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VOLUME 8 ISSUE 2, 2023

## SPECIAL ISSUE: CULTURE(S) ON THE MARGINS

### Guest Editors

**Simon Stewart**

University of Portsmouth (UK)

**Rita Riberio**

University of Minho - Braga (PORTUGAL)

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## Editorial

# Culture(s) on the Margins: An Introduction

Simon Stewart <sup>1\*</sup>, Rita Ribeiro <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Portsmouth, UNITED KINGDOM

<sup>2</sup> University of Minho - Braga, PORTUGAL

\*Corresponding Author: [simon.stewart@port.ac.uk](mailto:simon.stewart@port.ac.uk)

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## ABSTRACT

Sociologists and those working in related disciplines have often found more of interest on the margins than in the centre. It is where innovation takes place, where the new replaces the outmoded, where ‘outsider’ or heterodox voices challenge the orthodoxy, and where culture creators are most able to follow the laws inherent to their specific region of the cultural field. The margins are where you will find ‘underground’ or ‘cutting edge’ scenes. Moreover, ethnographic traditions in sociological research have produced fine-grained accounts of cultures of subaltern, subcultural, diasporic groups, and the ways in which these groups and individuals engage in counter-hegemonic practices. At the same time, sociologists have also drawn attention to how those occupying the margins of societal fields are characterised in terms of lack: dominated individuals and groups lack the requisite cultural capital or social connections to get on in life. This special issue, which derives from discussions held at the Culture(s) on the Margins mid-term Sociology of Culture Research Network (European Sociological Association) conference at University of Portsmouth in the summer of 2022, contributes to debates on the relatively underexplored topic of culture(s) on the margins through several conceptual and empirical interventions. In doing so, it focuses on three interrelated aspects of marginality: first, marginality as a site of domination; second, marginality as opening up spaces of resistance; and third, marginality as enabling different ways of seeing and thinking.

**Keywords:** culture, margins, marginality, sociology, cultural sociology

## INTRODUCTION

Sociologists and those working in related disciplines have often found more of interest on the margins than in the centre. It is where innovation takes place, where the new replaces the outmoded, where ‘outsider’ or heterodox voices challenge the orthodoxy, and where culture creators are most able to follow the laws inherent to their specific region of the cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993, 1996). The margins are where you will find ‘underground’ or ‘cutting edge’ scenes. Moreover, ethnographic traditions in sociological research have produced fine-grained accounts of cultures of subaltern, subcultural, diasporic groups, and the ways in which these groups and individuals engage in counter-hegemonic practices (e.g. Anderson, 2003 [1976]; Becker, 1991 [1963]; Hebdige, 1979).

At the same time, sociologists have also drawn attention to how those occupying the margins of societal fields are characterised in terms of lack: dominated individuals and groups lack the requisite cultural capital or social connections to get on in life; they are ‘failed consumers’ or they make the wrong choices; they lack the time and resources with which to develop and deploy an aesthetic disposition; and they lack the social power to confer

legitimacy on their practices or representations. Those 'beyond the pale' are rendered abject, considered to be 'matter out of place' (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2004; Tyler, 2020). Among the social types identified on the margins, there is the Simmelian figure of the stranger who 'comes today and stays tomorrow', who is invisibilized and ignored, or hypervisibilised and racialised (Simmel, 1971 [1908]; Stewart and Sanders, 2023). Strangers are part of the group and yet do not fully belong. They are set apart from the group with an objectifying distance, and during times of crises, they are the ones blamed when things go wrong. As Beverley Skeggs (2004) points out, cultures of the dominated are nevertheless 'propertized' by the dominant who, occupying more mobile position are able to plunder the edgy associations and most exciting bits while leaving behind that which is deemed to be 'the constitutive limit' and that which has no cultural value.

This special issue, which derives from discussions held at the Culture(s) on the Margins mid-term Sociology of Culture Research Network (European Sociological Association) conference at University of Portsmouth in the summer of 2022, asks which perspectives, methodologies and methods might help sociologists better understand and make sense of culture(s) on the margins. Marginality is relatively under-utilised as a concept in cultural sociological research. How might academics examine marginality and challenge power imbalances within the field of culture and other societal fields but also within cultural sociological practice? How can academics (the dominated dominant) research the margins without silencing the voices that they seek to hear, and avoiding the position of the researcher or activist who silently assumes that there is 'no need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself' (hooks, 1989: 22)? As Elísio Macamo (2021: x) observes, the moment that the scholar enters the field to conduct research, they make the ethically problematic assumption that they have the right to change people's lives whether the people like it or not. Confronting these ethical issues is at least a starting point in ways of thinking about researching marginality. The articles in this special issue address some of these questions and thorny issues but also serve as a means of opening up debates. With reference to sociological debates on culture, we focus on three interrelated aspects of marginality: first, marginality as a site of domination; second, marginality as opening up spaces of resistance; third, marginality as enabling different ways of seeing and thinking.

## MARGINALITY

Marginality can be conceptualised as a site of domination imposed by those with a greater array of resources at their disposal and who may have plundered these resources, at some stage, from those in a dominated position, and may continue to do so. Those in a dominant societal position have the ability to legitimise and consecrate their acts and pronouncements, and the spaces they occupy (Bourdieu, 1984). The dominated, in contrast, do not possess the economic capital to buy the time for culture or the cultural capital with which to bestow prestige on their activities (Bourdieu, 1986). Marginality is thus an experience of isolation and exclusion from the dominant culture. Marginality, as Loic Wacquant (2008: 2) observes, needs to be considered in relation to the specific historical context, or matrix (of class, race, state, etc.) in which it is situated. For example, he notes that 'despite similar morphological tendencies and kindred lived experiences, the French working-class periphery and the African-American ghetto remain two sharply *distinct sociospatial constellations*' (p. 231). However, there are also emergent conditions of advanced marginality in both these contexts that involve socio-spatial relegation and various forms of closure, in a Weberian sense, which mean that individuals and groups are denied access to resources or the competition for resources. Advanced marginality involves insecure wage labour, disconnection from macroeconomic trends, territorial stigmatisation, the dissolution of a sense of 'place', the loss of hinterland, and social fragmentation (Wacquant, 2008).

But marginality is more than this. Occupying a position of marginality also has the potential to open up a space of resistance that is generative of experiences and critical ways of envisaging the world (hooks, 1989, 2015 [1984]). As bell hooks (1989: 21) notes, 'that space of refusal, where one can say no to the coloniser, no to the downpressor, is located in the margins'. Understanding marginality as a space of resistance opens up possibilities for what hooks (1989) terms spaces of radical openness. These are spaces where criticality, agency and creativity can be asserted, individually and collectively. In this special issue, we see examples of these spaces in Tremlett's article on Roma artists' work that asserts agency through space and presence and in Manstatten's article on the interview situation, which explores the dynamic interplay between the researcher and the research participant. Spaces of radical openness are sites where society can be reimagined and where communities of resistance can form. But what are such spaces? According to hooks (1989: 23), 'spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated and transformed through artistic and literary practice'. In this sense, culture, whether expressed in people's stories and sense of agency, or in their creative mode of music and literature, is an agent of social change. This view of culture works against its role as a homeostatic device, as Zygmunt Bauman (2011) envisaged it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when it served as a means of normative regulation and social reproduction. It also differs from culture's previous role as an agent of change



through the proselytising call of Enlightenment and colonial conquest, or, more recently, its role in a consumer society where its central role is as stimulant for desires and seductions (Bauman, 2007, 2011).

Marginality also enables different ways of seeing and thinking. Culture(s) on the margins are linked to hierarchies and power relations. They are part of the whole even if outside of the main body (hooks, 1989). Georg Simmel's (1971[1908]) social type of the stranger offers insights here: the stranger's social position is characterised by mobility in relation to a bounded group; a combination of nearness and remoteness; and, most significantly, a sense of objectivity, inasmuch as the stranger is not considered an integral part of the group and its partisan attitudes. The stranger is an organic member of the group, one who stays within the boundaries of the group and yet, ultimately, is 'inorganically appended to it' (Simmel, 1971: 149). As a marginal figure, the stranger is in a unique position to view and see things in an alternative way and gain dispassionate insights into the workings of the society and consider how it might be different. Many of those who have been at the margins have gained insights from their movement to and from the centre. hooks (1989: 22) relates how she was not listened to when on the margins. Instead, she says, 'they met me at the centre'. Cultural and artistic creations of communities on the margins are attractive to cultural industries when they can be envisaged as fresh commodities for voracious markets. Those on the margins may be invited to the centre and the boundaries seem blurred but the cultural hierarchies and economic inequalities remain. Nevertheless, marginality can be something one holds onto, even when moving to the centre, as a means of envisaging alternative worlds, alternative ways of doing things. The insights gained in the margins can be utilised in the centre. This is because of the different ways of seeing enabled by the position of marginality.

Reflecting on the experiences of African Americans in the USA, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903: 2) wrote about the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity'. A couple of decades later, Robert E. Park (1928: 893) wrote about the figure of the migrant as the exemplary 'marginal man' whose mind, in adapting to a new environment, in transition from the old, experiences a kind of productive turmoil 'where the changes and fusions of culture are going on'. More recently, Abdumalek Sayad (2004) writes about the sense of identity of French Algerians who are made to feel that their presence is temporary and their cultural identity is in flux despite having been born in France. As one respondent puts it:

I am Algerian despite my French papers; I am French despite my Algerian appearance. I am French ... as French as anyone else. I was born here, grew up here, was made here, for here, to live here; I feel at home here, have French habits and French ideas ... But, deep inside me, I feel myself to be Algerian despite it all'. (Sayad, 2004: 251)

## THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

In contributing to sociological debates on marginality, the articles in this special issue offer insights into the relatively underexplored topic of *culture(s) on the margins*. As such, the special issue features several contributions to debates about marginality in relation to culture by means of various conceptual and empirical interventions. Annabel Tremlett's contribution highlights how artists from a minoritised background *assert agency through space and presence*, and in doing so, disrupt the 'object domain' of 'Gypsy' and 'Roma', opening up new modes of representation and ways of seeing the world. Paula Guerra's article draws attention to the assertion of agency through her analysis of three *sites of subaltern cultural production that combine art and politics*. Here we see cultural production in marginal zones of the cultural field asserted as a kind of practical utopia. It might be a struggle to make ends meet but the belief in the value of the game nourishes the radical habitus of the culture creators and producers Guerra engages with in Brazil and Portugal.

With its analysis of media representations of the tragic Lampedusa shipwreck disaster of 2013, where more than 400 migrants drowned, Guido Nicolosi's article provides a key intervention on *memory, marginality and culture*, focusing on two forms of memory that could not be more contrasting: on the one hand, the public memory expressed by the Italian media that dematerialised the deaths and depersonalised the victims; on the other hand, the collective memory of the people of Lampedusa that was articulated through painful and evocative reflections on the materiality of death and the physical presence of the migrants' corpses. In Pedro Menezes's article, a crucial point is made about the *orientation to culture for those on the margins*: culture is not simply a luxury that is only open to those with the requisite levels of cultural and economic capital. It can be accessed by anyone willing to participate, whether as core members of the music collective, who enjoy music as an extension of work, or for those who get involved in order to experience a heightened sense of creativity and escape.

With an historical sociological perspective, Mathias Berek relates the situation of the nineteenth century thinker Moritz Lazarus as a story of *marginality in the centre*, where Lazarus's social position as a marginal man in the centre of German society, allowed him a period of prominence and political influence, and a space from within which to formulate an approach to culture that has proven to be - and has the potential to be again - highly influential in

academic circles despite the fact that Lazarus himself disappeared back into the margins, both in the German society of his later years, and in relation to the sociological canon. Andrea Lombardinilo offers unique insights into *contrapuntuality, media and memory*. He focuses on representations of the Holocaust in media and film, which utilise contrapuntal narratives of good and evil, memory and forgetting, transgression and redemption in order to come to terms with the burdens of the past. Lombardinilo argues that this approach also helps to understand the representations of contemporary traumas such as those experienced by refugees.

Ruth Manstatten probes the thorny issue of *researching culture(s) on the margins through the interview situation*. Her article articulates the complexities of dialogue between the interviewer and the unemployed research participant through which interviewees adopt a range of subject positions in relation to the interviewer and, more generally, the wage labour norm. They adopt the positions, for example, of critical appropriation of negative classifications, and embarrassed subordination. Pınar Gümüş Mantu's article reflects on *assertions of critical belonging in relation to cultural identity and forms of Othering*. She draws attention to the ways in which her research participants cultivate a critical outlook through which they are able to contest and rebut cultural stereotypes of the oppressed Muslim woman and envisage ways of further improving their situation through education.

Let us now consider the insights offered in the articles of this special issue in greater detail.

Even during times of increasing awareness of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, Roma people remain subjected to degrading and stereotypical representations based on tropes associated with 'the Gypsies'. Scholars in this field of enquiry have long sought to deconstruct these images, whether those with negative or Orientalist connotations relating to criminality, fortune-telling, tricksterism, deviance, and 'Otherness', or the more 'positive' connotations of romanticism, exoticism, bohemian freedom and musical prowess. Tremlett's article deploys visual analysis to extend the reach of academic critique of these representations beyond deconstruction. Her article examines visual art and activism produced by Roma artists that denaturalises Gypsy stereotypes and destabilises their meanings. Tremlett is inspired by Stuart Hall's observation that 'art is a kind of thinking', and makes some key observations about the work produced by Roma artists: she draws attention to techniques of seriating, which involves utilising material objects associated with the trope of the Gypsy in ways that disrupt and undermine these representations and instead enable recognition of Roma people. She highlights how Roma artists are creating 'new spaces out of old places' and thus opening up new modes of presence, expression and agency. A further body of art uses visibility and materiality to destroy and then reclaim the 'object domain' of what it is to be Roma or 'Gypsy'. In sum, Tremlett argues that the images considered 'do not just challenge stereotypes through deconstructing them, but use practices of denaturalisation, exposing an ideological system that is so frequently hegemonic, ubiquitous and taken-for-granted'.

Guerra's article delves into the underground artistic and creative scenes in Portugal and Brazil and her analysis of peripheral contexts in relation to the commercial logic of global cultural industries problematises the distinction between the art of resistance and the art of existence in creative collectives. Based on three empirical cases - PWR Records and *padê editorial* in Brazil, and Príncipe Discos in Portugal - the author offers an in-depth analysis of the dynamic identities of these creative scenes in the context of the structural processes of marginalisation that shape the relationship between the global North and South, with relations of domination and subalternity rooted in colonial and capitalist history and also expressed in the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. PWR Records is located in the Northeast of Brazil, a peripheral and disadvantaged region, and supports women musicians, encouraging their participation in the national and international music scene, providing training and releasing their creations. An independent book publisher founded by two women, *padê editorial*, publishes DIY books by authors from social, racial and sexual minorities who are often ignored or rejected by mainstream publishing houses. Situating themselves in opposition to heteronomous and standardised cultural production, *padê editorial* produces handcrafted books guided by principles of production control and mutual aid. The third case is Príncipe Discos, a record label based in Lisbon since 2011. It functions as a cooperative and is dedicated to novel and hybrid forms of musical expression that have flourished in the city's peripheral and racialised neighbourhoods, home to populations mainly from Portuguese-speaking African countries. In response to the commodified logic of the mainstream culture industries, these artistic and creative collectives position themselves within the do-it-yourself/ourselves culture and express a radical habitus, cultivated in response to new experiences and through which these culture creators develop liberating micro-utopias through activist praxis. Based on the analysis of these three creative sites, the article argues that the 'choice of poverty' can be a choice of freedom, a strategy for averting the injustices of hegemonic culture, with its colonial and capitalist logic, and a way of putting forth the alternative visions of marginalised groups.

Nicolosi's article focuses on one of the most terrible and shocking events of our time: the shipwrecks of boats packed with migrants trying to reach the northern shores of the Mediterranean. He does so through the eyes of the inhabitants of Lampedusa, who have witnessed and dealt with the consequences of several of these disasters, in particular the tragic one that occurred on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, when more than 400 people drowned. The article discusses the dissonance between the social memory and public memory of this catastrophe. Indeed, the

representations of the shipwrecked migrants' deaths differ significantly depending on the point of view. The Italian media representations aseptically sanitise the death of migrants by means of de-individualisation and dematerialisation, and reveal death metaphorically (objects instead of bodies), obliterating its bodily concreteness. For the community of Lampedusa, the memory of the events is excruciatingly material and tangible. The cries and pleading hands of those calling for help, the bodies swallowed up by the sea, the smell of decomposing corpses, the refusal to eat fish that may have fed on human corpses, are among the concrete memories of the people who came to the rescue of those condemned to risk their lives in search of a better life. Collective memory was thus formed out of the real experience of the death of unknown strangers, who were acknowledged as human beings in urgent need of help for the living and respect for the dead, in contrast to the impersonal representations and the 'self-absolving and consolatory interpretative framework' of the media, which contribute to reinforcing and legitimising the marginalisation and Otherness of migrants.

Menezes's article draws attention to a cultural scene on the margins of Brazilian society, and even more so in relation to the globalised and commodified world of popular music. Situated in the North-East of Brazil in Fortaleza, a city of 2.6 million people, The Lado B music collective has set up an adiabatic circuit involving each member of the collective. This type of circuit has antecedents, ranging from the interactions characteristic of the relatively autonomous literary scenes of Paris, as depicted in Bourdieu's (1993) analysis of the nineteenth century field of cultural production in France, to the workings of post-punk scenes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Lado B adiabatic circuit involves a rotation of all the key roles that enable a festival to happen. For example, the member of the collective who was performing on the stage at the previous festival is now in charge of the lighting for the current event. Central to Menezes's analysis is a distinction between musicians for whom music is intimately connected to the routine of everyday life and as such can be considered as a second job, a task to be accomplished rationally, and musicians unwilling to commit to the adiabatic circuit and who consider their practice of music as fundamentally separate from their everyday existence. Music is, for them, a pure leisure activity, a mechanism through which they seek pleasure and escape. It is only those who view music as work, as a second job, that are willing to commit to the rigours and responsibilities of the adiabatic circuit. Moreover, Menezes notes that the position-taking of music as work or as escape is taken both by those with and without economic and cultural capital at their disposal. Money, while important, is not the most important variable in participation in the festival. Those without resources, situated on the margins of Fortaleza, do not seek out culture any less than do those with resources. For them, participation in the festival can be a rationally considered line of work, a potential income source, or it might be a chance to experience the hedonistic and poetic pleasures of the city.

As sociologists, research on marginalised groups and theorising about the relationship between the centre and the margins (and the symbolic definition of their boundaries) is at the heart of our discipline. It is less common to reflect on marginalisation within the academic field of sociology itself. This is precisely the subject of Berek's article. He analyses the biographical, academic and public career of Moritz Lazarus, a German Jewish philosopher of great renown in the second half of the nineteenth century. Lazarus was at the centre of society, with considerable influence in shaping the project of the German nation, and yet he found himself marginalised, eventually losing favour as anti-semitic sentiments increasingly found expression in German society. Lazarus laid the foundations of social psychology and worked on fundamental concepts of sociology. He established the notion of *Völkerpsychologie*, the 'psychology of peoples', which was later hijacked by proponents of socio-biological perspectives. He also proposed a sociological conception of the Hegelian notion of the 'objective spirit', which informed Simmel's influential discussions of objective culture as the accrual of human creations such as scientific knowledge, technology, language, literature, music and artistic innovation, religious doctrines and social customs. Objective culture, Simmel went on to argue, appears to have a life of its own that stands above and beyond the subjective culture of individuals. More generally, Lazarus's input informed sociological theorisations of the concept of culture. Berek argues that being 'a marginal man in the centre of German society' was crucial in shaping Lazarus's social analysis, giving him the intellectual insight to conceptualise culture as a pluralistic endeavour with belonging to a society or nation as a manifestation of agency, with the bond between individuals built collectively. This is a very different interpretation of culture when compared to the substantialist-biological approach to *Völkerpsychologie* that became more prominent as Lazarus was forced back to the margins of German society.

In his article, Lombardinilo presents a theoretical reflection on media representations of the Holocaust based on the contrapuntal analysis proposed by Roger Silverstone. Following Bauman's idea that the Holocaust was not a pathological deviation of modernity, but, on the contrary, the rationalising order of modernity was a necessary condition for the organisational apparatus and industrial scale of Nazi extermination, Lombardinilo analyses contemporary rhetorical devices concerning this defining event of the twentieth century. The author shows that mediascapes and the public sphere are imbued with a contrapuntal tension that results in the Holocaust being discursively presented in a simultaneously polarised and balanced interplay between good and evil. Faced with the mass extermination of peoples categorised as marginal to humanity according to the criteria of Nazi racism, an unintelligible and unbearable event in the post-Holocaust era, public and published discourse finds moral relief in

contrapuntality. Between good and evil, remembering and forgetting, contemporary European societies deal with the dreadful burden of the past (colonialism, war, genocide) through narratives of redemption and overcoming. As Lombardinilo notes, ‘resistance, opposition, resilience, aggregation, solidarity, courage, are some of the keywords that seem to inspire this contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust’. The article also draws attention to contemporary representations of the excluded, the potential victims of dehumanisation, most notably migrants from the global South. As Baudrillard, whose theoretical perspective is an important framework for this article, says, the ‘removal of the Otherness’ is something that continues apace.

In her analysis of marginality, Manstatten’s article focuses on the research process itself as a source of insight into the ways in which unemployed interviewees position themselves in relation to the interviewer and in doing so, challenge, accept, or critique the norm of wage labour. Critique from the margins, she concludes, is heterogeneous and often contradictory. Analysis of the dynamic interplay and self-positionings that take place in the interaction between the researcher as someone conforming to the labour norm as a university-employed researcher and the interviewee as a ‘deviant’ in relation to this norm produces key insights that contribute to a wider sociology of inequalities. The interview situation becomes a site of critique and Manstatten’s attention to the mutual forms of address that occur reveals that the interviewees take up various positions. For example, Bärbel expresses a sense of *embarrassed subordination*, trying to avoid the gaze of others and contrasting what she perceives to be her self-inflicted failures in life with the interviewer’s successful career. There is no hint of a critique in her approach to the wage labour norm. In contrast, Said adopts a position of *critical appropriation of negative classifications*, drawing attention to injustices associated with immigration law preventing him from gaining access to the labour market. In identifying subtle differences between six types of self-positioning, Manstatten deploys situational analysis, which involves mapping the various elements present in a situation, e.g. individuals, objects, discourse, and analysing the relations and hierarchies between them. She also utilises subjectivation analysis to examine the ways in which subjects position themselves in relation to the normative order, i.e. the wage labour norm.

