresponds to emotions, perception and cognition; and the third, the noetic dimension - derived from *'nous'*, meaning spirit - refers to that which is strictly human. In other words, it encompasses all the creative activity of the spirit, the axiological dimension, with religious, ethical, moral and aesthetic values, as well as the awareness of finitude, given that man is a mortal being (Aquino et al., 2014). This includes "the possibility of going beyond oneself – *self-transcendence* - and distancing oneself from bio-psycho-social determinants - self-distancing" (Silveira & Gradim, 2015, p.154).

3.2.2. Conceptual framework

It is noted that logotherapy possesses a well-structured theoretical core, centred on two axes: the first focuses on the concept of the meaning of life, structured around a conceptual triad encompassing freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life (Aquino, 2021; Nassif et al., 2010; Santos, 2019). The second axis, meanwhile, focuses on axiological categories, considering a second triad: values of creation, values of experience and values of attitude. (Santos, 2019; Santos, 2016; Noronha et al., 2018).

Freedom of the will implies that although human beings are influenced by existing conditions, they possess the potential to make decisions and shape their own history. The will to meaning is understood as the primary motivation of human beings, who tend to seek meaning. And the meaning of life is posited as something concrete, dynamic and present in every situation of human life, making it necessary to find it.

Concerning the second axis, it is through this triad of values that meaning in life is realised: whether by offering something to the world, such as a job or a work of art, signifying the value of creation; or by receiving or experiencing something with the world, such as a meaningful encounter with someone, love for a person, or even an aesthetic experience, signifying the value of experience; or by adopting an attitude towards adverse situations or suffering, corresponding to attitudinal values (Santos, 2016, 2019; Noronha et al., 2018).

3.2.3. Meaning of Life

In logotherapy, the concept of meaning takes on a specific semantic dimension: 'meaning in life'. This assumes a dynamic character, from a perspective of becoming, as meaning changes according to the person, the time and the circumstances. In other words, it is understood as something changeable and as something concrete in the world. This differs from the expression 'meaning of life', which has a broader scope and a more universal character, signifying the meaning of existence as a whole (Frankl, 1946/2019). The Austrian psychiatrist's conception is based on the assumption

that meaning pre-exists and that it is up to man to seek and find it. He does not speak of a construction of meaning, but of a rediscovery (Frankl, 1983 cited by Horácio, 2011). In parallel, three expressions are frequently mentioned to distinguish different types of will identified in human beings by the three Viennese schools of psychotherapy: the will to pleasure, a hedonistic conception driven by human drives and instincts, coined by Freudian psychoanalysis; the will to power, coined by Adler's individual psychology, denoting the will to social superiority; and the will to meaning, by the Franklian school, understood as a primary motivation that drives human beings in search of meaning in life (Aquino et al., 2014; Kroeff, 2011).

On the other hand, when this human will to meaning is not fulfilled and is therefore frustrated, a sense of meaninglessness emerges, which is termed existential vacuum. Other synonymous terms are also used to refer to this state, such as existential void and existential frustration (Horácio, 2011; Aquino, 2011; Carneiro & Abritta, 2008). It should be noted that existential void is not considered a pathology. Still, it can lead to a state of noogenic neurosis (Santos, 2016), understood as a neurosis that occurs in the dimension of *the nous* (spiritual). As such, it is not of instinctual origin, as Freud theorised, but is related to conflicts of ethical or moral values and existential issues (Horácio, 2011). Existential void is also identified in research as being at the root of problems or dysfunctions in contemporary society, such as drug addiction, alcoholism, violence, depression and even suicide: "Without generalising and with caution, it can be observed that the rise in depression has become the most evident symptom of existential void (Fizzotti, 2002, cited by Carrara, 2016, pp. 69–70; Silveira & Gradim, 2015).

3.3. Variables Related to Existential Void and Meaning of Life

This category of analysis aims to summarise information relating to research that has identified associations between meaning of life, existential void and other variables, whether axiological or contextual, as set out below.

3.3.1. Axiological Categories

a) Meaning of life, religiosity and spirituality – L1 and L2

Both studies presented the logotherapy perspective on the theme of religiosity and spirituality, with L2 seeking to verify the relevance of the proposal. L1 highlights the distinctive feature of logotherapy as an approach that fosters the relationship between psychology and religion, contrasting with schools of thought that hold a negative view of this relationship. Both articles highlight the spiritual dimension postulated by Frankl as having great therapeutic potential, since, by allowing religious and existential questions to emerge spontaneously, it enables a rehumanisation, contributing to psychological well-being and the promotion of mental health. The difference between theology and psychotherapy is emphasised, the former being focused on the study of metaphysical issues and the latter on the treatment of psychological issues, psychological dysfunction and/or the promotion of human potential.

b) Meaning of life and logotherapy - L3, L5, L6, L11, L12

All the studies that include logotherapy within their scope sought to explore its theoretical core, highlighting some constituent aspect of the theory. Study L3 focuses on a synthesis of Frankl's theory, with an emphasis on the conception of man and the meaning of life. It highlights the anthropological distinction of this theory, which conceives of man as a free, responsible being with the autonomy to make his own choices. It situates the theory within the phenomenological and existential fields, rebelling against reductionism and against the idea of man as determined by his id. Study L12, for its part, also of a theoretical nature, aims to explore the theory of logotherapy conceptually, using a concept map. In it, the researcher presents the two core axes of logotherapy: one formed by the triad comprising freedom of will, the will to meaning and the meaning of life; and the other by the triad of values, including values of creation, experience and attitude. Additionally, he weaves a network of concepts, clarifying the relationships between them.

Studies L5, L6 and L11 correlate logotherapeutic principles with supervisory practice and clinical practice. L5 explores how logotherapeutic principles can enrich the supervisory relationship and concludes that the incorporation of these principles can enhance the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, regardless of their theoretical orientations. When dealing with issues of values, logotherapeutic principles can aid in understanding and managing conflicts of values. Study E6, meanwhile, focuses on clinical practice, aiming to provide concrete guidelines. In particular, it cites the Socratic dialogue technique as an important tool with therapeutic potential, facilitating the client's progress. Similarly, study L5 also highlights the suitability of implementing logotherapeutic principles in various orientations and contexts, combining them with other perspectives, as this aids in the understanding of values and in a better visualisation and delineation of life projects. Study L11 outlines the central tenets of logotherapy and compares them with other perspectives such as psychoanalysis and individual psychology. It highlights that there is no standardised system for conducting psychotherapy, but that there is a desire to broaden the patient's capacity to understand values, as well as to empower the individual beyond pleasure and work, enabling them to cope with suffering, given that this is an inherent dimension of human life.

c) Meaning of life and mental health – L8 and L10

Study L8 aims to reflect on the legacy and contributions that Viktor Frankl's approach can bring to public health. It provides an overview of the themes proposed by Frankl, such as self-transcendence/self-distancing, the will to meaning, values, existential void, and noogenic neuroses, all of which are relevant to public health. The proposal is a call to medical anthropology, emphasising that establishing dialogue on these themes can aid in rehumanisation. In this way, it challenges the biomedical sterility present within the field of public health, which goes so far as to dismiss the patient's subjectivity and experience.

As a practical approach to integrating logotherapy into the public health system, a relevant strategy would be to incorporate its trans-theoretical principles into public policies relating to mental health. In this regard, one option would be to provide training in the principles of logotherapy for healthcare professionals in general, including those within the traditional biomedical system and the field of psychology itself. Among these, the following may be mentioned: the therapist's open attitude towards listening to the patient, in a spirit of acceptance and non-judgment; work with narrative psychology or bibliotherapy, utilising narratives or storytelling in interventions and the reconstruction of personal histories; as well as educating professionals to make space in consultations for existential questions such as the meaning of

life. Another possibility at the social and community level would be the establishment of support groups focused on constructing meaning and reframing experiences. Such initiatives, grounded in logotherapeutic principles, can foster a more humanised approach to care, particularly within the biomedical sphere, where the focus is on treating the individual as a whole organism.

Additionally, the L10 study investigates the relationship between meaning in life and mental health in a specific population: teachers. It concludes that a lack of meaning is associated with burnout syndrome and perceived stress, just as meaning is associated with well-being and better psychological functioning. It also reiterates that analyses involving other professionals similarly conclude that meaning in life plays a preventive role in psychopathologies. Attention is drawn to the need to test theoretical models and interventional practices to validate theories, and to implement mental health practices in different contexts, which help people discover the meaning of existence, broadening their perspective to the possibilities of meaning and the perception of values.

3.3.2. Research Context

a) Meaning of life, existential void and education – L4, L18 and L20

The above studies converge in highlighting the role of education in promoting a sense of life. All emphasise the importance of education in also being oriented towards an axiological foundation, in addition to its traditional role of transmitting knowledge. There is a contemporary need to educate oneself in values, promoting a sharpening of consciousness for a better perception of the demands of each situation and of existential responsibilities. They highlight that the current reductionist model, focused solely on cognition, may contribute to existential void, given that the dimension of human phenomena is undermined by technique and the transmission of objective knowledge. Study L4 presents the contributions of logotherapy to the formation of a value-oriented consciousness, that is, one focused on the perception and categorisation of values. Research L18, on the other hand, taking a more practical perspective, uses bibliotherapy to promote awareness, encouraging the discovery of values, self-knowledge, and approaches to problems and the handling of adversity. Study L20, also of a practical nature, validates a proposal for the prevention of existential void in adolescents. It also utilises resources such as fables, poems, parables and metaphors to translate philosophical language into practical life. It is concluded that the intervention promoted a sense of meaning and a reduction in levels of despair and existential void.

3.4. Resources for Working on Existential Issues

In light of the above, it is evident that existential issues have come to the fore in the contemporary context, characterised by a sense of existential void, a view supported by various authors (*e.g.*, Carrara, 2016; Silveira & Gradim, 2015; Santos, 2016). Having outlined the philosophical assumptions, based on the conception of man and the presentation of the conceptual framework, as well as having presented the correlation between the constructs and different variables, it is necessary to translate this theoretical framework into the practical sphere, with the *goal* of contributing concrete alternatives for clinical practice. Thus, this section presents some resources outlined in the analysed articles for managing and working with existential issues.

a) Techniques adopted in the therapist's approach, presented in a descriptive manner: When spiritual and religious issues arise, the therapist must adopt an appropriate approach, without repressing or imposing guidance (L2), and remain open to the patient's worldview (L3).

b) Techniques regarding the psychotherapeutic procedure, presented in the form of proposals: Within the therapeutic setting, broadening the scope of the work, going beyond psychological reconstruction, bringing the discussion of the meaning of life into the picture (L1); relate psychotherapeutic work to values (L3); and empower the individual beyond pleasure, leisure and work, enabling them also to cope with suffering (L11).

c) Socratic Dialogue: Described in study L6 and indicated both for the therapist-client relationship and in the individual interviews conducted in the research (L13), as well as in group discussions with researchers, termed 'multi-dialogue' (L16), being a resource employed in the last two studies. This is a logotherapeutic resource inspired by the Greek concept, when the philosopher Socrates, using a technique called maieutics, through an ironic stance and the formulation of questions, brought to light the ideas of the people with whom he was conversing. This technique is recommended for mobilising the client's noetic or spiritual dimension (L6), stimulating the search for meaning (L20) and promoting a change in existential attitude (L13). According to Frankl (1994, cited by Martínez & Florez, 2014, pp. 5–6): "In logotherapy, the implementation of Socratic dialogue requires the establishment of a safe environment, a genuine encounter between the therapist and the client, and an attentive disposition to listen and discover meaning in the dialogue."

d) Values Awareness Technique: This is a technique used to increase awareness of a person's hierarchy of values, whether ethical, moral or personal. In the selected article, this technique was described and recommended for use in both supervisor-supervisee and supervisor-patient relationships, promoting the articulation and communication of values. It can be implemented through reflective dialogue, self-assessment, group discussions and personal narratives (L5).

e) Narrative psychology: This technique aims to reconstruct personal stories in a narrative form, fostering a connection between personal experiences and relationships with others. It can foster empathy, a deeper understanding of values, and consolidate identity (L13). In the selection, it was employed and exemplified as narrative criminology, which can bring benefits in the treatment of offenders by stimulating a sense of purpose in the reconstruction of narratives.

f) Bibliotherapy: This is a strategy that uses resources such as books, short stories, fables, poetry, parables, amongst others, to facilitate ontological understanding (L4, L16). It was mentioned as a resource both in the educational context, to broaden awareness of values (L4), being presented as a proposal, as well as in therapeutic interventions (L16), being employed in the research through fables and parables, aiming to adapt logotherapeutic philosophical language into a more accessible form. Through this strategy, it is possible to learn about values, overcoming adverse situations, resilience and adaptability through knowledge of others' life experiences, as in the case of Viktor Frankl's (1946/2019) work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which the psychiatrist recounts his life experience in Nazi camps. Through allegorical narratives, parables convey higher realities, transmitting values and meanings, whilst fables, using fictional characters (inanimate, anthropomorphic beings), convey educational messages and moral lessons (Ferreira, 1975, cited by Aquino et al., 2011). In the educational context, the

inclusion of education in human values is advocated as a strategy to prevent existential void, as a means of broadening awareness of values, learning about responsibility, developing an understanding of values, self-knowledge, and the development of skills such as adaptability and resilience in the face of adverse situations.

4. Discussion

The purpose of this integrative review was to present what has been published in the contemporary literature of psychology, with a focus on logotherapy, regarding existential void and the meaning of life, from 2000 to 2023. The aim was to ascertain how these studies are being conducted and how they might contribute to addressing existential issues.

Of the 34 articles retrieved, the research revealed that the logotherapy approach of the Austrian psychiatrist from the Third Viennese School, Viktor Frankl, stood out, with twenty recorded findings, that is, more than half of the studies found.

It is worth highlighting the seminal role of Viktor Frankl's logotherapy regarding the construct of the meaning of life, which was mentioned in the majority of the studies, regardless of their theoretical orientations. It is evident that the complementary role of this approach, as proposed by its founder himself, truly fulfils this condition, as it can cooperate with various psychotherapeutic schools. It thus becomes apparent that logotherapy possesses a characteristic that could be termed 'trans-theoretical', due to its suitability for different perspectives. However, Frankl (1946/2019), whilst advocating the principle of cooperation, cautioned that it was necessary to exercise conscious eclecticism, always respecting the client's uniqueness. It should be emphasised that, although it possesses this complementary characteristic, logotherapy also has autonomy and is employed as a central approach. The key distinguishing feature of this perspective, also known as 'existential analysis', was that it brought both 'logos' (understood as meaning) and existence into the therapeutic setting (Frankl, 1978, p.197). These are themes not explicitly addressed in the traditions that preceded it, such as: the meaning of life, which is not a focus of Freudian psychoanalysis; and existence, which is overlooked in behaviourism.

Logotherapy has a systemic theoretical core, with its own lexicon encompassing two central axes: a triad comprising freedom of will, the will to meaning and the meaning of life, and another triad of values, categorised as creation, experience and attitude (Frankl, 1946/2019). These ethical, moral and aesthetic values take on paramount importance in the current context, a hypermodern era witnessing an axiological crisis. Through the restoration of these values, meaning in life is realised and, in this way, it presents itself as an invitation to minimise existential pathologies. Another key aspect of this school of thought is its dimensional ontology. That is, it adds a dimension to the conception of man, termed the noetic or *nous* dimension (Frankl, 1994). It is within this dimension that those attributes exclusively human are found, distinguishing man from animals: religious, ethical, moral and aesthetic values, as well as consciousness. Based on this classification, Viktor Frankl leaps his conception of psychotherapy, as he views man as a self-determining rather than a determined being, forging his own path despite existing constraints. In this way, he differed from the premises proposed by Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler (Figueiredo, 1991/2013), who conceived of man as the result of extrinsic and intrinsic forces, merely as a product of the environment.

Among the variables explored by logotherapy-oriented research, the relationships between the meaning of life and religiosity and spirituality, logotherapy as a form of psychotherapy, and mental health and education stand out. Logotherapy aligns itself with the spiritual dimension of the human being and fosters a reconciliation between psychology and religion. It posits this spiritual dimension as something healthy in the human being and sees in it great therapeutic potential, serving as a source for the maintenance of mental health. By incorporating the triad of values as one of its theoretical premises, logotherapy extends its applicability to the field of education, where researchers have argued for an education focused on teaching values and existential issues (Santos, 2019; Aquino, 2011, 2014). Such a practice would educate human beings for existence, broadening their consciousness and existential responsibilities, not limiting itself merely to the transmission of objective knowledge and cognition, a system currently in place. Thus, an invitation is extended to the community to educate for values.

Among the resources mentioned in the articles for addressing existential issues, the following can be listed: a) the therapist's stance when religious and spiritual issues arise, demonstrating appropriateness and openness; b) the therapeutic procedure, including *logos* in therapy, preparing the individual for suffering and incorporating a forward-looking perspective; c) emphasis on Socratic dialogue in both research and clinical practice, as a form of dialogue that engages the interviewee in the search for meaning and in their existential attitude; d) raising awareness of values, to enable clients to appreciate them more fully; e) narrative psychology, using the reconstruction of stories to consolidate identity and values and strengthen bonds in personal relationships; and f) bibliotherapy, using reading as a means of learning about values, resilience, adaptability to adverse situations, and learning through the experiences of others. It is worth noting that the last two approaches rely on storytelling, whether oral or written, to engage with the dimension of meaning, through one's own experience or that of others.

The results highlight the importance of the logotherapy approach in psychological practice, particularly due to its trans-theoretical nature, which allows it to engage with other theoretical frameworks in psychology, fostering a richer heuristic and broadening the scope of comprehensive and interventionist strategies. Thus, in this study, the systematisation of theoretical foundations stood out, such as the triad of values and the noetic dimension of the human being; alongside the identification of relevant variables associated with existential void and the meaning of life, such as the theme of spirituality and the context of education; as well as therapeutic resources, such as Socratic dialogue and bibliotherapy. This study fills an epistemological gap by offering a theoretical analysis within a landscape dominated by empirical research, providing a solid foundation for expanding research and clinical intervention in the existential dimensions of the individual.

5. Final Considerations

This integrative review highlighted current trends in contemporary psychological research regarding existential issues, viewed through the lens of logotherapy. A significant theoretical surge is observed in the field of research on this approach, indicating a greater need for the integration of this school of thought into the empirical realm and clinical practice. Considering the threefold human dimension, an imbalance is observed in terms of scientific investment, with a focus on the biological dimension. And whilst

the psychic dimension has gained some ground since the last century, the noetic dimension - the third described by Viktor Frankl, relating to ethical and moral values, decisions, aesthetic creation and religiosity, demands greater attention. This is consistent with what Husserl (1936/2002) had already foreseen, when he drew the attention of the European intellectuals to the risks of advancing greatly in technological terms without a corresponding existential advancement.

The meaning of life, according to research guided by the lens of logotherapy, has been considered a construct that permeates many problems reported by clients/patients, being present in various contexts, such as health, school and family, amongst others, providing fertile ground for study, particularly in the field of psychotherapy. It can be inferred that the meaning of life lies at the root of all concerns, as its absence leads to psychological suffering, whilst the search for it leads to mental health.

