AGE-INDEPENDENCE
FOR MEDIA PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT *Age is a static socio-demographic dimension, but is it still a useful category for media pedagogy and media competencies? This article is a theoretical examination of the fixation on age in German media pedagogy research and practice. The thesis of this article, therefore, is that this dominant focus on age should be shifted to neglected contexts and ways to discover them. The key point is to distinguish cases in which it makes sense to focus on age groups in media pedagogical research and practice from those in which it is discriminatory and less important than other factors. Therefore, it analyses historical developments that justified concentration on the subject in German media pedagogy and, thus, the overemphasis on age concepts.*

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INTRODUCTION

Media pedagogy is the field of research and practice which should enhance media competence to participate, and emancipate people *in, with and through* media (Gapski and Gräßler 2007). German media pedagogy focuses primarily on *people* in its research and practice (Ganguin *et al.*, 2017: 302). Researchers' and practitioners' question for work is: "What are the people doing with the media?" (Schorb, 2003: 77). Therefore, they define their target groups according to generational lines and the life course (*e.g.* 'children', 'adolescents', 'adults' or 'seniors') (Hartung *et al.*, 2009; Schäffer, 2003; Rosenstock, 2007). The age is by default interpreted as a meaningful context for media appropriation without proving its relevance. The main assumption of this article is that the dominant focus on age should be shifted to other, neglected, contexts and ways to discover them. The rationale for this article is to analyse the problem of ageism in media pedagogy with the aim to provide alternative approaches for defining target groups. The argumentation is based on the assumption that age has little to do with the ability to develop media competences. Lack of awareness and education among certain demographic groups excludes portions of society from taking advantage of the benefits of recent technological developments. For example, the smartphone, a hybrid of technology and online content, combines the known media and their functions (Hepp, 2005). Daily life fosters its obligatory usage (Givskov and Deuze, 2018: 400) because non-smartphone-users are expelled from messenger-groups with family or peers (Rosales and Blanche-Tarragó, 2018). Digital exclusion also occurs with issues related to current schedules and low-priced tickets for public transportation, from administration (Sanchez-Valle *et al.*, 2018) or their online bank accounts (bitkom, 2018).

The article discusses the theoretical impacts of this emphasis on different usages of age concepts by considering arguments for age as an anchor category, as well as the limitations of it. Further, it shows, by giving examples from German media pedagogical work, how age-categories lead to discrimination against older adults. By illustrating the disadvantages, the article encourages researchers and practitioners in the field of media pedagogy to reconsider the use of categories which do not specify the subjects of research: people and media. Referring to the genealogy of German media pedagogy, the article seeks reasons for focusing on age groups in order to find a way to avoid this phenomenon.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FOCUSING ON TARGET GROUPS OF AGE

From a media and communication science perspective, media pedagogy is a subdiscipline of sociology where borrowing concepts as the socio-demographic can be appropriate. The basic assumption here is that: "Chronological age, a property of individuals, may stand as a proxy for biological maturation, psychological development, membership in larger social categories (*e.g.*, cohort), or life stage or phase" (Settersten and

Mayer, 1997: 234). Nevertheless, we need to specify it for our research and practice object, *i.e.,* the media, considering that

we know that chronological age itself is an "empty" variable we rarely assume that it is age itself that causes a behavior; instead, it is whatever age presumably indexes that is thought to be important (...) we must ask ourselves why age is being measured and how it will be used. (Settersten and Mayer, 1997: 238).

AGE AS A FOUNDATION OF EQUALITY

In media pedagogical research and practice, age is used as an indicator of various complex conditions, yet with some limitations.

(1) Orientation on the Curriculum and Socialization

Media educators use age as an index, when they take socially defined positions into consideration, such as kindergarten, pupils, young people or retirees. These concepts refer to age as an anchor category, which is useful when planning or researching media appropriation or media competences within a curriculum. In educational systems, such as the school system, people can be classified by age, because of the fact that the individual's current career step mirrors his/her socialization process. Even in this case, there are differences between different school systems or regions, like comparing lower-class schools with private ones. With the end of schooling, people's career steps differ (Haubold and Ganguin, 2017) and age is not an indicator of the connection between working life and media competences.