Mantu’s contribution to the special issue focuses on the sense of ‘critical belonging’ expressed by young women from families of Turkish origin residing in Germany. The research participants, women aged between 21 and 31, are members of the third or fourth generation descended from those who came to Germany as part of the guest worker programme that commenced in the late 1950s. These women demonstrate high levels of awareness of the racialised and gendered forms of stigmatisation that they face as a minoritised ethnic group and seek to protect themselves from these forms of Othering. At the centre of Mantu’s argument is a critique of integration-centred approaches to migration which perpetuate racialised binaries such as ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘native’ and ‘migrant’, modern and traditional, and which focus ideologically on the figure of the Muslim. In this model, failure among migrants to participate in the labour force and educational system is perceived in gendered and racialised terms as a problem with roots in migrants’ culture. Mantu’s research respondents feel the brunt of these attitudes: on the one hand, they are ‘perfectly integrated’ members of German society but, on the other, they are consistently Othered as a consequence of their outward appearance. They are regularly confronted with questions such as ‘Where are you from?’ and ‘When will you go back to Turkey?’ They are viewed in relation to cultural stereotypes of oppressed Turkish women and their choices are interpreted in this light, e.g. ‘Are you able to choose who you marry?’ In response to seeing their mothers marginalised in social situations, many of Mantu’s respondents discussed how they actively sought to transform their situation through education so that they are able to take up a stronger position.

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## Challenging Stereotypes Is Not Enough: A Dialogue with Roma Art

Annabel Tremlett <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Portsmouth*, UNITED KINGDOM

\*Corresponding Author: [annabel.tremlett@port.ac.uk](mailto:annabel.tremlett@port.ac.uk)

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### ABSTRACT

Public representations of Roma, Gypsy and Traveller people still tend to homogenise and typecast ‘the Gypsies’ with visual representations a mainstay of racist tropes. Whilst academics have worked to challenge stereotypes through deconstructing age-old tropes, pointing out their historical fallacies and inherent (often hidden) modes of practice and persuasion, visibility has often been glossed over. Furthermore, academic work has not yet changed the ideological system that still racialises and excludes ‘Gypsies’. This article considers what we might learn from a focus on the visual, considering the increasing visibility of artists and activists from various Roma heritages who produce evocative images of their reactions to, and experiences of, damaging stereotypes. Using visibility as a lens, and focusing on Roma artistic and activist production, i.e. looking at what happens when Roma people become the image-maker, this article brings new insights into the ways of challenging stereotypes. Three preliminary observations are drawn from contemporary Roma Art and activism that can form a paradigm shift from old modes of deconstructing. Rather than solely deconstructing misrepresentations, contemporary art and activism take up familiar tropes associated with ‘the Gypsies’ and transforms them. Rather than just challenging through deconstructing, the artists and activists *denaturalise* age-old misrepresentations by unsettling the supposed stability and fixity of those stereotypes.

**Keywords:** anti-racism, ‘Gypsy’, visibility, Roma Art, stereotype

### INTRODUCTION: WHAT’S WRONG WITH DECONSTRUCTING?<sup>1</sup>

Whilst there are huge diversities and hybridities across people from Roma heritages (or associated ethnonyms, e.g. Gypsy, Traveller, Sinti, henceforth ‘Roma’ as an umbrella term<sup>2</sup>), public representations of these groups still tend to homogenize, with stereotypes permeating all areas of society, from media to education, policy formation and everyday discourse. Challenging stereotypes through deconstructing – making explicit the ways representations have been created in order to illuminate their pathological and damaging prejudice (utilising decolonial, intersectional, queer theorising) – has been a useful way of revealing the often pervasive, negatives discourse on Roma people.

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to the two anonymous reviewers who offered many constructive comments for the re-writing of this article – both felt more like dialogues than reviews, for which I am most grateful. I also really appreciate the feedback from Dr Lucie Fremlova who kindly commented on an early draft.

<sup>2</sup> As an umbrella term ‘Roma’ can be useful to draw together voices and experiences to tackle racism and inequalities. At the same time, it is also inadequate at expressing the diversities and hybridities of the people who might be affiliated to such a term (Surdu, 2016). It is used here as a broad label in an act of strategic essentialism, not as a process of abstracting and simplifying (Harris and Rampton, 2009: 116).

However, recent debates in academia questions whether deconstructing is enough. Mirga-Kruszelnicka, in discussing new critical approaches to studies about Roma communities, emphasises the old “homogenizing academic narrative” (2018: 16) that has plagued the history of Romani studies (see also Acton, 2004: 109, 2016). At a recent conference on *Racism and Romani studies* (ERIAC, Timisoara September 14<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2023), the role of academia in constructing a fixed view of Roma ethnicity was emphasised, and the damage of further victimizing Roma by over-emphasising exclusion was highlighted. Might the way we focus on deconstructing negative stereotypes also end up just emphasising exclusion, reifying those very representations we are trying to challenge? Even if offering ‘new’ or ‘alternative’ representations, does this just end up creating more representations, leaving the old, misrepresentations still with their power?

Furthermore, has the work of deconstructing representations become a field too used to itself – taking for granted the constructivist/deconstructivist approach that it is good at unpacking, but not necessarily effective in pushing for change (except in pointing out what not to do)? This paper is not about rejecting current approaches (there is still so much we need to learn about the ways representations work, Tremlett et al. 2017: 643), but to look to invigorate this academic area by drawing on other ways to tackle racist tropes.

The first section to this article argues that visuality as a lens can offer potential to go beyond the dominant approaches of deconstructing misrepresentations. This section shows how racist practices are historically intertwined without one necessarily preceding the other, but in an uneven, ambiguous dialogic relationship.<sup>3</sup> This sets the scene for the article’s call for a deeper focus on visuality, currently seen as a ‘black hole’ in our knowledge on Roma histories and practices (Junghaus, 2021a). The second section then gives an overview of how ‘Roma Art’ is being conceptualised and the theoretical backdrop to studying representations and how this can be applied to developing understandings of visual representations and Roma people. The choices of images used in this article is also explained.

The third section then turns to an analysis of images, divided into three parts, which form three observations derived from these images that can help inform ways of resisting and transforming age-old stereotypes. First, artists and activists work to reconfigure who ‘the Gypsy’ is by using their bodies in juxtaposition with various objects and dress to question the mechanics of their own objectification. Second, the hypervisibility associated with ‘the Gypsies’ (as in they are often ‘seen’ but not engaged with or listened to) is made obvious by artists’ use of space, setting their own rules about what is manifest and how. Third, both activists and artists question the very idea of ‘the Gypsies’ whilst reinforcing their (ethnic) existence and presence. In this final observation, we can see that contesting, or even destroying, the object domain is shown as a means to free the narratives that have controlled and restricted Roma people.

This article invigorates the role that deconstruction has in challenging stereotypes, considering visuality as a paramount to advancing knowledge in this area, contributing to a wider call to decolonise Romani Studies (Brooks et al., 2022). The aim is to achieve this through creating a dialogue with art, echoing cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s interest in the ways that Black British art created certain ‘moments’ (2006: 3). Hall said that in these art pieces, ‘enormously profound ideas and indeed concepts are at work, that art is a kind of thinking also; it’s a way of feeling and a way of looking, but it’s also a kind of thinking’ (Hall in Dibb and Jaggi, 2009). This paper calls for a critical understanding of visuality as central for breaking down this idea of the seemingly immutable, entrenched stereotypes of ‘the Gypsy’ that have dominated discourses and practices over hundreds of years.

## **SECTION ONE: VISUALITY, RACIST PRACTICES AND ‘THE GYPSIES’**

We must first consider an ongoing debate on visuality, identity politics and representations of Roma people. How can we justify a focus on the visual, when it is shocking structural inequalities, poverty, exclusion and virulent, often violent racism that affects people’s everyday lives? Is trying to understand the visual an indulgence? Is it deflecting from the ‘root causes’ of discrimination and exclusion as mainly socio-economic (see Magazzini, 2016: 66-67; Ryder and Taba, 2018; Ryder, 2019; van Baar and Vermeersch, 2017)? This first section argues that understanding the ‘visualness’ of misrepresentations of Roma is vital for challenging stereotypes effectively. Here we see how visuality has been used as a means to suppress, commodify and abuse certain communities which then serves as a warning to others. This purposeful visual misrecognition has enabled wealth and power to remain or be redirected to the ruling elite. Thus a focus on how the histories of visualities work to maintain this power and order forms the backdrop to this section.

As ‘Roma’ is an example of a large group of ethnonyms with outsider ascription (often at odds with how people self-define) it is hard to pinpoint when these communities became established in Europe. However, it is generally understood that minorities connected to such terms had already been living in the European parts of the Byzantine

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<sup>3</sup> In this article, visuality is understood as “encompassing more than vision”, as images can also be produced by texts to legitimise authority, “aestheticizing the status quo” (van Baar et al., 2020: 21).



Empire before the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The ethnonym ‘Gypsy’ came about as a particular truncation of ‘Egyptian’ as the mistaken origins of various travelling migrant groups to other parts of Europe dating at least from the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Fraser, 1995: 45-83). Two female figures in Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Haywain Triptych* (1512-15) – a biblical metaphor for humankind pulled along by sin – are said to represent ‘Egyptians’ and are considered some of the early representations of ‘Gypsies’ that follow themes of fortune telling, deviance and trickery (Carmona, 2018: 148-150; Pokorny, 2009). Such paintings formed part of a new interest in European Renaissance art, depicting nature, the world and its people. Orientalism, darkness and criminality – also vividly shown in Jewish iconography and images of Muslims (repeatedly called *Saracens* as a derogatory term) formed the ‘other’ to whiteness, Christianity and innocence (Koerner, 2016). This was the beginning of the formation of the visuality inherent in the discourse of “racial Europeanization” (Goldberg, 2006) in which ideas about ‘the Gypsies’, along with Jews and Muslims played a significant role (Heng, 2018: 417-456; Marsh, 2008: 75-78).

We can follow examples in European history of different regimes utilising ‘the Gypsy’ and their supposed visual difference to assert power and authority on different communities. A stark example (which is not widely discussed, even in Romania where it occurred) is the forced bondage and slavery of ‘Țigan’ people (a word that specifically referred to Roma slaves) in 14<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century Wallachia (modern day southern Romania) (Achim, 2004, 2021; Furtună, 2019). The ‘Țigan’ were visualised as racialised others with ‘black skin’ and ‘deformed mouths’, drawn from a 16<sup>th</sup> century hagiography, found in two texts in popular circulation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a religious text entitled *History for the curse of Gypsies when they became black* (1814) and *Why Gypsies are not Romanians* (1839) (Matei, 2022: 312).

The 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries saw swathes of legislation passed right across Europe, coinciding with an era of the development of modern states in which the anxieties of early state formation were mixed with the fear of invaders, with those wanted power utilising racializing narratives of Muslims, North Africans (referred to as ‘the Moors’ in a frequently pejorative manner), Jews and Roma to pursue the desire for legitimacy, power and territory. This occurred hand in hand with the rise of Protestantism (Taylor, 2018: 66-86). In Spain, on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1749, a massive undercover organised raid on Roma people, authorised by King Ferdinand VI, was set in motion simultaneously across the country, resulting with the arrest of most Roma people and the attempted genocide (the word ‘extermination’ was used) of an estimated 12,000. Known as ‘the Great Gypsy Round-up’, its justification was “to root out this bad race, which is hateful to God and pernicious to man” (Ferdinand V’s Jesuit confessor, cited in Crowe, 2007: 45), a racialization that was already weighted in visual difference, noted in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century writings of Cervantes (Pym, 2007) and theatrical performances such as *The Spanish Gypsie* (Ndiaye, 2020).

In other parts of Europe, a drive to ‘civilise’ was underway with the ‘look’ and ‘sound’ of Roma (skin colour, dress, cultural practices including language) denoted as ‘uncivilised’. There were also measures to ‘civilise’ Roma people which attempted to erase their culture, lifestyle and language. In Austro-Hungary, for example, measures were brought in with a focus on removing their visibility as both ethnic others and criminals:

In diet, apparel and language [Gypsies] were required to follow national usage, eat no dead cattle, sport no multi-coloured garments, and refrain from speaking their own tongue. They should no longer let themselves be seen in mantles whose only purpose was to cloak stolen goods. (paraphrased from one of Joseph II’s imperial-royal decrees 1782, cited in Willems, 1999: 30 and Taylor, 2014: 102)

Many countries radicalized their legislation so the mere presence of ‘Gypsies’ (also conflated with ‘vagrants’ and ‘bandits’) was a crime that could result in the death penalty (Lucassen, 2008). The creation of an iconography that stigmatised Roma, whilst ignoring their actual presence and contributions to societies, paved the way for such normative discourses of their otherness.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century obsession with romanticism and freedom from the rapid industrialisation that radically altered rural landscapes and societies then gave rise to another version of Roma people’s visual otherness and alterity. The rise and influence of Bizet’s opera *Carmen* on the romanticised and sexualised visualisation of ‘the Gypsy’ in 19<sup>th</sup> century western Europe is well documented (Bennahum, 2013; Charnon-Deutsch, 2004; Christoforidis and Kertesz, 2019; Langham Smith, 2021). *Carmen* became a symbol of bohemian freedom and defiance of conventions, whilst always at risk from her dangerous (titillating) sexuality, leading to criminality and violence. The figure of *Carmen* is complex, representing the “good, evil, sacred and demonic” (Bennahum, 2013: xvi) with diverse iterations and reinventions, yet this complexity is often reduced to a very repetitive visual ‘frozen’ form (Charnon-Deutsch, 2004: 10).

With the advent of photography and 20<sup>th</sup> century politics, visual representations became a means to provide scientific evidence for the justification of racist practices and genocide. Prior to and during the First World War, restrictions were placed on Roma people across Europe, but particularly by German states (Crowe, 2008: 137-148; Matras, 2014: 172-174). ‘Gypsies’ and ‘Sinti’ were then subjected to the Nuremberg Race Laws after 1936 and became targets for fascist politics and far-right movements across Europe. It is estimated that half a million Roma people from central and Eastern Europe were murdered during the Holocaust in the Second World War, a likely

under-estimation (Bársony and Daróczi, 2008; Kenrick and Puxon, 2009). Visuality formed a part of the racist practices of the Nazi regime and elements from this era are still used in modern-day discourse and even policing practices (Bogdal, 2011; End, 2019; Rosenhaft, 2008).

After the Second World War, communist visual cultures were intrinsic to Soviet expansion and ideology (Skrodzka et al., 2019) with ‘Gypsies’ seen as a social stratum, a part of enforced proletarianization that used visual images to rehabilitate them to normative ideas of the proletariat (in ‘white’ terms as ‘romantic folk’), which in fact objectified them further (Piotrowska, 2022; Schmidt and Jaworsky, 2021). Films, performances and Roma-produced cultural artefacts (e.g. newsletters) from these periods are important resources for showing the inherent ambiguities in communist visual cultures and ‘Gypsies’ (Iimre, 2009; Kürti, 1993; Mladenova, 2016; O’Keeffe, 2020).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen both a growing awareness of the devastating consequences of the systemic racism against Roma minorities, as well as a trend for the ‘normalisation’ of racism against Roma which have included horrific murders of Roma people and children (Amnesty Report, 2014). This has coincided with the rise of populist, right wing politics and surveillance cultures that bolster their populism through demonising Roma minorities. This trend uses particular visualities that make use of strong symbols and repetitive images: from Italian politician Matteo Salvini’s iconic bulldozer image to symbolise the ‘cleaning up’ (i.e. destruction) of migrant Roma homes in his 2015 European election campaign (Cervi and Tejedor, 2020); to media reporting that points to criminality without showing the faces or voices of Roma people or the continual repetition of images of fecklessness, criminality and decadent lifestyles in documentaries or so-called ‘reality shows’ (van Baar and Ivasiuc, 2020).

Visuality is only recently emerging as a serious category of analysis for the study of the histories and representations of Roma people. This section has given a broad overview of the ways visuality has been inherent in the ways Roma people have been treated by political systems. The next section now moves onto what we can learn from the visualities produced by artists and activists from Romani heritages.

## SECTION TWO: VISUALITY AS A LENS: ROMA ART

There is now a growing literature on the art and activism from people of Roma heritages, spear-headed in recent times by curator and art historian Timea Junghaus and through the European Institute for Roma Arts and Culture (ERIAC) that she heads (Junghaus, 2021a, 2021b, see also Baker and Hlavajova, 2013; van Baar and Kóczé, 2020, particularly 3-68, 257-334). This section gives a background of the recent history of Roma Art, the theoretical approach used in this article and a justification for the images used.

The 1970s is seen as an informative time for a growing awareness of the connections and solidarity amongst diverse people with Romani heritages across Europe. The first World Romani Congress was held in 1971 in London at which the idea of an international union was also considered, and formally founded in 1977 (Acton and Klimová, 2001: 159-160; Klimová-Alexander, 2005: 13-29). The Congress, which had taken years of concerted efforts from Roma organisations across Europe, is seen as foundational for modern-day activism and indeed contributing to a growing recognition of Roma visual artists as a collective group (Junghaus, 2014: 28).

The recognition of Roma artists occurred in parallel to the efforts of Roma activists who formed or resurrected organisations and collectives after the Second World War to denounce the horror of Roma persecution and murder during the Holocaust and to rebuild communities. Examples include *Romani Nomenklatura* in the Soviet Union and their *Teatr Romen* whose performances were both challenged by and challenging of the contemporary political forces (Lemon, 2000); the creation of *Études Tsiganes* in France in 1949 under Roma writer Matéo Maximoff (who himself had been in a Vichy concentration camp) (Barrera, 2022); and the voices of Roma people and activists in Roma-led newspapers in Romania from the 1930s onwards (Negoi and Necula, n.d.). Summer camps were organised by such activists to bring (particularly young) people together to give them a chance to develop skills and to nurture future leaders. Such camps included art and music from Roma artists that were otherwise ignored by mainstream – for example in Hungary huge murals by incredibly talented Roma artists were used to adorn the canteens of these camps, which only today are more widely recognised for their artistic value and cultural worth (György, 2022: 37-42).

Summer camps specifically for Roma artists were also organised. Whilst Roma artists and activists were often involved in such camps, there was a wider interest from non-Roma art curators who believed they were ‘discovering’ something authentic, primitive and unique. This linked to a wider cultural movement in the 1970s that wanted to break free from the constraints of formal ‘high’ art and celebrate art from everyday life. Roma artists did not always benefit from this interest - they often found themselves being pigeon-holed as ‘naïve’ which meant they weren’t offered formal training (in order that they remain ‘naïve’), putting them at a disadvantage in the wider art world as well as disallowing artists to choose and fulfil their own potential (see the experiences of artists Márta Bada and Brigitta Milák in Museum of Ethnography Budapest Films, 2001). The 1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Self-Taught Artists in Budapest, Hungary (1979 – organised by long-time Roma activist Ágnes Daróczi) was first held

at a community centre and later at the Museum of Ethnography (Folklore) rather than an institute of contemporary art, “as if the exhibits were the exotic objects of an alien civilization” (Junghaus, 2006: 8).

A new wave of Roma Art was identified with the creation of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno (1991) headed by Roma intellectuals. The 1990s were said to form a ‘cultural turn’ in discourses on Roma minorities. By the early 2000s, Roma intellectuals, activists and artists were becoming more visible in public institutions. The first Roma Pavilion at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Venice biennale, *Paradise Lost* (2007) was a significant step in giving contemporary Roma culture an audience it deserves (Junghaus and Székely, 2007). The creation of the European Research Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) (2017), based in Berlin and funded jointly by the Council of Europe and the European Union with support from the philanthropist George Soros, gives a platform to a range of Roma artists and activists working in different mediums and energizing the debates on identity, authenticity and inclusion, whilst also committing to archive Roma art, culture and heritage.

### Theoretical Framework: Decolonising Romani Studies

Curator and intellectual, Tímea Junghaus, writes about ‘Roma Art’ using specific ‘Roma decolonial approaches’ including ideas of epistemic disobedience, epistemic de-linking and epistemic reconstruction:

Roma Art demonstrates that in order to step out and write ourselves out of the hegemonic narratives and viewpoints we have to manifestly redefine “our spaces”, to re/configurate diasporic gazes into subjects and to invite ourselves to be viewers; to uncover the colonial discourse inscribed in us and to depict it in exhibitions so that it is quasi disenchanting; in order to unmask the Western master-discourse as a historical legend. (Junghaus, 2014: 41)

Such a theoretical framework has become increasingly popular – the journal *Critical Romani Studies* (established 2018) is seen as an emblematic shift from the Gypsy Lore tradition (Bogdan et al., 2018; Ryder, 2019). This article aligns itself with the decolonial, intersectional, queer theory discussions in *Critical Romani Studies*, similarly drawing on wider literature on visual culture and ‘race’ (Hall, 1993, 1997, 2006; Hall et al., 2013; Sealy, 2019), and acknowledging the ways visibility is connected to structural violence and racism (Berents and Duncombe, 2020). Contemporary policies and practices are influenced by this continued circulation of a certain racialised hypervisibility (Messing and Bernáth, 2017, see also Breazu and Machin, 2018; Catalano, 2012; End, 2017; Fremlova, 2021; Mayall, 2004).

The history and effect of such images, and then what happens when Roma people do become the image-makers, is a nascent but emerging area. There is a growing field of critical approaches to research on/with Roma people to break such an impasse, including use of reflexivity, intersectionality, queer approaches, post-colonial thinking or superdiversity (Mírka-Kruszelnicka, 2018). My work has always been influenced by such theoretical approaches (particularly from Black British Cultural Studies that writes from a post-colonial, anti-essentialist standpoint) as a means to describe and analyse ethnographic observations from my fieldwork (Tremlett, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017). In this article I also draw on Mieke Bal and Gayatri Spivak’s work in seeing images as performances of the theoretical. Rather than trying to impose a framework, this approach looks to the visual representations themselves as formative of an approach, “because seeing is an act of interpreting, interpretation can influence ways of seeing, hence, of imagining possibilities of change” (Bal, 2003: 21).

### Methodology

The images chosen for this article come from accessing various online sources that have burgeoned in the past decade to form an impressive resource on art and activism produced by Roma-heritage artists and activists. This activism and creativity started to change Roma artists’ relationship with the art world. The establishment of the European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture (ERAC) in Berlin in 2017 has been one of the biggest funded cross-European ventures about Roma minorities of recent times. ERAC is a major source of the artworks surveyed for this article, not only in its thematic sections but also as host to RomaMoMA, a contemporary art project initiating a forum for collaborative reflection on a future Roma Museum of Contemporary Art. RomArchive is also a rich digital resource that documents and therefore makes Romani cultures and histories visible. Furthermore, the websites of art galleries and institutions (often heavily featured on ERAC or RomArchive) have also been perused, such as Kai Dikhas (Berlin), Gallery8 (Budapest, Hungary), Romani Cultural & Arts Company (Swansea, Wales), Museum of Roma Culture (Belgrade, Serbia), Museum of Roma (Brno, Czechia).

The Venice Biennale has housed Roma Pavilions (2007, 2011, 2019, 2022, also all featured in ERAC’s website), whilst Małgorzata Mírka-Tas was chosen as the official Polish representative at the 59<sup>th</sup> Biennale in 2022 – the first Roma artist to represent a country. Documenta15, the influential art show in Kassel, Germany, displayed its first group exhibition of Roma art, entitled *One Day We Shall Celebrate Again* in 2022 (via the collective art project RomaMoMA). As the limitations section following emphasises, this article does not attempt to give a summary of all of the artworks or artists available from these sources. I encourage those who are not yet familiar with Roma

Art to utilise these resources and discover the richness of the tremendous effort to record Roma cultural histories and to build a genealogy of Roma arts and culture (Junghaus, 2021).