Among the resources identified for addressing existential issues, those with a narrative focus stand out, such as narrative psychology and bibliotherapy. They attract attention for bringing expression and aesthetic experience into the picture, drawing upon a field of knowledge that is not objective but rather sensory. Narratives and expressions prove to be a fertile ground for directly addressing the question of meaning. Narrative is closely aligned with the premise of the South Korean philosopher Han (2018), who noted that data does not fill voids, but rather narratives or storytelling do, and with the anthropological conception of *Homo narrans*, viewing humans as storytellers and listeners. With this in mind, just as Frankl proposed bringing '*logos*' and 'existence' into psychotherapy, it might also be appropriate to include *'mythos'* in this perspective, thereby also providing a form of *'mythotherapy'*.

Like all research, this study also has limitations. One of these relates to its restriction to five databases, which, combined with the descriptors used, may have favoured the identification of records more focused on regions such as Latin America, the USA and Canada, as well as cultural issues, given that the records were restricted to Western culture. Broadening these criteria, thereby increasing the cultural diversity of the articles collected and analysed, could facilitate the identification of possible cultural differences regarding existential concerns. This is, therefore, a topic to be explored in future research.

In light of the above, and taking into account both the limitations and the contributions resulting from this integrative review, it is worth concluding with a few suggestions, already outlining possible future directions:

- An invitation to the community to develop an education system that also focuses on the teaching of values, just as logotherapy is grounded in the study of values, being a key element in addressing existential issues;
- An invitation to researchers to explore the field of logotherapy further and to examine the relationships or validation between theoretical and empirical techniques for addressing existential issues;
- An invitation to clinical psychology to explore the foundations of logotherapy, which, owing to its trans-theoretical nature, as postulated by its founder Viktor Frankl, can contribute to enriching the psychotherapeutic repertoire, benefiting both psychologists and those in therapy.

Furthermore, for a more comprehensive analysis of the contemporary psychology landscape, which emphasises subjectivity and lived experience, it is necessary to consider the findings of phenomenological and existential approaches, to guide relevant discussions and contributions towards a more holistic and genuine understanding of this subject.

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Translating Tea-related Intangible Cultural Heritage Terminology for Heritage Communication: A Case Study of Tea Cultural Landscapes in Tea: Questions and Answers

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Abstract

Tea cultural landscapes integrate ecological environments, traditional techniques, and cultural values, representing an important form of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Taking Tea: Questions and Answers as a case study, this paper examines the translation of tea-related ICH terminology from the perspective of interlingual reconstruction and heritage communication. Six representative terms are classified into natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions and analysed through qualitative case studies. The findings indicate that different categories of terminology require different translation strategies, including literal translation, transliteration, explicitation, and cultural annotation. These strategies contribute to both intercultural comprehensibility and the preservation of cultural specificity. The study suggests that the translation of tea-related terminology functions not only as linguistic transfer but also as a form of heritage communication that may enhance the international dissemination of tea cultural landscapes and Chinese tea culture.

Chinese Tea Culture | Heritage Communication | Intangible Cultural Heritage | Interlingual Reconstruction | Tea Cultural Landscapes | Terminology Translation

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Translating Tea-related Intangible Cultural Heritage Terminology for Heritage Communication: A Case Study of Tea Cultural Landscapes in Tea: Questions and Answers

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Abstract

Tea cultural landscapes integrate ecological environments, traditional techniques, and cultural values, representing an important form of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Taking Tea: Questions and Answers as a case study, this paper examines the translation of tea-related ICH terminology from the perspective of interlingual reconstruction and heritage communication. Six representative terms are classified into natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions and analysed through qualitative case studies. The findings indicate that different categories of terminology require different translation strategies, including literal translation, transliteration, explicitation, and cultural annotation. These strategies contribute to both intercultural comprehensibility and the preservation of cultural specificity. The study suggests that the translation of tea-related terminology functions not only as linguistic transfer but also as a form of heritage communication that may enhance the international dissemination of tea cultural landscapes and Chinese tea culture.

Keywords: *Chinese Tea Culture, Heritage Communication, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Interlingual Reconstruction, Tea Cultural Landscapes, Terminology Translation*

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of global cultural diversity protection and heritage preservation, the international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become an important aspect of cultural exchange and communication. As a unique carrier that integrates ecological wisdom, traditional techniques, and cultural beliefs, tea cultural landscapes have attracted increasing international attention. In September 2023, the Jingmai Mountain Ancient Tea Forest Cultural Landscape was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, marking the growing global recognition of Chinese tea culture and its heritage value (UNESCO, 2023).

As one of the birthplaces of tea culture, China possesses abundant tea-related intangible cultural heritage resources. Tea cultural landscapes embody the long-term interaction between human beings and nature and reflect the integration of ecological environments, production techniques, and spiritual traditions. UNESCO defines cultural landscapes as the combined works of nature and humankind, highlighting their cultural and historical significance (UNESCO, 1992). Therefore, the international communication of tea cultural landscapes requires not only the transmission of factual information but also the interpretation of the cultural meanings embedded within them.

Chawen Chashuo (《茶问茶说》, *Tea: Questions and Answers*) by Lan Zengquan, Shen Xiaojin and Hu Dianbi systematically introduces Chinese tea culture, covering tea production, ecological knowledge, and cultural practices. The proposed English translation of selected terms from the book provides a valuable case for examining how Chinese tea culture can be represented and communicated across languages. Existing studies have mainly focused on translation strategies and terminology equivalence, while less attention has been paid to how translation reconstructs the cultural meanings of tea-related heritage and communicates tea cultural landscapes as heritage narratives. Drawing on Nord's functionalist approach (Nord, 1997) and Tymoczko's discussion of cultural representation in translation (Tymoczko, 2007), this study examines the translation of representative ICH-related terminology in *Tea: Questions and Answers* from the perspective of interlingual reconstruction. By analysing terms from the natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions of tea cultural landscapes, the paper explores how the translation of tea-related ICH terminology functions as heritage communication by making culturally embedded meanings more accessible across languages.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Cultural Landscapes

The concept of cultural landscape originated in cultural geography and was formally incorporated into the UNESCO World Heritage framework in 1992. According to UNESCO, cultural landscapes are the combined works of nature and humankind, reflecting the long-term interaction between people and their natural environment (UNESCO, 1992). Compared with traditional categories of cultural

or natural heritage, cultural landscapes emphasise the dynamic relationship between ecological systems, human activities, and cultural values. As a result, they provide an important perspective for understanding living heritage that continues to evolve through social practices and cultural transmission (Taylor & Lennon, 2011).

Within this framework, tea cultural landscapes can be understood not merely as physical tea-growing environments but as integrated heritage systems that combine ecological resources, traditional knowledge, production techniques, and cultural beliefs. This perspective provides a useful foundation for examining how tea-related heritage is represented and communicated through translation.

2.2. Theoretical Dimensions of Tea Cultural Landscapes

Tea cultural landscapes are a distinctive form of cultural heritage that reflects the long-term interaction between human communities and tea-growing environments. Building on UNESCO's understanding of cultural landscapes, recent studies suggest that tea cultural landscapes can be understood through three interconnected dimensions: natural, technical, and spiritual.

The natural dimension refers to ecological systems associated with tea cultivation, including ancient tea forests, biodiversity, climate conditions, and sustainable agricultural practices. These elements constitute the environmental foundation of tea culture and reflect traditional ecological knowledge accumulated through human–nature interaction (Zhu, 2024).

The technical dimension encompasses tea cultivation, processing techniques, tea-making skills, and related forms of practical knowledge. As important components of intangible cultural heritage, these techniques are transmitted across generations and contribute to the continuity of tea culture.

The spiritual dimension includes beliefs, rituals, customs, aesthetic values, and symbolic meanings associated with tea culture. Concepts such as tea ancestor worship, tea-related rituals, and cultural expressions embody the social memory and cultural identity of tea-producing communities (Zhu, 2024).

These three dimensions are closely interconnected and together form the cultural significance of tea cultural landscapes. Accordingly, they also provide the analytical framework for the classification and discussion of tea-related terminology in this study.

2.3. Interlingual Reconstruction and the Translation of Heritage Terminology

Interlingual reconstruction refers to the process through which cultural meanings are reinterpreted and represented across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Rather than viewing translation as a simple transfer of linguistic forms, this perspective emphasises the reconstruction of cultural knowledge in ways that are accessible and meaningful to target audiences.

In translation studies, Nord′s functionalist approach highlights that translation should be guided by communicative purposes and the needs of target readers (Nord, 1997). Similarly, Tymoczko argues that cultural translation involves the representation and negotiation of cultural meanings rather than the direct transfer of information (Tymoczko, 2007). These perspectives suggest that the translation of heritage-related terminology requires translators to balance cultural specificity with intercultural comprehensibility.

This challenge is particularly evident in tea cultural landscapes, where many terms are deeply embedded in local ecological knowledge, traditional techniques, and cultural beliefs. The translation of such terminology therefore involves not only linguistic choices but also the communication of heritage values associated with tea culture. From this perspective, interlingual reconstruction can be understood as a process through which tea-related cultural meanings are reinterpreted and communicated to international audiences.

Based on this understanding, the present study adopts interlingual reconstruction as an analytical perspective for examining the translation of representative tea-related intangible cultural heritage terminology in *Tea: Questions and Answers*. By analysing selected terms from the natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions of tea cultural landscapes, the study explores how translation contributes to the communication and international dissemination of tea-related heritage.

3. Research design

3.1. Data Collection and Term Selection

The data for this study were collected from *Tea: Questions and Answers*, a comprehensive work that systematically introduces Chinese tea culture, including tea production, ecological knowledge, and tea-related cultural practices. Rather than focusing on isolated tea products or individual tea-making techniques, the book presents tea culture as an integrated heritage system involving interactions among natural environments, traditional practices, and cultural values. Therefore, it was selected as a representative case for examining how tea-related intangible cultural heritage terminology is reconstructed and communicated through translation.

Following the analytical framework established in Section 2, the collected terminology was classified into three dimensions: natural, technical, and spiritual. To ensure the representativeness and analytical value of the selected examples, terms were chosen according to four criteria: (1) significance within tea cultural landscapes; (2) translation complexity and cultural specificity; (3) clarity of textual context; and (4) relevance to heritage communication.

Based on these criteria, nine representative terms were selected for detailed qualitative analysis, with three terms representing each dimension of tea cultural landscapes, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Selected Tea-related ICH Terminology

Category	Chinese Term	Proposed Translation	Translation Strategy
Natural	森林茶园	Forest Tea Gardens	Literal translation + explicitation
Natural	茶园生态立体种植	Three-dimensional Ecological Plantation	Literal translation + functional explanation
Natural	古茶树	Ancient Tea Trees	Literal translation + cultural annotation
Technical	擂茶	Lei Cha	Transliteration + explicitation
Technical	茶艺表演	Tea Art Performance	Literal translation + functional explanation
Technical	杀青	Fixation	Functional translation + technical explicitation
Spiritual	茶寿	Tea Longevity	Literal translation + cultural annotation
Spiritual	茶祖	Tea Ancestor	Functional translation + cultural annotation
Spiritual	茶舞莲花雾	Lotus-Mist Tea Dance	Creative translation + cultural reconstruction

These terms represent the ecological, technical, and cultural dimensions of tea cultural landscapes and provide a basis for examining how tea-related heritage meanings are reconstructed and communicated through translation.

3.2. Analytical framework

To examine how tea-related intangible cultural heritage (ICH) terminology is communicated through translation, this study adopts a qualitative case-study approach. The selected terms are analysed through a five-dimensional framework consisting of: (1) source term, (2) textual context, (3) English translation, (4) translation strategy, and (5) heritage communication function.

First, each term is examined within its original textual context to identify its cultural significance in tea cultural landscapes. Second, the corresponding English translation is analysed with particular attention to the strategies employed, including literal translation, transliteration, explicitation, and cultural annotation. Finally, the analysis considers how these translation choices contribute to the communication of heritage-related meanings and facilitate intercultural understanding among international readers.

Rather than evaluating translations solely in terms of linguistic equivalence, the present study focuses on how translation mediates the natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions of tea cultural landscapes. Through this approach, the study explores the role of translation in communicating tea-related heritage values across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

4. Findings

4.1. Translation of the Natural Dimension

The natural dimension of tea cultural landscapes reflects the ecological knowledge and environmental practices that have developed through long-term interactions between tea-growing communities and their surroundings. Among the selected examples, Forest Tea Gardens (森林茶园) and Three-dimensional Ecological Plantation (茶园生态立体种植) illustrate how ecological concepts are represented and communicated through translation.

Forest Tea Gardens refers to a tea cultivation system embedded within well-preserved forest environments. In the translation, the term is rendered as Forest Tea Gardens, a largely literal translation that preserves the original ecological imagery. However, the concept extends beyond the simple coexistence of forests and tea plants. To enhance intercultural comprehensibility, the translation is supplemented with explanatory information describing tea trees growing under forest canopies and within relatively intact ecological systems. This strategy helps international readers understand the ecological characteristics that distinguish traditional tea forests from conventional tea plantations.

Similarly, the term茶园生态立体种植is translated as Three-dimensional Ecological Plantation. The translation combines literal rendering with functional explanation to convey the multi-layered ecological structure of tea cultivation systems. The expression highlights the coexistence of trees, shrubs, and ground vegetation within a sustainable agricultural ecosystem. Rather than focusing solely on agricultural production, the translation communicates the ecological wisdom embedded in traditional tea-growing practices.

Another example illustrating the natural dimension is “古茶树” (Ancient Tea Trees). Unlike ordinary tea trees, ancient tea trees embody both ecological characteristics and cultural continuity, as they represent long-established tea-growing environments preserved through generations. Therefore, the translation of this term involves not only the transfer of botanical meaning but also the reconstruction of its heritage value.

The proposed translation “Ancient Tea Trees” adopts a literal translation strategy, retaining the core meaning of the original term. The adjective “ancient” conveys the temporal dimension associated with these trees and highlights their historical significance. However, since the term may not immediately evoke the cultural and ecological values attached to ancient tea trees among international readers, further contextual explanation is necessary in heritage communication contexts.

These three examples demonstrate that the translation of natural-dimension terminology requires attention not only to ecological meanings but also to the relationship between natural environments and cultural heritage values. Through appropriate translation choices and contextual explanation, natural elements of tea cultural landscapes can be made more accessible to international readers.

4.2. Translation of the Technical Dimension

The technical dimension of tea cultural landscapes encompasses traditional tea-making techniques, tea-related practices, and forms of practical knowledge that have been transmitted across generations. Among the selected examples, Lei Cha (擂茶), Fixation (杀青) and Tea Art Performance (茶艺表演) demonstrate how translation mediates the communication of culturally specific tea practices and technical knowledge to international audiences.

Lei Cha is a traditional tea-based food preparation popular in several ethnic communities in southern China. In the translation, the original Chinese term is retained through transliteration as *Lei Cha*, while an explanatory phrase, “pounded tea,” is added to clarify its basic meaning. This strategy preserves the cultural identity of the source term while simultaneously improving accessibility for readers unfamiliar with Chinese tea culture. Additional explanations of ingredients and preparation methods further help communicate the cultural and practical characteristics

of Lei Cha, allowing international readers to understand it as more than a conventional tea beverage.

Fixation represents another important example of technical-dimension terminology related to tea production. Referring to the heat-treatment process that prevents enzymatic oxidation and preserves the quality of tea leaves, the term embodies specialized knowledge developed through traditional tea-making practices. Unlike terms that can be directly understood through their literal meanings, "杀青" contains technical implications that may not be immediately accessible to international readers.

The proposed translation "Fixation" adopts a functional translation strategy combined with technical explicitation. Although a literal rendering such as "kill-green" may retain the imagery of the source term, it may cause confusion among readers unfamiliar with Chinese tea processing. The term "fixation," which is widely used in tea science, better conveys the technical function of this process. Additional explanation is therefore necessary to clarify its role in tea production and to facilitate intercultural understanding of traditional tea-making knowledge.

Tea Art Performance represents a different type of technical-dimension terminology, focusing on the performative and ritual aspects of tea practices. While the term itself clearly conveys the performative aspect of tea culture, the accompanying description highlights its integration of aesthetics, etiquette, and philosophical values. In this way, the translation communicates not only a tea-related activity but also the cultural meanings embedded in traditional tea practices. The translated term therefore functions as a bridge between observable practices and the broader cultural values they represent.

These examples suggest that the translation of technical-dimension terminology requires a balance between cultural preservation and communicative effectiveness. Different types of technical terms may involve not only procedural knowledge but also local practices and cultural meanings. By combining transliteration, literal translation, and explanatory strategies, translations can make tea-related knowledge more accessible to international audiences while retaining important elements of cultural specificity. By combining transliteration, literal translation, and explanatory strategies, the translations make tea-related knowledge more accessible to international audiences while retaining important elements of cultural specificity. As a result, translation can serve as a means in communicating the technical heritage embodied in tea cultural landscapes.

4.3. Translation of the Spiritual Dimension

The spiritual dimension of tea cultural landscapes encompasses beliefs, symbolic meanings, cultural values, and collective memories associated with tea culture. Compared with the natural and technical dimensions, the translation of spiritually loaded terminology presents greater challenges because such terms often carry culturally specific concepts that lack direct equivalents in the target language. Tea Longevity (茶寿) Tea Ancestor (茶祖) and Lotus-Mist Tea Dance (茶舞莲花雾) provide representative examples of this challenge.

Tea Longevity refers to a traditional cultural expression associated with longevity and good fortune. Its meaning originates from the symbolic interpretation of the Chinese character "茶," which is traditionally linked to the age of eighty-eight. Since no widely established English equivalent exists, the translation adopts the expression Tea Longevity and supplements it with explanatory information regarding its cultural origins. This strategy allows the cultural symbolism embedded in the source term to be communicated while reducing the risk of misunderstanding among international readers.

Similarly, Tea Ancestor refers to the legendary figure regarded as the originator of tea culture, most commonly Shennong in Chinese tradition. The proposed translation adopts a functional rendering, Tea Ancestor, while further explaining its cultural and historical significance. Without such clarification, international readers may interpret the term literally as a family ancestor associated with tea rather than a symbolic cultural figure. The explanatory approach therefore helps preserve the cultural meaning attached to the concept while enhancing intercultural comprehensibility.

A further example of spiritually and aesthetically embedded terminology is "茶舞莲花雾" (Lotus-Mist Tea Dance). Unlike Tea Longevity and Tea Ancestor, which mainly represent cultural concepts and symbolic figures, this term integrates artistic expression, natural imagery, and emotional associations within a concise cultural expression. The elements "莲花" (lotus) and "雾" (mist) carry rich symbolic and aesthetic meanings in Chinese culture, representing purity, elegance, and an ethereal atmosphere.

The proposed translation "Lotus-Mist Tea Dance" adopts a creative reconstruction strategy rather than a purely literal translation. By retaining the key cultural images of "lotus" and "mist" while presenting them in an accessible English expression, the translation attempts to reproduce the aesthetic effect and symbolic associations of the original term. This case demonstrates that the translation of tea-related ICH terminology may require the recreation of cultural imagery and emotional resonance across languages.