Diversity within generations of adults is high in terms of career patterns (Bergström, 2017; Christensen, 2017; Givskov and Deuze, 2018; Haubold and Ganguin, 2017; Stone *et al.*, 2016; Doh, 2011). Therefore, age is not relevant in informal or non-formal media-pedagogical research and practice or personal media use in leisure time or daily routines. Therefore, age could be *one* variable for adults.

(2) Orientation on Different Steps of Development

Similar interests of the target group can also be structured by using age as an anchor category through specific development issues (Faltenmaier *et al.*, 2013). Focusing on age in this case means emphasizing the conditions of a target group while neglecting their interests, skills and abilities. This connection is valuable in stages of life when usage-skills and abilities have yet to be developed.

According to Beate Sodian (2008), the psychological basis for seeing, listening, or conscious touching are developed around the age of twelve. Furthermore, the ability to understand and abstract, the ability of hypothetical thinking and reflection should be reached by this age (Horn *et al.*, 2016; Krampen, 2008; Oerter and Dreher, 2008). People thus have all physical and psychological skills needed for competent media use when they are around twelve years old, and they are *fully developed for establishing media*

competences. These abilities do not decrease with age. The skills and abilities which are needed for media-usage do not distinguish adults from older people or teenagers (Bergström, 2017; Christensen, 2017; Haubold and Ganguin, 2017).

(3) Discovering the Backgrounds of the Indicator Age

An alternative to using the empty variable of age as a category is to investigate the content of media competence and medium-specific interests of the subjects (Haubold and Ganguin, 2017). Both can be age-independent. Age-related concepts were imported to media pedagogical research, such as biography-research, generational approaches, or research about life span and life-caesuras (Hartung *et al.*, 2009; Schäffer, 2003; Beck *et al.*, 2016; Rosenstock, 2007). These approaches try to overcome discrimination by investigating the differences which result from ageism (Baetge and Harnisch, 2013). Therefore, it is appropriate to use phases of life (Beck *et al.*, 2016; Kruse, 2011; Doh, 2011) as a variable instead of chronological age or age as an anchor category. Nevertheless, age still plays a role as a guideline in these approaches because they are structured chronologically.

DISCRIMINATION AND AGEISM: MEDIA PEDAGOGY AS A PRIVILEGE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Targeting by age groups results in age-discrimination, which can be found in German media pedagogical research and practice. Ageism refers to the "marginalization and discrimination" (Krekula *et al.*, 2018: 33) of groups of people according to their age. The term was formulated to stress the discrimination against older people[1] (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer, 2018: 2). The consequences of this are symbolic, cultural, discursive and ideological and are seen in social practices (interactions), social structures, organizations, and institutions (Berger, 2018: 1). They affect different living conditions, mutual recognition, educational possibilities, as well as material and immaterial resources (*ibid.*). All these aspects can be identified in German media pedagogical research and practice.

(1) Effects in Organizations and Institutions: Deficient Research

German media pedagogical professions are mostly connected to educational research, which is closely linked to school or teacher training (GMK, 2018a). Twelve media pedagogical professions are directly linked to teachers' training for primary and secondary school. Further, nine degree-courses are highly specialized in children and media; one of them researches early childhood. In contrast, there is no media degree programme which researches seniors, and only three media pedagogical professions relate directly to adult education (GMK, 2018a). It should not be the aim to demand a profession like this – for reasons which are explained later – but this illustrates disparity.

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[1] Nevertheless, ageism is a problem for younger people as well *(ibid.)*. Following the definition of Butler, ageism is a phenomenon around three aspects: "(1). Prejudice against older adults, old age, and aging (*i.e.*,attitudes towards older adults), (2). Discrimination against older adults (*i.e.*, behavioral acts targeting older adults), and (3). Institutional norms and strategies supporting stereotypes and reducing the opportunities of older adults." (Ayalon and Tesch-Römer, 2018: 12, as quoted by authors).
To speak about the first aspect, empirical research is needed, that survey if and how ageism comes upon German media pedagogies. This article concentrates on the second and especially on the third dimension.