### Limitations

In this paper I am using certain representations from artworks and campaigns in order to understand how to build an approach to visibility and Roma people that does not fall into the trap of same-old representations. When surveying the artworks online (as well as at some exhibitions), I have looked for artwork and activism that quite obviously challenges racist tropes. What I am also not doing is considering the trajectory of all Roma Art, or artists or activism in their own right that also extends beyond static images e.g. online activism, broadcasting, protests, performances, theatre, community events and so on. The justification I have for the limited focus of this paper is that there is so much to say, but not so many ways to say it – we are still in the infancy of articulating the ways visibility interacts and affects, and this paper is just a start. This is why the analysis section is a series of observations. It does not profess to present an analysis of all Roma Art and activism.

## SECTION THREE: ANALYSIS

### Observation (i) Reconfiguring the Object/Subject: Bhabha's 'Seriating'

The first observation sees the ways that objects are positioned in art and activist images create a relationship between 'old stereotypes' and 'alternative narratives' which brings something new. The first two examples are activist projects using images created by and of Romani students and intellectuals from across Central and Eastern Europe (both first devised and exhibited in Budapest, Hungary). The first is from an exhibition *Accessories* produced by Roma students on the Central European University's Roma Access Program in collaboration with photographer András Jókúti (Central European University, April 2014<sup>4</sup>). The second is from a series of portraits *No Innocent Picture* with photographs by Miklós Déri (from a larger project called 'Roma Body Politics', Gallery8 Budapest 2015<sup>5</sup>). Images from both exhibitions utilise a close-up of individuals who are looking straight at the camera with various additions: either objects (a guitar or violin, fortune telling paraphernalia, a knife, even a baby) or dressed up in clothes that infer criminality, delinquency or exoticism. The effect, alongside the captions in *Accessories* and a contrasting portrait in *No Innocent Picture* (in which the second portrait shows the model in their 'normal' clothes), is to show that the people in the photographs do not represent or perform the characters that their accessory or dress infers, and their gaze is back onto us, the viewers, to ask us to think about the restrictions of these accessories.

The juxtaposition of the captions in *Accessories* or the second portrait in *No Innocent Picture* also open up possibilities— what else might these people be? In one, a young man is revealing a line of watches on his wrist. He looks like a man in a pub or on the street selling stolen goods. Yet the caption reads 'I like collecting watches'. Not a criminal, then, but a horologist. In another, a woman is pictured with a guitar obscuring her face 'My life does not hang on these strings' reads the caption. Here the refusal of music as central to the model's identity might be seen as controversial, questioning the prominence given to 'Gypsy music' as the most positive contribution of these minorities to European culture (Dobai and Hopkins, 2021; Silverman, 2013). The exhibition thus makes a stand against narrow-mindedness and confinement of restrictive stereotypes – even 'positive' ones.

The contiguity of different materials and objects to disrupt accepted normative thinking can also be seen in artists' work. Malgorzata Mirga-Tas – the first Roma artist to be the chosen artist for a national pavilion at the Venice Biennale – stitched together huge tapestries in her exhibition *Re-enchanting the World* for the Polish Pavilion to tell the stories of Roma in both a broad, global context and a very personal one. Inspired by the famous allegorical Renaissance frescos from Palazzo Schifanio in Ferrara, Italy, Mirga-Tas uses personal items such as material from clothes from her friends and family, jewellery or a rosary to make their presence in her work very real, these objects functioning as "relics, remnants and traces" that give a "tactile and palpable presence" (Szymański and Kusek, 2022: 67).

Thus different materials (objects, photographs, dress, tapestries) are brought together to make us 'read' the human experience differently – disrupting the familiar to recognise the presence of Roma people who have often been ignored or written out of collective cultures and histories, a technique Homi Bhabha calls "seriating" (Bhabha, 1994: 22, discussed in Bal, 2008: 117). The visibility itself becomes the practice of resistance. The effect of using materials – whether objects, photographs, tapestries - in different ways, Bhabha's seriating, is to complicate the object/subject relationship, revealing the "racialised regime of representation" (Hall, 1997: 247) and emphasising the politics of the gaze.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2014-04-08/international-roma-day-celebrated-ceu> (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://gallery8.org/romabody> (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

## Observation (ii) Asserting Agency Through Use of Space and Presence

These artworks and activist exhibitions bring to the fore the need to dislodge master narratives and make alternatives visible. Hence the problems inherent in hyper-visibility is made visible through the ways ‘the Gypsies’ are constructed. The activists and artists challenge the spaces (taking the meaning of ‘space’ from geographical writing that looks at physical space as well as emotional or psychological place, Agnew, 2011) that are usually afforded to ‘the Gypsy’, but which have obliterated the possibilities for themselves. In this second observation, we see how the stagings of artworks form an important conversation about the possibilities of engagement and inclusion, alongside resistance to and transformation of racist images and practices.

It is noticeable how much physical space is used by some Roma artists. For example, the aforementioned artist Malgorzata Mirga-Tas exhibited at the 2022 Venice Biennale floor-to-ceiling hand stitched tapestry panels depicting women who have cared for her and inspired her, ‘astonishing’ viewers with its ‘monumentality’ (Tumbas, 2023: 12) that also celebrates everyday life - Roma women are shown meeting, singing, drinking coffee, out in fields gathering potatoes, the figures stitched in fabrics taken from their own clothes. The size of the work highlights both the space that these women occupy in the artists’ life, as well as giving a message about the space not normally afforded to such representations. Artist Nihad Nino Pušija (originally from Sarajevo, with Roma and Bosnian heritages) also offers some huge images in his work *Gladiators* (2011) – but rather than Mirga-Tas’ celebration of community and Roma women, in this work Pušija reveals a vulnerability to his male subjects, as the unwavering gaze of these enormous photos of solo young Roma men in gladiator costumes is offset by the seeming vulnerability of their young bodies in warlike costumes, pictured alone.

The politics of space is also highlighted by British Traveller/Romani artists Delaine le Bas and Damian le Bas. Building on a previous article based on an interview with both artists (Tremlett and le Bas, 2020), here I push the analysis further, asking not just how artists utilise space, but also how they reconfigure the idea of ‘space’. *Safe European Home?* (the title taken from punk band The Clash’s record about the safety of ‘whiteness’ in Europe), was first created in 2009, shown as an installation positioned outside the parliament building in Vienna in 2011 and has subsequently been installed in various forms in Berlin (2017), Copenhagen, Dublin, Hastings and Thessaloniki and Worthing (2018) (Gypsydada.com). Through exhibiting artworks they are known for (Damian le Bas’ cartography, Delaine le Bas’ cross-disciplinary art with varying media) alongside creating artworks in the moment from contemporary politics and local materials, the travelling installation asks: what constitutes a ‘safe space’ in the current political and economic environment?

Their use of space as discursive, performative and evolving (concluded the 2020 paper) acts to defy normative discourses on the ‘integration as inclusion’ in policy discourses. Instead of attempting to show how ‘the Roma’ can be included, instead, it asks ‘is Europe a safe home for Roma or anyone?’ and offers creative sites for dialogues on anti-racism and social change – thereby creating space for a critical discussion on what ‘inclusion’ might mean (Tremlett and le Bas, 2020).

To push this analysis further, I ask what this, and other artworks, offer in the reconfiguration for our understanding of ‘space’ and anti-racism. Theorist Gayatri Spivak, on visiting *Safe European Home?* in Vienna, wrote a critical essay on her impressions, calling the exhibition a “theory of theatre”:

Delaine and Damian Le Bas’ staging of the question mark in *Safe European Home?* is to be on a grid of theorizing, rather than caught in a theory-practice or theory-material opposition. I hope this will be clear—theorizing is an activity—[...]. In some ways then, the way we look at theory or theorizing is a sabotaging of the classical Greek European model. (Spivak, 2012)

If theorizing is the activity, then the practice of that theory is **presence** – both Delaine and Damian were well known for their physical presence at their exhibitions. But in fact, all artworks in this article are centred on presence, even if without physical presence. This is an extension of the first observation, showing the artworks as not just ‘encounters with Roma’, but rather *visuality and presence is the encounter*.

Artwork as encounter is sharply crystallised by the centrality of the artist or activist. At the opening of the first ever Roma Pavilion in Venice (2006), Hungarian Roma artist Omara handed over her glass eye to the billionaire George Soros as a gesture of gratitude (Junghaus, 2011). Omara (Mara Oláh, 1945-2020), one of the most prolific Roma artists of her generation (despite only beginning to make art at the age of 43), is also (belatedly) recognised as one of the most important, seen at the intersection of feminist and decolonial thinking with (often heartbreaking and disconcerting) portraits of her experiences of being a woman and ‘cigány’ (Gypsy), of racism, ageing, motherhood and illness (Junghaus, 2013).

Omara’s artistic practice included forthright communication with audiences: her frequent inscriptions on her paintings criticise local politics and racism (*Immediate disciplinary procedure* (1998); *Mara and the policeman* (1972<sup>6</sup>)), whilst she depicts her home in a small village as a ‘luxury shithole’ (‘luxusputri’), digging out a swimming pool

<sup>6</sup> Available at: <https://secondaryarchive.org/artists/mara-olah-omara/> (Accessed 10 October 2023)

herself and depicting it in paintings<sup>7</sup>. She also showed no qualms in aligning herself with or challenging authority – calling everyone (whether her neighbour or a politician) ‘diamond’, her paintings depicted herself alongside various famous people. Omara set up her own rules for entering the art world, and it is argued that her “artistic actions, hysteria, scandals, protests, and political statements” should be seen as intrinsic to her artwork (Junghaus, 2013: 310, cited in Molnár, n.d).

The artworks observed in this section have an insistent presence in physical spaces (whether in person and/or through inscriptions or performances) whilst revealing a breadth and intensity of experience. The artists’ desires to manifest presence creates new spaces out of old places – thereby radically asserting agency. Yet there is a danger to such presence – as Jones points out after visiting Marina Abramovic’s exhibition *The Artist is Present* (2010), such availability can end up destroying the notion of ‘being seen’ – what the Hungarian press called the ‘extreme personality’ of Omara, subjecting the artist to scrutinization to the point of exhaustion, a “spectacularization [...] of a “body” and a “body” of work” (Jones, 2011: 18). Nonetheless, such contradictions also reflect the instability of spaces which is where new configurations can occur. To borrow from geographer Doreen Massey, space is a “pincushion of a million stories” (Massey, 2013, in Haas, 2023: 4) and so creating something different in spaces that do not normally tolerate (or simply ignore) alternative visions of ‘Roma’ can give prominence to other stories, potentially creating spaces of possibilities for “alternative imaginaries” to emerge (to borrow from Newman and Clarke, 2015: 106).

### **Observation (iii) Destroying and Reclaiming the Idea of an ‘Object Domain’**

In the previous two observations, we saw how artists and activists can put themselves as central to visibility, but without defining themselves in restrictive terms of ‘Roma’. In this third and final observation, we look at what this means for something or someone being labelled as ‘Gypsy’. Even amongst academics, the question of who is defining who and why is termed “the work of Sisyphus” – a continual debate that is never resolved (Tremlett, McGarry and Agarin 2014, also used as the title of Rostas’ book 2019). What do we mean when we (or others) use the term ‘Roma’ or ‘Gypsy’ or ‘Traveller’? A particular group, an individual, an umbrella term? And how are they defined? And what for? – who has the power?

Such questions raise the bigger question of what the ‘object domain’ is when we are talking about Roma people. Norbert Oláh, an artist from Hungary, installed a brick wall outside of the former building of the Roma Parliament in Budapest (part of the OFF-Biennale Budapest, 2021). The piece, called ‘Anxiety of the Roma Artist’, is made of ordinary red bricks but with inscriptions of words and terms that become very loaded when related to ‘Roma issues’ in public discourses. Words (in Hungarian) such as ‘conflict’, ‘fighting’, ‘history’, ‘skin’ and so on are all printed onto the bricks which gives them each a self-enclosed, seemingly permanent space to exist. Yet the wall has no discernible function as a ‘wall’ and its appearance on a pavement in front of the former Roma parliament appears disconcerting. Is it a statement about Roma politics? Or politics in general? Or just a plea to save some space? It is well known that Roma people have had a history as brick makers and builders in Central and Eastern Europe, and the fact that the artist built the wall with his father, further adds complexity – what are we seeing/not seeing in this wall? Is it meant to be about tradition? Or collaboration? Or exclusion? But how can we tell? The actual focus of the piece is the appearance of the wall itself – it’s not necessarily its existence (it’s just a brick wall), but its very manifestation in this particular moment in this particular spot (in front of the former Roma Parliament) changes the public space and makes us consider what it is doing there. This is not a representation *of* Roma people (McGarry, 2014) but a representation *and* Roma – an important distinction made by Bal when discussing artworks and refugees (Bal, 2022).

In a different example of art *and* Roma, British artist Daniel Baker’s artworks centre on visibility as materiality. His artworks employ elements of what he describes as a ‘Roma aesthetic’ – a mode of making, “the collective qualities embedded in objects and artefacts that originate from, or circulate within Roma communities” (Baker 2017: 744, Baker 2020). Baker thus sees Roma aesthetics as a practice of everyday life, rather than an essentialised form of ‘ethnic art’. His work with mirrors (e.g. *Anagram*, 2007, *Mirrored Library*, 2008, *Stack*, 2022), wheels (e.g. *Mobile Surveillance Device*, 2015), colourful textiles (e.g. *Swarm*, 2013) integrate the experiences of Roma people through materiality - foregrounding objects whose existence is motivated by their visibility.

Baker asks what visibility means for Roma people, “the ways in which Roma visibility might continue to both reflect and inform the lives of Roma people”, Baker, 2022: 9) whilst also considering his approach as forging a ‘Queer Gypsy’ subjectivity concerned with Roma invisibility (Baker, 2022: 8, see also Fremlova, 2022). Things that have a particular visibility or visual quality address the social constituencies interacting with them (Bal, 2003: 6).

Many of Baker’s art pieces consider everyday items connected to ‘the Gypsy’ as a statement of existence in an active, intimate, community or familial setting. Selma Selman’s art (a Roma artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina) also focuses on the ways materiality have shaped Roma people’s lives. A painting of the artist with her family

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<sup>7</sup>Available at: <https://index.hu/video/2011/04/24/omara/> (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

breaking up a car for scrap metal (*Untitled*, 2014) shows the physicality of that aesthetics. This is continued in other works: in her performance *Platinum* (2021) at the National Gallery of Sarajevo, Selman extracted precious metal from catalytic converters pulled from scrapped cars and created a tiny platinum axe, both “defying the worn-out clichés of Carmen as femme fatale”, and emphasising the hard labour typically carried out by Roma people, whilst also creating something very precious and beautiful (Tumbas, 2023: 4). Selman has become a celebrity, posing for *Elle* magazine in Spring 2021.

In all these artists’ work there is no assumed expertise or authority over the ‘object domain’. Rather, the object domain is questioned through materiality and visibility. In this way the terms ‘Gypsy, Roma and Traveller’ are taken out of the essentialisms that have plagued their traditional counterparts (to borrow a phrase from Mieke Bal, 2003: 7).

## CONCLUSION – FROM DECONSTRUCTING TO DENATURALIZING

The aim of this article is to develop new ways of challenging stereotypes of Roma people. Analysing a range of artworks and activism for this article has allowed a deeper understanding of the potential role of visibility in breaking free from essentialisms whilst remaining attentive to their very real political effects. The images do not just challenge stereotypes through deconstructing them, but use practices of denaturalisation, exposing an ideological system that is so frequently hegemonic, ubiquitous and taken-for-granted. Three observations made of these images in this article highlight these denaturalising practices:

1. **Reconfiguring ‘the Gypsy’:** images achieve this by performing Bhabha’s ‘seriating’ through incorporating and subverting objects connected to racism and misrepresentation.
2. **Asserting agency through space and presence:** the use of space and presence uncovers the agendas of hypervisibility. Roma people are depicted as agentive, diverse humans, with images not having to be a certain ‘Roma way’ – i.e. there is not the need for detailed ethnicised biographies of artists or artworks, whilst there is still a strong focus on Roma identity and experience. Presence is activism in itself.
3. **Visibility as the object domain:** still having notions of ‘Roma’ ‘Gypsy’ and ‘Traveller’ – thereby not destroying the ‘object domain’ *per se* but instead, destroying the idea of having to have a particular ‘object domain’. Thus visibility becomes the object of study.

In academic work on representations, we might draw on these observations to think about visibility having its own effects in the role of representations – as Alloo says we cannot reduce an image to a copy (i.e. the image cannot represent something that already exists independently of the image), rather it is the very appearance of images that is the point of interest. This understands visibility as not only concerned with referentiality and ‘aboutness’ but rather prioritises “an analysis of how something appears in a given instance” (Alloo, 2021: 4). Using the words of Bal, this is about questioning the ways representations are ‘of something’ (Bal, 2003). We cannot reify a picture as being representative ‘of Roma’. The point is to understand its “constitutive phenomenal suchness” (Alloo, 2021: 5) – how it came about, why, who has the power, who benefits and who loses out?

We can get stuck in a loop with challenging stereotypes – an endless cycle of deconstructing that holds the danger of relying on or reifying the stereotypes. Continually pointing out and deconstructing unfair representations is not enough - in fact, this might just work to support and concretise the ideological system that keeps old hierarchies and racisms in order. In this article, using visibility as a lens and observing what kinds of images are produced by artists and activists from Roma heritages, we can see how age-old associations are not just challenged but engaged with and thus denaturalised. These practices of denaturalization are an agentive response to systemically unfair histories. We need to think about how we can use such practices in academic work, for examples: not just deconstructing misrepresentations, but also pointing out the (historical) fallacy of stereotypes in the first place; engaging more with the ways Roma people already have resisted and continue to resist unfair practices and misrepresentations; juxtaposing misrepresentations with other ways of representing Roma, such as in art, activism and through self-representations.

The practices emerging from Roma artists examined here are examples of how Roma people have navigated and resisted stereotypes, which unsettle the supposed stability and fixity of those stereotypes. Only this way might we disrupt the authority of those histories and the tropes that are attached to them.

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## Underground Artistic-Creative Scenes Between Utopias and Artivisms

Paula Guerra <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Porto, PORTUGAL

\*Corresponding Author: [pguerra@letras.up.pt](mailto:pguerra@letras.up.pt)

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### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two countries usually represented as (semi-)peripheric: Portugal and Brazil. At stake is a metaphorical perspective of the Global South as equivalent to most (although not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised territories. The use of this concept marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference towards an emphasis on geopolitical power relations. Using the examples of Brazil's PWR Records and padê editorial, and Portugal's Príncipe Discos, the article highlights a series of manifestations of a radical *habitus* that has materialised in underground musical-creative creations, which increasingly have emerged as a stage for contemporary resistance. These examples demonstrate the spurious nature of the division between the concepts of the *art of resistance* and the *art of existence*: they are activist resistances that enact working utopias. In many such projects, we find artists with a (sub)cultural do-it-yourself background, who are not afraid to combine art and politics, and who reject the old idea of 'art for art's sake'. An *art of resistance* emerges that, in the cases analysed, is linked to the adherence to new social movements, such as feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, the right to the city and anti-racism. Using a qualitative methodology, with a strong multi-sited ethnographic slant based on interviews and documentary analysis, we demonstrate how the artistic imagination of contemporary youth is materialised in combined resistance and existence for a place in the world.

**Keywords:** *arts of existence*, *arts of resistance*, artivisms, radical *habitus*, underground artistic-creative scenes, utopian *praxis*

### FROM RESISTANCE TO EXISTENCE; FROM DECOLONIZATION TO ARTIVISMS

We begin with the problem, then examine the context. In the early 1990s, the fields of sociology and cultural studies were confronted with a 'cultural turn' characterised by greater attention to social actors' reflexivity and everyday actions at the expense of a more structuralist view (Bennett, 2018; Chaney, 1994). In the twenty-first century, particularly over the last decade, we have witnessed a new phase of this cultural turn, linked to the (dis)concealment of issues ranging from structural or systemic racism, passing through LGBTQIA+ complexities, and moving to decolonialism. This highlights an important feature: the importance of everyday engagement between the arts, civic intervention, and activism, that is even more evident in peripheral areas of large cities and urban centres. A growing number of young artists are unafraid to combine art and politics and reject the *old ideas* of *art for art's sake*. They seek resistance and they manifest themselves, above all, on the margins, as part of the underground. In addition to creating forms of resistance, they also create strategies for existence (or survival). By forms of resistance, we refer to (sub)cultural modalities of production carried out through a do-it-yourself (DIY) process in which consumer goods are stripped of their original meanings and turned into subversive parodies of the dominant society. According to Hebdige et al. (2019), in this approach there is no change in power relations

and structural problems remain untouched (Guerra et al., 2020). The responses carried out by the subcultures would be situated only in a symbolic and imaginary realm (Guerra, 2024).

Ferreira (2016) hypothesises that it is difficult to find traces of a politics of resistance in the aesthetics of contemporary youth scenes, due to the lack of a clear ‘enemy’ against which to fight. Nevertheless, the same author argues that while aesthetics and politics remain intertwined in the most recent youth scenes, it will be more productive and innovative to shift the focus of the analysis to a perspective closer to the experience of young people in the artistic-cultural-creative scenes; he proposes approaching their aesthetic resources as expressions of an *art of existence*. In the framework of this article, this concept, expanded and relocated, has a use that associates it with the arts of earning a living – of transition to work (Bennett, 2018). Therefore, these social actors are reformulating the concept of activism – or artistic activism – into a way of life that encompasses different spheres of life. Through the case studies presented in this article, we intend to understand how the contemporary (post-)juvenile scenes in Brazil and Portugal presuppose these *arts of existence* and can be seen as dynamics of productive existence, ineluctably marking the passage to adulthood.

We cannot help but notice, based on previous investigations, that many of today’s activists have a subcultural background (Guerra, 2018, 2020a, 2021). Indeed, do-it-yourself cultures have asserted themselves as a platform for multiple cultural, political, and economic youth imaginaries. In a world where the threats to young people’s futures have increased significantly – accentuated by the post-pandemic context – underground creative-artistic-music scenes have emerged as an opportunity to obtain a place in an increasingly precarious and impoverished framework of life. Our goal is to situate underground creative-artistic-music scenes and DIY cultures within a wide range of contemporary contexts of *arts of existence* and activism (Haenfler, 2018; Veal and Tammy, 2016).

In recent decades, a growing body of theory has emerged in youth studies addressing qualitative changes in the way agents engage with politics – that is, whether the concept of resistance should still be applied to the practices of emerging (sub)cultures (Guerra et al., 2020; Hebdige et al., 2019). These recent studies argue that young people are abandoning traditional political interest and contesting political actions to express their interest in other types of struggles through art that encompasses all spheres of social life, expressions of positions and tastes (Guerra, 2020b, 2020c). Several studies have examined DIY careers/trajectories as strategies that, according to authors such as Threadgold (2018), demonstrate conscious acts of ‘choosing poverty’. This notion applies to the cases presented here and, in terms of the basic geographical and social contexts, leads us to demonstrate that reflexive choices are made to engage in forms of work – often self-employment – that try to counteract situations of precariousness and intermittent income. Of course, this conceptualization converges – differently – with the referenced *arts of resistance* and *arts of existence*. Moreover, we can affirm that in the Brazilian and Portuguese contexts, the concept of resistance is an antecedent to the *arts existence*. It was through resistance in the face of political ideologies, and segregation and social exclusion, that these social actors created new aesthetics, new typologies of consumption and new modalities of artistic production, cementing the importance of a DIY ethos and *praxis*.