These examples demonstrate that the translation of spiritually loaded terminology involves more than linguistic transfer. In many cases, cultural symbolism, historical memory, and community beliefs must also be communicated to target audiences. Through explanatory and reconstructive translation strategies, culturally specific concepts can be made more accessible while maintaining their heritage significance. Translation therefore serves as a means of representing and communicating the symbolic and cultural values embedded in tea cultural landscapes.

5. Discussion

5.1. Translation and Heritage Communication

The findings presented above demonstrate that the translation of tea-related intangible cultural heritage (ICH) terminology involves more than the transfer of lexical meanings. Across the natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions of tea cultural landscapes, translation functions as a process of cultural mediation through which heritage values are interpreted and communicated for international audiences.

The analysis shows that different categories of tea-related ICH terminology involve different layers of cultural meaning, requiring translation strategies that address their specific ecological, technical, and symbolic dimensions. For natural-dimension terms, explanatory translation helps reconstruct ecological knowledge embedded in traditional tea-growing systems. For technical-dimension terms, transliteration and functional explanation help represent tea-related skills and practices in ways accessible to target readers. For spiritual-dimension terms, additional cultural interpretation is often necessary to convey symbolic meanings and cultural values that may be unfamiliar to target readers. These findings support Nord's view that translation should be guided by communicative purposes and the needs of target audiences (Nord, 1997). They also resonate with Tymoczko's argument that

translation involves the representation and negotiation of cultural meanings rather than the simple transfer of information (Tymoczko, 2007).

From a heritage perspective, translation can be understood as an important form of heritage interpretation. Previous studies have emphasised that heritage communication involves helping audiences understand and engage with the meanings embedded in cultural resources rather than merely providing information about them (Smith, 2006; Timothy & Boyd, 2015). The translation of tea-related terminology performs a similar function by making culturally specific concepts accessible to international readers while preserving their heritage significance. In this sense, translation serves not only as a linguistic activity but also as a means of heritage communication that supports intercultural understanding and cultural representation.

The findings therefore suggest that the effective translation of tea-related ICH terminology may contribute to the broader representation and intercultural accessibility of tea cultural landscapes within global heritage discourse.

5.2. Translation and the Sustainable Communication of Tea-related Heritage

Beyond facilitating heritage communication, the translation of tea-related terminology also has the potential to support the sustainable communication of intangible cultural heritage. As cultural heritage increasingly enters global contexts, effective translation becomes essential for ensuring that culturally specific knowledge can be understood, appreciated, and transmitted across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The findings of this study suggest that successful heritage translation requires a balance between cultural authenticity and intercultural accessibility. Excessive simplification may lead to the loss of cultural specificity, while overly literal translation may create barriers to comprehension. The examples analysed in this study demonstrate that strategies such as transliteration, literal translation, explicitation, and cultural annotation can work together to preserve heritage meanings while enhancing communicative effectiveness.

From the perspective of Ecotranslatology, translation can be viewed as a process of adaptation and selection within a particular cultural and communicative environment (Hu, 2021). Translators are required to adapt to the linguistic, cultural, and communicative needs of target readers while retaining essential features of the source culture. This perspective is particularly relevant to the translation of tea-related heritage terminology, where ecological knowledge, traditional techniques, and cultural values are closely interconnected. By making culturally embedded concepts more accessible to international audiences, translation helps create conditions for the wider recognition and continued communication of tea-related heritage.

As the global visibility of Chinese tea culture continues to increase, especially following the inscription of the Jingmai Mountain Ancient Tea Forest Cultural Landscape on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2023), translation may provide increasing opportunities for intercultural dialogue and the communication of heritage meanings. The translation of tea-related terminology therefore contributes not only to linguistic communication but also to the representation and interpretation of tea-related cultural heritage across languages and cultures.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the translation of tea-related intangible cultural heritage (ICH) terminology in *Tea: Questions and Answers* from the perspective of interlingual reconstruction and heritage communication. By analysing representative terms from the natural, technical, and spiritual dimensions of tea cultural landscapes, the study explored how translation reconstructs and communicates ecological knowledge, traditional practices, and cultural values embedded in Chinese tea culture.

The findings indicate that different categories of tea-related ICH terminology involve different layers of cultural meaning and therefore require translation approaches that address their ecological, technical, and symbolic dimensions. Literal translation, transliteration, explicitation, and cultural annotation can be combined to improve intercultural comprehensibility while preserving cultural specificity. The study further suggests that the translation of tea-related terminology functions not only as linguistic transfer but also as a form of heritage communication that supports the representation and intercultural accessibility of tea cultural landscapes.

The research contributes to current discussions on the translation of intangible cultural heritage by highlighting the relationship between terminology translation and heritage communication. It also provides practical insights into the translation practices involved in presenting tea-related cultural heritage to international audiences.

This study is limited by its focus on a single text and its qualitative case-study design. Future research may expand the scope of analysis by examining additional tea-related heritage texts or by exploring audience reception of translated heritage terminology in different cultural contexts.

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Contemplacao em Lenilde Freitas: O Feminino e o Flagrante Momentâneo em Breve Abordagem

Contemplation in Lenilde Freitas: the feminine and the fleeting moment in a brief approach

Article Record

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Abstract

In this short article about the poet Lenilde Freitas, whose work is markedly feminine – as it presentes common to the authors, in a space of sisterhood, such as perception of nature, for exemple, with poems about rose apple and cashew trees – the author walks through the steets of her childhood in Recife, creating poetic images. Additionally, she captures moments, as if photographing them, and crystallises in poetry. In her work, there i salso a dialogue with the literary arts, though the creation os poems dedicated either to the Pernambuco poet Deborah Brennand, with whom she spent time with, whether it was the writer Clarice Lispector, whose poetic sensibility was studied be Lenilde Freitas in her master's dissertation. As a retring writer, I would now like to presente a little bit of her poetic work, for a sensitive, semple and reclusive woman.

capturing the moment | communion with authors | Female poetry | space of sisterhood

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Contemplacao em Lenilde Freitas: O Feminino e o Flagrante Momentâneo em Breve Abordagem

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Abstract

Neste breve artigo sobre a poetisa Lenilde Freitas, em cuja obra, marcadamente feminina – que apresenta temas comuns às autoras num espaço de sororidade, como a percepção da natureza, por exemplo, em poemas sobre os jambeiros e cajueiros a autora percorre as ruas da infância, no Recife, em imagens poéticas. Além disso, flagra os instantes, cujas imagens cristaliza em poesias, como que os fotografando. Em sua obra, o diálogo com as artes literárias, mediante a elaboração de poemas dedicados quer à poetisa pernambucana Deborah Brennand, com quem conviveu, quer à escritora Clarice Lispector, cujo viés poético foi estudado por Lenilde Freitas em sua dissertação de mestrado, se faz presente. A seguir, um pouco do seu fazer poético, escrito por uma mulher sensível, simples e reclusa.

Keywords: *comunhão com autoras, espaço de sororidade, flagrante dos instantes, Poesia feminina*

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1. Introdução

No ano de 1993, a então professora de literatura portuguesa da Universidade de São Paulo e crítica literária, Nelly Novaes Coelho, em seu *A Literatura Feminina no Brasil Contemporâneo,* publicou artigo sobre a poetisa paraibana, nascida em Campina Grande mas radicada no Recife desde tenra infância, Lenilde Freitas (1939-2024), intitulado *O Mito de Eva Reinventado.* No livro (1993, p. 19), a autora diz que as mulheres, àquela época, buscavam nova imagem, nova identidade, em uma tentativa de romper assim, audaciosamente, com o estabelecido pelo mundo patriarcal. Ela afirma que a arte depende do seu momento histórico, econômico e social, até mesmo de classe, para ser elaborada. É assim que podemos perceber nas concisas poesias de Lenilde Freitas, que constituem a maior parte de sua obra, um espaço de sororidade.

Em um momento de cumplicidade e gratidão, a poetisa responde com a elaboração do poema *Emblema Lusitano*, publicado na coletânea *A Corça no Campo* (2010). Nelly Novaes Coelho lembra-se (1993, p. 12) "da forma com que a literatura feminina vem se impondo à crítica - como um fenômeno especial, a despeito das muitas vozes (inclusive de escritoras...) que veem nessa distinção mais uma discriminação". Na opinião da catedrática (1993, p. 12), a preocupação daquelas que fazem obras de mulher acontece porque há uma "metamorfose-em-marcha" na contemporaneidade, sendo as literatas sua pedra-de-toque. Vale acrescentar ainda, por seu pensamento crítico, que não se trata de saber se a literatura realizada por mulheres é melhor que a masculina, mas sim de saber o que elas constroem e como o fazem, determinando novos caminhos.

Foi assim, com esta mescla de gratidão e sororidade, que Lenilde escreveu o poema *Emblema Lusitano*, dedicado a Nelly Novaes Coelho:

> Entra comigo
> no casarão decrépito
> a nostalgia das origens.
>
> Meus passos
> impregnam de espanto
> as paredes caladas.
>
> Por que arde nos olhos
> a luz extinta
> e carreia bolor
> o obscuro nada?
>
> Quedo-me na instância
> De uma saudade primeva:
> Tudo geme ao meu redor (2010, p. 154).

Segundo a acadêmica e pesquisadora da literatura feminina, Luzilá Gonçalves Ferreira, o espaço de sororidade acontece porque as escritoras mantêm laços de cumplicidade, umas abraçando as outras, tal a comunhão pela luta emancipatória das mulheres. Todavia, nada disso é uma revanche contra o masculino, antes uma tentativa de abrir espaço em meio às trincheiras da luta, afirmando a sua existência, tão negada por séculos. Líder do Grupo de Trabalho A Mulher na Literatura, da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, a também romancista, juntamente com outras professoras, passou a entrevistar e ouvir relatos de poetisas pernambucanas, entre as quais Lenilde Freitas, com os seus poemas livres, modernos e objetivos, flagrando os momentos percebidos e os cristalizando. Outra a abordar o tema do gênero feminino foi a crítica literária e teórica da literatura, Eurídice Figueiredo.

2. Discutindo Gênero

Em sua obra *Por uma Crítica Feminista: Leituras Transversais de Escritoras Brasileiras*, Eurídice Figueiredo aborda o tema a partir da leitura de outra pensadora: Teresa de Lauretis, que postula, em quatro proposições:

> "1. Gênero é uma representação; 2. a representação do gênero é a sua construção através da arte e da cultura; 3. a construção do gênero é um processo que se dá em todos os níveis da sociedade, inclusive no seio do feminismo; 4. ele também se dá em sua desconstrução. O gênero, como o real, não é apenas o efeito da representação, mas também o seu excesso, aquilo que permanece fora do discurso como um trauma em potencial que se/quando (sic) não contido, pode romper ou desestabilizar qualquer representação" (1994, p. 209).

Outra pensadora, a filósofa norte-americana, Judith Butler (2010, p. 25), postula que se o caráter do sexo é contestável, o chamado sexo também é construído socialmente, acontecendo o mesmo com o estabelecimento do conceito de gênero. Ela acrescenta: "Talvez o sexo sempre tenha sido o gênero, de tal forma que a distinção entre sexo e gênero se revela absolutamente nenhuma. Se o sexo é uma categoria tomada em seu gênero, não faz sentido definir o gênero como a interpretação cultural do sexo" (2010, p. 25). Nesse sentido, Lenilde Freitas, de forma sutil, coloca, nos seus poemas, as peculiaridades do gênero feminino. Este fato se dá em todos os seus livros: *Esboço de Eva*; *Desvios*; *Espaço Neutro*; *Cercanias*; *Grãos na Eira*; *A Casa Encantada* e a coletânea *A Corça no Campo*.

Para fechar esse espaço de debate feminino, vale a leitura de uma poesia dedicada à amiga do dia a dia, Deborah Brennand, tão reservada quanto Lenilde Freitas, chamado *Pássaro Noturno*:

Na bilha de barro
a água esfria
sobre o peitoril da janela.

Há um desassossego
de folhas em agosto.

Os capins
embaraçam seus cabelos
no vento que varre o pátio
da igreja enraizada
num canto da praça.

A meus pés,
de um cachorro
cujo nome desconheço,
jorra afeto.

Há tempo... há tempo
diz o pássaro noturno.

E, como a lua,
a noite oferta-me a própria cabeça
numa bandeja de prata (2010, p. 32).

Além de um toque de sororidade, as referências aos artistas está presente na obra de Lenilde Freitas. Nelly Novaes Coelho e Deborah Brennand, em especial, demarcam o território da compreensão do fazer poético e a luta emancipatória das mulheres através da literatura; mulheres muitas vezes incompreendidas pelos próprios parceiros, como se apenas entre irmãs a comunhão viesse a acontecer. Todavia, comprovando a ausência de confronto entre a produção canônica masculina e a produção feminina, há inúmeras homenagens a poetas na obra da poetisa, tais como Joaquim Cardozo, Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Pena Filho, T. S. Eliot e Fernando Pessoa, entre os homens. Entre as mulheres, Juana Ibarbourou, Florbela Espanca, Charlotte Mew e Clarice Lispector, por exemplo. Esta última foi tema da dissertação de mestrado da poetisa junto à Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. No poema *A Clarice Lispector,* ela diz:

Os desatinos do mundo
exaurem a mulher
lua
desde sempre
a observar a terra.

A ramagem respira o silêncio
que abriga a noite
ancorada no mar.

Cansada dos peixes,
a água adormece. (2010, p. 169)

Outra característica peculiar de Lenilde é o recurso a elementos da natureza, com suas metáforas de frutos e flores, sendo também uma característica bastante feminina, por meio do fazer poético que acumula prêmios: All Nation Poetry Context, nos Estados Unidos; Prêmio Emílio Moura de Poesia, em Minas Gerais; Prêmio Augusto dos Anjos, na Paraíba; Prêmio Arriete Vilela, em Alagoas, e os Prêmios Passárgada e Nestlé de Poesia, ambos em São Paulo. Nessa abordagem do feminino, pode-se retomar, e para concluir, o pensamento de Eurídice Figueiredo:

> "Não é possível falar de uma escrita feminina sem cair no essencialismo que postula uma identidade fixa do que é uma mulher; por outro lado, não é possível ignorar que o fato de ser mulher tem algum impacto no tipo de literatura produzida, como querem as desconstrucionistas" (2020, p. 95).

3. Recurso à Natureza

Nordestina, Lenilde Freitas mantém olhar peculiar: observa, atentamente, a natureza que a circunda no Recife, como, por exemplo, os jambeiros frondosos, fincados à rua das Creoulas, nos bairros das Graças; ou nas cercanias da avenida Fernandes Vieira, no bairro da Boa Vista, que frequentou na infância. Há também as uvas e os cajus amarelos (não os vermelhos), responsáveis por compotas deliciosas e outras iguarias, muito encontrados à beira-mar. Além disso, ela constrói imagens a partir das flores, tais como as árvores da acácia ou as pequenas e mimosas margaridas. Na sua tese de doutorado, apresentada junto à Universidade Federal de Campina Grande em 2025, a pesquisadora Thaísa Rochelle Pereira Martins traça o caminho que percorre estas veredas, sinalizando como alguns estudiosos conceberam a natureza como ciclo vital humano.

Visitemos o poema *O jambeiro*:

Raios de sol
infiltram-se
por entre as folhas do jambeiro.

Em terra estranha,
eis que o tempo
reencontra essa paisagem
fixada em país nenhum.

Sentemo-nos
- diz minha voz
no outrora com degraus
de pedras e de pombos
- o que nos torna cúmplices
é este mesmo azul que nos recobre.

Tua mão sustinha a cor
de um verão perfeito,

enquanto meu olhar
percorria o sem-fim do dia
cuja luz – sempre plena –
introduzia-se por entre os ramos
de um jambeiro
que – até este instante –
eu julguei morto. (2010, p 3)

De acordo com a pesquisadora Thaísa Martins (2025, p. 75), entre as questões filosóficas que circundam a temática da natureza está um ciclo organizado, natural, em que o ser humano é intrínseco, onde este participa "não apenas como parte ou fim último da dinâmica da natureza, mas como meio pelo qual ela é revelada". Assim, no que concerne ao ecossistema, o ser humano deve experimentá-lo síncrono. A poesia de Lenilde Freitas, no que tange a isso, é constituída de imagens que estabelecem uma relação íntima entre sujeito e natureza, partindo de percepções humanas, em que o eu poético se mescla à contemplação. Em especial, o poema traz o flagrante da fragilidade de uma árvore que produz frutos sazonais e, mesmo os produzindo, depende da vontade humana para continuar existindo.

A poetisa realiza, num instante de contemplação e consagração, proporcionar ao leitor registro lírico. Segundo o crítico literário e professor da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Lourival Holanda, no prefácio *A persistência de Estrela À Corça no Campo*, "foi dito muito a partir de poucas palavras" (2010, p. 30), em se tratando das poesias de Lenilde Freitas. E ele continua o raciocínio: "Não há em Lenilde uma proliferação aleatória do imaginário poético – mas, antes, seu controle, uma acurada sintaxe de imagens" (2010, p. 20). Dessa forma, percebe-se o quanto a escritora capta o esplendor da natureza, com seus elementos considerados organismos vivos, em movimento contínuo (vejam-se as estações do ano, marcadas pelo jambeiro). Ela projeta de tal forma a imagem no poema que este fica fora da linha temporal, imagem duradoura, ganhando perspectivas que escapam ao habitual.

Outra imagem do esplendor da natureza singrado em poesia se acha no poema *Crepuscular*. Ouçamos:

Longe,
as acácias
- cálices dourados
onde a tarde bebe
o vinho mais rubro.

Anjos lá no céu
guardam seus arados
porque o olhar do sol
está perdendo o brilho.

- Segue no escuro
o trem sobre os trilhos (2010, p. 37).

Outro estudioso da obra de Lenilde Freitas, o professor da Universidade Federal de Campina Grande, José Hélder Pinheiro Alves, no artigo intitulado *Há que Guardar a Poesia: O Instante e a Natureza em Lenilde Freitas*, redigido em parceria com Thaísa Martins, faz observações pertinentes. Numa delas, atesta o quanto as imagens nascem da percepção arguta do artista, "ligadas a uma experiência subjetiva, que difere, em certo ponto, das classificações objetivas e que podem também despertar no leitor estímulos diversos ligados à emoção" (2023, p. 253). Por conseguinte, pode-se afirmar que a formação imagética escapa ao senso comum, acontecendo, a poesia, a partir da aproximação de opostos, mediante a unidade da linguagem, essa última posta em tensão, expressando o que somente pode ser dito por criação de imagens, nas artes.