The essential media pedagogical research institute, the *JFF* (*Institute for Media Pedagogy in Research and Practice*), concentrates on children and adolescents (JFF, 2018). Likewise, the *media pedagogical research association South-West* (the *mpfs*) collects data about the media usage of children and young people (mpfs 2018). In 2012, the *JFF* started to stress the early childhood by introducing the *miniKIM* research panel, which focusses on two to five year old children. Since 2016, they have expanded their research on children's families, but the main focus is still on children (mpfs, 2018).

Even when media pedagogy takes seniors into account, the main focus lies on the description of their deficiencies in comparison to *ordinary* users. "Life's caesuras" (Kruse, 2011: 254; Doh, 2011: 20, 73) of older people focus on gone things. The orientation on biological physical and psychological changes (Simon et al., 1999: 29) ask for tasks to cope. Furthermore, concepts of generational media usage try to explain why older people use media differently (Thalhammer, 2017; Hepp *et al.*, 2014, 2015), which fosters and reinforces stereotypes (Schorb, 2017: 256).

(2) Effects in Educational Opportunities: Young People vs. the Leftovers

The media authorities in Germany, the major actors in informal media education, define 'children and young people' (die medienanstalten, 2018a) as their target groups for enhancing media competencies. Three out of the fourteen media authorities list 'adults', one 'seniors' and only the media authority of the smallest federal state, Saarland, names 'all' as its target group (die medienanstalten, 2018b). The *German Professional Association for Media Education (GMK)* focuses the informal media education on young people (GMK, 2018b). The most important media pedagogical German award for best practice the *Dieter Baacke Preis* groups projects with older people together with those involving disabled people[2] with the purpose of 'exchange between generations' (von Gross *et al.*, 2018)[3], which means that young people are required.

This stereotyped image of pedagogical work implies that intergenerational practice means that young people teach older. Projects are built around children and their grandparents (die medienanstalten, 2016: 120). The media authorities have been funding projects where 'intergenerational' means that seniors get an insight into new media from children or young people (die medienanstalten, 2018b). If older people are involved or addressed in practice projects, their strengths are reduced to 'life experience' (Mayer, 2009: 115, 122), which is discriminatory and follows false assumptions. Young people are not necessarily in touch with the media or informed about all their functions (Initiative D21 e.V., 2019: 38). Secondly, this describes only technical competence while reflexive competencies in particular are rarely addressed. Thirdly, technical competence is unrelated to teaching skills. Moreover, *new* media are built upon functions from the existing media and, thus, are not entirely new, so they are familiar to experienced users.

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[2] While on the subject, it is worth noting that this is discriminative against disabled people as well. In point of fact, it seems as if their disabilities were not taken seriously.

[3] The translation of category 4 of the Dieter-Baacke-Preis: "intergenerational/integrative projects (*e.g.* media pedagogical cooperation, exchange between generations, family-oriented media work, media pedagogical projects in the context of inclusion or integration of children and young people with disabilities)" (GMK, 2018c).

(3) Social Interaction: Mutual Recognition as Symbolic and Positive Discrimination

Discrimination is reflected by the use of derogatory terms like 'Silversurfers' (Röser, 2017), 'Silvergamers' (Kohring and Heinz, 2012) or 'Senior-Courses' (die medienanstalten, 2018b). The term 'Silversurfer', for example, refers to physical ageing because it creates an image of elderly media users, who supposedly act differently from other groups. It is a classical difference construction (Scherr, 2017: 44) and additional linguistic discrimination (Schorb, 2009: 320). It was not possible to find a homogenous media usage of the older-aged generation (Loos, 2012; Doh, 2011). Instead, there are different media generations, where older people are subordinated (Hepp *et al.*, 2017: 81; Beck *et al.*, 2016; Hepp *et al.*, 2015).

An effect of considering people as special media users is that parallel media-worlds are created. Middle-aged and senior users are interesting for economic reasons (Schorb, 2009: 320). Meanwhile, the Federal Ministry claims that people are "never too old for the Internet" (BMFSFJ, 2018) and implicates topics, which are just for retired persons. There has been some research about digital immigrants or older people's abstinence from new media content and practical ways to integrate them (*e.g.*, Hartung *et al.*, 2012–2019). Courses about smartphone-use for mature people have emerged (Kübler, 2019), and research has begun to address the leftovers (BMBF, 2018; BMFSFJ, 2018).