This does not amount to a position of denial of the *arts of resistance*, but rather to the assumption of a diachrony of life that leads social actors from resistance to existence. By not opting for a sterile essentialism, we can point out deviations and/or setbacks, depending on the actor-territories under analysis. Two of the cases are in Brazil, and one is in Portugal.<sup>1</sup>

Ferreira (2016) and Bennett (2018) argue that the concept of resistance is no longer adequate to perceive the practices of youth cultures, while the concept of existence is concerned more with social and personal recognition than with a self-fulfilled and self-defined professional identity. The latter concept is intrinsically related to an ethos and a DIY practice, and in this way aims to contest the socially and structurally imposed process of transition to adult life. The *art of existence* is particularly relevant to the Global South, where these practices can be interpreted as a form of ‘love for the necessary’: living for the moment, overcoming barriers and limits in a constant search for freedom, survival, independence, and economic and artistic sustainability (Guerra, 2021).

Both the *arts of resistance* and the *arts of existence* are guided by the enunciation of complex and polyhedral identity-affirmation processes. In Brazil, there is a focus on issues of gender, ethnicity and the dynamics of artistic production and consumption (musical and literary) – that is, these ‘arts’ describe a logic of action that is focused primarily on the digital field because PWR and padê editorial are still fighting for a physical and political space that is open to these discussions. We therefore face a dimension of digital activism: the internet becomes the field of action, but it can also be understood as the ‘margin’ of the physical and urban centres. In the case of Portugal, at Príncipe Discos the focus is now on racial relations in an increasingly gentrified and segregated Lisbon. Once again, the *arts of resistance* and the *arts of existence* – intertwined in Príncipe Discos – asserted themselves as weapons of struggle and contestation, opening doors for the creation of a space for the consumption of African music. They represented the struggle for a physical space and a place in Portuguese society, showing that the African and Afro-

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<sup>1</sup> Only one case was selected in Portugal because, due to the geographical dimension and social reality of the country, few cases fit the dimensions of analysis systematized in that country. Compared with Brazil, this idea of *the art of existence* has a far less significant expression.

descendant population is no longer invisible. Through our case studies, we thus show that DIY trajectories – associated with an *art of existence* – are a possible way to repair labour, social or school trajectories marked by ruptures and precariousness (Guerra, 2021).

These *arts of existence* can also be explained and understood through concepts such as *illusio*, which highlights the conviction that the ‘game is worth playing’ (if we think of a Bourdieusian translation) and that the financial difficulties – among others – are worthwhile, even if the benefits are only symbolic (Bourdieu, 1996; Threadgold, 2020, 2023). The concept of *illusio* in relation to the *arts of existence* also shows strategies to explore and counteract the unpredictabilities of everyday life (Guerra, 2022). In relation to our case studies, this *art of existence* is also linked to a participation in new social movements, such as feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, the right to the city and anti-racism. This is because the *art of existence* is also characterized by affinity networks, which are expressed in the defence of ideologies such as those mentioned above and are in a context of strong sociabilities and identity-sharing (Guerra, 2024). This leads social actors to engage in labour trajectories of great political and social tension.

Countries such as Brazil and Portugal have assumed themselves to be paradigmatic from many perspectives: political, economic, social, cultural and artistic (Guerra, 2021). In this article, we focus on cases from Brazil and Portugal; however, the term ‘Global South’ refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Oceania, which were impacted by (de)colonial processes (Quijano and Wallerstein, 1992). It also includes Southern European countries such as Portugal, which are considered ‘semi-peripheral’ in world-system theory (Wallerstein, 2004). At stake here is a metaphorical perspective of the Global South as equivalent to mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalised territories (Mahler, 2017). This use of the term marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference to an emphasis on geopolitical power relations and sociocultural aspects connected to artistic/cultural production.

Adopting a qualitative methodology, with a multi-situated ethnographic orientation based on interviews and documentary analysis, we demonstrate how the artistic imagination of contemporary youth materialises in forms of resistance (Guerra, 2020d; Weij and Berkers, 2017) for a place in the world, particularly in contexts of oppression and social inequalities. These processes of artistic imagination are analysed with a focus on communities and minorities, thus revealing the other side of the dimensions of crisis and structural inequality of Portuguese and Brazilian societies (sexism, social inequalities, special segregation, racism, discrimination).<sup>2</sup> These (young) people use arts, and music in particular, to convey practices of active citizenship, to manifest themselves and to affirm themselves socially and culturally, bringing into play the concept of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), which is closely articulated with contemporary modalities of activism, and inclusive and sustainable living ecosystems.

In terms of structure, the article begins by examining the epistemological framework of the Global South using a broad conceptual perspective. We then look at the state of the art through concepts and paradigms related to DIY, and the links with Bourdieu’s theories (1977). The cases analysed are then presented: PWR Records and padê editorial in Brazil; and Príncipe Discos and *kuduro* in Portugal. We analyse how these projects, and their protagonists, have specific strategies that explain why we consider the division between *art of resistance* and *art of existence*. The article ends with some unfinished conclusions regarding the need to explore the realities of these countries through analysing them to gain a better insight into concepts such as activism, DIY, resistance and existence, and utopias related to artistic work and careers: the so-called ‘arts of breadwinning’ (Guerra, 2021, p. 131).

## CAN EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH JOIN THE ARTS TO *SAVE US FROM COLLAPSE*?

A growing body of theory deals with issues of DIY ethos and *praxis*, and the underground (Duncombe, 2002; Goris and Hollander, 2017; Xiao and Donaghey, 2022), especially as a tool to think new worlds and new practices, and as a form of political expression around social struggles such as urban gentrification, artistic work, racism and sexism (Belfiore and Bennett, 2007; de Cautier et al., 2011; Dufor, 2002). With some exceptions, academic studies are still located mostly in Western countries in the so-called Global North (Salzbrunn, 2020). There is also a tendency to analyse the societies of peripheral or semi-peripheral countries from a Eurocentric and Anglo-Saxon perspective, discarding the experiential reality of all geopolitical and socio-historical contexts that do not fit this frame of reference (Quijano, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on interviews with the protagonist of the cases in Recife, Brazil in August, and September 2018. For documentary collection and processing between April and September 2022, I would like to thank Ana Oliveira and João Lima. The interviews were conducted in accordance with the ethical procedures of the American Sociological Association and all interview excerpts used in this article received informed consent.

When discussing a decolonial Global South, it is important to first address the intellectual decolonisation required to understand the alternative narratives and works coming from these contexts and territories, and their particular intellectual journey towards a ‘decolonial turn’ developed over several decades (Behari-Leak, 2019; Maldonado-Torres, 2011; Mignolo, 2014) in order to decolonise their own histories and methodologies. This is relevant to the field of social sciences if we are to include minority groups and perspectives in academia, as the entrenched exclusion of views from the Global North does not just harm minorities (Moosavi, 2020). Decolonisation and postcolonial studies have tried to deconstruct the imposed ideas and systems of colonial oppression that have shaped the system of thought, and consequently academic studies, to this day. In our case, counter-storytelling has been a good path of methodological deconstruction, as it has been ‘a powerful mode of recentering knowledges from the margins – a decolonial alternative to neoliberal epistemes that maintain institutions/universities as centres of knowledge production’ (Dutta et al., 2022, p. 67).

Based on these contributions, we elaborate a model of interpretation of these realities based on the crossing of four key ideas from post-subcultural theories and youth studies, which were transferred to the cultural and artistic reality we intend to analyse. The first idea is based on a void of diversity in cultural and artistic practices, which leads to the introduction of artistic-cultural studies of experiences that have been undervalued by Anglo-centric ways of thinking. This approach may also be applied to analyse underground and/or marginal cultures in semi-peripheral realities such as that of Portugal. The second idea is anchored in the defence of new sounds, arts, places and actors, which implies analysing and reflecting upon the innovative cultural experiences that arise in countries such as Brazil – not as exotic, but rather as new aesthetic and creative experiences. The third idea involves a commitment to multicultural knowledge – which, in the words of Wallerstein (2004), is based on Africanity, Indigenous peoples, religions and cultures; this comes from the multicultural reality of societies in the decolonial Global South, breaking with a hierarchical, monocultural way of thinking. Finally, an analysis is advocated involving a fine-tuned study of the excluding differentials – gender, ethnicity, precariousness, poverty – of social groups that are usually omitted (women, immigrants, Indigenous populations).

## **FROM WORKING UTOPIAS TO A *RADICAL HABITUS* IN CREATING *ARTS OF EXISTENCE***

Social movements have been an essential source of innovation in modern societies, generating new ways of thinking departing from the prevailing *status quo*. However, it was only from the 1960s onwards, with the emergence of the ‘new’ social movements, that a qualitative change took place. This was a consequence of a lack of confidence in the political system and scepticism about achieving change without the use of revolutionary means. The aim of these new social movements was to change society from within, turning them into ‘laboratories of experience’ (Melucci, 1996). These new social movements, associated with the concept of *illusio*, presuppose the mobilization of organized actions that are assimilated by a group of individuals who share the same *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1996). The new social movements can also be related to the concept of working utopias (Crossley, 1999), which aim to achieve a degree of materiality of a given action and serve as an example for other members of this social movement in the sense that they presuppose concrete actions directed towards change – in this case, political, social and cultural change (Crossley, 2003).

At the same time, these new social movements invite pedagogical action (Santos and Guerra, 2017), enabling people to learn how to act and think differently. Such learning also focuses on how an action is possible, making it a *praxis* in terms of the know-how that is learned and incorporated, such as DIY or do-it-ourselves (DIO) approaches (Pickard, 2022). Thus, awareness-raising is a *praxis* (rather than a practice), both individual and collective. At the same time, there are differences between a creative practice and a repetitive practice, with the latter being mechanical, rather than based on conscious, aprioristically thought-out action. The former, in contrast, is a practice that seeks the transformation of reality – a revolutionary and transformative *praxis* (Vásquez, 2007). This *praxis* must occur regularly, creating multidimensional spaces of struggle and pedagogy, thus creating the context for the continuation of the *arts of existence*. The cases analysed in this article come close to this, in different forms and intensities (Smith, 2020).

We think it is fruitful, when discussing social movements, to use the approaches of Bourdieu (1977) to explain and understand the modalities of contemporary activist resistance/existence found in the cases analysed in this article. Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of practice is used to explain how the circumstances and norms of each social actor shape their actions. The advantages of using a Bourdieusian approach are inescapable, enabling an examination of the concept of radical *habitus*, as postulated by Crossley (2003). Rarely are new social movements, such as anti-racism or feminism, the result of circumstantial eruptions; rather, they are the outcomes of long-lasting underground processes – hence the power of *habitus* dispositions. The big difference is the recognition that social actors can change as their *habitus* is mouldable. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon the concept of radical



*habitus*, which arises when agents deal with new experiences that break with their previous expectations or norms, causing them to alter their worldview, thus creating new types of *arts of existence* and *resistance*.

Alexander et al. (2022) state that many young activists began their activism by worrying about environmental causes; however, after seeing the different impacts of their activism, they went on to engage in other activisms related to racial and economic inequalities. This idea can be applied to our cases in the sense that music and music production have given rise to an involvement, from an activist point of view, with other causes, such as feminism, precariousness and Indigenous people. Therefore, we can see Crossley's (2003) assertions in play, given that the radical *habitus* also influences other dimensions of agents' lives: their choice of job, lifestyle and consumption practices. This concept can be interconnected with Threadgold's (2018) views on the 'choice of poverty' and the questioning of the processes of transition to adulthood. Specifically on the *art of existence* as an ethos, authors such as Ibrahim (2011) speak of an anti-capitalist *habitus* that demonstrates the internalisation of the *habitus* beyond the sphere of activism, being visible in the way people produce and consume cultural and commercial goods; it is a way of interconnecting the personal with the political, influencing the behaviour of agents in the various fields in which they engage.

## DIY PUBLICATIONS: THE CASE OF PWR RECORDS AND PADÊ EDITORIAL

Our first case study is the PWR Records label (Sobre Nós, 2021).<sup>3</sup> This is a DIY project in which we can see the intersection between gender struggles and feminism. Label founders Hannah Carvalho and Letícia Tomás were a regular presence in the underground music scenes of Recife in Brazil and became more interested in the production and organisation of musical events. In 2016, when they founded the label, the scene was mostly male. They had the same surprise McRobbie had when analysing subcultures: they had trouble finding any women (McRobbie and Garbert, 1997). In an almost academic logic, they mapped all the indie bands in Brazil and measured the percentage containing at least one woman – very few bands had any female members. This observation was the basis for PWR Records' choice to only release bands formed by women and with a focus on the Northeast – a peripheral and generally forgotten area of Brazil.

The strategies of PWR Records are not only about releasing records: Letícia Tomás told us in an interview that women do not participate so much in the world of music and 'many girls do not have a band because they were not encouraged to learn how to play a musical instrument'. To overcome this limitation, PWR Records promotes monthly workshops for girls, teaching them to play musical instruments; they also promote, in several areas of Brazil, the Jam das Minas [Girl Jam], where all participants are encouraged to try a new instrument and join in the presentation of songs in an improvised collective performance – for example, the Jam das Minas held in Recife in 2017 and nicknamed 'Women Doing Stuff'. The event begins with two workshops, on fanzines and free embroidery, and only at the end of the afternoon is the Jam das Minas truly held, with the following call: 'call your friends, here we have synth, drums and guitar for everyone to play ♥' (Sympla, 2017). The purpose of these initiatives is embodied in the PWR Records editorial: "It's not about talking about being a woman anymore. It's just being her. It's about occupying that space" (PWR, 2019, n/p).

PWR Records has been deepening its activities, remaining faithful to the initial cause: it engages in music distribution, music publishing, music licensing and merchandising, agency, press office, launch strategy, branded content, mentoring, production of edicts and classes/lectures (PWR, 2019). Everything is based in a DIY ethos and *praxis*. In seven years, PWR Records has worked with over 50 bands and female artists, and has taken artists to national and international festivals, such as Bananada Festival (Brazil), SXSW (USA), Rec-Beat Presents (Peru), SIM São Paulo (Brazil) and Luz Del Fuego (Spain). The logics of struggle, contestation and social criticism implemented by PWR Records are in line with the conclusions about the new social movements in the previous section. Thus, music, the use of DIY and the insertion of these young women in the Brazilian underground scene gave rise to an activist involvement in other social causes, and here feminism and the contestation of the precariousness of artistic careers should be highlighted, particularly in the case of women.

Another case is *padê* editorial,<sup>4</sup> an independent book publisher that narrows down the social group it sets out to promote, as it only publishes books by black, lesbian, transvestite, transgender and bisexual authors. Founded in October 2015 by Tatiana Nascimento and Barbara Esmenia, it was influenced by Eloisa Cartonera, who produced books with cardboard covers. Its name *padê* refers to a recovery of the importance of religions of African origin and resistance strategies: *padê* means a ceremony of the *candomblé* religion, in which Exu – the messenger between the spiritual world and the material world – is offered food, drinks and animal sacrifices. The same approach can be observed in the option for the constant use of lowercase, both in the name of the publisher and the name of the authors published – a practice made famous by feminist philosopher bell hooks (2022). Pereira

<sup>3</sup> Label PWR RECORDS, *mulheres na musica [women in music]*, <https://www.pwrrecords.org>

<sup>4</sup> *padê* editorial, [https://www.facebook.com/pade.editorial/?locale=pt\\_BR](https://www.facebook.com/pade.editorial/?locale=pt_BR)

and Coutinho (2021) discuss this strategy as a way of deconstructing a literary canon that pays little attention to diversity and the need to give a voice to silenced social groups. The use of lowercase in the name is a way of emphasising the writing and its substance to the detriment of the notion of authorship – an issue related to the concern that a publisher should not be associated with narratives of pain and oppression.

Padê editorial is a publishing house based on a DIY logic, in which the founders handcraft all the books. *The Cartonera* and *cartoneras* influence is visible in the use of cardboard on the covers, which keeps production costs down and allows customisation of the covers, making them true works of art. The choice to control the entire production, editing and sales line is a clear political statement, creating a proximity with the author and moving away from the mainstream Brazilian book industry. padê editorial is concerned with the autonomy of the authors it publishes, seeking to ensure that they learn and internalise certain DIY know-how: at the time of the call to publish DIY books by LGBTQIA+ authors, distribution was the responsibility of the authors, since one of the project's objectives was to establish a collaborative relationship between partners and develop skills and strategies related to self-publishing, dissemination and sales so, in addition to having their book published, authors would be left with basic entrepreneurship skills that could provide financial autonomy (Lima, 2018).

The political option is even more visible if we take into consideration that padê editorial only publishes works by social and sexual minorities – that is, groups with no space in the traditional Brazilian literary industry and very little in the independent industry. The two founders talk about their experience of visiting book fairs that are practically monochromatic and cis-gendered, which is not so different from Dalcastagne's (2012) description of the Brazilian publishing world or Muniz Júnior's (2016) analysis of the Brazilian independent publishing world. From these experiences, we understand the aim of the publishing house: to give voice to a set of silenced narratives, implying the need to change the Brazilian publishing market – which Carvalho and Tomás call 'colonial'. The only way to do this is by giving prominence to other voices: a 'black-affirmed narrative', as Tatiana Nascimento called it in an interview (Lima, 2018).

Padê editorial became known when it decided to make a call for proposals to publish 60 handmade books by lesbian, transvestite, transsexual and bisexual authors. It was eventually supported by the Elas Social Investment Fund [Her Social Investment Fund] and received over 300 applications. Many of the entries involved protest and denunciation – a dimension that the founders decided to abandon because they considered it limiting in terms of LGBTQIA+ narratives, opting instead for dissident writings within a dissent that moves away from narratives about pain:

We want to publish these voices/words/images that contain other narratives about us that are not only about pain, about racism, about hetero-cis-normativity, LGBTQI phobias (...) To take back through written narratives this complexity is also to resist – in this case, to the stereotype that we are beings whose only experience that legitimates or justifies our expressiveness is pain (narrate it, narrate resistance to it). (Tatiana Nascimento, interview in Lima, 2018)

It was a brave decision, as it had the potential to create a stir in the LGBTQIA+ movement itself, with accusations of escapism, but what we saw was a choice that further complexified the option for dissidence and diversity, refusing to accept that marginalised bodies are defined only by marginality and the violence by which they are targeted. padê editorial is inscribed in the triple transgression and/or liberation of triple burden of Kilomba (2022): the first burden is the (silenced) voice of women; the second burden relates to the fact that only lesbian women are published; the third burden concerns the focus on black women, who carry in their bodies a triple burden that is not felt by white women. The books of this publisher are therefore deviant geographies that break with the established pattern of the representation of who writes books in Brazil and the stereotypical representation of Brazilian women (Pereira and Coutinho, 2021). The publication of the books is concerned with the place of speech, with silenced voices given a hearing, which appeals to the majority of the publisher's readers, who are members of the LGBTQIA+ and/or black communities.

Like PWR Records (and other Brazilian publishers such as Nega Lilo Editora, Editora Brejeira Malagueta, Malê and Coletivo Narrativas Negras), padê editorial is more than a DIY publishing house: it is an activist DIY publishing house that is concerned with human rights and is interested in publishing a range of diverse voices, even if this means lower profits. There remains a political stamp of wanting to read non-hegemonic narratives in publishing circuits, whether literary or musical. In Threadgold's (2018) perspective, agents who have reflexively chosen this path strategically make a decision that allows them more time and space for their creative passions and socio-political interests at the expense of greater financial security (France and Threadgold, 2016; Threadgold, 2023).

When we examine this Brazilian reality, we must question Ferreira's (2016) approach, which considers that youth and underground scenes have undergone a significant shift from the *art of resistance* to an *art of existence*. In fact, in the work and activities of PWR and padê editorial, we can identify a strong political dimension, especially from the point of view of creating stages of expression for the population and social strata that tend to be culturally,

artistically and socially invisible. In fact, the transition from an *art of resistance* to an *art of existence* constitutes added value for the advancement of post-subcultural studies and theories that, to date, have been guided by a devaluation of the political dimension of the underground and DIY scenes. It is undeniable that in the Brazilian reality, and with artists and individuals involved in new social movements, DIY careers are an essential strategy to escape poverty and ensure an income (Guerra, 2021), but also to create emerging typologies of arts of existence.

So far, we have argued for the importance of ‘choosing poverty’ (Threadgold, 2018). Although we consider that this classification still has the capacity to portray the reality of many artists and individuals with artistic careers, especially in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries such as Brazil and Portugal, we cannot help but wonder about the changes it might undergo in its conceptualization. From the outset, by understanding the use of a DIY *praxis* and ethos as a strategy for the pursuit of a typology of action of ‘art of existence’, we are creating change. It is important to note that the choice of poverty often comes from a privileged individual context. Only a few people can opt for an art of existence over an art of resistance, not least because they possess sufficient economic, social and cultural power to insert themselves into a certain ‘place of speech’ (Ribeiro, 2017).

As Leal (2011) notes, the existence of these publishers is crucial to create and develop the presence of racialised, LGBTQIA+ and feminist themes in the musical and literary field and, consequently, to legitimise in this same field the bands and authors who choose to publish. A particularity of the DIY projects we analysed was the need to establish close relationships with other publishers or key people in the respective fields. We are talking about publishers comprising only the founders, who take on various tasks, from planning to production and dissemination; this makes it essential to have social actors who, despite not being officially linked to the publishers, share the interests and causes they advocate. These mutual aid strategies, despite originating from a need or a ‘love for what is necessary’, are also the basis of a different way of doing business, a position refuting the neoliberal capitalist values of competition above all else.

When we talk about utopias working backwards, we refer primarily to the causes that both projects defend. Above all, we cannot forget that this utopian quest is a utopian *praxis*: a utopia constituted by actions and practices that aim to change the world. The manifestations and *modus operandi* of this utopian *praxis* congregate a composite of techniques of slow editions in which each book/disc is a *true handmade labour of love* – of the control of all the steps of artistic-creative production, of the realisation of workshops/festival in partnership with publishers and relevant institutions in the LGBTQIA+, anti-racist and feminist milieu, of the mutual help and social responsibility inherent to each process and activity. This *modus operandi* is a (powerful) way of politicising the work and creating alternatives to the hegemonic market.