4. O Instante Flagrado

Continuando o raciocínio do professor José Hélder Pinheiro Alves (2023, p. 249), no que tange à produção de Lenilde Freitas, ele afirma que a linguagem poética se baseia na percepção de instantes, decorrente de olhar acurado, sobre os acontecimentos corriqueiros do cotidiano, seja o vaivém, por exemplo, de um cachorro percorrendo a rua, sejam as mais diversas e ricas imagens que surgem da natureza, reveladoras de peculiaridades e subjetividades. Trata-se de composições imagéticas que promovem o momento criador, propiciadores da concepção poética, tendo a literata "um caráter sempre reflexivo, atento ao tempo e seus (des)mandos [...] vivências amorosas às vezes doídas, situações, reflexões, observações sobre o cotidiano, tudo de modo sempre contido" (2023, p. 249). Mas o que diz o teórico e poeta francês Bachelard?

Para ele (1994, p. 188), "as simultaneidades sensíveis que reúnem perfumes, cores e sons, não fazem senão atrair simultaneidades mais longínquas e mais profundas". Consequentemente, a imagem captada junto à natureza se impregna de olhar lírico, evocando lembranças passadas, trazidas à tona no mesmo instante do desenrolar da cena. Acrescente tratar-se aí de uma experiência ligada à fonte dos afetos, ao carinho pela criação, observando a relação entre árvores e vida; flores, pássaros e os homens.

Outra crítica literária brasileira, Betina Cunha, discute a natureza nas poesias do francês Paul Eluard e do pernambucano Manuel Bandeira, que Lenilde Freitas utilizou para o seu insight criador. Elas

> "[...] são o fruto de uma identificação que se estabelece no âmbito da percepção e provocam, no seio da imaginação criadora, o desencadear de sensações que se ajustam e se superpõem às conhecidas. Por essa simbiose emocional, induzem sentidos e valores novos que se concretizam para formar uma realidade diferente. Diferente porque se aloja no campo da imaginação, mas verdadeira porque, pelo plano da sensibilidade e da emoção, é real, concreta e perceptível" (Cunha, 2000, p. 40).

Concluindo esse bloco, ouçamos o poema *Lisboa*, onde a poetisa narra o episódio sobre o cotidiano das pessoas, quando de sua visita a Portugal.

Tão bom
ficar assim olhando a rua:
pessoas passam na calçada
árvores sonolentas se espreguiçam
o pensamento ocioso pensa em nada.

Tudo verdade
tudo mentira nua e crua.

Mais algum tempo
nem eu nem rua
lembraremos.

Ah, os que passam
- sonâmbulos caminhantes
Dos extremos (2020, p. 153).

5. Reflexão Sobre a Vida

A obra de Lenilde é estudada nas universidades. Wandersson Hidayck Silva, por exemplo, em sua tese de doutorado junto à Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, intitulada *Sonho, Corpo e Êxtase: Elaborações do Divino nas Obras de Hilda Hilst e Lenilde Freitas*, também reflete sobre a vida, a existência. Exemplo disso é o poema *Brugges*:

E se morasse em Brugges
à beira do canal
tão floridas as janelas
debruçadas sobre as águas
com pontezinhas deitadas
à sombra da tarde?

Se sentado nos Cafés
lesse poemas
ao som de um violino
e o porvir sem alarde
reescrevesse teu destino?

Mas todo sonho é nuvem
e como nuvem some.
Realidade é a capa (dura)
onde inscreveram teu nome (2010, p. 152).

Encontramos nesse poema a polaridade entre sonho e realidade: nele a autora, imersa numa cidade medieval, conservada no coração da Bélgica, decanta não apenas a beleza do rincão, mas a dura realidade daquele que aprecia a vida, quando aponta que os sonhos são passageiros como as nuvens, enquanto a realidade da vida é implacável, muitas vezes retirando todos os sonhos. Há, porém, um fato relevante: toda a beleza e esplendor da poesia, no sentido de encantar e seduzir o leitor. Lenilde Freitas se apropria do sedutor, daquilo que é belo, para questionar o sumo da nossa existência. Católica praticante que era, lembra-nos do Calvário que os seres humanos vivem na Terra. Ela não trata de um mistério no correr da vida, fala com experiência de quem muito já realizou, tudo isso sem amargura, apenas constatação, e continua vivendo a intemporalidade.

Nesse sentido, ela corrobora o pensamento do pensador da poesia, João Alexandre Barbosa, em seu *As Ilusões da Modernidade*. Segundo ele (2009, p. 16), o tempo do poema não existe, acontecendo apenas entre o poeta e a linguagem, mostrando a intemporalidade da poesia, ou seja, a presença, na obra de arte, de um roteiro intertextual. Aqui, o poeta "desfaz o nó das circunstâncias", criando um espaço para a atualização cultural, enquanto a leitura já se encontra marcada pelas circunstâncias que a propiciam. De fato, o que o autor diz é inevitavelmente intemporal, quando se lê um breve tratado da existência humana, com sua angústia bipolar: perda x ganho, o que Lenilde Freitas muito bem fez no poema *Lisboa*. "A poesia contemporânea é uma poesia reflexiva, crítica, uma poesia de cultura, ligada à meditação e à leitura de obras anteriores" (2009, p. 17).

João Alexandre Barbosa continua:

> "Para a leitura do poema moderno, é fundamental esta perspectiva: o espaço do poema enfeixa os espaços do poeta pela operação da intertextualidade. Da mesma forma que os seus tempos particulares são consumidos pelo tempo da linguagem da poesia, através de uma leitura intertextual que se introjeta na composição, assim os espaços circunstanciais são dependentes da construção intensificadora do espaço da linguagem do poema" (2009, p. 32).

Outro ponto que merece menção, no que concerne à poesia de Lenilde Freitas, é a oscilação da linguagem e a autonomia da arte, que fala por si e, na poesia, encanta pela sedução da palavra, mantendo tensão entre dois polos; no caso do poema *Lisboa*, contemplação x angústia existencial, que impregnam a universalidade dos sentimentos, numa mescla entre realidade e história pessoal: realidade vivida pela autora versus a história dos sentimentos transfigurada no poema. Podemos, por conseguinte, sedimentar as ideias acima propostas a partir do teórico Hênio Tavares (2002, p. 11), que pontua o quanto o gracioso, na poética, é atrativo, pelo efeito produzido a partir da expressão, numa graça de movimentos e encanto: "bondade da alma".

Outro teórico que fala a respeito do traçado escrito é Jacques Derrida, em seu *A Escritura e a Diferença*. O pensador (2009, p 301) assinala que a consciência nos concede o que se chama de qualidade, ou seja, grande diversidade de sensações, que são modos diferentes de referenciar o mundo exterior. Aqui, fica visível o quanto a poesia de Lenilde Freitas é verossímil, pois que, em *Brugges*, por exemplo, ela contempla o mundo exterior para, a partir daí, realizar a viagem interior, aquela pertinente ao sentimento. Derrida pontua (2009, p. 301): "Podemos perguntar-nos como nascem estas qualidades e onde nascem estas qualidades". Como resposta, tem-se que é nesse mundo de sonhos, pois o poeta é senão um sonhador, que acontece a poesia. E acrescenta (2009, p. 309): "o sonho é intraduzível", intraduzível em outras línguas, pois que é peculiar ao pensamento individual.

Antes de iniciar a conclusão deste artigo, recorro a dois poemas de Lenilde, breves, como é do seu estilo, mas densos, impregnados de reflexão. O primeiro, *Instante*, revela a sua face nordestina, contemplando os frutos da terra. Ela narra:

Um olhar a menos
e não seria possível
ver no amarelo dos cajus
- trapezistas balançando
na lembrança –
o ouro esporádico
da vida (2010, p. 27).

E, num congraçamento de artistas, curvando-se à excelente literatura genuinamente portuguesa, até mesmo um tributo ao grande poeta moderno lusitano, pode-se ler, em *Lembrando Fernando Pessoa*:

Dentre dois homens iguais
o feliz é o que finge
estar distante demais
a dor que ainda o atinge (2010, p. 96).

6. À Guisa de Conclusão

Autora moderna, Lenilde Freitas deixa legado de beleza e reflexão, seja passeando pelo mundo, e o contemplando, de que *Lisboa* e *Brugges* são exemplos, seja nos tributos, como (Clarice Lispector e Fernando Pessoa) (nome dos dois poemas). Poética encantadora, que traduz as cores da terra (o amarelo dos cajus e a cor das acácias, por exemplo), marcadamente feminina, a poetisa fala dos instantes flagrados, do recurso à natureza, em *O Jambeiro*, bem como das questões de gênero, sobretudo em pauta nos nossos dias. Faço minhas, aqui, as palavras do crítico e pensador da estética Clement Greenberg, no seu *Estética Doméstica*. Segundo ele (2013, p. 80), o juízo estético nos possibilita total intimidade com nós mesmos, à medida que apreciamos a obra de arte. Nada de ruídos exteriores quebra esse momento de intimidade: arte-leitor.

Assim sendo, o juízo final sobre a obra de arte lida é realizado pelo leitor atento e contumaz que, partindo de sua própria intuição e sensações, codificando a obra conforme o seu nível cultural e de experiência de mundo, emite o seu pensamento em plena liberdade, numa verdade reveladora. "Em resumo: a experiência estética requer, por sua amplitude e intensidade, que o leitor se torne receptor distanciado e, portanto, cada vez mais objetivo", acrescenta Clement

Greenberg (2013, p. 84). Mas não se trata de uma contemplação qualquer, pois que esta se dá na condição de espectador e não de um agente passivo, mero consumidor do mundo capitalista. Muito mais, nesse debruçar sobre a beleza que enche os olhos; questiona a mente e acalma o espírito. Somente a arte tem esse poder e Lenilde Freitas nos cumula com sua obra.

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Interrogating Modernity: Cultural Relativism and the Idea of Civilisation in Satyajit Ray's Agantuk

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Abstract

Satyajit Ray's final cinematic testament, Agantuk (The Stranger, 1991), redefines modernity as a moral and intercultural condition rather than a technological or economic one. This paper argues that through the lens of cultural relativism, Ray critiques the Western-dominated conception of civilization and exposes the ethnocentric hierarchies that categorise societies as "advanced" or "primitive." The narrative introduces Manomohan Mitra, the cosmopolitan stranger whose anthropological insights mirror India's postcolonial anxieties and moral dilemmas. By contrasting the bourgeois fear of the urban elite with the ethical integrity of indigenous cultures, Ray challenges Eurocentrism and the developmentalist paradigm that equates progress with industrial and technological growth. The study demonstrates that Agantuk offers a decolonized vision of civilization grounded in moral integrity, intercultural empathy, and plural modernities—proposing that true modernity lies in ethical consciousness rather than material achievement.

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Abstract

Satyajit Ray's final cinematic testament, Agantuk (The Stranger, 1991), redefines modernity as a moral and intercultural condition rather than a technological or economic one. This paper argues that through the lens of cultural relativism, Ray critiques the Western-dominated conception of civilization and exposes the ethnocentric hierarchies that categorise societies as "advanced" or "primitive." The narrative introduces Manomohan Mitra, the cosmopolitan stranger whose anthropological insights mirror India's postcolonial anxieties and moral dilemmas. By contrasting the bourgeois fear of the urban elite with the ethical integrity of indigenous cultures, Ray challenges Eurocentrism and the developmentalist paradigm that equates progress with industrial and technological growth. The study demonstrates that Agantuk offers a decolonized vision of civilization grounded in moral integrity, intercultural empathy, and plural modernities—proposing that true modernity lies in ethical consciousness rather than material achievement.

Keywords: *Anthropology, Civilisation, Cultural Relativism, Humanism, Modernity, Postcolonialism*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

Satyajit Ray (1921–1992) remains one of the most revered humanists in cinematic history, a filmmaker whose works consistently probed the ethical and social dilemmas of modern India. A prolific intellectual, Ray's films transcended mere storytelling, offering complex meditations on tradition, change, and morality. *Agantuk* (1991), his final work, operates as a profound philosophical culmination of this worldview, condensing decades of observation and critical thought into a tight, chamber drama format.

Released at a juncture when India was poised for radical economic liberalisation and increasing globalisation, the film's critique of modernity takes on particular resonance. Ray uses the unexpected arrival of an estranged uncle, Manomohan Mitra, to trigger a forensic examination of the values held by the urban elite. The narrative's tension hinges not on physical action, but on ideological and ethical debate, positioning the film as a crucial text for understanding postcolonial intellectual thought concerning globalisation and cultural identity (Dutta 115). The premise - the suspicion cast upon an educated, well-travelled stranger by his own middle-class relatives - immediately establishes the central conflict: the tension between the fear-driven rationalism of the modern metropolis and the ethical sincerity of the outsider.

1.2. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following core questions:

1. How does *Agantuk* problematise the Western, technologically-defined idea of "civilization" and expose its inherent ethnocentrism?
2. In what specific narrative and dialogue-based ways does the film engage with the principles of cultural relativism as an anthropological and ethical stance?
3. What nuanced vision of "modernity" one divorced from the developmentalist paradigm - does Ray propose through Manomohan Mitra's character and the film's narrative resolution?

> (Here, the term "developmentalist paradigm" refers to the postcolonial economic belief that national progress must follow the Western model of industrialization and technological expansion, often at the cost of ethical and cultural autonomy.)

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this paper are:

- To interrogate Ray's cinematic discourse on civilisation, showing how it functions as a comprehensive critique of Eurocentric models and advocates for epistemic humility, is the aim.
- To explore the pervasive tension between rational modernity, moral integrity, and indigenous identity within the specific

context of postcolonial India, one must consider various factors.

- To analyse the film's narrative structure and cinematic language as a deliberate tool for dramatising intellectual conflict and achieving a philosophical conclusion.

2. Methodology

The methodology employed is primarily qualitative, utilising textual analysis of the screenplay and close film analysis of *Agantuk*'s mise-en-scène, character dynamics, and dialogue. The theoretical framing integrates two distinct but interconnected fields of inquiry: postcolonial theory (drawing on concepts of Orientalism, hybridity, and provincialising Europe) and anthropological notions of cultural relativism (specifically the Boasian tradition that rejects universal hierarchies of culture). By synthesising these frameworks, the paper positions Ray's film as a unique piece of cultural criticism that bridges aesthetics, ethics, and cultural anthropology.

2.1. Thesis Statement

Agantuk serves as Ray's critical meditation on modern civilisation, arguing that true modernity lies not in technological or economic advancement but in moral and cultural self-awareness. It advocates for a humane universalism grounded in the principles of cultural relativism and plural modernities.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Critical Reception of *Agantuk*

As Satyajit Ray's final film, *Agantuk* has been critically received as a philosophical capstone to his career, often drawing comparisons to his earlier works that dealt with social and moral alienation, such as *Pratidwandi* (The Adversary, 1970) and *Seemabaddha* (Company Limited, 1971). Critics, such as Andrew Robinson, often highlight the film's intense focus on dialogue and moral debate over dramatic action, calling it a "testament" to Ray's unwavering faith in humanism (Robinson 345). The film's minimalist setting - largely confined to a single middle-class Calcutta apartment - amplifies the intensity of the ideological conflict (Sarkar 99).

Manomohan Mitra's character, the *agantuk*, is interpreted not merely as a family member but as a philosophical catalyst, mirroring the function of figures like the guru in *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964) or the protagonist's alter ego in *Pratidwandi*. However, Manomohan is distinct: he is an educated, self-made man who willingly sheds the trappings of civilised life, choosing a nomadic existence among indigenous tribes. This choice makes him an interrogator, prompting an examination of how Indian society views its own educated global citizens who reject Western norms. Critical writings acknowledge that the suspicion he faces the relentless urge to categorise him as either a fraud or a lunatic is a reflection of the bourgeois society's deep-seated insecurity about wealth, identity, and authenticity (Dasgupta 15).

3.2. Modernity and Postcolonial India

The debate surrounding **modernity** has been central to Indian intellectual thought since the independence movement. Figures like Rabindranath Tagore, while embracing the scientific spirit of the West, vehemently rejected its materialism and cultural arrogance, advocating for a synthesis of Eastern spiritual wisdom and Western rationalism. Mahatma Gandhi offered a more radical critique, seeing industrial modernity as inherently violent and alienating, favouring instead an indigenous, decentralised model of self-sufficiency. Jawaharlal Nehru, conversely, championed a developmentalist model, viewing modern technology and state-led industrialisation as the necessary path to national progress and global standing (Kaviraj 56).

Ray's cinema, particularly his late period, engages with this tripartite historical debate. *Agantuk* specifically targets the post-Nehruvian bourgeoisie - those who have benefited from developmental modernity but have adopted a consumerist, ethically hollow value system. The film asks: Is the Calcutta apartment, with its television and suspicion, truly more "modern" than the forest village with its honesty and communal wisdom? Ray's exploration aligns with theorists like **Partha Chatterjee**, who distinguish between the political project of the modern state and the cultural project of modernity in postcolonial nations, suggesting that the latter must be negotiated on indigenous terms (Chatterjee 23).

3.3. Cultural Relativism and Civilisation Discourse

Anthropological studies provide the theoretical bedrock for Manomohan's critique. The concept of cultural relativism, foundational to Franz Boas and later developed by Melville Herskovits, posits that a person's beliefs and activities should be understood within the context of their own culture, rejecting any absolute standard of culture or civilisation (Boas 8). This stance directly challenges ethnocentrism the belief that one's own culture is superior - which has historically underpinned colonial and imperial projects.

Ray deploys Manomohan as the embodiment of this anthropological outlook. The uncle's globe-trotting is not tourism but anthropological immersion, enabling him to articulate a systematic critique of Eurocentrism. By recounting his experiences with aboriginal tribes in Australia or the tribes of the Amazon, Manomohan forces his hosts to confront the limitations of their narrow, metropolitan worldview. The narrative, therefore, is structured as a direct attack on the *discourse of civilisation*, the insidious colonial project that categorised non-Western peoples as "primitive" to justify domination and intervention (Said 45).

3.4. Ray's Humanism and Universalism

Ray's cinema, from the innocence of *Pather Panchali* (1955) to the profound questioning of *Agantuk*, has always been marked by a profound **humanism**. This humanism is not merely sentimental but intellectual, concerned with the dignity and moral complexity of the individual. In his early works, Ray negotiated the conflict between tradition and modernisation, often viewing change with compassionate apprehension.

In *Agantuk*, this humanism evolves into a full-fledged **universalism**, yet one that is paradoxically grounded in **cultural diversity**. Manomohan's defence of indigenous cultures is not romantic idealisation; rather, it is a pragmatic recognition that moral and ethical integrity are independent of technological progress. Ray uses the character to suggest that the commonalities of human morality - trust, generosity, community are often more robust in societies that have not yet been corrupted by the consumerist imperatives of global modernity (Ray, *Our Films* 62). His negotiation between the global experience (Manomohan's travels) and the local context (the Calcutta home) ultimately frames civilisation as a matter of ethical choice, not geographical location or technological destiny.

3.5. Theoretical Framework

To fully appreciate *Agantuk* as a philosophical statement, the film must be analysed through the combined lenses of postcolonial theory and cultural anthropology.

3.5.1. Postcolonial Critique of Modernity

The ideological engine of *Agantuk*'s critique is rooted in the tradition of postcolonial thought that seeks to decenter Europe and expose the intellectual violence embedded in the concept of modernity.