Dealing with these stereotypes is hard (Klein, 2017; Baetge and Harnisch, 2013) because it leads to self-stereotyping (Rebelo, 2018), which leads to problems in daily life (Thomas and Thomas, [1928] 1970). Discrimination occurs because of established stereotypes, which are also reproduced in media pedagogical practice.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: REASONS FOR THE DOMINANT FOCUS ON AGE

An explanation for why German media pedagogy addresses target age groups and is biased in favour of young people can be found in its history.

From Protecting to Privileging Minors

One of the largest fields of work in media education in Germany is protection of minors. In cases of media protection, age as a socio-demographic factor still plays a dominant role in research and practice. In the beginning, the groups who were media-protected were not addressed in relation to age, but in terms of their reading skills (Stöber, 2003: 140). Subsequently, women and non-adults were once defined as those who were protected from the content of "trash and dirt literature" (Barth, 2002: 82; Jäger, 1988: 173). Whereas gender has ceased to matter in targeting media protection, the youth and children are still protected from harmful media content by German law (BMFSFJ, 2014). German youth media protection still distinguishes children aged zero to six; twelve; sixteen and eighteen. (JuSchG & JMStV, 2015). This dominant focus on young people makes sense in terms of

orientation on development psychology. Otherwise, it is questionable, if the categories of decision making that youth media protection is using – such as fear, violence, sexuality, or extremism (KJM, 2019) – are completely age-independent and could be directly classified (as the *Pan European Game Information (PEGI)* already does). In this case, people could decide on their own (or parents for their children) if they are *old enough* for the content. Such a method already works in practice because there is no age limit for books.

After the media pedagogical phase of protection, media pedagogy focused on education and especially on children's and youth's education (Hüther and Podehl, 2005). Educational technologists, for instance, produced media and media content for schools (Hüther and Podehl, 2005). Whereas German media pedagogy aimed to educate the entire population after World War II to limit the effects of propaganda, recent research has concentrated on young people's education, thus focusing on their work at school (Süss *et al.*, 2013). Media pedagogues have established target-group-friendly content and methods for young people, such as school films or a children's channel (*KiKA*) (Hüther and Podehl, 2005). The media authorities have been founded. Also, researchers focus on the target groups of young people to learn more about their daily lives, their particular problems and requirements (as the research institutes *JFF* and *mpfs* still do today).

In later years, media educational researchers and practitioners opened the field of labour. Since the rise of the Internet, media pedagogy has dealt with careers (Hüther, 2005). 'Media pedagogy for adults' means 'media pedagogy for vocational education' (Helbig and Hofhues, 2018). Retired people's human resources offered focusing on the target group of older adults with the appeal to life-long learning. An economic rather than pedagogical, perspective has been adopted, which gives rise to a new problem: The oldest are excluded from access to media pedagogy because they are not part of the labour market (Schorb, 2009: 319).

FOCUSING AGE THROUGH MISUNDERSTOOD DIDACTIC DEFINITIONS

Current discrimination against adult media users stands in opposition to the postulation of an age-independent approach of pedagogy and especially of media competence's aims (Schorb, 2017: 256). The limited target groups of media pedagogical work and research were not intentioned. On the contrary, Comenius – as one of the cornerstones of German media education – demanded education for everyone (Schaller, 1995). Even though Comenius tried to prepare content for a younger generation, he intended to do so for all, particularly for those who are disadvantaged, who are unprivileged (Schaller, 1995).

With the development of media competence concepts, the focus shifted to the consideration of age. The models contain 'reflexive' (Baacke, 1996; Schorb, 1997; Moser, 2010; Groeben, 2002), 'cognitive' (Schorb, 1997; Aufenanger, 1997; Kübler, 1996; Tulodziecki, 1997) or 'affective' (Aufenanger, 1997) dimensions. They are theoretically described as being age-independent, but in research and practice, they define groups based on age. To

differentiate target groups by aspects other than stages of development shifts the anchor category to age groups. Dieter Baacke (1980a; Baacke and Vollbrecht, 2003) describe media competences as didactics to deal with media. He differentiates the categories of young people from 0–5, 6–12, and 13–18 years, yet his idea of media competence is age-independent (Baacke, 1979; 1980b; 2004; 2018). Nevertheless, these categories are used as target groups and in a way that excludes adults.