As well as being spaces of practical utopia, of a radical embodied *habitus*, these projects are also proof that a different reality is possible. As we have seen, none of the publishing houses confines itself to the publication of books/discs; they are also responsible for workshops, debates and conferences, becoming places for discussions, where new ideas are debated and disseminated – an essential dimension for the creation of social capital and networks (Crossley, 2020) and a vital way of disseminating the ethos of the movements (McKay, 1998). However, they are more than this: since these discussion spaces are spaces of representation, they are spaces in which social groups that have not always had a voice can address their concerns freely. They thus enable new experiences that break with the previous ones and expand into all areas of social life: they enhance a radical *habitus* thirsty for activism in various complementary dimensions, which is why it is unsurprising that several of the founders of these publishing houses are simultaneously involved in anti-racist, feminist, LGBTQIA+ and environmentalist causes. We know there is a debate about the need to recover the concept of resistance to youth studies or to focus on a line that addresses the new forms of politicisation of agents based on a celebratory and carnival logic (Pàmpols and Porzio, 2005). However, what we see in the publishers we have analysed is a conjugation of the two dimensions that, if we apply the concept of radical *habitus*, cannot be dissociated, as dispositions towards resistance or anti-capitalist *praxis* will impinge on various dimensions of social life – notably the choice of employment (Guerra, 2018). Hence, we see the founders of padê editorial in constant tension to keep the doors open, but this is a consequence they were already expecting given the state of the Brazilian cultural market and their bet on a very specific market niche.

## ‘I KNOW WHO I AM’: FROM LISBON TO THE WORLD – PRÍNCIPE DISCOS

In 2011, Mário Matos, José Moura, Nelson Gomes and Pedro Gomes founded the label Príncipe Discos<sup>5</sup> and in that same year it released its first project, *Eu sei quem sou* [I know who I am], by Marfox.<sup>6</sup> This project is rooted

<sup>5</sup> Príncipe Discos, <https://principediscos.wordpress.com/>

<sup>6</sup> DJ Marfox is the main figure of a group of musicians from the so-called second generation of immigrants from the former African colonies, born and raised in Portugal, often in social housing estates on the outskirts of the country’s capital; inspired

in a dense social network of alternative music that cements a Lisbon scene: Nelson Gomes and Pedro Gomes had great experience in organising live concerts through the association Filho Único<sup>7</sup> and each already had a solo music career in alternative rock projects; José Moura, besides being the owner of Flur Discos,<sup>8</sup> has a career as a DJ and is part of the Zonk collective, which organises concerts; Mário Matos works at Flur Discos and is a musician. It is no coincidence that, in an interview, José Moura declared that the label worked as a cooperative and was based on values such as local and traditional, and a vision of the future away from the dictates of the market. In fact, playing with the name ‘prince’, José Moura reveals that the use of this word was intentional as the publishing house seeks to discover a hidden nobility. Very close to a utopian *praxis*, these social actors created this structure to allow the music from the peripheries to be heard in the city centre (Elliot, 2022). Marcon (2013) stated that there were no great paths for underground music, and all the *kuduro* and beat artists from the periphery, to be released and have an artistic career. Buraka Som Sistema<sup>9</sup> proved that it was possible, but it was Príncipe Discos that systematically sought to invest in and explore musical genres effectively confined to the peripheries, such as *kuduro* and *funaná*, and certainly the legitimacy and subcultural capital that the founders had in the Lisbon underground scene allowed doors to open.

As Marfox sums up: “The label gave a stamp and an identity to many lives in the periphery” (quoted in Gomes, 2022). However, perhaps the most relevant impact was to allow the crossing of audiences that had not come together before but could do so because of the music. The meeting point was MusicBox,<sup>10</sup> where Príncipe held its Noites da Príncipe [Prince Nights], in which artists and agencies, but also young people from the peripheral neighbourhoods, would listen to the same music they played in their homes at a space central to Lisbon’s nightlife. A lot had changed since the 1990s and early twenty-first century, when the only possibilities for playing music were the parties and balls organised by residents’ or immigrants’ associations, or the clubs that bet on the success of ‘African nights’. The scene spread beyond the neighbourhoods and allowed central Lisbon to get to know figures who were better known abroad than in Portugal (except for the peripheral neighbourhoods, where they were a reference), such as DJ Marfox, Nigga Fox, DJ Firmeza and Nídia. The importance of Príncipe’s Nights was not only commercial; they also had an ethical dimension: to expose the music made in the peripheries and to show another face of territories that are still very stigmatised. The political reach of the label, visible in the words of Pedro Gomes, another founder of Príncipe, is undeniable: “White Lisbon is finally getting closer to black Lisbon and vice-versa.”

Noites da Príncipe, as well as the influence of Príncipe Discos all over the city, can be seen as utopian spaces in a segregated, gentrified and touristified context. It is no coincidence that Brown (2021) states that *kuduro* is one of the musical genres that most enables utopian spaces. We can also involve Príncipe here, not only because it is a musical genre highly influenced by technology – which allows it to circulate relatively independently of the dictates of the market and mixing styles and genres from both the Global South and North – but also because it breaks away from the unequal relationship with the West.

The creations of Príncipe Discos also oppose a vision tributary to Hebdige’s symbolic resistance (Guerra, 2020c), which understood consumption and dancing to the sound of *kuduro* and the beat as a way for people to forget their social context while in the present on the dance floor. However, this is a reductive reading of the empowering capacity of music – which, as Jameson (2005) puts it, proposes a utopian ‘energy’ that motivates collective and communal artistic creation, an impulse that energises social and artistic movements. According to Brown (2010), we are facing ‘bodily utopias’ in which the body is rehabilitated as a space of joy and jubilation, and there is nothing better than electronic and dance music to demonstrate the Promethean possibilities of human connection through music (Mbembe, 2005).

Brown’s (2021) utopian vision argues that a *praxis* of fun and pleasure is necessary for social transformation, and it is possible to find this utopian impulse in discos and bars – spaces marked by dance and music in which cooperative relationships are chiselled despite wider contexts of inequality. Belanciano (2020) questions whether all the narratives about the ‘new Lisbon’ or the ‘African Lisbon’ are narratives of love or rather ways of neutralising the relations of racial inequality that are still the norm in Portuguese society (Contador, 2001). Príncipe Discos itself is not without some of these tensions at its core since four white men founded and operate a label that edits

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by the music of their family origins (especially Angolan *kuduro* and Cape Verdean *funaná*), they created a beat that has left its mark on the world electronic scene.

<sup>7</sup> Filho Único is a concert promoter and agency founded in 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Flur Discos is an independent record shop that has existed in Lisbon since 2021. In addition to selling records, Flur also has a very intense editorial program of Portuguese and international independent music.

<sup>9</sup> Buraka Som Sistema was a Portuguese band, with Portuguese and Angolan members, whose sound is associated with *kuduro*. Their first major success was the song ‘Yah!’ in 2006, featuring Petty, followed by another success with ‘Wawaba’. They were among the Portuguese musical projects with the most international projection in the 2000s and 2010s and are linked to the Enchufada label.

<sup>10</sup> MusicBox opened in 2006. It is a bar, nightclub and concert hall with its own programme, located in Cais do Sodré.

and deals mainly with black artists. Mário Matos, one of the founders, admits that, ‘In the beginning, artists were like, “We’ve never seen these motherfuckers, and they are coming here to take our music”. So, I had to show them that I work for them only’ (in Bloom, 2020). If we follow Brown’s (2010) concept of corporal utopia, such a tense relationship can only be overcome on the dance floor and in the moving of the bodies to potentiate the utopian ‘energy’ opened by the possibilities of human connection. It is not only researchers and cultural interlocutors who admit this utopian possibility, but also the musicians themselves – despite admitting the tensions and contradictions around *kuduro* and other African music, racism and prejudice.

## RESIST TO EXIST OR EXIST TO RESIST? DESIRES FOR CHANGE, UTOPIAS AND ARTISTIC FIELDS

The dichotomies resistance/celebration or *art of existence/art of resistance* have less and less conceptual value when we analyse new artistic practices, especially in countries of the Global South. If we apply a Bourdieusian perspective we see that it is impossible to clearly separate the *art of existence* from the *art of resistance*, not least because one is the stage for the other’s performance.

Activism – or the disposition towards activism based on the concept of *habitus* (Santos and Guerra, 2017) – spreads across various dimensions of social life and influences a set of social practices, such as lifestyle, modes of consumption and even the job/profession chosen. This translates the *arts of existence*. It is only possible to understand the financial difficulties experienced by these social actors, by understanding the *illusio* (or, in the language of social movements, the symbolic rewards) that underlies these choices. It is the *illusio*, the confidence that ‘the game is worth playing’, that justifies ‘choosing poverty’, which explains why some of the founders of these projects already have in their trajectory some (failed) attempts to create publishing houses directed to the LGBTQIA+ movement or *kuduro*. However, although there is a choice of poverty, there is also a ‘place of speech’ (Ribeiro, 2017) that must be recognized. Remember that these social actors have a privileged place of action in relation to others.

There is a desire to change the world, to achieve a form of utopia. Still, it is a utopia that has a place, to paraphrase Thomas Moore, and to serve as an example and pedagogical agent for all those who share the same values and dispositions. This is why PWR Records, apart from its recordings, offers a series of workshops to teach girls to play musical instruments, or the *Jam das Minas*, with seminars on how to make fanzines and other underground cultural practices. It is also worth mentioning that *padê* editorial has workshops to help its authors become independent through self-publishing practices and dissemination of their work. Moreover, it is justifiable that Príncipe Discos wants to put *kuduro* and *batida* on a global pop music ballast, placing these sounds at the centre – outside the periphery – of the city and the world, and celebrating them at Noites da Príncipe. A practical utopia can only exist through a constant and embedded utopian *praxis*, a *radical habitus*, which applies itself in all dimensions of life and is enduring. And when we look at the strategies of the publishers as a form of utopian working, as a utopian *praxis* that encompasses all dimensions of the lives of the social actors involved, we can understand how spurious the long discussions between the subcultural and the post-subcultural schools are, and how inconclusive the analyses of whether the concept of resistance should be maintained or abandoned might be.

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## Social Memory, Public Memory, and Marginality: The Case of the “Death in Migration”

Guido Nicolosi <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Catania, ITALY*

\*Corresponding Author: [guido.nicolosi@unict.it](mailto:guido.nicolosi@unict.it)

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### ABSTRACT

Memory is a source of ‘immunization’ for individuals (psycho-cognitive memory and biological immune system) and for communities (De Martino). We can consider culture as the memory of society. Particularly, the cultural memory of disasters plays a fundamental role. Ideally, it should help to reduce the vulnerability of societies to the risks of recurrence of natural/technological/social catastrophic events. However, memory is not an exact process, but a selective and reconstructive one (Bartlett). Furthermore, the memory of society is multiple and continuously exposed to the risk of distortions, interpretations, and manipulations. Social memory (Halbwachs) is the broader sphere of communicability that delimits the arena in which the different collective memories (of groups) compete for the relevance and plausibility of their own discourses. It will correspond, with good approximation, to the term “public memory”. In particular, the media and journalism play a very important function, as public memory is a memory of the public sphere (Habermas) and, somehow, the public sphere is itself memory (Jedlowski). This presentation aims to compare two social memories of a single catastrophic event in which a marginal social category was involved: migrants illegally crossing the Mediterranean Sea. The research focus concerns a watershed event of the recent migratory phenomenon: the Lampedusa shipwreck that took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013. The goal is to show how collective and public memory contrast each other. We will discuss two cultural and communicative processes located along the oppositional materialization/dematerialization axis. In the article we will reinterpret the evidence collected in the research carried out in 2014 on the Lampedusa shipwreck that took place on 3 October 2013 in order to reflect on the dynamics between different types of memories in the framework of the memory of disasters. We assume that they can be deeply distortive as they promote interrelated memory bias.

**Keywords:** disasters, death, migration, media, collective memory

### INTRODUCTION

On 26 February 2023, in the early hours of the morning, almost 10 years after the dramatic shipwreck of Lampedusa, a new tragedy involving migrants occurred in Italy, a few metres off the coast of Steccato di Cutro (Calabria), when a boat with over 100 people on board was pushed by very rough sea against the rocks close to the Italian coast. Thanks to the public dissemination of the video, we can see the boat in movement as filmed the night before by a control plane from the European agency Frontex (**Figure 1**).

According to journalistic reconstructions, at 23.03 Frontex warned the International Coordination Centre of Maritime Safety with a dispatch. It also sent the report to the Operations Centre of the Coast Guard in Rome. There are no visible elements showing the presence of migrants on board, however, the systems on board the



**Figure 1.** Frame from Frontex video footage.

Eagle 1 detect a ‘significant’ thermal response near the hatches, an accurate sign of a possible human load. Moreover, Eagle 1 records a flow of calls between the boat and Turkey, and this too supports the theory of migrant transport.

Today, we know that there were at least 180 people hidden in its ‘belly’, with the telephone signal inhibited by traffickers. After tracking, Eagle 1 departs, and as it leaves, it takes a photo of the boat with a long distance shot that shows it rocking among the waves more than was apparent from closer footage. The rest is the story of a massacre. The bodies of the migrants remain in the memory and in the nightmares of the inhabitants of Cutro. What remains in the memory of the international public opinion is only the picture of the skeleton of a wreck (**Figure 2**); or worse, the aseptic black and white photo of an anonymous boat with the romantic name of Summer Love which today sounds to our ears like an unbearable insult of black humour.

Ten years later, the tragic story of the migration crisis in Italy repeats itself, as if nothing had happened on the beaches of Lampedusa on that terrible October 3, 2013. The primary objective of this article is to develop a reflection on the theme of the memory of disasters, such as a specific and particularly significant case of the social and also political role of public memory. This objective will not be pursued solely through a review of theoretical issues, however important they may be, but by presenting and re-reading, from a memory studies perspective, the results of a case study linked to empirical research carried out after the Lampedusa shipwreck (Nicolosi, 2018).

In particular, the main aim of this article is to compare two social memories of a single catastrophic event. The research focus concerns a watershed event of the recent migratory phenomenon: the Lampedusa shipwreck that took place on 3 October 2013. The goal is to show how collective and public memories can contrast each other.

## MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND IMMUNIZATION

Memory is the basis of our identity. It is correct to say that we are what we remember we are. Reversing the Cartesian maxim *cogito ergo sum*, we are not what we are because we think, but because we have the ability to remember what we think. Our every thought, every word spoken, and every action depends on our ability to store our experiences (Squire and Kandel, 2010). Memory is also a fundamental source of ‘immunization’ for the individual. First of all, from a biological point of view, our immune system is the memory of our body, with respect to the threats we suffer from the outside world (Edelman, 1992). From a psycho-cognitive point of view, memorizing experiences decreases the likelihood of repeating past mistakes.

But memory is not a phenomenon that unfolds exclusively on an individual level. There is a social matrix of memory that has been demonstrated over time by the authoritative consolidated literature. Of these, it is sufficient to recall the most relevant (e.g. Bartlett, 1974; Halbwachs, 1954; Vigotsky, 2007 [1934]).

Lev Semenovic-Vigotsky (2007) works on the theme of memory as part of his research on the development of children’s abstract thinking and inner language. To his merit, he is credited with having introduced the definition



**Figure 2.** Photo of the remains of the boat on the beach of Cutro shortly after the shipwreck.

of ‘mediated memory’, referring to a socially and culturally connoted subject. In doing this, he focusses his attention on the communicative dimension, in particular the verbal dimension, i.e. the use of words.

The great Soviet psychologist and pedagogist showed that there is a link between memory and evolutionary development and, therefore, the appearance of mental functions based on logic and abstraction. He distinguishes between an organic and a mediated memory and clarifies that if in childhood the child thinks through memory, later the adolescent remembers through thought. Remembering therefore has a double nature: a natural mechanism (based on the stimulus-response relationship), but also a social and cultural process. The social and cultural context shapes the form, content, and mode of transmission of memory. Here, the identity characteristics of the subject and his individual life history, are fundamental, and the mediation of language is decisive.

The second contribution which we deem important to mention, albeit briefly, is that of the British psychologist Frederic Bartlett. He was not satisfied with the results of experimental research under laboratory conditions, indeed, his goal was to show the real functioning of memory mechanisms, in the real social contexts to which the subjects belonged.

Bartlett’s studies are pioneering because they are aimed at creating a bridge between memory, imagination and the construction of meaning. In particular, he claims, meaning is the result of a connection between what is and what is not, aligned to the classic definition of the sign provided by De Saussure (1916). This obviously means reading meaning as a connection between the present and the past.

The ethnographic connotation of his research and his attention to other cultures in the carrying out of his experiments are very interesting and relevant. This interest arose from the aim of studying and showing the weight that culture plays in the construction of meaning and in the processes of memorisation. For example, his experiments on the domestication of experience in repetition were of great importance, with the use of narrative repertoires from different cultures to those of the subjects studied. In short, for Bartlett, memory is a process of gradual and phased rationalization which implies a progressive transformation consistent with the socio-cultural horizon of reference.

Bartlett defines memory as a constructive process because remembering an experience means adapting it to an already constructed meaning, but it is also creative because remembering can stimulate active and selective intervention. Both the individual and the social group, he tells us, recall the past by reconstructing and reshaping

it in the interest of the present. According to Bartlett, recollection uses the social past to creatively direct the actions of the subject's present, thus also organizing future knowledge. In this sense, remembrance grounds the subject in duration.

Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1950), rightly considered the father of the sociology of memory, defines memory as a *social fact*, since every memory implies social structures that function as a canvas around which to organise a story from the past and which make communication and sharing possible.<sup>1</sup> For Halbwachs, memory is knowledge, remembrance, trace, evocation of the past, and, ultimately, all social thought is memory. Although there is a tendency to consider it a privileged object of psychology, that it is a functional and mental operation of the individual, there are 'social frameworks of memory' and that is a 'collective memory'. Only when our individual thought is placed within these frameworks, can it remember.

Thus, Halbwachs's (1925, 1950) theory of memory has a dual nature. On the one hand, it seeks to demonstrate that an individual's memory itself always develops within a social framework and, on the other hand, it highlights the true and proper manifestations of collective memory, i.e. the way in which human groups, social classes, religious groups or families keep the memory of their past. Naturally, Halbwachs does not intend to question memory as a psychic function, but rather he opposes the sociological level of the collective to individual mental mechanisms.

Furthermore, for Halbwachs, memory is never merely preserved, but always reconstructed from the present. It is, in fact, the group to which the individual belongs that provides the tools to reconstruct the past: language, calendars, conventions, spaces, durations, etc. All these things make the past meaningful. The selectivity of memory, after all, is nothing more than the ability to order the sense of the past according to representations, visions of the world, symbols, or notions that allow social groups to think about the present.

Thus, there are three key passages in Halbwachs (Lavabre, 1998):

- a) The past is not preserved but reconstructed from the present;
- b) The memory of the past is possible only because of the social frameworks of reference that individuals possess;
- c) There is a social function of memory: the mythologised past is recalled to justify the present social representations.

A particularly relevant aspect, for our work, concerns the emphasis placed by Halbwachs on materiality. Memory, the French sociologist tells us, is inscribed in places and spaces (and in things) in which the groups in action in society recognise each other. In this sense, unlike history, which aims at a universal knowledge of the past through a unitary reconstruction of truth, collective memory is plural and multiform, because it is inscribed in the social times and in the differentiated spaces appropriated by groups.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, since individuals participate synchronously and diachronically in the social life of different groups, they will have an individual memory which is defined as the interference of different collective memories. Therefore, collective memory is not a sociological abstraction or a pure metaphor. It is not the unitary memory of a group on the model of individual memory and it is not a mere addition of individual memories. It is the precondition of the ability to remember for individuals and is, for this reason, able to guarantee a fundamental function of social integration.

The great Russian semiologist Yuri Lotman says that the memory of a society is its culture. More generally, the concept of culture is decisively intertwined with the concepts of memory, transmission, text and *semiosphere*.<sup>3</sup> For Lotman (2023), culture is memory because it is always linked to past experience and therefore always implies an intellectual continuity that develops at an individual and social level. Culture is the set of nongenetic information, the nonhereditary memory of humankind. However, it is an active and dynamic memory, not merely a documentary one. The destruction of memory is the destruction of a culture. From a political point of view, this aspect is central. Furthermore, in Lotman's semiotics, since culture is a function of the mnemonic operations that take place within it, it is also a function of the media, institutions and practices intrinsically linked to the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge (Ernst, 2018: 164).

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<sup>1</sup> In brief, we can distinguish between three conceptual fields of reference (Guzzi, 2004): 'collective', 'social' and 'cultural' memory. The first denotes groups' memory heritage characterised by powerful identity bonds - family, religious community, class. The 'social memory' concept denotes a wider communication sphere encompassing the arena within which the various collective memory discourses vie for relevance and plausibility. To a considerable extent this corresponds to the term 'public memory'. Lastly, 'cultural memory' denotes the past's influence over the present via symbolic legacies, rites and traditions.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Le Goff (1988) masterfully investigates this contrast between history and memory, refusing to dismiss the relationship between the two as merely opposing. Indeed, he defines history as the scientific form of collective memory, both based on documents and monuments.

<sup>3</sup> The continuum that makes social life, relations and communication possible is called the *semiosphere* by Lotman (1985), in analogy with the concept of *biosphere* - the ambit necessary for living beings for their biological survival.

Interestingly, the archaeologist Jan Assmann (1997) tells us about a ‘grand alliance’ between power and memory. He will say (*op. cit.*, p. 43): ‘A strong incentive for memory is power’ and, again, ‘Power needs an origin, a provenance’ (p. 44). However, also in this case, as in that of the cult of the dead, we are faced with a duality of the phenomenon: retrospective and prospective. Power must take possession of the past to have legitimacy, but it also wants to take possession of the future with its own performances, that is, it legitimizes itself retrospectively and immortalizes itself prospectively. Furthermore, duplicity within duplicity, since the other side of memory is oblivion, the alliance of power with memory is an alliance with oblivion. For this reason, we will also see it later, a decisive question for power concerns the definition of the perimeter of the so-called *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>4</sup>

If we insist on the biological metaphor, we could say that there is a social memory that is also a decisive source of immunisation for communities (De Martino, 2019). For example, the memory of disasters plays a complex and fundamental role in determining the way in which social groups deal with emergencies and crises (environmental, social, technological, etc.). In addition to having a highly symbolic function, capable of rebuilding the social and supportive fabric of a wounded community (Clavandier, 2004), ideally it should also help reduce the vulnerability of societies to the recurrence of catastrophic events.

However, as demonstrated by Bartlett (*op. cit.*), memory is not a perfect process, but a highly selective and ‘reconstructive’ one. Even social memory lends itself to distortions, interpretations, and manipulations (Pfister, 2009), ultimately representing a potential risk for the management of future catastrophes (D’ercole and Dolfuss, 1996). However, whilst a social group can share the same knowledge of past events, collective memory is ultimately always divided in its interpretations. Moreover, in cases referring to traumatic and tearing events for the community, which are extremely controversial, this can be a source of political and judicial conflict (Luchetti, 2022). There is a gap between the accepted version of the past, the past conserved in the archives, and the *under-reported* versions.

Assmann (1997) himself, on the other hand, had spoken of a contra-presentistic memory which pushes against the founding memory which legitimises the *status quo* thanks to the mythology constructed by the holders of power, and is aimed at expressing the dissatisfaction of certain social groups: the revolutionary movements, heretics, etc. These groups, by imagining a different past than the one celebrated by institutionalised power, build an imaginary memory projected towards a new order, a new social reality.

These traces play no part in event commemoration and express no capacity to forge memories. This is especially decisive in the official definition of catastrophe memories as Kaspersky brilliantly demonstrated (2012) in reference to the Chernobyl nuclear tragedy. The symbolic transmission of community allegiance is built on a putative past, a tradition. The past is used in various ways as if it were a resource. In fact,

The manner in which the past is invoked is strongly indicative of the kinds of circumstance which makes such a ‘past-reference’ salient. It is a selective construction of the past which resonates with contemporary influences (Cohen, 1985: 99).