Edward Said's Orientalism provides the context for the cultural paranoia displayed by Anila and Sudhindra. Orientalism, the intellectual framework that constructed the "Orient" as a monolithic, exotic, and inferior "Other," functions within the film by inverting the gaze. Anila and Sudhindra, the modern Indians, unconsciously internalise the West's criteria for civilisation (wealth, verifiable identity, professional stability) and apply it to their own "Oriental" outsider (Manomohan). Their suspicion is a form of self-Orientalism, where the "Stranger" is categorised as the untrustworthy, unverified anomaly that threatens their meticulously constructed modern existence (Said 60).

Homi Bhabha's concept of the liminal space and hybridity is helpful in understanding Manomohan's character. Manomohan, an Indian man who rejects the Bengali surname, speaks multiple languages and possesses Western travel documents while championing tribal cultures, exists in the "in-between" space. He is a hybrid figure whose refusal to be defined by a single culture be it Western, Bengali, or tribal makes him an unsettling presence to the securely anchored bourgeois family. His presence destabilises the binary of tradition/modernity, forcing a reassessment of what an authentically *Indian* modernity might look like (Bhabha 37).

Finally, Dipesh Chakrabarty's Provincialising Europe provides the theoretical injunction: the assumption that Europe represents the sole source of modernity and the standard against which all other histories must be judged must be overturned. *Agantuk* is Ray's cinematic act of provincialization. By having Manomohan argue that the aboriginals possess a superior moral framework a more authentic humanism than the Parisians or the Calcultans, Ray effectively dismantles the universalist claim of Western enlightenment philosophy and insists on the legitimacy of plural modernities (Chakrabarty 12).

3.5.2. Cultural Relativism

At the heart of Manomohan's philosophical identity is the doctrine of cultural relativism. This anthropological concept is not simply a passive tolerance of differences but an active methodological and ethical stance. Franz Boas and Melville Herskovits championed this stance, arguing against the evolutionary notion that all societies progress along a single track from savagery to civilisation. Instead, they argued that culture is an integrated whole, and its practices must be evaluated by its own terms, not an external standard.

Manomohan's dialogues are replete with examples of this relativist thinking. When Sudhindra scoffs at the "primitive" ritual of a tribe, Manomohan counters that the tribe's honesty, their lack of a concept for a bank vault, and their commitment to communal welfare represent a moral advancement that the fraud-ridden, modern world has lost. This shifts the definition of "civilisation" from an achievement of *technology* to an achievement of *ethics*. Ray's employment of cultural relativism here is a sophisticated move: it is used not to praise all non-Western practices blindly, but to highlight the hypocrisy inherent in the supposedly objective standards of Western progress (Herskovits 78). The critique is thus aimed at the universalising *judgment* of cultures, not the differences themselves.

3.5.3. Ray's Humanist Anthropology

Ray's approach in *Agantuk* can be defined as Humanist Anthropology. This framework views the film as an ethnography of the modern Bengali middle class, conducted by a participant-observer (Manomohan) who is simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Manomohan, the character, embodies Ray's dual role as both a globally informed artist and an intensely local intellectual. His conversations function as ethnographic field notes, contrasting the fear and suspicion of the urban household with the simplicity and trust of the tribal village. The film ultimately uses anthropology as a tool for ethical self-reflection. By showing Manomohan's easy adaptability and cultural fluidity, Ray proposes that the truly "civilised" person is one who can navigate multiple cultural contexts without prejudice, a person whose identity is defined by a universal human ethic, rather than a narrow cultural or national origin. The Humanist Anthropology framework recognises that Ray utilises Manomohan's perspective to bridge aesthetics, ethics, and cultural study, delivering a final, powerful lesson in epistemic humility.

4. Analysis

4.1. The "Outsider" as Cultural Mirror

Manomohan Mitra, the Agantuk (stranger), is the dramatic catalyst and the philosophical core of the film. His arrival fundamentally disrupts the carefully calibrated existence of the settled urban couple, Anila and Sudhindra. Manomohan is not simply a long-lost relative; he is an ideological wrecking ball, embodying the very things the Indian bourgeoisie fears and fetishises: the global, unverified identity and the rejection of economic security.

The bourgeoisie's suspicion, particularly that of Sudhindra, is immediately rooted in the modern, rational-bureaucratic demand for verifiable identity. In a society obsessed with documentation, professional titles, and traceable lineage, Manomohan's self-description an amateur anthropologist, a nomad, a global citizen is insufficient. Sudhindra's immediate consultation with his lawyer friend, Pradip, reveals the moral corruption inherent in their "civilised" world: suspicion is the first resort, and legal scrutiny is the necessary defence against the unknown. This reaction is a powerful indictment of bourgeois modernity, which substitutes trust with contracts and authenticity with documentation.

Manomohan, conversely, uses dialogue as critique. His stories are not anecdotal but carefully constructed philosophical arguments. His recollection of living with a tribal community that had no word for "thief" because they had no concept of ownership forces Sudhindra to question the premise of his own security. "Are we truly civilised," Manomohan implicitly asks, "if our progress requires us to build walls of paranoia, suspicion, and legal protection?" (Ray, *Agantuk* script). This character functions as a cultural mirror, reflecting the urban family's alienation from their own history and their uncritical acceptance of Western materialistic values. Manomohan is comfortable in his identity because he has defined himself against the colonial project of categorisation; his hosts are uneasy because their identity is entirely dependent on the *categories* they have inherited.

4.2. Civilisation vs. Barbarism: The Irony of Modernity

Ray skillfully utilises the irony of modern existence to expose the arbitrary nature of the "civilised" label. The film establishes that in the modern world, technological and economic advancement often coexist with moral decay.

Manomohan recounts an instance of true barbarism not in a remote tribal setting, but in the sophisticated modern West: witnessing the callous treatment of an older woman in an international airport, juxtaposed against his experience of profound hospitality from an impoverished indigenous group. The irony is stark: the airport, the symbol of global connectivity and technological progress, becomes the site of human cruelty, while the remote dwelling, dismissed as "primitive," is the repository of genuine human kindness.

This narrative strategy directly challenges the Enlightenment concept of linear progress, which assumes that technological innovation naturally leads to moral betterment. Ray argues the opposite: the relentless pursuit of wealth and material security, which are the defining characteristics of capitalist modernity, actively erodes moral empathy. Sudhindra and Anila's suspicion the fact that their primary motivation for hosting their own relative is the fear of being defrauded is Ray's ultimate illustration of modern moral bankruptcy. Their fear is their defining feature, making them spiritually "primitive," despite their professional and material success (Robinson 348). Manomohan summarises this perfectly when he observes that the modern world is one where "the civilised man is a barbarian, only better dressed" (Ray, *Agantuk* dialogue). The film thus performs an intellectual reversal: the "barbarism" lies not in the cultural Other, but in the anxious, fearful, and morally compromised heart of the modern metropolis.

4.3. Cultural Relativism and the Ethics of Understanding

Manomohan's defence of indigenous cultures is the cinematic realisation of the cultural relativism framework. He engages in what can be termed epistemic humility, insisting that different cultures offer valid and equally complex modes of being, challenging the ethnocentric arrogance of his hosts.

He refutes the notion of evolutionary superiority by focusing on cultural integrity. When he describes the simple lifestyle of the Oraon tribe, he highlights not their lack of technology, but their abundance of *trust* and *community*. He argues that their communal songs, dances, and rituals are not mere entertainment but highly sophisticated systems of maintaining social cohesion and psychic well-being—functions that the alienated urban world attempts to replace, often inadequately, with psychotherapy and consumerism.

Ray employs a subtle but potent defence of indigenous wisdom. In one pivotal scene, Manomohan, realising his hosts are sceptical of his world travels, pulls out a boomerang—an artefact of the Australian Aboriginal people. This object, simultaneously a tool of hunting and a symbol of cultural ingenuity, becomes a point of fascination, especially for the young son, who represents the uncorrupted imagination. Manomohan explains the construction and the necessity of it within its cultural context. The boomerang, a piece of sophisticated indigenous technology, is silently contrasted with the fax machine or the television—technology born of a different cultural necessity. This scene serves as a miniature lesson in intercultural empathy: to understand the object, one must understand the culture that produced it. Manomohan's anthropological insight is Ray's implicit call for a world that approaches other cultures with curiosity and respect, not with a hierarchy of judgment (Dasgupta 18). This relativist position is fundamentally an ethical one, demanding the humility to admit that one's own cultural perspective is not the universal standard.

4.4. The Domestic Space as Microcosm of Civilisation

The action of *Agantuk* is confined mainly to the Calcutta apartment, which functions as a microcosm of modern, anxious civilisation. The apartment, with its well-furnished interior, its reliance on a telephone and a lawyer, and its inherent atmosphere of guardedness, symbolises the retreat of the modern Indian middle class into a fortress of consumerist morality.

The suspicion levelled against Manomohan by Sudhindra and his friend, the solicitor Pradip, is the moral code of this microcosm. Authenticity is reduced to legal documents; relationships are subordinate to property rights; and human worth is measured by professional stability and bank accounts. The home, which should be a site of unconditional familial acceptance, becomes a court of law.

The key to the film's philosophical arc lies in the transformation of Anila. Initially, Anila shares her husband's suspicion, albeit with greater emotional conflict, as the stranger is her uncle. However, she gradually begins to see the hollowness of their life through her uncle's stories. Her growing willingness to listen, to engage, and ultimately, to defend Manomohan's humanity against her husband's rationalising suspicion, represents the film's hope for reconciliation. Anila's transformation symbolises the possibility for the modern Indian to reconcile technological progress with ethical self-awareness, allowing tradition (familial and cultural) and modernity (intellectual curiosity and empathy) to coexist without the domination of Western materialism. The domestic space, initially a site of fear, becomes a laboratory for a truly ethical, decolonised modernity.

4.5. Cinematic Language and Symbolism

Ray's cinematic approach in *Agantuk* is deliberately restrained, using minimalism to amplify the intellectual and moral conflict. The film relies heavily on dialogue and close-ups to foreground the psychological and philosophical struggle, making the conversations the primary sites of dramatic action.

Framing is used effectively to symbolise intellectual positions. Sudhindra is often framed in tight, contained close-ups or rigid two-shots, emphasising his static, defensive, and bounded worldview. Manomohan, conversely, is often captured in more open, fluid mid-shots or framed against a window or an open door, suggesting his expansive, unconfined perspective. The camera often rests on the characters' faces during long exchanges, forcing the audience to become forensic witnesses to their internal moral debates. The absence of a dramatic score during critical moments of suspicion accentuates the uncomfortable silence and the weight of the characters' judgments.

The ending sequence is the film's most explicit visual and symbolic statement on civilisation. Manomohan, having been accepted by Anila and having given his entire inheritance to her family (proving his lack of material motive), dances with the tribal visitors he has brought to the city. This brief, joyous, and utterly authentic moment of communal expression, filmed against the backdrop of the staid Calcutta apartment, shatters the film's previous tension. The tribal dance, a form dismissed by the modern world as "primitive" becomes the highest expression of human connection and cultural dignity. The dance is the antithesis of the fear and suspicion that governed the home for the film's duration. The ending, however, is not a simple resolution, but an open question: Manomohan leaves as suddenly as he arrived, suggesting that the journey toward true civilisation and ethical modernity

is a continuous, personal quest that cannot be settled within the confines of a single urban home.

5. Discussion

5.1. Ray's Vision of Ethical Modernity

The analysis confirms that Ray's vision in *Agantuk* moves beyond a simple rejection of the West to propose a model of ethical modernity for postcolonial societies. This vision stands in critical alignment with, yet distinct from, the historical stances of Tagore and Gandhi.

Like Tagore, Ray advocates for a modernity that embraces global intellectual exchange and universal humanism while fiercely guarding against the materialistic corruption of Western consumerism (Tagore 98). Manomohan, who is both highly educated and globally travelled, is the perfect embodiment of Tagore's ideal of the culturally rooted cosmopolitan. However, unlike the often-abstract cultural nationalism of Tagore, Ray grounds his argument in the specific, tangible cultural relativism of Manomohan's anthropological fieldwork.

Ray's vision is arguably more pragmatic than Gandhi's radical anti-modernism. While Gandhi called for the complete dismantling of industrial civilisation, Ray, through his work, implicitly acknowledges the irreversibility of technological progress. Instead of rejecting modernity outright, Ray suggests that it must be *recalibrated*. The true measure of modern success is not the Gross National Product or industrial output, but the Gross National Ethics - the capacity for trust, empathy, and social justice. This is the essence of Ray's ethical modernity: a commitment to moral universality that is only achievable through deep cultural humility and an appreciation for plural ways of living (Kaviraj 68). Manomohan's final act of generosity, giving away the wealth that would have *verified* his status in the modern world, serves as the ultimate moral litmus test.

5.2. The Paradox of Civilisation

Agantuk brilliantly navigates the paradox of civilisation: the state of being that simultaneously represents humanity's greatest potential for progress (intellectual, technological) and its greatest capacity for oppression (colonialism, ethnocentrism, moral decay).

Ray demonstrates that the concept of "civilisation" is an inherently double-edged tool. When it is defined by the West, it becomes a justification for cultural hierarchy and colonial violence (as articulated by Fanon 54). Yet, Manomohan's quest is not to abandon the term, but to reclaim and redefine it. His definition of civilisation hinges on its root meaning: a commitment to the well-being and dignity of the *civis* (citizen/human being).

By contrasting the fear-driven, individualistic urban life with the trust-based, communal life of the indigenous tribes, Ray forces the audience to confront the arbitrary nature of the term. The film suggests that every society contains within itself the seeds of both progress and barbarism, and that the crucial difference lies in the chosen ethical framework. The paradox is resolved by adopting a relativist perspective: recognising that there are plural modernities and plural ways of being civilised, none of which holds absolute superiority. The film acts as a plea to the postcolonial Indian mind to stop viewing its own cultural reality through the judgmental, ethnocentric lens inherited from colonialism (Chakrabarty 15).

5.3. Relevance Today

The philosophical arguments embedded in *Agantuk* retain profound relevance today, particularly in an era characterised by accelerated globalisation, cultural homogenisation, and rising ethno-nationalism.

The film's critique of consumerist materialism and the resulting urban alienation is even sharper in the twenty-first century, where digital technology and global commerce have amplified the anxieties over identity and authenticity first observed by Ray. Manomohan's struggle for verification resonates strongly in a world dominated by KYC (Know Your Customer) protocols, digital tracking, and the monetisation of identity. The modern fear of the "stranger" has been technologically weaponised, making Ray's call for trust and self-verification more urgent than ever.

Furthermore, in a geopolitical climate marked by the resurgence of xenophobia and a defensive retreat into narrow cultural definitions, *Agantuk*'s advocacy for cultural relativism and intercultural empathy offers a crucial corrective. Ray's final work reminds contemporary audiences that the path to a harmonious global future lies not in enforcing a single, technologically-driven definition of progress, but in cultivating the moral courage to see the inherent worth and dignity in every cultural form, regardless of its position in the global economic hierarchy. It is a timeless testament to the power of humanism as a decolonising force (Robinson 350).

6. Conclusion

Agantuk stands as a masterwork of cinematic and philosophical reflection, marking the culmination of Satyajit Ray's lifelong engagement with questions of civilization and modernity. This study has shown that the film functions as a profound critique of the Eurocentric narrative of progress, exposing its moral contradictions and advocating instead for a vision of ethical, plural modernities grounded in cultural self-awareness. Through the figure of Manomohan Mitra the cosmopolitan outsider who embodies the spirit of cultural relativism - Ray dismantles the technological and developmentalist definitions of civilization and reclaims modernity as a moral pursuit.

This paper's original contribution lies in positioning *Agantuk* as a cinematic articulation of postcolonial ethical modernity, achieved through the synthesis of postcolonial theory and cultural anthropology. It demonstrates how Ray's film transcends conventional aesthetic readings by offering a philosophical model of decolonized civilization one that privileges empathy, moral integrity, and intercultural understanding over material progress.

The transformation of Anila and the final communal dance encapsulate Ray's utopian ideal: a synthesis of rooted cultural identity and universal humanism. In its intellectual depth and humane vision, *Agantuk* urges viewers to decolonize the mind, to recognize multiple paths to modernity, and to measure civilization not by wealth or technology, but by the ethical capacity for trust and mutual respect.

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Hiba, Lifetime Usufruct and the Question of Shariah Compliance: A Quranic and Legal Analysis of Bangladesh's Transfer of Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026

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Abstract

This article examines whether Bangladesh's Transfer of Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026 – which creates a statutory mechanism permitting donors to transfer property while reserving lifetime usufruct – contravenes Qur'anic inheritance provisions. The analysis distinguishes between three distinct legal concepts: inheritance (mirāth), which governs property remaining at death; classical Hiba, a completed lifetime gift; and the proposed statutory gift with reserved usufruct. The Qur'an's inheritance rules in Surah al-Nisa 4:11 – 14 attach to property forming part of the deceased's estate and do not expressly prohibit genuine lifetime dispositions. Critically, proposed section 122A(4) expressly states that the new mechanism is a distinct mode of transfer that does not affect the validity of existing "gift or Heba." The article concludes that the amendment does not, on its face, violate Qur'anic inheritance commands, provided the arrangement constitutes a genuine lifetime transfer rather than a testamentary disposition disguised as a gift. The humanitarian objective of protecting elderly parents from dispossession is compatible with Islamic principles of justice, family responsibility, and prevention of harm, though careful safeguards against abuse remain essential.

Bangladesh property law | Hiba | Islamic law | lifetime usufruct | Qur'anic inheritance | Shariah compliance | Transfer of Property Amendment 2026

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Keywords: *Bangladesh property law, Hiba, Islamic law, lifetime usufruct, Qur'anic inheritance, Shariah compliance, Transfer of Property Amendment 2026*

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1. Introduction

Property disputes within Muslim families frequently arise at the point where religious inheritance rules encounter modern social realities. One particularly difficult situation concerns parents who have only daughters and no sons.

Under Qur'anic inheritance law, the existence of daughters does not necessarily mean that every part of the parents' estate will pass exclusively to the daughters. Depending upon the complete surviving family structure, other heirs may have rights in the residue. Consequently, some parents, during their lifetime, voluntarily transfer property to their daughter through Hiba, intending to secure her economic future and to prevent later disputes concerning the property.

There is nothing inherently unusual about a living owner making a lifetime transfer. The legal and theological difficulty begins when the parent wants simultaneously to:

- transfer the property to the daughter;
- protect the daughter against future claims of more distant relatives;
- continue living in and enjoying the family home;
- prevent the daughter's husband or other persons from dispossessing the parent; and
- preserve the parent's security until death.

The Bangladesh legislature has attempted to address precisely this social problem through the Transfer of Property (Amendment) Bill, 2026.

The Government Press published Bill No. 105/2026 on 27 August 2026. The Bill proposes new sections 122A and 122B. Section 122A is entitled "Gift with reservation of right of usufruct."

The central question is therefore: Does such a statutory arrangement violate any express command of the Qur'an?

In my considered view, the answer is not necessarily, and on the face of the Bill, there is no clear Qur'anic violation merely because Parliament creates such a lifetime-usufruct property arrangement. But this conclusion requires careful qualification.