Marc Prensky (2001: 6) has a similar idea as he formulates the 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' as different types of media appropriators, who need new ways to plan the didactics with new "methodologies for all subjects, at all levels". Unfortunately, it led to discrimination, when digital natives were characterized as young and digital immigrants as mature adults (Loos, 2012) even though *new media* are new for everyone. Also, everyone needs new ways to appropriate them. For this reason, it is necessary to overcome the age-based target groups and re-establish an age-independent media pedagogy.

CONCLUSION: OVERCOMING THE DOMINANT AGE-FOCUS

This article offers impulses for reconsidering the dominant focus on age (when discussing target groups in media pedagogy). The proxy of age reaches its limits by referring to adults and older people. The concepts reach their limits when media pedagogy is dedicated to people from the age of twelve and non-formal and informal education. Therefore, the proxy age should not be overrated. Focusing on age leads to neglecting other attributes that are probably relevant, such as biographical caesuras, developmental or generational issues.

The article illustrates that ageism is a problem within German media pedagogy in its organisational and institutional aspects. Research and practice focus on the categories of age, particularly young people. One consequence of this is that *the elderly* or *older people* is used as a residual category in which to collect a kind of leftovers respectively young people, for whom the media pedagogical projects are conceptualized. It ends up in fewer educational possibilities for leftovers. In this case, middle-age groups of 'adults' are discriminated as well. Older-aged adults face symbolic discrimination by being targeted through the use of deficient and difference constructions. By trying to address the leftovers, an overemphasis on the group of *non-minors* leads to positive discrimination (as Rothermund and Temming (2010) describe as a problem for democracy). All these effects of ageism have an impact on material and immaterial resources, thus excluding older people not only from media education but also from daily life practices.

To discover the reasons for the normative depiction of age and frequent discrimination that adults and seniors face when dealing with media, the article summarises historical developments of media pedagogy in Germany. Media educators started with the age-independent idea of including the unprivileged and protecting the youth. This evolved into a form of privileged treatment in which those who are not children or adolescents

are neglected. Both Comenius and media pedagogues who developed models for media competence (by following the Habermasian perspectives of Enlightenment about a self-determined subject (such as Baacke (1996), Schorb (1997) or Gapski (2001)), implemented media pedagogy for everyone, especially for unprivileged people and minorities. The didactic implementation where developmental psychological stages are decisive led to the misconception that age differences are relevant to media appropriation. Subsequent analysis of the roles that media play in the labour market led to a focus on employees who are in preparation for, or within working life, while those who do not participate remain as leftovers.

Stressing age as an anchor category causes ageism and discrimination, which disadvantages the supposed group of older people even though they are not different from others in their media appropriation, which stands in contrast to an age-independent aim of media pedagogy. The aim should be to re-establish media pedagogy for everyone again.

One of the problems of emphasising age lies in the orientation on psychological development, which uses age as an anchor category. Through creating didactic ways to inform media competence, those concepts were overtaken. This explains the focus on the subject within the German media competence approaches. From an idealistic point of view, the main concepts argue top-down and describe how a person should be to become a competent individual (Schiefner-Rohs, 2013). The subject's predispositions, especially the development stages, are based on age.

A way to solve this subject-centrist perspective is to combine it with the Anglo-American media-literacy ideas, where the emphasis lies more on the media (see Table 1.). Contrary to the theoretical German media competence, the media literacy tradition lies in pragmatism (Dewey, 1997). Following the aim of alphabetization – as the word literacy illustrates – it is an empirical approach (Ganguin *et al*., 2017). With the aim to decode information (Swertz and Fessler, 2010), the media are described as technical devices and mediators of content. The question is: What do the media want to be done by the subject? To understand the media and become literate, it is necessary to know and see through their technical characters whereby the subject is described as a user: What allows the media to be done by the person? The focus lies on functional skills and abilities, which a person needs to act with the media (Aufderheide and Firestone, 1993). Therefore, the perspective completes the German one that takes these skills and abilities for granted (Baacke, 1996). Moreover, both most central media literacy models standardize the steps of decoding (Livingstone, 2004; Potter, 2004), and target media-specifics. Consequently, they describe them independently of the subject (*i.e.* they are age-independent).