Whilst the symbolic-identity narrative generally aims to over represent the collective memory’s homogeneity, coherence and internal harmony it is actually only rarely a monolithic entity. The existence of the community depends on the power of official and institutional symbols and on memory with selective re-elaborations designed to create functional, legitimising frameworks. It can also make use of memories as a tool in the struggle against political opponents or to legitimise specific power aspirations. *Damnatio memoriae* is a historical reconstruction constant in the collective memory (Wynter, 1998).

The media and journalists play an extremely significant part in the public-memory-shaping process. Drawing on Habermas’s thought, public memory can be considered a public sphere memory (Habermas, 2005). In some ways the public sphere is itself memory, as Paolo Jedlowski rightly argued (2018), as it only exists as a constant and diachronic dialogue between ideas and arguments, both past and present. But this is not all. The public sphere also encompasses and elaborates past discourses, arguments and narratives which are constantly marshalled to shore up theories, back up stances and support collective ideas and so on. Public memory is thus ultimately an ‘image of the past under public debate’. And it performs two fundamental functions: a) defining the ‘plausibility and relevance criteria’ by which traces of the past are selected from the vast patrimony available to groups and societies; b) delineating the arena in which group collective memories dialogue with one another, lose their self-referential quality and are subject to critical analysis.

Jedlowski interestingly acknowledged the fundamental importance of two key issues: the selection matrix at work in public memory, which inevitably tends to exclude certain stances and theories considered marginal, and the increasingly important role played by non-rational, identity-based or imaginary symbolic arguments.

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<sup>4</sup> In Roman law, *damnatio memoriae* was a penalty which consisted in the cancellation of traces concerning a particular person, as if he had never existed. It was a particularly harsh punishment, reserved only for traitors and *hostes*, the enemies of the Roman Senate.

The memory-journalism bond can seem counter-intuitive. Journalism has always been considered distinct from history and has itself always aspired to newsworthiness, a quality powerfully bound up with proximity, relevance and novelty (Zelizer, 2010). However, from the late 1980s onwards, collective memory studies have devoted a great deal of attention to journalism and the role it plays in shaping memories and the collective reconstruction of the past, because it is increasingly clear that group memories are powerfully influenced by themed agendas. Media sociologists, in particular, have increasingly highlighted a persistent preference on the part of journalists for events preceding currently-under-way news items. Three aspects of the past are journalistically appealing: commemoration, historical analogies, historical contexts. In this sense journalists can certainly be said to be 'memory agents' of great importance, although many journalists would probably reject such a definition.

For Lang and Lang (1989) collective memory selects from a set of images of the past which retain their historic relevance by means of a re-mediation process. In this sense journalism is fundamentally important memory work. The reference to the past in journalistic narrative is a constant quest to accord meaning to the present narrative, to connect-up, suggest inferences, create reference points with which to assess the impact of a given event and its magnitude, offer analogies and supply immediate explanations. It is very frequently precisely comparison with the past that makes news stories especially appealing. In this sense, for journalists the past is a decisive implicit backdrop to draw on to highlight foreground news reporting. In other words, for journalists the past is the most important knowledge store available to them to supply explanatory readings of the present (and future). It can thus, with Lang & Lang, be said that the past is the primary furnace in which public opinion is forged.<sup>5</sup>

An important part of journalistic narrative is based on traumatic events which the public is urgently seeking interpretative frameworks for. As has now been clearly demonstrated by trauma studies there is a powerful nexus between journalism, collective memory and collective trauma (Alexander et al., 2004; Meek, 2010). The tensions and critical issues feeding into the public debate which revolves around dramatic events are a reliable memory work generation indicator. The more controversial the events – such as disasters and catastrophes – the greater the recourse to journalistic memory and past narratives. Naturally this dialogue with the past is not always accurate. Quite the opposite. It can also be misleading and dangerous.

## **PUBLIC MEMORY, SOCIAL MEMORY, AND DISASTERS: DEATH IN MIGRATION AND THE CASE OF LAMPEDUSA**

As already discussed in the introduction, the main aim of this article is to re-read, from a memory studies perspective, the results of a case study already discussed (Nicolosi, 2018): the Lampedusa shipwreck.<sup>6</sup> The goal is to show how collective and public memories can contrast each other. To do that we decided to present the two opposing intertwining processes acting in that case study. In that research, we called the first process *materializing*, as it is based on the cultural elaboration of death in concrete and corporeal terms. On the contrary, we decided to call the second *dematerializing*, as it is based on the concealing and rarefying of the material aspects of death.

In order to do that, we compared the Italian media representations of the events of Lampedusa with the accounts related by the inhabitants of Lampedusa. With regard to the media, a qualitative analysis was carried out on texts and images produced by the news programmes broadcast by television channels (over a period of seven days) – Rai 3 (public television), La7 (private channel) and Sky (private digital TV) – and some articles published in the newspaper *La Repubblica* (over a period of 28 days), in the weeks following the boat disaster. With regard to the experiences of the inhabitants of Lampedusa, on May 2014 we carried out about 30 non-structured in-depth interviews with firsthand witnesses (emergency rescuers, teachers, priests, scuba divers, fishermen, institutional representatives).

### **Media Representation of Migration and the Events of Lampedusa**

Media representation is a form of social representation (Moscovici, 1961) and a process oriented towards a symbolic reconstruction of reality (Eco, 1964; Wolf, 1985). The media representation of migration in Italy

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<sup>5</sup> This fertile relationship is confirmed by the experience of Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) which recently (2012) set up an online service entirely devoted to past media for which it coined the term *retronews*. It is a website providing free access to 1500 printed items published from 1631 to 1950. *Retronews* is both a textbook digital consultation and archive space, a research tool and fully-fledged magazine – an opportunity to find out more about history via press archives - and, at the same time, a retrospective view of current events.

<sup>6</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 a fishing boat sailed from Misurata, Libya, overflowing with immigrants sank half a mile from the coast, due to a fire that had broken out on board. The shipwreck caused the death of about 400 people. It was not the most serious catastrophe in the Mediterranean Sea, but it was the only one with first-hand witnesses, the first (and the only) narrated by media, the first one producing social memory.

produced a broad socio-political debate and several empirical studies (Binotto et al., 2016; Censis, 2002; Corte, 2002; Cotesta, 1999; Dal Lago, 1999; Mansoubi, 1990; Morcellini, 2009; Musarò e Parmiggiani, 2014 and so on).

Although they show different perspectives they also have some important evidence in common. In particular, it would seem that newsmaking in Italy submits the migrant to a radical process of symbolic deindividuation. The techniques of representation often use an expressive, linguistic and iconic register shaped by a semantic structure negating the migrants' social identity (Nicolosi, 2007).

The tragic events of Lampedusa on 3 October 2013 reproduced the very same semantic configuration. Concerning the press, around 80% of the article we analysed followed the traditional de-individualizing register. In this narrative, death underwent a process of refined symbolic rarefaction. It is always 'between the lines' and never explicit. It is always detached from the identity of the involved people. Here, death remains a 'backdrop' detached from the bodily dimension of real corpses. It becomes immaterial, abstract, odourless and colourless.

In the case of images, the tendency was even more homogeneous. Media (press and television) used a 'tropical' iconographic regime based on a rhetorical 'translation'. Here, the corpses were metaphorized or 'rarefied' using synecdoche, metonymy, etc. Images shown on television were relics of the boats, flowers in the sea, coffins, coloured bags, groups of anonymous migrants, etc. In newspapers we saw fishing boats overflowing with migrants, remains of objects such as toys, instruments and utensils, documents, shoes, trousers, etc. All these objects are only traces. The real identities of migrants and their bodies were never revealed. The corpse disappears, it is present only in the background, as we said before.

### **Anatomy of the Social Memory (and Imagery) of Lampedusa Inhabitants**

The real experience of the people of Lampedusa shows a different frame. We carried out our interviews a year after the tragic events (May 2014) and we can say that on Lampedusa, death and its material dimension had a tremendous impact on the life of the island community. The power and the scale of the events violently dictated the most material features. Many fishermen who had taken part in the rescue operations were still not able to go out to sea to cast their nets.

The prevailing sentiment of the interviewees is that of abandonment, a feeling produced by the fact of being abandoned *with the corpses* of the migrants. From the interviews it clearly emerges that it was the concrete, physical presence of the corpses and the material difficulties linked to the management of this presence that marked the lives of the community. This material presence was symbolically elaborated and then expressed with various remembrances and mental images. We tried to categorise and present them using the words of the inhabitants.

The first rescuers were above all besieged by the shouts and cries of a multitude asking for help. B., a shipwright who had gone out to sea on the evening of 2 October to spend the night on the craft with some friends, found himself in the place of the shipwreck the following morning. He remembers having mistaken the screams for the cries of the shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*), birds that nest on the Pelagie islands, similar to seagulls, whose cry is reminiscent of the desperate cry of an infant:

what happened? So it was then that he started to say: I can hear screams! I said: look, with all these seagulls ... 'No no no I can hear shouting, I hear shouting' [...] and, while we were going out into the open sea I told him: 'See, A., shearwaters, seagulls, shearwaters, seagulls' but then ... after a minute there were no shearwaters or seagulls. All these arms reaching up for the sky, these young men of colour who were desperately shouting out for help. And, well; then we understood that the sea was full of them and we understood the scale of the tragedy taking place.

Another significant issue emerging from the accounts was what we called the dilemma of choice, here lived as a corporeal fact. The drowning victims in fact were pleading for help, arms flailing, begging to be pulled aboard the boat to safety. For the rescuers, this meant the burden of a terrible choice, deciding who should be 'drowned' and who should be 'saved'. This was a choice conditioned by material contact with the bodies of one with the bodies of the other; a contact whose memory is seared on the conscience of those who found themselves there. As Z., a fisherman, explained:

it's hard to get a word out of him these days. One of his brothers doesn't go fishing any more because two or three of the people he was trying to save just slipped right through his hands. Two kids as well, do you see? This thing has stayed with him; he just can't get over it and has fallen into depression. Guys, this morning he was sitting right here, but he seemed to me just like a mummy.

The fact of bodies slipping away towards death is one of the main dramatic aspects of the accounts. It happened often as the bodies of the migrants were covered in petrol and therefore particularly slippery. The onus of choice returns in other accounts but from a different perspective. For example, the doctor of the town is moved to tears

while narrating the story of a father who is forced to choose which of his two sons to sacrifice in order to save the life of the other son and that of his wife:

he told me a story, that would have been better if he hadn't. What I mean is, there were four of them and they had a little 3-year-old son. Don't ask me to tell you these things because it makes me feel ill... Because he says 'I am a good swimmer', he had his wife on one arm, the older boy on the other and the youngest on his chest. Then he got tired, obviously, and had to leave the elder son... D' you see? ... So when you lot ask me about these things I feel ill.

Another powerful issue reported in the accounts we collected is that of the strong smell emanating from the corpses of the migrants (*lu càuru di mortu*). These corpses were collected in plastic bags and then placed in coffins in the hangar of the airport for some weeks. G. related that:

Really, if you went by the road to the airport you could smell the smell of death, you felt a really strange sensation. There were people who had to leave that area for a while because you could smell ...

S., on the other hand, underlined that:

Compared to the deaths that have taken place here, especially that of the last one, which was the most visible: bodies were laid out along the pier, they were left in the hangar for a long time, many weeks ... what a stink! I lived in front of the hangar so ... whoever went by there could smell the odour of death, so it was tangible this time, in a physical way ... death was present.

Importantly, A., who coordinated the organization of the process to put the corpses into coffins spoke of nightmares and waking up during the night. Again, the main feature here is the smell:

possibly it is hard to believe, only from the telling, because who has not seen, who has not lived though this experience first hand... I tell you again, still today I wake up at night with the smell, really. And I say: what is that smell?

The presence among the corpses of several young infants and children (*i picciriddi*) provoked a shared commotion defined by the interviewees as a 'delirium'. This had strong impact on the collective memory of the island. One of the most common images discussed by the interviewees concerns finding on the seafloor a mother with her child in her arms, holding her hand over his mouth in a last desperate attempt to save his life by avoiding drowning. She was depicted also by the media as a sort of *Pietà* of modern times.

G., remembering the incredibly hard work carried out by the deep-sea divers mobilized (many novices) from all over Italy:

No no no, I spoke to someone from Catania who told me 'I don't think I'll be able to go underwater for at least a year' ... because of what they found down there, because they found many mothers with their children. They saw the worst, if you really want to know: they saw mothers, some young girls who had gone into labour, about to give birth, with the babies still attached; a massacre.

The doctor who examined the corpses underlined this feeling with this particular emphasis:

it isn't true that you get used to it, absolutely not ... most of all concerning the young children and babies [...] they bring them to you immediately during a boat tragedy, as happened in October 2013, you're having trouble [understanding if the child is alive], and so they just give them to me to hold, as if they were alive, to look over them intensely, to try and figure out if there's a breath of life left in them. And this image remains impressed on your brain and then you relive it every now and then, often when you're relaxed and in bed, at home, you relive all these things.

Food and death linkage is a fundamental anthropological topic. In Lampedusa, many people remember facts considered as a violation of an archetypal *taboo* for cultural integrity of a closely knit social group: the contact and the contamination of the community's food with the 'impure' remains of the migrants' (the foreign) corpses. Particularly, two events were frequently related by interviewees. The first one concerns the deployment of the refrigerated lorries, generally used to transport fish and food stuff, for transferring the corpses. G. is very clear on this point:

All these people left us with no means of transport, I mean, how were we supposed to transport these bodies from the sea to the hangar? The divers recovered the bodies and laid them on the quay. Where were we supposed to put these bodies? So in the end they had to ask the help of our fishermen with



their refrigerated lorries. I mean, can you believe that? What a fiasco [...] I'll just tell you that when we saw our lorries go by, which we recognized, all the water coming out from underneath where the bodies were ... I mean ... words fail me.

The second event concerns the bodies and corpses that were not retrieved from the sea. T., a teacher at the local, high school, explains this quite clearly:

We were talking about fish with my pupils last year, and then I asked the kids something that really had nothing to do with the lesson: 'Where should we buy fish? Directly from the port? In the fish market, or here? Well, as it was the period when there had been a lot of migrant boats arriving ashore, a boy said to me 'What's important is that you don't buy bluefish' [...] And I thought 'Why?' And, well, they explained to me that when there are migrant boat disasters they never eat bluefish, because bluefish are carnivorous: and so these bodies that are in the sea, perhaps ... in fact, he said, sometimes it happens that in the nets the fisherman find a head, a leg, an arm, a piece of chest, all eaten by fish and the fish that eat immigrants are bluefish.

Finally, what strongly marked the collective memory of Lampedusa inhabitants was the choice to move the migrants' coffins, loading them onto a ship with a crane, even before they were all identified. S. defines the scene of this phase of the material 'management' of the corpses as surreal, Pirandello-esque:

but the absurd thing at the last moment is that some relatives had obtained authorization to identify the bodies while they were carrying the coffins of their relatives from the hangar towards the port, and they were putting them on board with a crane [...] and at a certain point all the relatives came to get the coffins off the ship again, crying, despairing, and so they stopped to identify the bodies, put a flower ...

The apotheosis of this process was on the day of the funerals. Once again it was the material body (its absence, here) that defines its boundaries. In fact, the Italian government, for 'logistical' reasons, decided to organize it in the mainland (Agrigento) and, above all, *without* the corpses of the migrants. S., a sociologist with the non-profit organization Caritas operating on Lampedusa, defined this fact a sort of *coitus interruptus* that blocked the freeing of negative energies that had accumulated over the preceding weeks. Surely it dramatically interrupted the process of elaboration of mourning that the community of Lampedusa was experiencing, together with the families of the deceased migrants.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ten years after the Lampedusa tragedy, the dramatic shipwreck that occurred on the beaches of Cutro somehow reactivated public memory of the events of October 3, 2013. Many Italian and foreign media evoked the events of Lampedusa, and the parallel animated public debate. The element that unifies the two dramatic shipwrecks is the same 'dyscrasia of the imaginary'. On the one hand, that of the local community is once again defined around the materiality of death, its alienating emotional power. On the other, the one built in the media on the rarefaction and metaphorization of migrant bodies.

As mentioned in the introduction, collective memory is not the unitary memory of a group on the model of individual memory, and it is not a mere addition of individual memories. At the same time, the collective memory's homogeneity, coherence and internal harmony is a very rare condition. This is especially true when we face traumatic, highly symbolic, and inevitably divisive events.

The memory of disasters is not a monolithic entity. Based on Rothberg's theory (2011), we defined it as 'multidirectional'. In a world characterized by technologically mediated communication flows, the memory of a traumatic event does not belong only to the community that suffered the event itself. In this complex and heterogeneous process, the public memory produced by the media plays a central role. The memories of local communities who have directly experienced a certain catastrophe could remain under-reported. In our opinion, this is a very important challenge for the management of future disasters. Equally, it is a potential source for the political manipulation of collective memory. This is why in this article we would like to reinterpret the evidence collected in the research carried out in 2014 on the Lampedusa shipwreck that took place on 3 October 2013 (Nicolosi, 2018). The aim is to reflect on the dynamics between different types of memories in the framework of the memory of disasters.

The empirical analysis of the two forms of memory produced, the collective memory of the inhabitants of Lampedusa and the public memory of the Italian media, led us to emphasize their profound difference which we tried to represent along the oppositional *materialization/dematerialization* axis. The choice of this contrast is obviously full of meaning, because it appears somehow counterintuitive, to the point of creating an interesting tangle of

oxymorons. As a matter of fact, in scientific literature, public memory is usually considered in some way the material dimension of collective memory.

In fact, we can consider the notion of public memory to be halfway between collective memory and official memory. We know that there are few traces in the social sciences theorizing the notion of public memory, the notion of collective memory remaining largely dominant. However, a notion that in my opinion deserves to be mentioned is that of the sociologist Olivier Roueff (2013), who proposes a pragmatist conceptualization of public memory as a regime of availability.

This expression aims to emphasize the materiality of collective memory. Here, we start from the traces, materials from the past which are concretely available and can be grasped in different contexts as memorial signs and constituted as a history of a group, a practice, an institution, etc. It is this material availability which defines its public character. This definition seeks to move away from mentalism, thanks to the importance given to the materiality of memorial signs, available depending on the uses in contextualized practices. Public memory can be distinguished from collective memory in several ways.

On the one hand, if we consider collective memory as the production and transmission of common memories within the intermediate groups (families, churches, etc.), we speak of public memory to designate groups which publicly problematize a memory and identity disorder and, where appropriate, request recognition (compassion, repentance, reparations, etc.) from the official authorities and translation of their demands in memory politics. Here, we have a public memory awaiting official memory.

More importantly, the notion of public memory demands *proofs* of memory in the sense that, on the one hand, memories can be the subject of controversies, of disputes in public arenas exposed to telling, arguing, interpreting, showing, etc. The materiality of its production and transmission needs mnemotechnics and memento-technologies. Far from being axiologically neutral, these memory technologies are most often the subject of controversy and dispute. Like for the *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1984), controversy can concern the choice of their location, the administrators of the place, the symbolism conveyed, etc.

On a theoretical level it is interesting to note the specific nature of media communication, which has a double condition of social representation and public memory. Indeed, collective memory and social representations are two phenomena whose kinship and affinity are demonstrated on a theoretical and empirical level by at least three common characteristics (Viaud, 2003): a) the fundamental role played by communication (Moscovici, 1961); b) the role played by group identities and memberships in defining the orientation of both (Halbwachs, 1925, 1950); c) the weight of the natural language in their definition (Jodelet, 1989).

Theorizing the notion of social frameworks of memory or collective memory, Halbwachs (1925, 1950) proposed a sociology of remember-with opposed to Bergson's thesis of a reduplication of the past in the present. Halbwachs opened the way for the analysis of reconstruction of the past according to the horizons of meaning of the present. Sometimes this perspective seems to propose a reified meta-subject which would impose itself on individual memories.<sup>7</sup> In order to overcome this limitation, we assumed a processual interpretation of collective memory (Bastide, 1970). In this interpretation, we can consider the memory phenomenon, not as an already constituted object or as a phenomenon reduced to its indexation to an already constituted back-world (social frameworks, social structures, force fields, etc.), but as something *en-train-de-se-faire*.

In this article we assume that media and journalism play an extremely significant part in the public-memory-shaping process. Public memory can be considered a public sphere memory, and, in some ways, the public sphere is itself memory, as Paolo Jedlowski (2018) rightly argued. Public memory is thus ultimately an 'image of the past under public debate'.

It is interesting to note how the public media memory of the Lampedusa events materializes a collective memory by dematerializing it. The tension towards the officialization of collective memory here is therefore based on the dematerialization of the Lampedusa inhabitant's social memory, with important social and political consequences. Particularly, the symbolic rarefaction of death means that it is always detached from the identities of the involved people. Here, I would like to emphasize that this process is deeply distortive as it promotes three main interrelated memory biases: a) deindividualization (loss of identity); b) the erosion of the tragic dimension of migration phenomena; c) social irresponsibility.

In order to understand the impact of the first and the second bias, we could consider, using the *a contrario* argument, the consequences of the publication of the images of the death of Aylan Kurdi. Here, it is possible to see the effects on public opinion and decision makers of showing the death and the identity of migrants involved in catastrophic events.<sup>8</sup> The picture of Aylan Kurdi's death has remained one of the most iconic images of international collective memory on migration. Taken up by artists, intellectuals, philosophers, and journalists, it

<sup>7</sup> The same criticism is often made of Durkheim's theory of social representation.

<sup>8</sup> We remember that following its publication, several governments, such as Germany and England, decided to open the doors to a significant number of refugees and, more generally, a very critical public debate was activated regarding European immigration policies.

remains the most symbolic image of the migratory tragedy. Many years later it continues to exert an important influence on public opinion, unlike the many similar images never published.

What explains the influence still exerted by this photograph these days? As we said, usually news-making on migration produces a radical symbolic deindividualization process. Representation techniques and images are based on an expressive, iconic, and linguistic register denying social identities of migrants. On the contrary, thanks to that picture, our memory of Aylan Kurdi is built around his identity. In a very simple way, the photo presents a small child with whom we can all identify thanks to his common and recognizable clothing (the shorts, the shoes) and his somatic features, barely glimpsed. Aylan, whose name, and face are known, looks like anyone's kid. Furthermore, the image presents an essential iconographic structure, which shows an evident plastic and semantic asymmetry. On the one hand, the incurable drama of the death of a child, on the other, the cold and bureaucratic, yet embarrassed, acknowledgment of an impotent official. This photo swiftly became a symbolic representation of the ongoing clash between the legitimate hope of a better future (with which we all identify in times of crisis) and the indifference of a technostucture unable to enter into harmony with the world.

The body of Aylan reminds us that we must abandon the reassuring belief that migration is a 'mechanical' problem, of moving from one point of the globe to another. This is the watershed. It forces us to ask ourselves what could push fathers and mothers to get to the point of risking the lives of their children to reach Europe. It shifts the focus from the fact (mechanical delocalization) and the alleged consequences (crime, unemployment, terrorism, etc.) to the background: what terrible condition could push me to risk so much? In this sense, this photo identifies the crisis, giving it a human and tragic face. It takes it out of the abstract and rarefied dimension that characterized the media representation of the death in migration like in the Lampedusa tragedy. It represents its counterpart and (demonstrates) all the implications of the neutralized narrative of the Lampedusa events.