2. Three Different Concepts Must Not Be Confused

A large part of the present controversy appears to arise from treating three different legal concepts as though they were identical.

2.1. Inheritance

Inheritance arises after death. When a Muslim dies owning property, the estate is distributed among the heirs according to the applicable rules of Islamic inheritance.

2.2. Hiba

Hiba is a lifetime gift. A living owner voluntarily transfers property to another person without consideration, subject to the requirements applicable to Hiba.

2.3. Statutory Gift with Reserved Lifetime Usufruct

The 2026 Bill proposes a third category: a transfer by gift in which the donor reserves the right of lifetime enjoyment (usufruct).

The proposed section 122A(1) expressly states that a transfer of movable or immovable property by way of gift, while reserving the donor's lifetime enjoyment, shall be valid. The proposed section 122A(2) limits this mechanism to specified close family relationships, including parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, and spouses. This distinction is crucial.

3. What Does the Qur'an Actually Say About Inheritance?

The principal Qur'anic provisions are found in Surah al-Nisa 4:11–14.

Qur'an 4:11 states that if there is only one daughter, she is entitled to one-half of the estate; if there are two or more daughters, they collectively receive two-thirds, subject to the complete rules of succession. The verse also provides shares for parents and emphasises that these are obligations ordained by Allah.

Qur'an 4:12 deals with spouses and other categories of heirs. Qur'an 4:13 describes these provisions as the limits ordained by Allah, while 4:14 warns against transgressing those limits.

Therefore, Islamic law must never permit a deceased person's estate to be distributed contrary to the Qur'anic inheritance rules merely because someone dislikes the prescribed shares.

But there is a fundamental question: When do those inheritance rules attach to property?

They attach to the property left by the deceased. If an owner has genuinely transferred property during his lifetime, that property is ordinarily no longer part of the owner's estate at death. This is the conceptual foundation of Hiba.

4. The Qur'an Does Not Say That a Living Owner Cannot Dispose of His Property

This point is often overlooked in public discussion.

The Qur'an lays down inheritance rules for the property left after death. It does not contain a verse stating: "A Muslim owner must preserve all his property until death so that his future heirs may inherit it."

Nor does Qur'an 4:11 state that a parent with daughters must retain ownership of all property until death. Indeed, the Qur'an recognises numerous forms of lawful ownership, voluntary spending and transfer during life.

Therefore, it would be incorrect to argue simply: "Because inheritance shares are fixed in Qur'an 4:11, every lifetime transfer that reduces the eventual estate is necessarily a violation of Qur'an 4:11." That proposition is too broad.

At the same time, one must distinguish a genuine lifetime transfer from a transaction that is merely disguised as a lifetime transfer while actually functioning as a testamentary disposition taking effect only after death. That distinction is central to the Shariah debate.

5. Hiba Is Not the Same as Wasiyyah

A fundamental distinction exists between Hiba and Wasiyyah (bequest/will).

A genuine Hiba takes place during the donor's lifetime. A Wasiyyah ordinarily operates upon death and is consequently subject to the Islamic rules governing bequests.

The classical law of Hiba therefore contains requirements intended to establish that ownership has genuinely moved during the donor's lifetime.

Bangladesh's existing Transfer of Property Act, 1882 defines a gift as a voluntary transfer of existing movable or immovable property without consideration, accepted by or on behalf of the donee.

Section 123 addresses the mode of transfer and expressly recognises a Hiba under Muhammadan law for the registration purposes specified there.

Thus, Hiba is a lifetime transaction, whereas inheritance and testamentary succession are activated by death.

6. The Problem That the 2026 Amendment Attempts to Solve

Consider the following real-world situation.

A father and mother have one daughter and no son. They own the family home. They make a Hiba to their daughter. The daughter becomes owner. The parents continue living in the house because it has always been their home.

But after registration, the daughter and/or her husband may claim: "The property now belongs to us. You have no legal right to remain."

The result can be extraordinarily harsh. The parents may have voluntarily surrendered ownership precisely because they wanted to protect their daughter, only to discover that they have also surrendered their own residential security.

This is not merely a theoretical problem. The present legislative initiative was publicly described by the Law Minister as an attempt to allow parents and other donors to retain the right to use and enjoy property during their lifetime after transferring it to children or other close relatives. The stated humanitarian purpose was to prevent donors from losing access to their own homes.

7. What Exactly Does Section 122A Propose?

The wording of proposed section 122A is extremely important.

It provides for: "Gift with reservation of right of usufruct."

The proposed section 122A(1) validates a transfer by gift where the donor reserves the right of lifetime enjoyment of the property.

Subsection (2) limits the arrangement to specified close relationships, including:

- parent → child;
- child → parent;
- grandparent → grandchild;
- grandchild → grandparent; and
- husband and wife.

For immovable property, the provision requires a registered deed under the Registration Act, 1908.

This is not simply a provision saying: "The daughter will become owner only after the parents die." The statutory model is more

nuanced. It contemplates a transfer by gift while preserving a lifetime usufructuary right for the donor. That distinction matters greatly to the Shariah analysis.

8. The Most Important Clause: Section 122A(4)

Perhaps the most significant provision for answering the objections of Islamic scholars is proposed section 122A(4).

It expressly provides that a transfer under section 122A constitutes a distinct mode of transfer and shall not be interpreted as limiting, derogating from, or affecting the validity of any gift or Hiba or other recognised mode of transfer.

This clause deserves special attention.

If Parliament had intended to redefine Muslim Hiba, the legislation could have amended the relevant provisions governing Hiba itself. Instead, the Bill says expressly that the new statutory mode does not affect the validity of Hiba.

The Law Minister similarly stated during the parliamentary debate that the measure was not intended to alter Muslim Hiba and that the statutory gift was a separate property-law mechanism.

9. Does the Amendment Violate Qur'an 4:11?

My answer: Not on its face.

The reason is simple. Qur'an 4:11 regulates inheritance. The proposed section 122A regulates a lifetime property transfer.

If the donor transfers ownership during life, the property may no longer form part of the donor's estate at death. Therefore, the transaction does not necessarily interfere with the distribution of the property that actually remains in the estate.

This is analogous to a person spending, selling or otherwise lawfully disposing of property during life. The heirs do not acquire a vested ownership right in every asset merely because they may become heirs in the future.

The Qur'an gives heirs rights in the deceased's estate; it does not necessarily give them a present ownership interest in every asset of a living parent. This is the key distinction that should inform the public debate.

10. But Is the New Mechanism Itself "Hiba"?

Here the scholars' objection deserves careful consideration.

The answer should be: Not necessarily.

The Bill itself deliberately calls the arrangement a distinct mode of transfer and separately preserves Hiba. Therefore, one should not argue: "Classical Hiba permits X, therefore every feature of section 122A must be classical Hiba." That does not follow.

Nor should one argue: "Section 122A is not identical to classical Hiba, therefore it violates the Qur'an." That also does not automatically follow.

The appropriate question is: Is the new statutory property right itself contrary to any explicit Qur'anic prohibition or an established, definitive rule of Shariah? That is a much narrower and more intellectually defensible question.

11. The Principle of Intention

The questioner has specifically referred to the famous Hadith: "Innamal-a'malu bin-niyyat" ("Actions are judged by intentions"). This Hadith is recorded at the beginning of Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim and is among the foundational principles of Islamic jurisprudence.

The intention of parents in the situation under discussion can be entirely different from an intention to defeat Allah's inheritance law.

Suppose the parent's intention is: "I want my only daughter to receive the property during my lifetime because I fear that distant relatives may eventually take it, but I also want to retain my home and security until my death."

That intention should be examined fairly. It is not automatically equivalent to: "I reject Allah's inheritance law."

The first intention may arise from a desire to protect a daughter and preserve parental security. Nevertheless, good intention alone cannot make an otherwise invalid transaction valid. The Hadith on intention does not mean that every legally impermissible act becomes permissible merely because the actor has a good motive. Thus, niyyah is important but not sufficient by itself.

12. The Hadith Concerning Gifts to Children

There is another important Hadith that should not be ignored.

In the well-known narration of al-Nu'man ibn Bashir, his father gave him a gift and sought the Prophet's ﷺ approval. The Prophet asked whether the father had given equivalent gifts to his other children. When the answer was no, the Prophet instructed him to take the gift back.

This Hadith establishes an important principle of fairness among children in gifts. But the factual situation differs when there is only one child. Where there is genuinely only one child, there is no sibling against whom the parent is discriminating.

This does not by itself answer every question about inheritance, but it demonstrates why the jurisprudence of Hiba cannot be reduced to the statement that "all gifts to children are prohibited."

13. A Crucial Distinction: Defeating Inheritance Versus Disposing of Property

There is a significant jurisprudential distinction between:

A. Fraudulent circumvention of inheritance

A person creates a sham transaction merely to deprive rightful heirs, while the supposed transfer is not genuine.

B. Genuine lifetime disposition

A living owner genuinely transfers property during life and thereby changes the ownership before death.

The first raises serious Shariah concerns. The second is a recognised feature of property ownership and Hiba jurisprudence.

Therefore, the mere fact that a lifetime gift has the consequence that certain people will not inherit that particular property does not automatically prove that the donor has violated Qur'an 4:11. If that proposition were accepted without qualification, virtually every lawful sale, gift or consumption of property during a person's lifetime could be characterised as an interference with future inheritance. That would be an untenable approach.

14. The Parents' Right to Security Is Also a Serious Islamic Consideration

Islam does not merely discuss inheritance. It places enormous emphasis on:

- justice;
- kindness to parents;
- prevention of harm;
- fulfilment of obligations;

- protection of property; and
- preservation of family relationships.

The Qur'an repeatedly commands good treatment of parents. Therefore, a legal framework designed to prevent a parent from becoming homeless or being expelled from the family home after transferring property should not be dismissed without examining its protective purpose.

The classical legal maxim commonly expressed as "lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār" (no harm and no reciprocating harm) is also relevant as a general jurisprudential principle, although the grading of individual Ibn Majah transmissions should be distinguished from the broader acceptance of the maxim in fiqh literature.

The important point is that Islamic jurisprudence has never been indifferent to preventing serious and unjust harm.

15. The Daughter's Husband Does Not Automatically Become Owner

Another misconception deserves correction.

If a father gives property to his daughter, the daughter's husband does not thereby become owner of that property merely because he is her husband. The property belongs to the daughter according to the terms and validity of the transfer.

The problem in practice is therefore not that Islamic law automatically gives the daughter's husband ownership. The practical problem is whether the daughter may allow or facilitate her husband's interference with her parents' residence. This is precisely why a lifetime right of occupation/use can be valuable.

16. Why the Proposed Law May Actually Strengthen the Parents' Position

Traditional Hiba can create a difficult practical situation:

Before Hiba

Parent = owner + occupier.

After unconditional Hiba

Daughter = owner. Parent = potentially only an occupier by permission.

Under the proposed statutory mechanism

Daughter = transferee/owner while Parent = holder of a legally protected lifetime usufruct/right of enjoyment.

Thus, the law attempts to separate ownership from lifetime enjoyment. This is a sophisticated property-law solution to a genuine social problem.

17. The Bill Does Not Appear to Abolish Hiba

This is perhaps the strongest response to the argument that the amendment itself destroys Islamic Hiba.

The proposed legislation explicitly states that the new statutory mechanism does not affect the validity of: gift; Hiba; or other recognised modes of transfer.

Therefore, if a Muslim family wishes to execute a traditional Hiba according to Muslim law, the Bill does not, on its face, abolish that avenue. Rather, Parliament has attempted to create another form of property transfer. This distinction should be central to any scholarly debate.

18. Where the Scholars' Objection Can Be Legitimate

It would nevertheless be unfair to dismiss the scholars' objections as irrational.

There is a genuine jurisprudential issue if the statutory mechanism is interpreted as follows: "The parent has given Hiba, but the daughter has no present ownership whatsoever and will receive the property only after the parent's death."

That arrangement would resemble a testamentary transfer much more closely than a completed lifetime Hiba. Classical Hiba generally involves a present transfer, and questions of possession and control are important.

Therefore, Islamic scholars are justified in asking: What exactly is transferred now? What remains with the donor? Is ownership transferred immediately? Is only usufruct retained by the donor? Or is ownership itself postponed until death? These questions cannot be answered merely by looking at the word "Hiba" in a deed.

19. The Better Legislative Interpretation

The best interpretation, in my view, is to regard section 122A as creating a statutory lifetime property transfer with reserved usufruct, not as an amendment to the classical law of Hiba.

Under that interpretation:

- ownership is transferred during the donor's lifetime;
- the donor retains a legally protected right of enjoyment;
- the transaction is separate from inheritance;
- existing Hiba remains available;
- the Qur'anic inheritance shares continue to govern whatever property remains in the estate at death.

This interpretation is consistent with the actual wording of section 122A(4).

20. Section 122B and Protection Against Abuse

The proposed section 122B provides an additional safeguard.

After registration, the gift is generally described as irrevocable, subject to specified exceptions involving mutual consent or judicial intervention for circumstances such as financial, medical, educational, family or other genuine necessity.

Where consent cannot be obtained because of minority, disappearance, unsoundness of mind, legal incapacity or another sufficient cause, the District Judge may authorise variation or revocation subject to the statutory requirements.

This is significant because it shows that the legislature is attempting to balance the security of the donor with the security of the donee.

21. Comparison with the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Reform

Bangladesh has historical precedent for legislating in areas connected with Islamic family law.

The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961, which remains applicable in Bangladesh, was enacted following recommendations of the Commission on Marriage and Family Laws. Its section 4 provides a form of representational succession for children of a predeceased son or daughter. Bangladesh inherited this reform

framework after independence. Academic literature describes the provision as a significant modification of the classical scheme of succession.

This historical experience is important. It demonstrates that the relationship between classical fiqh and modern Muslim family legislation has never been completely static. There has been continuing debate over whether particular reforms are faithful applications of Islamic principles, legitimate ijtihad, or departures from established rules.

Therefore, simply saying "Parliament has legislated, therefore it is Shariah" is insufficient. But equally, saying "Parliament has legislated differently from one traditional fiqh formulation, therefore it violates the Qur'an" is also insufficient.

22. The Qur'an Must Remain the Ultimate Reference Point

The correct hierarchy should be:

> Qur'an → authentic Sunnah → established principles of Islamic jurisprudence → legitimate juristic interpretation → statutory implementation.

Where a statute directly contradicts a clear Qur'anic command, Parliament cannot make the contradiction disappear merely by legislative wording. But where the Qur'an has prescribed inheritance rules and Parliament regulates a lifetime property transaction outside the estate, there is no automatic contradiction. That distinction is fundamental.

23. The Question of "Only Daughters"

The case of parents with only daughters deserves particular attention.

Qur'an 4:11 expressly recognises daughters as heirs. One daughter has a prescribed share of one-half; two or more daughters collectively have two-thirds under the verse. The remainder can, depending on the surviving relatives and the applicable rules, pass to other heirs.

Consequently, parents who fear that their daughter may not ultimately retain their entire property are addressing a genuine succession issue. However, the exact outcome must always be calculated from the actual surviving relatives. It is not correct to state universally that: "If there is one daughter and no son, the paternal uncle or cousin automatically gets the remainder." Islamic inheritance is a technical system of exclusion and priority. The identity of the surviving heirs must be established before calculating the estate.

24. A Balanced Shariah Position

The following propositions can reasonably be defended:

- **Proposition 1:** Qur'an 4:11–12 must be respected when distributing property that remains in the deceased's estate.
- **Proposition 2:** A lifetime Hiba is conceptually different from inheritance.
- **Proposition 3:** A genuine lifetime transfer does not automatically violate Qur'an 4:11 merely because it changes what remains in the estate at death.
- **Proposition 4:** Good intention is relevant but does not legalise an otherwise invalid transaction.
- **Proposition 5:** The 2026 statutory mechanism should not automatically be called "Hiba" in the technical classical sense.
- **Proposition 6:** The Bill expressly preserves the validity of Hiba.
- **Proposition 7:** The statutory reservation of lifetime usufruct is intended to protect parents from losing their home and security after transferring ownership.
- **Proposition 8:** Whether every technical feature of the new statutory mechanism conforms to every school of classical fiqh is a separate jurisprudential question.

25. The Central Error in the Present Debate

The most serious analytical error would be to reduce the debate to: "Hiba is Islamic; therefore every amendment concerning Hiba is Islamic." That is too simplistic.

The opposite error is: "The amendment differs from classical Hiba; therefore it violates the Qur'an." That is also too simplistic.

The proper legal question is: Does the new statutory arrangement contradict a clear Qur'anic rule, or does it merely create a new civil-law mechanism governing ownership and lifetime enjoyment while preserving the existing rules of inheritance and Hiba?

On the wording presently available, the second interpretation is stronger.

26. The Importance of Social Reality

Islamic jurisprudence has historically dealt with changing social circumstances through principles of ijtihad, maslahah (public interest), prevention of harm, custom where legally relevant, and the objectives of Shariah (maqasid al-shariah).

Property law must address real human problems. If an elderly mother transfers her only house to her daughter out of love and religious conviction and is subsequently expelled from that home, the law has failed to protect an obvious human interest.

A humane legal system should not force parents to choose between protecting their daughter and protecting themselves. The proposed lifetime-usufruct mechanism attempts to avoid precisely that dilemma.

27. A Necessary Safeguard: No Coercion or Fraud

The humanitarian purpose of the amendment should not become a licence for abuse.

A valid statutory system should ensure:

- informed consent of the donor;
- absence of coercion;
- capacity of the donor;
- clear identification of the property;
- registration;
- explicit specification of the donor's lifetime rights;
- protection against fraudulent execution;
- protection against exploitation of elderly persons; and

- access to judicial remedies.

The objective should be family security, not family manipulation.

28. Final Answer to the Central Question

Does the 2026 amendment violate the Qur'an?

On the face of the published Bill, I do not find a direct violation of a specific Qur'anic inheritance command merely because the law permits a donor to transfer property while retaining lifetime enjoyment.

The Qur'an's inheritance provisions, especially Surah al-Nisa 4:11–14, govern succession to the estate left at death. They do not expressly prohibit a living owner from making a lawful lifetime disposition.

Moreover, the Bill expressly says that its new mechanism is a distinct mode of transfer and does not invalidate or restrict Hiba.

Does that mean every feature of the amendment is automatically Shariah-compliant? No.

If the statutory mechanism were interpreted to mean that there is no present transfer whatsoever and ownership arises only upon death, a serious Shariah objection could arise because the arrangement would begin to resemble a testamentary disposition.

Therefore, the decisive legal question is: Is ownership transferred during the donor's lifetime while only usufruct/enjoyment is retained, or is ownership itself postponed until death? The first is substantially different from the second.

29. A Proposal for Constructive Dialogue

Instead of framing the matter as "Government versus Islamic scholars," the better approach would be: "Islamic scholars + jurists + legislators + property-law experts + social researchers."