Table 1. **General Comparison of German Media Competence and Anglo-American Media Literacy Perspectives (cf. Gemkow and Haubold, 2016).**

Media Competence	Category of Comparison	Media Literacy
Enlightenment (Theoretical)	*History*	Literacy/Alphabetization (Pragmatic)
Idealistic Dimensions for a Subject (Pedagogical Ideal)	*Focus on*	Pragmatic Steps of Acting with Media (Explicit Usage)
Deductive, Normative (Top Down)	*Concept*	Deductive, Normative (Bottom Up)
Participating/Emancipated Subject	*Aim*	Decoding Media Messages
Creator of Media / Self-Determined Part of Society	*Subject*	User of Media
Cultural Objects	*Media*	Technical Devices with Specific Characters

Through this polarisation, a wide spectrum of how media pedagogical work can be situated is demonstrated (see Table 1.). Focusing on the subject is only one possibility. Therefore,

>Instead of stressing the subject's characteristics, the Anglo-American perspective gives various connection options to emphasize a wide range to describe media competence/literacy.

>There is a lack of empirical exploration on the German side.

>The idealistic view needs a pragmatic counterpart, inasmuch that the situational aims of the person do not step back behind theoretical ideals, which would connect the concept of media education with the one of media competence.

In an interactional perspective (Süss *et al.*, 2010: 60; Schorb, 1995: 46), neither centres on the subject nor the medium. It also solves the problem that each dimension is limited in its relation to the media pedagogical practice, where mediatization (Krotz, 2001) connects these concepts. Interaction, thus, defines what is relevant in the situation of the media appropriation process. Depending on this, age *could* be a context but is no context per se.

Therefore, one way for age-independent media pedagogy could be to reclassify people regarding their media appropriation along both of the questions, instead of focusing on only one, thus developing subject-media-specific categories. Instead of borrowing contexts like age from socio-demographics, it is important to prove which contexts are essential for and in the single situation of interaction, which contexts are necessarily relevant.

The article invites media pedagogical practitioners and researchers to prove the relevance of age by defining target groups and to further investigate more research subject-specific contexts. These arguments simultaneously draw attention to a significant desideratum in an age-independent – and for this less discriminatory – media pedagogical research and practice.

Instead of borrowing concepts from other social sciences or using old fashioned categories or finding contexts of media appropriation on purpose or by accident, it is necessary to investigate and use media- and subject-specific contexts, too. The recommendations are:
>not to fall back on the common age-dependent target groups, when searching for equalities between them,
>to be sensitive to discrimination, especially to ageism and,
>to take other contexts into account.

The foregoing refers to both subjects of research: people and media. The recommendations are intended to establish age-independent media pedagogical research and practice.

In summary, the article provides the field of media pedagogy with a novel approach through combining perspectives and media scientific traditions. The table focuses on a wider spectrum of contexts of adult media appropriation and, thus, provides multi-perspective approaches, which could shift the problem of ageism in media pedagogy.

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MEDIJSKA PEDAGOGIJA NEOVISNA O DIMENZIJI DOBI

Rebekka Haubold

SAŽETAK *Dob je statična sociodemografska dimenzija, no pitanje je je li to još uvijek korisna kategorija za medijsku pedagogiju i medijske kompetencije. Ovaj članak teorijski propituje usredotočenost na dob u istraživanju i praksi njemačke medijske pedagogije. Teza ovog članka jest da se dominantni fokus na dob treba preusmjeriti na zanemarene kontekste i načine kako ih otkriti. Ključna je stvar razlikovati slučajeve u kojima ima smisla usredotočiti se na dobne skupine u medijskim pedagoškim istraživanjima i praksama od onih u kojima je to diskriminatorno i manje važno od ostalih čimbenika. Stoga se analizira povijesni razvoj koji je opravdao koncentraciju na tu temu u njemačkoj medijskoj pedagogiji i prekomjerni nagla-sak na pojmovima koji se vezuju uz dob.*

Bilješka o autorici

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