About the third presented bias (social irresponsibility), public memory appears anchored to a narrative dramatization based on metaphors referring to impersonal events, without any possible 'subjectivization'. Public memory is dotted with verbal and iconographic metaphors that refer to an emergency paradigm: 'invasion', 'horde', 'mass'. Often the metaphorization refers to natural cataclysms: 'tsunami', 'wave', 'storm', etc. Like in the case of Lampedusa media narration, newspaper articles dedicated very little space to direct first-hand accounts of the migrants. There are very few subjective and autonomous connotations (migrants are generally discussed as a group, whose homogeneity is debatable). There is a strong tendency to polarize the figure of the migrant in a dichotomous representation as positive (victim) or negative (guilty): 'helpless protagonist of journeys of hope' / 'criminal enemy'.

It is important to note that the most used metaphors are negative: securitarian (criminality, terrorism), or sanitary (dirt, diseases, infection, contamination), even if statistical data show a very different reality. This negative emergency discourse exploits fears, prejudices, stereotypes and economic concerns of the native population and it is a fundamental political resource in the hands of several 'entrepreneurs of fear' (political actors such as the Front National in France, Lega and Fratelli d'Italia in Italy, and so on) able to successfully capitalize the outcomes of a climate of terror.

But when the polarization is positive, as in the case of Lampedusa shipwreck narration, the media organize public memory around the suppression of migrant bodies and identities, vehiculating a dangerous self-absolving and consolatory interpretative frame: a migration emergency linked to external and impersonal causes against which we have no chance of intervening. This emergency refers to an almost 'meteorological' exceptionality: it's like a flood, a tsunami, a storm. Against this exceptional emergency, what can we do? Little or nothing. We can only buffer or limit the damage, waiting for it to end. Deaths at sea are not our responsibility. They are caused by recklessness, desperation, and the unscrupulous trafficking of smugglers. The production of a rarefied and metaphorized memory supports the cultural paradigm of social irresponsibility based on a systematic and symbolic 'concealment of a corpse' (Nicolosi, 2018b).

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## Music Between Work and Leisure: The Case of a Collective from Fortaleza, Brazil

Pedro Menezes <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Porto*, PORTUGAL

\*Corresponding Author: [pedromenezes89@gmail.com](mailto:pedromenezes89@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Lado B is a collective of musicians from Fortaleza, Brazil, that holds monthly festivals in a public cultural center. Aiming at some self-sufficiency, Lado B organizes its festivals according to a kind of adiabatic circuit, which works as follows: at a given festival, each member of the collective is in charge of a function that is necessary for the realization of that particular event. At each new festival, each member of the group performs a task different from the role played at the previous festival; that is to say, members alternate themselves in the many roles as the festivals go on, until each individual has gone through each duty at a given festival. Once everyone has done everything, the cycle restarts. Music is not the main activity of any of those artists, so they all need to keep a day job. This situation creates a divergence on Lado B: while some see the collective as a second job, others face it as a leisure activity. In other words, one segment creates a relation of continuity between life and art, submitting music to the logic of routine, and the other faction establishes a rupture between life and art, as if culture was the ordinary world upside down. Based on interviews with members of Lado B, I ask: is music a job or a leisure activity? I intend to inscribe this question within the broader debate about the relationship between life and art, everyday life and culture, routine and spirit, asceticism and pleasure, functionalism and rebellion, pragmatism and madness. Thus, in a broad sense, I question: what is the relation between life and art? Are they irreconcilable or interdependent? Equal or opposed? Do they struggle against or reinforce each other?

**Keywords:** leisure, independent music, day job

### INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the discussion on how musicians who need to keep a day job view their artistic careers. Given that they have the means to earn a living, how do these artists face their activities in the cultural field? As the following analysis demonstrates, there are two main ways for those who need to combine day jobs and music: in the first case, the music career is a continuity of the job, another job, a business; in the second, music is seen as a rupture from the job, a denial of the job, a kind of leisure.

From a comprehensive perspective, I intend to enroll this specific question in the broader debate of the relation between life and art, quotidian existence and culture, routine and spirit, asceticism and pleasure, functionalism and rebellion, pragmatism and madness. According to this wider view, I ask the following questions: what is the relation between art and life? Are they irreconcilable or interdependent? Equal or opposite? Are they mutually reinforcing or dueling against each other?

In order to materialize so ethereal, almost existential, questions, I will analyze the dilemmas in a concrete case study: The *Lado B* (B-Side), a music collective from Fortaleza, a metropolis with a population of approximately 2.6 million people, located in northeastern Brazil.

Finally, I would like to question the supposed centrality of a factor that is hurriedly regarded as a determinant in this problematic: money. When dealing with the controversy between a profitable work and music (in this case, an unpaid activity that is either regarded as development or as a denial of the day job), supposedly money would play a defining role. Actually, it is considerably important. However, as I will explain, it is not the only or the prevailing variable in this equation. Not only the excess but also the lack of money provides good reasons to make music either as continuity or rupture from the realm of labor.

According to what will be demonstrated, among those interviewed for this article, some musicians have considerable sums of money, while others have very scarce financial resources. However, in both groups, there are some artists who view their careers as a job and others who consider their work as leisure. So, by associating the financial variable with the way the musicians perceive their activities, we can divide our empirical outline in four parts: more money/music as a job, less money/music as a job, more money/ music as leisure, and less money/music as leisure.

Before delving into this debate, it is important to mention some theoretical and methodological considerations.

### **Methods and Techniques**

This article is a development from my doctoral thesis, defended in May 2023. In my broader research, I studied the Centro Cultural Belchior (CCBel), a public cultural facility dedicated to music and located in Fortaleza, capital of the state of Ceará. My main concern was to understand the affinities and tensions between the three participants in charge of CCBel: the municipality, that founded the center in 2017, finances the activities, and owns the premises; the Instituto Cultural Iracema (ICI), a civil society organization hired by the local government to manage the center; and the musical collectives that provide the house's prime cultural product – the free monthly live music festivals. Obviously, the Municipality - ICI - Collectives triangle that supports CCBel is only one instance of the configuration found in other cultural facilities: the State – organized civil society – artists.

Several data collection techniques were employed for the research. Two of those tools relate to the content of this article: the semi-structured interviews and the reconstruction of biographical trajectories.

Altogether, fifty interviews were conducted with members of the local government, of the ICI, and of the musical collectives. Unfortunately, the length of an article does not allow me to quote extensively from a wider range of transcriptions, but my conclusions are based on the statements of the musicians.

The four categories mentioned above that associate the financial variable with how the musical activity is perceived are examples of Weberian ideal types (Weber, 2012 [1922]). Therefore, their value is rather heuristic, archetypical, and methodological, than empirical, concrete, and ontological; that is, they are arrows and not footprints on the sand, unidirectional possibilities and not trails effectively followed in tortuous and erratic ways. To make up for the coldness of these analytical categories, I decided to fill them with cases that illustrate these typologies more or less faithfully. I sought in the biographical trajectories the best concrete and substantial materialization of our models. Summing up, the ideal types are the form, and the biographies are the contents that embody, incarnate and give life to those frames.

### **An Old Debate**

The discussion about work and leisure seems trivial; however, each of these commonly used words evokes its respective glossary of concepts, dear to the sociological theory. Work represents functionalism, utilitarianism, asceticism, pragmatism, finalism, and rationality (Weber, 2007 [1904]). Meanwhile, leisure embodies the opposite of those notions: gratuity, uselessness, excess, lack of purpose, or the end in itself (Bourdieu, 2007 [1979]; Veblen, 1987 [1899]).

Those are the terms that are at base of Max Weber's (2007 [1904]) theory of rationalization, which, we must recall, the sociologist applied to the language discussed in this article: music (Weber, 1995 [1956]). According to Weber, rationalization is marked by two dynamics: internal and external. Internally, there is homogeneity and levelling: rationalization struggles to create a "flat" and "indivisible" space within its perimeter. Though externally, there is heterogeneity and rupture: when relating to other processes, rationalization seeks to distinguish itself from them by reinforcing its boundaries and reassuring its typical, native and exclusive traits. Ultimately, rationalization protects its own characteristics, the ones that make it what it is and not what it is not (or what others are). So, rationalization generates differentiation, not sameness. As we can see, the differentiation dynamics of rationalization in relation to other regimes happens through retreat, not spreading; through concentration, not dispersion. In other words, to be what it is, rationalization will not project itself over other spheres and try to conquer them. On the contrary, it will remain enclosed within itself, keeping inside its walls the autochthonous elements other spheres lack and that make it what it is. So, as we intended to demonstrate, rationalization will not



generate universalization, homogeneity, and expansion, but particularity, heterogeneity, and restriction. Rationalization creates specificity, a typicality constrained by centripetal forces, not a generality liberated by centrifugal forces.

The described dynamics of rationalization is the one discussed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 2007 [1904]), Weber's groundbreaking work, in which the author broaches not only the emergence of the objective distinction between work and leisure, but also deals with the constitution of the subjectivity to suit this new structure, and, finally, shows how both interlace.

Often, we come across the mistaken conclusion that the sociologist has said that the Protestant ethic "caused" the spirit of capitalism. It is unnecessary to delve into Weber's book to rectify such a statement, for the chronology of the historical facts by itself clarifies the matter: Protestantism could not have generated capitalism because it did not precede capitalism. Actually, according to Weber, the relationship between Calvinism and the modern phase of the capitalist mode of production (to which the sociologist applies the concept we focus here: rational) is not that of cause and consequence, but of "elective affinity", that is, of mutual approximation between a given subjectivity and a certain structural order, or, to mention Bourdieu (2007 [1979]), between a vision of the world and the world itself. By deliberately trying to create the ideal type of Protestant, "unwillingly", Calvinism ends up forging the archetypical capitalist soul or the individual with the adequate mentality for the rising rational phase of that production mode. As stated by the author, the disillusioned world that arose from the theory of predestination, associated with the stimulus to methodical work and ascetic frugality as a means to promote the salvation of souls, even if applied to religious purposes, conjured up not only the sole, dispassionate, conscience, but also the call to rational and disciplined action regarding work and spending, aiming at enrichment. Such volitions are nothing but the ingredients of the "iron cage" (Weber, 2007 [1904]) in which lives the capitalist ideal type.

Still in German sociology, the binomial work/leisure is also an object of Adorno's studies (2008 [1974]). Adopting his own negative dialectics, the author claims that this supposed distinction is, in fact, a nondifferentiation, since the separation between work and leisure submits the latter to the logic of the former, reducing idleness to a mere preparative whose main purpose is returning us to the job.

Switching from Germany to France, we find the subject in Marcel Mauss' essay about the gift (2017 [1925]). Analyzing the object exchange ceremonies in different cultures – Kula among them, widely discussed by Malinowski (2016 [1922]) – Mauss points out that the exchanges dismiss the utilitarian calculations of commercial trades and are fit for ceremonial and symbolic purposes. The Potlatch type ceremonies are emphasized because, in general, the loser is the one who gains the most: in a given exchange of artifacts, the less interested in earning or acquiring material benefits is distinguished as morally superior to the opponents.

Utilitarianism and disinterest as insignia of social and symbolic distinction is a central problem in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology (2007 [1979]). To the author, while the heirs of the Calvinist ethics analyzed by Weber (2007 [1904]) are proud of their methodical asceticism, others have transformed hedonism, waste, idleness, and indifference for the mundane dynamics in emblems of aesthetical and ethical superiority. Here, Bourdieu continues Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1987 [1899]), in which these questions had already been introduced.

It is especially interesting to this article that Bourdieu (1996) has shown how the cultural field adheres to this logic (illogical for those who do not share it) of disinterest. According to the author, the cultural field is an "upside down world" ruled by a kind of "anti-economy", that is, instead of adopting the principles that organize the quotidian life (pragmatism, functionalism, finalism, profit maximization and loss reduction), art stigmatizes these values and fosters their nemeses (gratuity, uselessness, waste, madness). To the sociologist, it so happens because the art field is in search for autonomy and, as such, it needs to nurture its own capital and expel the capital of other fields. By revering traits the common sense rejects and repelling characteristics the "real world" praises, the art field tries to establish its own autonomous field, with its own capital and rules, different from those of the other fields, notably, the economic field. If economy celebrates the accumulation resulting from rational calculation and condemns the expenditure derived from improvidence, art operates the other way around, awarding irresponsibility and ridiculing the ascetic prudence. In fact, it is not as if economy is sane and art, senile; they both are guided by reason, but each one has its own reason, which is the other's unreason (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]).

I intend to dialogue with those theories when discussing work and leisure with a musical collective in Fortaleza.

## THE ADIABATIC CIRCUIT

The seed of the *Coletivo Lado B* (B-Side Collective) is the *Rock Sim, Ele Não* (Yes to Rock, Not Him) music festival that took place on October 27th of 2018, in protest against the far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro. Thirteen bands and solo musicians performed at the event: Berg Menezes, Caike Falcão, Cid, Indigo Mood, Jangada Pirata, Lemori, Mad Monkees, Musavenal, Ouse, Pulso de Marte, Rematte, Void Tripper and Zéis. *Rock Sim, Ele Não* (RSEN) was entirely organized by the artists themselves, with no external funding or sponsorship: while someone was playing, the others were backstage, taking care of the ongoing show. After each

performance, the musician would take over a task behind the curtains and someone else would step on the stage. And all they did was hire an electric generator and play at the public promenade of *Praia de Iracema* (Iracema Beach), the most famous picture-postcard place in Fortaleza.

In the afterglow of RSEN's great success, the musicians who organized the event decided to keep setting up festivals in that same pattern. And, so, *Coletivo Lado B* was born. Thus, we can say that the collective turned perennial and systematic the union and the action that at first seemed ephemeral and specific.

From a practical point of view, *Coletivo Lado B* can be defined as a net or cooperative of musicians, similar to a "band of bands" who gathered to unify their demands, to increase their presence and visibility to the audience and the public sector, and, mainly, to become self-sustaining. Actually, the net or cooperative work that defines *Coletivo Lado B* operates as following: the collective organizes periodical festivals and each member takes on a necessary task to set up that particular event. At every new festival the musicians are responsible for different roles from the position they had in the previous event. So, they take turns in a rotating schedule and the cycle restarts when each individual has experienced every single task it takes to set up the concerts. For instance, hypothetically, at a given festival Berg Menezes plays, Caike takes care of the soundboard, Zéis does the lighting, and Pulso de Marte applauds from the audience. On the next event, Pulso will perform, Berg will do the audio mixing, Caike will take over the lighting, Zéis will join the public, and so on.

For operating in this closed system or adiabatic circuit, *Coletivo Lado B* does achieve a relative self-sufficiency, due to the fact that the group needs only its own members to organize the festivals, without any external help or support. According to this pattern, the participants are, alternately, professional colleagues, rivals, clients, bosses, employees or even the audience, in a reciprocal way (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]).

It is relevant to emphasize that what I call "the collective's adiabatic circuit" encompasses not only the active work of organizing a festival (playing, taking care of lighting and soundboards, logistics concerning catering and transportation, and all the bureaucratic red tape), but also the passive role that is the very essence of a concert, one the show cannot happen without: the audience that attends the festivals. So, besides taking turns accomplishing the productive tasks required to set up the festivals, the musicians alternately join their colleagues' audience as well. So, by completing the chain that starts on stage, goes through all backstage chores, and finishes in the audience, the collective members intend to work in a fully independent way.

The adiabatic circuit, a system that is closed in itself in order to achieve self-sufficiency, was not created by *Lado B*. In fact, it is a rather traditional artistic strategy. In the music field, it appears more explicitly in the American (Azerrad, 2018 [2001]) and British (Hesmondhalgh, 1997; King, 2017 [2012]; Ogg, 2016 [2009]; Reynolds, 2019 [2005]; Strachan, 2017; Worley, 2017) post-punk scenes, more precisely from 1978 to the mid 1980s. During this period, artists, regional scale labels (managed either by the musicians themselves or by daring entrepreneurs who, allegedly, were more strongly committed to ethical and esthetical rather than financial values) and small distributors tried to articulate a net to operate in parallel to the mainstream music industry, an extremely lucrative, exclusionary business, and also an oligopolistic market controlled by big record labels, the so-called "majors" (Hesmondhalgh, 2019).

Shifting the view from music to other artistic fields, the specialized literature registers far more ancient occurrences of such tactics of creating an enclosed whole whose parts alternately perform the necessary functions to maintain its existence, regardless of any external support. Sticking to the Bourdieusian sociology, there we find the adiabatic circuit in the so-called "society of artists" that marked the French literary field in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]).

But the society of artists is not only the laboratory where this very particular 'art of living', which is the artist's life style, the fundamental dimension of the artistic creation enterprise, is invented. One of its main purposes, yet always ignored, is being to itself its own market. It offers to the audacities and transgressions writers and artists introduce not only in their work, but also in their existence, conceived too as work of art, the most favorable and understanding welcome (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992], p. 75).

Though theoretically it seemed to be a good idea, *Lado B*'s adiabatic circuit faced some hardships when practically applied.

### **The Adiabatic (Short) Circuit**

The first *Lado B* Festival happened on December 15<sup>th</sup> of 2018. From this day, every month, a new edition of the concert took place. All was done as it had been in RSEN, the milestone of the entire undertaking. All but one important detail: while the concert against Bolsonaro had happened at a public urban promenade, the *Lado B* Festivals were hosted by Centro Cultural Belchior (CCBel), the aforementioned cultural facility owned by the local government, located very close to the site where RSEN had occurred.

Since the first edition at the premises of CCBel, bands and artists who had not participated in the RSEN concert were able to perform at the *Lado B* Festivals. Given such expansion it is fair to ask: which and how many musicians

belong to the *Lado B* collective? Though apparently simple, this question arouses a heated debate. Before providing an answer, it is important to learn what an artist should do to be considered a *Lado B* member. Or even before that: what does it mean, to “belong” to *Lado B*? In interviews with different musicians who performed at the *Lado B* Festivals, I asked if and why they regarded themselves as full members of the group. The answers were widely different: there are as many musicians who openly associate with the collective as there are artists who feel they do not belong in the team. In both cases, the definition of what it means to be or not to be a part of the collective was based on the same criteria: in or out of *Lado B*'s boundaries, all musicians agree that belonging to the collective means abiding by the adiabatic circuit system applied to the festivals. Therefore, those who go through the entire chain of functions are the actual members of the team, while those who just play in the concerts and do not return to support their colleagues' performances in the following editions are not. This definition of collective is generally accepted: those who take turns in assuming the multiple tasks in the chain see themselves as members of the collective and question the actual belongingness of others, that come by, occasionally, just to play. The latter, on the other hand, humbly admit their affiliation with the team is rather questionable for the same reason and acknowledge that the ones that go through the whole adiabatic system are the legitimate warriors of the group.

Despite the fact that many musicians admit, with no embarrassment, that they approach *Lado B* with the sole interest in just playing, ignoring the work behind the curtains, such attitude is strongly criticized by those who participate in all tasks. In other words, the ones who obey the adiabatic circuit resent the others who don't.

Vitor, from the band Canil, goes as far as creating a difference between “hard core of the collective”, to which he supposedly belonged, composed by the artists that are strongly committed to the project and respect the adiabatic circuit, and the “outskirts” for the others, to whom the whole idea of *Lado B* does not make very much sense.

According to Vitor's concepts, to the hardcore, the one thing that impairs the collective's viability is the satellites' lack of commitment to the adiabatic circuit; to the satellites, it is the hard core's demands for submission to an exhausting work regime that implodes the group. Paradoxically, the primacy of the union is, by itself, the factor that generates disunion. But, after all, who is right? In elaborate terms: is *Lado B* commitment or entertainment? Work or pleasure? Business or leisure?

## LEISURE AND BUSINESS

Considering the discussion mentioned above, we may summarize the debate in the following conclusion: the inner circle of *Coletivo Lado B* is composed by the musicians who respect the adiabatic circuit, that is, who perform on their own concerts and work backstage for their colleagues' performances. They reaffirm the collective's existence and limits and are acknowledged by themselves and all others as the legitimate members of *Lado B*. The outer circle of the collective is formed by the artists that do not go by the adiabatic circuit: they just deliver their own performance and do not work backstage for the other musicians' concerts. Those of the outer circle do not have a clear understanding about the collective's boundaries and do not see themselves as part of the team. But why do some abide by the rules of the adiabatic circuit and others do not?

On the contrary of what a quick look would suggest, followers and traitors of the adiabatic circuit are equally interested in music. Both groups regard this form of expression as the most important dimension of their lives, but they show this devotion in different ways: those who go by the rules of the closed system, as well as those who do not, are all driven by the love for music. The difference between the two ways this shared love is displayed is based on how each member relates to their music career and day job. Let's go back to this.

Not one member of *Lado B* makes a living out of music. Actually, the truth is quite the opposite: they all spend on their art more than they earn from it, so they need a job to provide for their lives and for their music careers. The way each musician relates the lucrative job to the unprofitable onstage work is a major determinant of the participant's engagement to the adiabatic circuit.

To both kinds of profile of those affiliated with *Lado B*, money and pleasure have always been divorced: music gives satisfaction, but does not put food on the table; work fills the stomach, but empties the spirit. This is true not only for those who adhere to the adiabatic circuit, but also for those who do not. The difference resides in how each one deals with the loose ends: the first group brings them together, the latter draws them apart. For those who go by the circuit, music is a synonym and a substitute for work, it replaces work: it is business. For those who disobey the collective dynamics, music is the opposite, the alternative to work, it is beyond work: it is leisure.

For the practitioners of the work chain, the ease of the rebels toward the music career disrupts the labor discipline they want to impose on *Lado B*. For those who dislike the task carrousel, the bureaucratic strictness (Weber, 1968 [1946]) it brings to art drains all the joy of the great entertainment and fun *Lado B* represents to them.

Looking at this dispute through the lens of the Weberian sociology, we can state that the efforts of the adiabatic circuit defenders in order to take *Lado B* as a profession is an attempt to give music a mundane feature, strip off the charm, and, ultimately, rationalize music (Weber 2007 [1904]): art is an awakening, it is life itself. On the other

hand, those who disagree with the system and turn the collective into their narcotic intend to keep the exceptional and extraordinary character of music. So, they feel the need to protect it from the rationalism of the first group, from the blade that levels and flattens work and pleasure, better yet, that makes the former colonize the latter: art is a dream. It is the opposite of life.

It is fair to say that the first trend functions in the same way as the Los Angeles Times astrology column, that, according to Adorno (2008 [1974]) tries to impose the rational and utilitarian logics of labor on the free and disinterested realm of pleasure.

The words said by Carlos, from Musavenal, Juliana, from Ouse, and Álvaro, from Rematte, represent the second movement very well. Musavenal's lead vocalist stated that music makes him forget about the world and his job at a car dealer; Juliana defined her band as her weekend "escape valve"; finally, Rematte's drum player describes his feelings when he is performing as "in rapture" and "able to exorcize his demons".