A joint expert committee could examine:

- classical Hanafi doctrine of Hiba;
- the four Sunni schools;
- contemporary Muslim personal-law reforms;
- Bangladeshi property law;
- the rights of elderly parents;
- actual cases of parental dispossession;
- the distinction between ownership and usufruct;
- the Qur'anic rules of inheritance; and
- safeguards against fraudulent or coercive transfers.

Such an approach would be more consistent with the Qur'anic command to deliberate with knowledge and justice than simply issuing categorical accusations of "Shariah violation."

30. Conclusion

The debate over Hiba and the 2026 property-law reform should not be treated as a conflict between Islam and modernity.

The real challenge is to reconcile three legitimate objectives:

First: Preserving the Qur'anic inheritance system;

Second: Protecting parents from injustice and dispossession during their lifetime; and

Third: Allowing parents to make legitimate lifetime arrangements for their daughters and other children.

The Qur'an clearly establishes inheritance shares. Those shares must be respected when the estate comes into existence upon death. But a living owner is not necessarily prohibited from making a genuine lifetime disposition of property.

The proposed Bangladesh mechanism goes one step further by separating ownership from lifetime enjoyment. It allows the donor to transfer property while retaining the right to live in and enjoy it. Most importantly, the legislation expressly preserves Hiba as a separate recognised mode of transfer.

Accordingly, the strongest scholarly conclusion is not that the amendment is automatically contrary to the Qur'an. Rather, its Shariah validity should be assessed according to its actual legal structure, not merely by its social consequences or by calling it "Hiba."

The humanitarian objective of protecting elderly parents is compatible with the broad Islamic concern for justice, family responsibility and prevention of harm. At the same time, the legislature should ensure that the new statutory mechanism does not disguise a testamentary disposition as a lifetime transfer.

In short: A law protecting a parent's lifetime right to remain in and enjoy property that the parent has lawfully transferred does not, by that fact alone, violate Qur'an 4:11.

The real Shariah question is not whether parents may protect themselves and their daughters; it is whether the legal form used to achieve that protection constitutes a genuine lifetime transfer or improperly postpones ownership until death. That distinction should be the starting point for a serious Islamic legal debate in Bangladesh.

Important Legal-Status Note

I have deliberately not described the measure as an already-assented Act without qualification. The official Government Press record identifies it as Bill No. 105/2026, published on 27 August 2026.

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Breaking the Culture of Silence: Clerical Abuse and Safeguarding in Ghana, A Practical-Theological Reflection in Global Context

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Clerical abuse | culture of silence | Ghanaian Church | practical theology | safeguarding

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Keywords: *Clerical abuse, culture of silence, Ghanaian Church, practical theology, safeguarding*

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1. Introduction: From Anecdote to Practical-Theological Inquiry

When I reflect on my early encounters in Ghana about the scandals in North America, I remember the silence surrounding clerical abuses, stories whispered, often about priests long deceased. It puzzled me how accusations could emerge against the dead. Who verifies such claims? Could they be genuine, or could they also be false? My skepticism grew from cultural and moral reasoning: in a society that reveres religious authority, how do we balance truth, memory, and justice?

That perception shifted when I arrived in Chicago. I began receiving emails, text messages, and phone calls from law firms inviting potential claimants to report clerical abuse for compensation. Their advertisements promised justice and money for those who would "come forward." The language was persuasive, legalistic, and transactional: *"Have you ever been abused by a clergy? Report it, we will represent you, and you will win …. amount."* This experience exposed me to a different cultural and legal world where clerical abuse is not only a moral or pastoral issue but a highly litigated one, deeply intertwined with the public's trust and the Church's credibility.

The situation raised profound theological and pastoral questions in me: How can the Church discern the truth, do justice, and heal wounded communities in contexts where "cultures of silence" collide with fragile safeguarding systems? How can it uphold both mercy and accountability? And how might these lessons from the West inform emerging realities in Africa, especially Ghana, where silence, reverence, and stigma still inhibit disclosure?

In this section, I situate the discussion within a practical-theological framework that moves from anecdote to structured inquiry. The essay (a) examines the Ghanaian experience within a broader ecclesial and legal horizon; (b) constructs a framework grounded in pastoral accompaniment, justice, and reparation, and institutional conversion; and (c) proposes field-based pathways, through interviews, conversations, and pastoral engagements, to generate empirical insights for the Ghanaian Church.

This reflection builds upon canonical norms, the U.S. Church's safeguarding architecture (particularly the Chicago experience under Cardinal Bernardin), and the recent Vatican updates on accountability and the protection of minors.[1][2][3] In adopting this lens, I aim to move beyond mere lamentation to discernment, inviting both Church and society in Ghana to break the silence, seek restorative justice, and reimagine safeguarding as an act of evangelization.

2. Naming the Silence: Ghanaian Social Dynamics and Disclosure Barriers

In Ghana, as in many African societies, silence operates as both a moral code and a cultural defense mechanism. My early interviews and informal conversations revealed that abuse, especially of a sexual or ethical nature, is rarely discussed publicly, not because it is absent, but because the social and religious fabric discourages its disclosure. In most local settings, the idea of exposing wrongdoing

[1]Francis, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi: Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio by the Supreme Pontiff Francis" (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2023), https://www.vatican.va/resources/resources_vosestisluxmundi2023_en.html.

[2]United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People: Including Essential Norms and Statement of Episcopal Commitment" (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018), https://www.usccb.org/offices/child-and-youth-protection/charter-protection-children-and-young-people.

[3]Francis, "Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: For a Synodal Church—Communion, Participation, Mission" (Vatican City: General Secretariat of the Synod, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2024), https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-synod-2024.html.

by a cleric or elder is perceived not as a pursuit of justice but as a challenge to authority, faith, and family honor.

The voices of some of my interlocutors, *Yaa*, *Mary*, and *Mansah*, embody this culture of concealment. Yaa confided that when she tried to tell her mother about what had happened to her, she was instructed never to mention it to anyone, "not even to your father."[45] Mary's case was more severe; she was accused by her family of having "seduced the culprit," and was even punished for "bringing shame" upon the family.[6] Mansah recalled similar treatment.[7] Their stories represent a tragic intersection between patriarchal family systems, religious reverence, and communal shame, all of which create formidable barriers to truth-telling.

2.1. The Culture of Silence as a Theological Problem

Within African moral anthropology, silence is often valorized as a form of discretion or respect for authority (*obu titiriw*). Yet in cases of abuse, this cultural virtue becomes a pastoral vice, a silence that sustains impunity and multiplies trauma. From a practical-theological perspective, this silence is not a mere absence of speech but a *sign of social brokenness*, a symptom of spiritual woundedness within the Body of Christ. Theologians such as Emmanuel Katongole[8] and Mercy Amba Oduyoye[9] remind us that any theology that ignores the suffering of the silenced betrays the gospel's call to truth and healing.

Thus, naming the silence is a theological act: to break it is to confront systems that confuse respect with fear, piety with passivity. The "culture of silence" must be re-read in light of Vatican II's call for dialogue and synodality, which envisions the Church as a community of truth-telling, not concealment.

2.2. Family and Clerical Authority: The Dual Burden of Fear

My field observations confirm that families themselves often reinforce the structures of silence. Parents fear social shame, public gossip, and the stigma of being known as "the family whose child was defiled by a priest." Some even perceive clerics as beyond reproach, *the Lord's anointed*. The oft-quoted phrase "touch not my anointed"[10] is misused to shield abusers, creating a sacralized impunity. This interpretation not only distorts Scripture but also betrays the Church's moral witness.

In many instances, the victims' first experience of betrayal comes not from the clergy but from their own families and parish communities. Their pain becomes internalized, resulting in depression, mistrust, and what trauma theology calls disenchantment with the sacred.[11]

2.3. Contextual and Empirical Corroboration

Recent Ghana-based research affirms this pattern. Acquaye et al., describe "multi-layered silence" in cases of sexual abuse, in which victims internalize trauma due to family pressure, reverence for elders, and the fear of disbelief.[12] Similarly, Rohn et al., find that survivors of sexual violence in Ghana hesitate to seek help because of fear of stigma and the perception that justice systems favor the powerful.[13] The same dynamics are evident within Church structures: clergy are often regarded as moral exemplars, and confronting them seems tantamount to confronting God.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM) has identified this trend globally, particularly in the Global South, where underreporting remains endemic. Its 2024 Pilot Report and 2025 Second Annual Report emphasize that safeguarding must not only protect minors but also empower local Churches to break cultures of silence through contextual education and survivor-centered policies.[14]

2.4. Toward a Listening Church

Theologically, silence must be transformed into listening. The *listening Church* (*Ecclesia audiens*), a phrase often invoked in synodal theology, calls the community to create safe spaces for survivors to speak, to be heard, and to be believed. This involves independent and transparent reporting mechanisms at the diocesan and parish levels, combined with trauma-informed pastoral accompaniment. It also demands catechetical re-education that challenges clericalism and promotes shared responsibility between clergy and laity.

In this light, the Church's mission is not simply to protect itself from scandal but to model what Pope Francis calls *"a field hospital where wounds are treated, not ignored."* The Ghanaian Church, therefore, stands at a decisive crossroad: either perpetuate a legacy of silence or embody a pastoral conversion that aligns with the universal Church's safeguarding vision.[15]

3. Awakening and Accountability: What Changed, and What Didn't, in the West

When I relocated to Chicago, I found myself in a church environment where clerical abuse was not hidden in silence but actively confronted, debated, and even litigated. The level of transparency shocked me, coming from a Ghanaian context where such matters are still whispered about in private corners. Here, victims were not only speaking; they were being heard. Law firms, survivors' networks, diocesan review boards, and the media had all become part of a complex ecosystem of accountability. Yet, beneath this openness, I sensed another kind of wound, the wound of institutional shame and the struggle for moral credibility.

3.1. The American Awakening: From Denial to Structural Reform

The Archdiocese of Chicago, where I now study and serve, was among the first to confront the scandal systematically. In 1992, under Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, the diocese established an independent Commission on Clerical Sexual Misconduct with Minors, whose findings set the foundation for later national reforms.[16] Bernardin's vision was rooted not merely in legal

[4]Susan James, "The Question of Personal Identity," ed. Keya Maitra and Jennifer McWeeny, *Feminist Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford University Press, July 7, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190867614.003.0009.

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[15]Francis, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi."

[16]J Dempsey et al., "Report to Joseph Cardinal Bernardin: The Cardinal's Commission on Clerical Sexual Misconduct with Minors" (Chicago, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago, 1992), https://www.bishop-accountability.org/reports/1992-06-BernardinReport/bern-fullreport.pdf.

compliance but in pastoral realism, the conviction that justice and compassion could coexist. His approach anticipated the 2002 USCCB Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which institutionalized diocesan review boards, reporting protocols, victim assistance programs, and annual audits. The U.S. bishops' Charter, revised in 2018, remains a global model of episcopal accountability.[17]

It created mandatory background checks, clear reporting procedures, and lay oversight structures, policies that other local churches, including those in Africa, continue to study.[18] At the heart of these reforms lies a practical-theological insight: that the credibility of the Church's proclamation depends on the integrity of its ministers. When the Church becomes the cause of trauma, evangelization itself is wounded.

3.2. The Financial and Spiritual Cost of Disclosure

The consequences of this awakening were staggering. By 2025, major dioceses such as Los Angeles,[19] New Orleans,[20] and Chicago had paid hundreds of millions of dollars in settlements. Some dioceses even declared bankruptcy to fund reparation programs. These financial losses, though painful, opened doors to truth-telling and transparency that had long been sealed. The Church in the West, forced by legal systems and survivor advocacy, was compelled to confess, not only in words but through institutional repentance.

However, this public reckoning also revealed tensions between justice and image management. Some bishops treated settlements as a way to silence rather than heal. Others, like Bernardin and his successors in Chicago, understood reparation as a sacramental act, a visible sign of repentance and moral renewal. The theological challenge, therefore, is not only how to pay but how to convert, how to move from denial to accountability, from secrecy to communion.

3.3. Ongoing Gaps: Transparency and the Limits of Reform

Even with these reforms, complete healing remains elusive. The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM), in its 2024 and 2025 annual reports, acknowledges that many dioceses still struggle with consistent implementation, data transparency, and survivor-centered engagement.[21] Safeguarding policies exist on paper but often fail in practice due to bureaucratic inertia, fear of scandal, and clerical defensiveness. The Vatican's ongoing review of episcopal accountability under *Vos estis lux mundi* seeks to close these gaps, requiring that even bishops be subject to investigation.[22]

From a practical-theological standpoint, these developments embody what theologian Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder call "prophetic dialogue."[23] The Church must listen to victims and the world's outcry as prophetic voices calling her to conversion. The response to abuse, then, is not only a juridical task but an ecclesiological vocation: to rebuild credibility through truth and humility.

3.4. Lessons for the Ghanaian Church

The Ghanaian Church stands at a point where it can learn from both the strengths and the mistakes of the Western response. The American awakening teaches that silence delays justice but never prevents exposure. The question is not whether the truth will come out, but how the Church will face it when it does. Ghana can avoid repeating history by acting preemptively, establishing independent safeguarding structures, publishing diocesan policies, and engaging in open dialogue among clergy, laity, and victims.

In our context, this means cultivating what Pope Francis calls a *culture of care and accountability,* not one of fear and concealment.[24] The moral credibility of the African Church, often celebrated for its vitality and vocations, depends on its ability to integrate safeguarding as a **spiritual discipline** rather than merely a bureaucratic requirement. The wounds of the West need not be replicated in the Global South if we choose courage over silence and prevention over reaction.

4. Canon Law Today: What the Church Can, and Cannot Do

In the pursuit of justice and reform, the Church's credibility depends not only on pastoral goodwill but also on the integrity of its juridical framework. Canon Law, though often misunderstood as distant or rigid, is one of the Church's most pastoral tools when properly applied. It exists not to protect the institution at the expense of the wounded, but to ensure that truth, mercy, and justice remain held in sacred tension.

4.1. Evolving Canonical Landscape

Since the 2021 revision of *Book VI* of the *Code of Canon Law* on penal sanctions, the Church has clarified offenses, sanctions, and investigative procedures.[25] This reform emerged from decades of painful experience and now names sexual abuse explicitly as a grave delict. Complementing this, as already indicated above, Pope Francis's *Vos estis lux mundi* has established universal norms for reporting, accountability, and the investigation of bishops and religious superiors. These updates mark a transition from fragmented local handling to a global, consistent standard.

In practice, the new canonical system recognizes abuse as both a sin and a crime, requiring ecclesiastical and, where necessary, civil cooperation. The goal is not only punishment but *restoratio iustitiae*; the restoration of justice, healing, and credibility within the Church.

4.2. The Challenge of the Deceased Accused

One of the most complex pastoral and canonical questions I encountered in my reflections concerns accusations against deceased clergy. Canon law does not impose posthumous penal sanctions; death ends juridical action (*mors extinguit personam*).[26] Yet this does not close the Church's moral duty. Transparency and acknowledgment remain essential. Dioceses may publish investigative findings, open archives for research, and offer public apologies and

[17] Bishops, "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People."

[18] Archdiocese of Chicago, "Policies and Procedures" (Chicago, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago, 2025), https://www.archchicago.org/about-us/policies-and-procedures.

[19] Dietrich Knauth, "Los Angeles Archdiocese Reaches $880 Million Sex Abuse Settlement," 2024, https://www.reuters.com/legal/los-angeles-archdiocese-reaches-880-million-sex-abuse-settlement-2024-10-16/.

[20] Ramon Antonio Vargas and David Hammer, "New Orleans Sexual Abuse Victims Approve $230 m Catholic Church Settlement," 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/30/new-orleans-sexual-abuse-victims-catholic-church.

[21] Giribaldi, "Protection of Minors: Second Report Proposes Restorative Measures against Abuse."

[22] Francis, "Vos Estis Lux Mundi."

[23] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Orbis Books, 2011).

[24] Giribaldi, "Protection of Minors."

[25] Holy See Press Office, "New Book VI of the Code of Canon Law" (Vatican City: Holy See Press Office, November 5, 2021), https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/06/01/210601b.html.

[26] Holy See, *Code of Canon Law: Latin–English Edition (Canons 1717–1731; 1395 §3; 1728 §1)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_index_en.html.

support for survivors. The healing owed to the victims transcends the death of the perpetrator.

As Cardinal Cupich has recently observed, "Even when the accused is gone, the community must still reckon with what has been done."[27] In such cases, canonical restraint must be accompanied by pastoral courage, truth-telling, remembrance, and the assurance that justice is not confined to the living.

4.3. Pastoral Implications for Ghana

For the Ghanaian Church, these developments are both instructive and urgent. Canon law must not be viewed as foreign bureaucracy but as an expression of communion and accountability. Implementing local safeguarding policies, training canonical officers, and integrating civil cooperation with institutions like DOVVSU can ensure that justice is pursued with both competence and compassion. The Church's witness in Ghana depends on this integrity.

In the end, canon law must serve not only as a legal instrument but as a spiritual pedagogy of justice, a means of conversion that mirrors the mercy of God while affirming the dignity of every person harmed by the Church's ministers.

5. Ghana's Emerging Safeguarding Framework

The conversation about clerical abuse in Ghana is still in its infancy. The "culture of silence" that has long characterized Ghanaian social and ecclesial life continues to obstruct transparency and justice. Yet there are signs of awakening, a gradual recognition that safeguarding is not merely a Western import but a pastoral necessity for the credibility and holiness of the African Church.

5.1. National and Ecclesial Initiatives

The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) has taken an important step by issuing a National Child Protection Policy (CPCB), outlining the Church's commitment to the safety of minors and vulnerable adults.[28] This policy, though commendable, requires broader implementation at the diocesan and parish levels. Its existence must be accompanied by education, training, and effective enforcement mechanisms. Parish priests, catechists, and lay pastoral agents must not only know the policy but internalize it as part of their pastoral identity.

To make safeguarding credible, dioceses must establish independent safeguarding offices staffed with trained professional canonists, social workers, and lay experts. Collaboration with civil authorities such as the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU)[29] and the Department of Social Welfare would ensure that ecclesiastical investigations complement state procedures rather than compete with them.[30]

5.2. Contextual Challenges and Opportunities

While Ghana has not yet faced the massive legal or financial crises seen in the West, the potential risks are real. Clergy misconduct, if left unaddressed, could gravely harm both victims and the Church's moral authority. Financial compensation systems like those in the United States may not be feasible in the Ghanaian context, but pastoral reparation, public apology, community reconciliation, and survivor accompaniment can serve as locally grounded models of justice.

Moreover, the Synod on Synodality calls for *co-responsibility and participation*, urging every diocese to become a "listening Church."[31] In Ghana, this can mean empowering lay safeguarding committees, training formators in seminaries to integrate affective maturity into priestly formation, and developing culturally relevant educational materials in local languages. The task is not simply institutional but spiritual, to form consciences capable of protecting the vulnerable and confronting wrongdoing without fear.

5.3. Toward a Contextual Theology of Safeguarding

In practical-theological terms, safeguarding in Ghana must evolve from policy to culture. It must become an expression of discipleship, not merely compliance. This requires a theological reorientation, from protecting the Church's image to protecting God's children. When seen this way, safeguarding becomes a form of evangelization, a witness to the Gospel's demand for truth, mercy, and justice.

As I have argued throughout, the Church in Ghana stands at a critical threshold: the choice between inherited silence and transformative accountability. By integrating canonical norms, local collaboration, and pastoral empathy, the Church can preempt a future crisis and model a distinctly African theology of healing and justice, rooted in the Gospel and enriched by communal solidarity.

6. Methodology

The methodological framework of this study was grounded in a qualitative, semi-structured interview and observational approach rooted in practical and contextual theology. It was designed to complement theological reflection with lived experience while maintaining the confidentiality of participants who requested privacy. The fieldwork focused on selected ecclesial and civic actors in Ghana and a smaller comparative group and situations in Chicago. Interviews were conducted with individuals directly involved in safeguarding formation, pastoral leadership, and survivor accompaniment, alongside select professionals working in legal, social, and therapeutic contexts. Participation was voluntary, and strict confidentiality was maintained throughout. The interviews were conducted both in person and virtually, recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically to identify key patterns of silence, accountability, and institutional reform. Data were supplemented by a thorough review of existing literature from both Ghana and the United States, allowing for a comparative analysis of ecclesial safeguarding frameworks and their practical-theological implications.

Ethical integrity remained central to the process. All interviews followed trauma-informed protocols to ensure psychological safety, anonymity, and respect for personal boundaries. Pseudonyms were used where appropriate, and identifiable details were omitted to protect participants' privacy. Listening was understood not simply as data collection but as a pastoral act of accompaniment, an exercise in theological attentiveness to wounded voices. The interview questions invited reflection on disclosure barriers,

[27] Devin Watkins, "Cardinal Cupich: Pope's 'Vos Estis' Update Seeks to Give Justice to Abuse Victims," 2023, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-03/cardinal-blase-cupich-pope-francis-vos-estis-updated-text.html.

[28] Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana, "Child Protection Policy: Booklet (Signed Version)" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana, 2023), https://www.cbcgha.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Child-Protection-Policy-BOOKLET-signed.pdf.

[29] Ghana Police Service, "Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU)," Ghana Police Service, 2025, https://police.gov.gh/en/index.php/domestic-violence-victims-support-unit-dovvsu/.

[30] Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) Ministry of Gender, "Acronyms and Terms" (Accra, Ghana: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2025).

[31] Francis, "Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: For a Synodal Church—Communion, Participation, Mission."

cultural factors, and perceptions of justice and reparation within the Church. The findings were interpreted through theological and sociocultural lenses, integrating insights from the field with relevant academic and ecclesial literature. This methodology thus provided a contextual and comparative foundation for analyzing safeguarding practices in Ghana and Chicago, serving as an empirical bridge between the study's theological framework and its practical conclusions

7. Discernment of False Allegations without Re-traumatizing Survivors

In both Ghana and the wider Church, one of the most delicate pastoral and moral tensions concerns the balance between protecting the innocent and believing the wounded. My own skepticism when I first heard accusations against deceased clergy reflected a legitimate concern about truth and justice, but with time, I came to recognize that the greater danger often lies in silence, disbelief, and institutional defensiveness.

7.1. The Ethical and Pastoral Balance

False allegations are real and can destroy reputations, ministries, and lives. Yet, as I observed in the United States, we are where we are not because of falsehood but cover-up. A theology of safeguarding must therefore operate with two convictions: that *truth liberates*[32] and that *justice belongs to both the accused and the survivor*. Canon Law and papal norms such as *Vos estis lux mundi* emphasize this dual obligation, preserving due process while ensuring compassionate, survivor-centered care.

From a practical-theological perspective, discernment is not merely juridical but spiritual. It calls for prudence, justice, mercy, and fortitude, virtues that prevent the Church from reacting either with suspicion or naivety. The goal is neither to defend the institution at all costs nor to accept every claim uncritically, but to create a transparent process where truth can emerge through fairness and compassion.

7.2. Trauma-Informed Ecclesial Processes

Investigations must proceed with empathy. Survivors should never be re-traumatized through disbelief or hostile questioning. Likewise, accused clergy must be treated with dignity until guilt is proven. This balance requires trained investigators, pastoral counselors, and safeguarding officers capable of both legal competence and pastoral sensitivity.

Dioceses should establish independent review boards, composed of canonical, legal, and psychological experts, including lay representation, to evaluate claims objectively and confidentially.[33] Chicago's model demonstrates that such structures can protect both survivors and the falsely accused through transparent procedures and documented findings.[34] In Ghana, adapting this model through collaboration with DOVVSU and trained pastoral teams can prevent the twin evils of unjust accusation and institutional silence.

Ultimately, discernment of allegations is not only about investigation but about *conversion*. It demands a renewed moral imagination within the Church, one that replaces fear with faith, and secrecy with solidarity. The measure of the Church's maturity will not be in how few scandals it reports, but in how truthfully it handles them when they arise. A culture of safeguarding, therefore, is inseparable from a culture of repentance and renewal.

8. Formation and Prevention: Culture Change in Practice

Preventing abuse in the Church requires far more than well-drafted policies; it demands deep moral and spiritual formation that transforms attitudes, habits, and culture. Safeguarding must become integral to the Church's identity, shaping the way ministers, catechists, and communities understand discipleship and human dignity. This approach calls for an interior conversion, a formation that goes beyond compliance to nurture empathy, prudence, and pastoral responsibility. In this sense, safeguarding is not a bureaucratic exercise but a moral imperative that expresses the Church's vocation to protect the vulnerable as a reflection of Christ's own care for the least among His people.

Within Ghana, priestly formation should adopt sustained programs focusing on affective maturity, healthy boundaries, and pastoral ethics. The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*[35] already highlights holistic human formation as the foundation of priestly life. Seminaries and religious houses must therefore embed safeguarding education throughout their curricula, across philosophy, theology, and pastoral practice, so that future priests view accountability as an essential dimension of discipleship. At the parish level, continuous training for clergy, catechists, and lay volunteers is equally vital. Locally adapted modules inspired by Chicago's VIRTUS: Protecting God's Children program,[36] translated into Ghanaian languages and rooted in local culture, could ensure broader understanding and accessibility. Regular retraining, transparent reporting systems, and background screening will gradually institutionalize vigilance and mutual trust within communities.

Ultimately, authentic prevention requires cultivating humility, transparency, and shared responsibility. A Church that forms its members to see safeguarding as a shared vocation begins to heal from within. This transformation reflects what Pope Francis calls *"co-responsibility in holiness,"*[37] a reminder that holiness and accountability are inseparable. When pastors, parents, and parishioners recognize their duty to protect, the Church becomes not only safer but also more credible, renewed as a living sacrament of God's justice, mercy, and compassionate love for all.

9. Recommendations for the Church in Ghana (Actionable)

The safeguarding of minors and vulnerable persons within the Church must move from policy to practice. The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) has already taken an important step through the publication of its *Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy*, yet implementation across dioceses remains uneven. Every diocese should therefore institutionalize safeguarding structures, appoint trained safeguarding officers, and publish annual reports that document progress and accountability. This visibility would not only prevent misconduct but also build public trust in the Church's commitment to justice.

[32]Jn 8:32

[33]Bishops, "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People: ."

[34]Chicago, "Policies and Procedures."

[35]Congregation for the Clergy, *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis: The Gift of the Priestly Vocation* (Vatican City: L'Osservatore Romano, 2017), https://www.clerus.va/content/dam/clerus/documenti/ratio-2026/Ratio-EN-2017-01-03.pdf.

[36]Archdiocese of Chicago, "Safe Environment Office: Compliance Resources," 2025, https://protect.archchicago.org/compliance-resources/safe-environment-office.

[37]Francis, "Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly, §§ 36, 48, 77-80."

To ensure fairness and professionalism, each diocese should also establish independent review boards composed of canonical, legal, and psychological experts, including lay and survivor representation. These boards can serve as transparent mechanisms for evaluating allegations and advising bishops on appropriate action. Furthermore, the Church must collaborate closely with state institutions such as the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) and the Department of Social Welfare. Such cooperation ensures that ecclesial investigations complement, rather than replace, civic justice, demonstrating that the Church stands not above the law but with the vulnerable.

Integral to prevention is formation. Safeguarding and affective maturity should be central to seminary and ongoing priestly formation. Courses on human development, ethical boundaries, and pastoral integrity must be reinforced through continuous education for clergy, catechists, and Church workers. In this way, the Church not only enforces compliance but cultivates a new moral imagination in which the care of the vulnerable is understood as a sacred vocation.

Equally vital is the establishment of pastoral care structures for survivors. Each diocese should have a liaison office dedicated to trauma-informed accompaniment, counseling, and reparative support. Public acknowledgment of harm, days of prayer, and community-based rituals of healing can help the Church move from silence to solidarity. Transparency is not a threat to faith but a witness to it, an expression of the Church's willingness to stand in the light of truth.

In conclusion, the future of the Church in Ghana depends on its courage to listen, protect, and heal. What began for me as skepticism about historical accusations has matured into a conviction that truth-telling is an act of faith. The experiences of the Church in Chicago, the Vatican's canonical reforms, and emerging local initiatives in Ghana all point to the same truth: safeguarding is not a bureaucratic obligation but a Gospel imperative. To protect the innocent and to acknowledge the wounded is to participate in Christ's own ministry of reconciliation. Suppose the Church in Ghana embraces this vision. In that case, it will not only avert future crises but also become a model of pastoral integrity and hope, a Church credible in mercy and steadfast in justice.

10. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that clerical abuse and the cultures of silence surrounding it cannot be understood merely as moral failings or institutional crises but as profound theological challenges that demand conversion, dialogue, and contextual discernment. In examining both the Ghanaian and Western experiences, it became evident that silence, whether rooted in reverence, shame, or fear, has sustained impunity and wounded the very body of Christ. The comparative reflections between Ghana and Chicago revealed how different socio-cultural, legal, and ecclesial contexts shape the Church's capacity to listen, protect, and heal. While the American Church has moved, often painfully, toward transparency, legal accountability, and survivor advocacy, the Ghanaian Church stands at a pivotal moment to learn proactively from these experiences. The task ahead is not simply to import policies but to inculturate safeguarding as a pastoral and spiritual discipline within the African ecclesial imagination. By grounding reform in the lived experiences of survivors, pastoral leaders, and faith communities, this research affirms that safeguarding is an expression of discipleship, not bureaucracy, a manifestation of the Gospel's call to justice, mercy, and truth.

Ultimately, the path toward healing requires both institutional courage and theological humility. The Church in Ghana, like the universal Church, must become a community that listens before it speaks, repents before it defends, and restores before it forgets. The journey from silence to safeguarding is, therefore, a journey of conversion, personal, communal, and ecclesial. It calls for formators who shape conscience, bishops who model transparency, and faithful who embody co-responsibility in holiness. When the Church protects the vulnerable, believes survivors, and confronts wrongdoing with integrity, it mirrors Christ's own compassion and justice. Thus, the future credibility of the Church does not rest on its perfection but on its willingness to tell the truth, seek forgiveness, and begin again. In embracing this vocation, the Church in Ghana can become a beacon of hope, a listening, learning, and healing Church that bears credible witness to the reconciling love of God in our age and culture.

Subject Index

Technical concepts and key subjects are indexed at their verified discussion pages.

KEY SUBJECTS Atmosphere • Clerical Abuse • Cultural Relativism • Espaço de Sororidade • Existential Void • Hiba • Tea Cultural Landscapes • Auto-Curation

A

Addressing Existential 5, 8, 10, 13–14
Agantuk 29–34
Analytical Framework 18–19
Anthropology 7–8, 10–11, 29–31, 33, 44
Atmosphere 1, 3–4, 20, 32
Auto-Curation 1, 3–4
Axiological Categories 8, 10–11

B

B. Genuine Lifetime Disposition 37
Background and Rationale 29
Bangladesh Property Law 35
Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha 41
also: BSS
Bibliotherapy 5, 11–14
Book Art 1, 3
Breaking the Culture of Silence 43

C

Chinese Tea Culture 17–19, 21
Cinematic Language and Symbolism 32
Civilisation 29–33
Clerical Abuse 43–44, 46, 48
Clinical Practice 8–9, 11–13, 15
Comunhão Com Autoras 23
Conceptual Framework 8, 10, 12
Contemplacao Em Lenilde Freitas 23
Contemporary Art 1–2, 4
Contextual and Empirical Corroboration 44
Contextual Challenges and Opportunities . . . 46
Cultural Meanings 17–18, 20
Cultural Relativism 29–34
Cultural Relativism and Civilisation Discourse 30
Cultural Relativism and the Ethics of Understanding 32
Cultural Values 17–18, 20–21
Culture of Silence 43–44, 46

D

Da Natureza 23–25, 27
Data Collection and Term Selection 18
Dimensions of Tea Cultural 17–21
Discutindo Gênero 23

E

Ecological Knowledge 18–19, 21
Eligibility Criteria 6
Ephemerality 1
Espaço de Sororidade 23
Ethical Modernity 32–33
Eurocentrism 29–30
Evolving Canonical Landscape 45
Existential Approaches to Existential Questions 5
Existential Issues 5–6, 8, 10–14
Existential Void 5–14

F

Final Answer to the Central Question 40
Final Considerations 13
Flagrante Dos Instantes 23

G

Genuine Lifetime 35–37, 39–40
Ghana's Emerging Safeguarding Framework . 46
Ghanaian Church 43–46, 48

H

Heritage Communication 17–21
Hiba 35–40
Hiba Is Not the Same as Wasiyyah 36
Humanism 6, 29–31, 33

I

ICH Terminology 17, 19–21
Important Legal-Status Note 40
Inheritance 32, 35–41
Intangible Cultural Heritage 17–21
also: ICH
Integrative Review 5–6, 8–9, 13–15
Interlingual Reconstruction 17–18, 21
International Readers 19–20
Interrogating Modernity 29
Introdução 23
Islamic Law 35–36, 38, 40

L

Lessons for the Ghanaian Church 45
Lifetime Transfer 35–36, 39–40
Lifetime Usufruct 35–36, 38–39
Liminality 1, 4
Literal Translation 17, 19–21
Logotherapy 5–15

M

Meaning in Life 7, 9–10, 12–16
Meaning of Life 5–16
Mental Health 6, 8–9, 11–16
Methodological Features of the Included Studies 10
Mode of Transfer 35–37, 40
Modernity 29–33, 40
Modernity and Postcolonial India 30

N

Narrative Psychology 11–12, 14
National and Ecclesial Initiatives 46
Natural Technical 17–19, 21
Natural Technical and Spiritual 17–19, 21

O

O Instante Flagrado 25
Object 1–4, 6, 32

P

Pastoral Implications for Ghana 46
Performance 1, 3, 19–20
Philosophical Anthropology 7–8, 10
Plural Modernities 29–30, 33
Poesia Feminina 23
Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors 44–45
also: PCPM
Por Exemplo 23–26
Postcolonial Critique of Modernity 31
Postcolonial Theory 30, 33
Practical Theology 43
Psychotherapy 9, 11, 13–15, 32

Q

Qur'anic Inheritance 35–36, 38, 40

R

Ray's Humanism and Universalism 30
Ray's Humanist Anthropology 31
Ray's Vision of Ethical Modernity 33
Recurso À Natureza 24, 26
Reflexão Sobre a Vida 25
Relevance Today 33
Research Context 12
Research Design 18
Resources for Working on Existential Issues . 12

S

Safeguarding 21, 43–48
Satyajit Ray 29–30, 33–34
Selection of Studies and Data Processing 7
Shariah Compliance 35
Socratic Dialogue 5, 8, 11–13
Spirituality 6, 9, 11, 13–15
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 10
also: SPSS
Statutory Gift with Reserved Lifetime Usufruct 36
Statutory Mechanism 35, 38–40

T

Tea Cultural Landscapes 17–21
Tea-Related Heritage 17–19, 21
Tea-Related Intangible Cultural Heritage . 17–20
Terminology Translation 17, 21
Text 1–4, 14–15, 21, 29, 43, 46
Text as an Ephemera 3
Text as an Object 1
Theoretical Dimensions of Tea Cultural Landscapes 18
Thesis Statement 30
Transfer of Property 35–36, 40
Transfer of Property Amendment 2026 35
Translation and Heritage Communication 20–21
Translation of Tea-Related 17–18, 20–21
Translation of the Natural Dimension 19
Translation of the Spiritual Dimension 20

Translation of the Technical Dimension 19
Trauma-Informed Ecclesial Processes 47
V
Values Awareness 12
Video Art 1, 3–4

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B. Complete Review Report & Research Assessment Sheet

Upon completion of the review, you will receive a **comprehensive Review Report** along with a detailed **Research Assessment Sheet**. These documents provide:

- Line-by-line reviewer comments keyed to **specific line numbers** in your typeset manuscript, enabling precise, unambiguous identification of every comment.
- A structured assessment covering originality, significance, clarity, methodology, and overall quality.
- Constructive feedback and actionable suggestions for improvement.

C. Responding to Reviewer Comments

Addressing reviewer feedback is simple and flexible. You have two options:

Option A - Author Dashboard: Log in to your Author Dashboard, navigate to **Manage Submission**, and create a **support ticket**. Simply quote the relevant line numbers from your review report and clearly describe your corrections or responses.

Option B - Email: If the Dashboard is not convenient, you may simply send an email with a numbered list of corrections referencing the line numbers, along with your responses to each reviewer comment.

Important: You do **not** need to reformat the document yourself at any stage. Our production executives will implement all your requested text changes directly in the typeset manuscript. Reviewer comments may be addressed and resolved right up until the Early View stage.

IV. Publication Lifecycle: Complete Transparency

A. Early View (Galley Proof)

- Upon acceptance, a **galley proof** (Early View edition) of your article is prepared according to the journal's publishing schedule.
- The Early View version includes **line numbers** for convenient reference during final corrections.
- You may still provide corrections at this stage by referencing specific line numbers via email or the Author Dashboard.

B. Ahead of Print

- Following the Early View, an **Ahead of Print** version is published before the final issue compilation.
- This version represents the final, corrected article but **does not yet include Volume or Issue numbers**.

C. Digital Publication (eJournal)

- After all corrections are finalized, the **digital eJournal edition** is published with line numbers removed.
- Your article receives its official **DOI (Digital Object Identifier)** and is indexed across global academic databases.
- The article becomes freely and permanently accessible online under our open-access policy.

D. Hardbound Print Publication

- Approximately **15 days after digital publication**, the article enters our offset production pipeline.
- Your research is printed in **premium hardbound volumes** and distributed to institutional subscribers, major university libraries, and social science research centers worldwide.
- The corresponding author receives a **complimentary hardbound copy** dispatched via government courier at no additional cost.

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- **Premium Hardbound Print Editions** for institutional archives and personal collections.
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- Optimize article metadata for maximum **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**, ensuring your paper appears prominently when scholars search for your research topics and theoretical frameworks.
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Authors are required to disclose all sources of funding and any financial or non-financial conflicts of interest. Full transparency is mandatory and is enforced at every stage of the publication process.

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IX. The LaTeX Author Package (Entirely Optional)

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