It's complicated. Actually, not really. It's a serene feeling: I love music, dude! I love, I love music! I think it affects some hormone in your body, you know? To me, man, music is entangled with me in a way I can't explain. What it does to me is like the same as oxytocin does to the body, get it? I can't even speak, but, to me, now, I get really happy with music...really very happy. Sometimes, when I'm with music, I forget about the world. I don't even remember I have another job [laughing a lot]. But I take it very seriously". (Carlos Lopes)<sup>1</sup>

"I always say: I don't wanna be famous, rich, like many people out there who think they're gonna be a great hit. No! It's hard to make money with music. I don't make a living out of music, I make a living for music. The money I make on my day job, I invest in my music career. To me, Ouse is my escape valve, it's my weekend. Sometimes I come across bad news, something that makes me feel bad, and the band is my communication device, you understand?" (Juliana Costa)<sup>2</sup>

"Every job is stressful. I'm always stressed with the band, chasing things. But it's a good stress, that doesn't compare with the one from a regular job, you know? I don't know if you play, but being on the stage is...there is no feeling close to it, there is no better place, dude. It could be just for a drunk bum, enjoying from under the stage, but it's really something else: it's where I'm able to exorcize my demons, get rid of anger, and bring me positive energy. It's not a 100% altruistic feeling. It's just a feeling of mine. (Álvaro Abreu)<sup>3</sup>

But, either as profession, reason, and ways of acting within the world (Weber, 2007 [1904]), or as entertainment, madness, and ways of escaping from the world, music is central to each of the two perspectives. As I said: the same feeling, two different ways of showing it.

Berg and Cid are two paradigmatic examples of each tendency. Lindberg Bezerra de Menezes, known as Berg, age 38, majored in Music at the Universidade Federal do Ceará (Federal University of Ceará), is a certified technician in Music from the Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica (Federal Centre for Technological Education), and left the Universidade Estadual do Ceará (State University of Ceará), where he studied History, before completing the course. Besides his academic education, Berg is a tenured civil servant at the State District Attorney's Office. His stable job as civil servant allows Berg to provide for himself and for his music career. Cid Saboia de Carvalho Filho, Cid, age 47, holds a Bachelor of Laws degree, but for over 10 years worked at Cidade, a local TV station affiliated with Record, a nationwide television network. At Cidade, Cid assumed several different positions and carried out many tasks in the audio department, from technical activities to creating jingles. However, his main income derives neither from the TV station, where he has not worked for years, nor from music, in which he actually spends his money. His earnings come from the rent of a real estate property he owns. While Berg's youth, in his own words, is divided in two periods: one of "fat years", and the other of "lean years", when his father lost his job, Cid was raised in an environment intersected by different kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 2007), though the coups in Brazil have left deep scars on his family. His grandfather, Jader Carvalho, was an important left-wing politician and intellectual. He was named Prince of Poets in the state of Ceará and was a member of the Literary Academy of Ceará. Jader was a lawyer, founded controversial newspapers, gave lectures, published fiction works and was incarcerated in two dictatorships: first, by Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo*, for disseminating the ideas of the Brazilian Communist Party, and later by the military dictatorship, until his release, in 1979, due to the general amnesty law. Cid senior, Jader's son and Cid's father, was also an intellectual and politician. He became a senator once the military dictatorship was over and the Congress installed the constituent assembly to write a new constitution for the country. Senator Cid was one of the authors of the current post-dictatorship Constitution,

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos' words were transcribed from the interview made on 17/04/2021

<sup>2</sup> Juliana's words were transcribed from the interview made on 17/08/2020

<sup>3</sup> Álvaro's words were transcribed from the interview made on 15/04/2021

enacted in 1988. Due to his father's term as senator, Cid Filho moved to Brasilia in 1986, when the rock scene was taking off in town. In the Brazilian capital, the Carvalhos' apartment was close to the epicenter of that musical effervescence, the Beirute Bar, where young Cid was in close touch with musicians that would soon become great Brazilian music stars. As Cid himself acknowledges, it was due to his father's influence, spotless reputation as a radio broadcaster, lawyer, writer, and politician, already preceded by that of his grandfather, old Jader, that he got his job at Cidade TV station. Not surprisingly, the artist refers to this big communication conglomerate as an "almost familiar business".

I worked there for about 10, 12 years and I quit when I went to São Paulo. But I worked there because it was an... almost familiar company, you know? It belongs to a very close friend of my father's, so I'd always quit and go back, 'till there came a time when I said 'shame on me' and left for good. (Cid)<sup>4</sup>

Even not mentioning each other, it is obvious that Berg and Cid are antipodal: their opinions are clearly and radically opposed. The statements below illustrate the divergence between the two conceptions: While Cid repeats his dislike for discussions that are necessary to keep the adiabatic circuit, Berg underlines that it is the commitment to professionalism that keeps the bands together, not aesthetical affinities. In fact, though under the comprehensive aegis of rock, the bands have significant differences in style. One funny detail synthesizes this immiscibility: while Berg confesses his resistance in working with mad people, Cid calmly admits his own madness.

This festival thing got started, didn't it, dude? And the, there was this, this...this rotating band schedule! Then it got too messy: there were too many bands! Then you'd have to keep always feeding the *Whatsapp* group, talking, then it's too many things and I get a little lost in the group, among things to do, so I ended up moving away a little. A crazy thing of my own, actually. (Cid)

If the movement may not be about musical unity, it should be about a similar idea, will, and intention. The union is not for style, it is for something else. For instance: I deeply respect anyone, with whatever vision of the world, willing to experience or do anything, but I have a hard time working routinely with very fucking crazy people, regardless of all due respect. So, in the collective, we don't have anyone with such a profile. They are all people I can work with, without making an appointment with the guy and then the guy just vanishing, or setting up a concert and, at the scheduled time, the guy passes out because he's too crazy, understand? So, everyone can do whatever they want with their lives, but I think people who are in the collective, the bands that are in the collective should be people of a kind of profile who see music in a certain way, professionally. So, what they do in their private lives is their private lives, but we have a strong commitment on schedule, putting things together, making things work fine, avoiding problems along the process...In a way, it makes me think: 'ok, it'll be alright'. At least to me, this is important. I think the bands in the collective share the same vision. (Berg Menezes)<sup>5</sup>

At another moment, Berg looks surprised by the fact that he, who works in and out of the music scene, seems to be more committed to the stages than those who are exclusively dedicated to music (there is no such case in *Lado B*, we must remember). However, now we notice, nothing is contradictory here: his mood toward music results from his routine as a civil servant, for that which is called "stimulus" is nothing but applying to the music field the rational logic of bureaucracy (Weber, 1968 [1946]) or of the bureaucratic capital (Bourdieu, 2007 [1904]).

Despite all this time working as a civil servant and a musician, I always expected a lot more from music than from the civil service, that pays my bills, but is very boring. But I feel that people who work just with music seem to be less stimulated than me! (Berg Menezes)

Exactly because the day job "pays the bills", but is "very boring", Cid needs music, that "doesn't pay the bills", to be enjoyable, at least. The job brings money, but not happiness, so since music brings no profits, there has to be pleasure. Otherwise, what is it worth? While Berg intends to turn music into a second shift of his work, Cid embraces art to flee the office. If, as the Italian poet says, "*lavorare stanca*" (Pavese, 2022), may poetry soothe us.

I'm a Bachelor of Laws, my father is a lawyer, my brother is a lawyer, my other brother is a lawyer, my brother's son is a lawyer...I thought 'No, dude. This is everything I don't want', I got out. I think that if I were right now in a suit, having to solve someone else's problems, I'd be very pissed, get it? I'd rather be making my music...art is very cool! I like it a lot: I wake up and go to sleep just thinking about it. Perhaps if I were right now in a law firm, I'd be just thinking about playing a guitar. In this case, I

<sup>4</sup> Cid's words were transcribed from the interview made on 14/07/2020

<sup>5</sup> Berg's words were transcribed from the interview made on 07/07/2020

wouldn't be there or here. At least, here, making music, right now, I am where I am. I'm doing what I'm thinking of. (Cid)

This antagonism is also illustrated by the already mentioned statements from Carlos, Juliana and Álvaro on one side, and Berg's words, on the other. In tune with Cid, Carlos talks about forgetting the job, Juliana refers to the band as the "weekend escape valve" and Álvaro thinks of the concerts as a sort of "rapture" that exorcizes his demons. Berg, on the contrary, believes there is something "educational" about the collective and that the musicians are "understanding the logic of a field of work" and "learning how to become a music professional".

Following about the idea of art as an "upside-down world" compared to "real life" (or, more specifically, economic life) (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]), Susan Sontag (2009 [1961], 2009b [1961]) stated that we do not value an artist by his/her work or by its content, but for the intensity, radicality and madness of the creator as he gives in to his creation, whatever it may be. Regardless of what the artist objectively did, what matters is that he/she has done it intensely, with some dose of "unhealthiness" (Sontag, 2009 [1961])

It is hard to read the analyses by Bourdieu, Veblen, Mauss and Sontag and not remember Cid and the others who also see music as the "upside-down world" (Bourdieu, 1996 [1992]), for which they have feelings that, even to themselves, are unspeakable and inexplicable, almost pathological (Sontag, 2009 [1961]). As Cid said, wrapping up: "the artist has to be different".

Dude, it's like... the artist, dude, is a different being. If were to put it on paper, I wouldn't be an artist, I wouldn't be a musician. I'd be selling tires, coconut, 'cause all of that would give more money. The other day, I was talking with Daniel Groove [a musician from Fortaleza] and he said: 'we don't make music 'cause we're forced to. We are not forced. We do it 'cause we want to. If it weren't music, we'd be painting or making pottery!' That's what an artist is, dude. An artist is independent, lives from his art despite the rest, however hard, the artist insists. Everything in life has its hardship...and its pleasure. But it's hard to see a sad artist, isn't it? The guy is living, doing what he likes, so it's great: he's happy. If you put everything on paper 'I wanna have children, I wanna etc', you won't be a musician, or you'll suffer. Better be something else. Musicians, artists in general, need to have a bit of this detachment (Cid)

Thus, if it is true that the rational discipline of the adiabatic circuit followers is an evidence of their love for music, so is the anarchic irresponsibility of those who ignore that system. They are all subjects of music, not only the ones who make it their business, but also those who make it their leisure.

At this point it is fair to ask: would the artist's individual social and economic situation determine the choice for either respecting the adiabatic circuit and considering *Lado B* a business, or disrespecting the adiabatic circuit and regarding the collective as leisure? As widely known, how we relate to money is directly dependent on how much money we have (Bourdieu, 2007 [1979]), or how summed up in Philip Larkin's (2004 [2001]) poem, "Clearly money has something to do with life".

To understand this issue, it's necessary to compare the variable respect/disrespect for the adiabatic circuit to the members' social and financial position.

### **The Many Sides of the B Side**

Among the musicians who have played at a *Lado B* Festival, Berg and Cid belong to a more protected socioeconomic layer. Though sharing the same privileged condition, only the first respects the adiabatic circuit and recognize himself as pertaining to *Lado B*'s hardcore, while the other just presents his performance and does not feel as effective member of the group.

The same divergence between the "faithful" and "disloyal" participants that occurs among the more affluent members of *Lado B* happens among the financially vulnerable artists of the team, as well.

Despite their kinship in *Lado B* regarding to their socioeconomic stratum, Nathália and Letícia, from Pulso de Marte, and Itálo, from Aborígenes Viajantes, are on opposite sides concerning their commitment to the collective: the formers, like Berg, follow the circuit strictly, making music as a business, while the latter embraces his music career like leisure, in the same pattern as Cid. **Chart 1** clarifies the relations between the two variables: socioeconomic protection degree and respect for the adiabatic circuit.

It is not odd to find the two patterns of commitment in both socioeconomic layers of the collective, because either financial security or insecurity provides good reasons to accept or deny the adiabatic circuit: it all depends on how the artist connects these dots.

On the one hand, a source of stable income provides a rearguard that enables the artist to place his music as a job itself, reducing the profitable activity to a mere sponsor of the artistic career, considered, in this case, the real profession (1A). On the other hand, material affluence may lead the individual to conduct with discipline the job that pays the bills and keep music in a ludic and pleasant dimension that, like a hobby, should be moderately

**Chart 1.** Clarification of the relations between the two variables: socioeconomic protection degree and respect for the adiabatic circuit

	(A) INNER CIRCLE	(B) OUTER CIRCLE
(1) MORE PROTECTION	Berg	Cid
(2) LESS PROTECTION	Nathália & Letícia	Ítalo

enjoyed (1B). The trajectories of Berg and Cid respectively illustrate each of these positions: for the first, music is work, business; for the latter, it is entertainment, leisure.

It is not only socioeconomic comfort that puts the musician at a crossroads. For opposite reasons, a vulnerable financial situation may, too, place the artist at the same spot. The lack of a financial feedback from traditional activities may cause disbelief in the established ways of making a living and lead the musician to invest in his musical trajectory. The job was meant to be lucrative, though boring, while music would be pleasant, though not monetizable. However, if, besides being tedious, the conventional profession is underpaid, the musician will have two good reasons to quit the job and pursue his artistic dream: money and pleasure, or business and leisure.

If money is the case, in the face of financial restraints, music may provide the social and economic rise that more stable jobs did not. The frustration with the scarce earnings from the conservative path may lead to considering the stages not only spiritually interesting but also quite compelling from a pragmatic and economic point of view. Thus, changing the office for a music career becomes a very reasonable professional and financial choice. Starting from a different position, one may reach the same conclusion as Berg: music is business, fulfills the functions and takes the place of a job (2A). If pleasure is the issue, prioritizing music when compared to the quotidian struggle also seems logical: if money is insufficient despite the lousy job and the exciting concerts, then let's go for the music, for, at least, it makes us smile. In other words, if we're set to be poor, let's at least be happy. Again, coming from a different place one may arrive at the same destination as Cid: music is leisure, it is Carlos' amnesia, it is Juliana's escape valve, and it is Álvaro's rapture, it denies and it is out of the world of work (2B). Conclusively, the lack of money and pleasure in the day job will lead the individual to seek one or the other in the music career.

If at the top of Lado B's socioeconomic pyramid, Berg represents business and Cid embodies leisure, in more vulnerable strata of the collective, Pulso de Marte is the one who repeats Berg's stoicism, while Ítalo faithfully reproduces Cid's hedonism. As we did with Berg and Cid, let us focus on the other characters with a magnifying glass.

Nathália Fernandes Rebouças, age 30, quit college before finishing the Environmental Sciences course. The artist worked in a bureaucratic job at a union. During the pandemic, she lost her job but found another, an even more precarious one: a company that manufactured uniforms for hospital workers won a public bid issued by the local government to supply specialized clothing to doctors and nurses who worked in the city hospitals. Given the unexpected rise in demand brought about by the Covid pandemic, the company needed to increase its workforce. However, instead of formally hiring more employees, the company decided to outsource and hire autonomous professionals, paying lower salaries and legal benefits. Nathália and her girlfriend, Letícia, had to accept the unfavorable conditions and, using their own sewing machines, they began manufacturing the uniforms from home, in the peripheral Dom Lustosa neighborhood. Letícia de Sousa Monteiro, age 27, also quit college and left an unfinished Psychology course. Letícia's parents and part of the family work in the textile business; they are not great entrepreneurs, but tailors and dressmakers, working in their own sewing machines in an almost artisanal regime. In the face of Nathália's dismissal, the couple decided to borrow the Sousa Monteiros' sewing machines to make it through the storm.

With no college degree, formal job, or any perspective of changing their lives through traditional ways, Nathália and Letícia started considering that, perhaps, Pulso de Marte could be their best opportunity. So, viewing the band as a passport to better days, the duo reduced their other activities to mere palliative emergencies, undeserving of further attention, and turned to their music career with all the discipline and diligence a profession requires.

We quit/dropped out of college, due to this music issue. It wasn't making very much sense at the time. And then we quit. I'm not sure I'll go back (Nathália Rebouças)<sup>6</sup>

The use of the phrase "make sense" is very significant. By saying that "it makes sense" to exchange college for music, Nathália is affirming that renouncing a traditional route in favor of an artistic career is not an inconsequent attitude of those who embrace ephemeral pleasures instead of professional stability, but a logical, rational, pragmatic, conscious, cold, and calculated decision, with the intent to acquire greater socioeconomic comfort (Weber, 2007 [1904]).

<sup>6</sup> Letícia's and Nathália's words were transcribed from the interview made on 07/07/2020

Their dedication to the adiabatic circuit comes from this conscious choice. By making *Lado B* their actual A-Side, the duo became highly admired by their counterpart in the upper socioeconomic layer of the collective, Berg Menezes.

The girls from Pulso de Marte are super dedicated, super organized. Letícia, for instance, is one of people I share my ideas with the most, here at the collective. She comes up to me and says 'Berg, it's not working, let's do different'. That is, we have a dimension we're learning how to become a professional in music and, for that, we need to do everything. Maybe this has reduced the number of bands in the collective. Today [to Berg] there are 9. Because people started saying 'oh, but I just wanted to play'. Then I say 'no, man, it's not like that, it's not just playing. There is a lot of things, there is release to do, there is a nice picture to take, we have to advertise on the papers'. Every now and then, there is a good article, some good stuff, and people say 'oh! The collective got all the space', that's how it goes, dude, we spend months organizing everything, trying to make this thing happen. (Berg Menezes)

Nathália makes it clear that the feeling is reciprocal and goes beyond: ratifying the argument of this text, the guitar player states that the view they share with Berg, in which music is business, reduces the socioeconomic gap and the spatial distance that separates them. If the bank account, the zip code, and the biography keep Berg apart from Pulso de Marte, the professionalism they both apply to their music careers builds a bridge over this social moat, bringing these individuals together.

I think we're getting even closer. Look, just think, if it weren't for this (the union, the collectives), I keep thinking, when would I ever meet Berg? Like, Berg is a wonderful person that I admire a lot, I like him a lot. He lives there... I don't know exactly, but he lives somewhere in Aldeota, Meireles, in the noble area. I'm here at the border of Fortaleza, close to Autran Nunes... and, I don't know, sometime ago, to me, this contact would be impossible. Although, we've made all efforts to be "recognized" [drawing quotation marks in the air with her fingers] in the noble part of town. Of course I have other friends here, from the periphery, that go to those other places (Praia de Iracema, etc), but it's a recent thing. Because some time ago, the gang from the periphery would just play at the periphery. Who was from Autran Nunes would play in Bom Jardim [a peripheral neighborhood], in Joao XXIII [also distant from central urban areas], anyway, other neighborhoods. But now, in case anyone organizes an important festival and asks 'do you have any bands to recommend, Berg?' No doubt, he'll recommend us. (Nathália Rebouças)

Considering the band the main professional activity and a potential source of income has proven to have been a good choice for Pulso de Marte. In 2016, Nathália and Letícia applied for the Festival de Música da Juventude (Youth Music Festival), a competitive event organized by Fortaleza's local government, but they did not go far in the competition. One year later, they applied again for the competition and, in Nathália's words, they decided to "try harder". And the results came in: Pulso de Marte won the 2017 festival and took home a 10 thousand reais reward, an amount of money they had never earned in their day jobs. So, as the traditionally obvious ways melt down, prioritizing the music career may be a very logic decision or, as Nathália said, a choice that "makes sense."

If the Protestant Ethics (Weber, 2007 [1904]) applied to music catapulted Pulso de Marte from Dom Lustosa to the affluent part of the Fortaleza, the tide that dragged Ítalo from Caucaia to Praia de Iracema was sex and nightlife.

Ítalo is 28 years old, and he is a tax analyst at an accounting firm where he works, in the area he majored from college. Dissatisfied with the cultural scene in Caucaia, a peripheral city of Fortaleza metropolitan region, the young man sought fresh air in Fortaleza's nightlife and engaged in Praia de Iracema's LGBT circuit. The only problem was distance! To find pleasure in Fortaleza, Ítalo had to drive to and from along the highway where the region's native people, the Tapeba, sold their crafts to make a living. Inspired by the indigenous people whose company he shared in his swinging migration movement, he named his band: *Aborígenes Viajantes* (Travelers Aborigines).

In the band, Ítalo took his epicurean commute as his muse. When the first lyrics were composed, the theme could not be different: the trips to and from between Caucaia and the nightlife of Praia de Iracema. According to what he confessed to me, *Uma Janela para Segunda* (A window to Monday), the band's first EP, is about a typical weekend of a young man split between the tiresome routine of an accounting office and the freedom brought by the ocean's salty water.

The order of the songs tells the narrative of a weekend in the character's life: *Edgar* brings joy to Friday, *Plebeu* is Saturday's nightlife, *Castelo Branco* arrives with Sunday's travelling vibe, and *Devaneios* ends with



the monotony and reflection of Monday, about that love, about the affair that happened during the weekend. The name of the EP was meant to tie the construction of the song sequence. (Ítalo Oliveira)<sup>7</sup>

*Uma Janela para Segunda* was released in 2018 but even before that Ítalo had created other songs about the evasive and escapist potential of Fortaleza's nightlife: *Mambembe*, single from 2018, was named after the nightclub Ítalo used to frequent, Tom Zé, from 2017, envisioned the theme of the window that opens to beyond the workplace, disclosing a horizon of redeeming promises. The EP cover shows the view Ítalo had from his work desk: two huge coconut trees, with palms blowing in the wind, outlined against a blue sky, very far from the office the young man was stuck to.

Fortaleza has deeply influenced my lyrics: that feeling of beach, of nighttime, meeting at bars, you know? That nightlife thing, that weekend you think of days on end. These experiences we have in Fortaleza by night are what inspire me the most. The prime example is *Mambembe*. I think it's interesting when the lyrics have some sexual connotation, but not so sexual, I mean, you understand? When the composer manages to tell that kind of intimate story, but in an abstract way, that can involve other people. Fortaleza inspires me a lot in that way. For instance, *Devaneios* is about a person I met through Grindr [a dating app that targets the gay community]. He lived in Cambeba [a neighborhood in Fortaleza] and I lived in Caucaia, and we talked...and I felt that platonic passion for him...so, when I started composing for the band, Fortaleza influenced me a lot regarding this issue of finding myself a gay man, this nightlife thing, how I started to understand my approach to Fortaleza's LGBT scene: Places like Mambembe, Praia de Iracema itself... These were the experiences I had from that time. All of this kept reverberating in the songs I wrote at the time. (Ítalo Oliveira)

Back to our argument, when Ítalo joined the band collective that would operate at the premises of a cultural facility located at Praia de Iracema, he would never take on the mission with an eye of a businessman, like Berg and Pulso de Marte, but with Cid's eagerness for life. The beach was not his factory, but his Wonderland, his Shangri-La, ultimately, his oneiric hideaway to where he fled on weekends, not to make business, but, on the contrary, to escape from that.

I don't belong to the collective. We really just played, so, we don't belong. Dude, *Lado B* was an invitation: It was like an invitation to be part of the concert, rather than to join the collective. My bond to the collectives is this: they invite me to play and I just do it. I don't work backstage. The links we have is just about the artistic part, really. Regarding management, we were never involved with any collective. (Ítalo Oliveira)

In this case, music is not the entrance door to the job market, but a window that opens way out of it, towards ecstasy.

## CONCLUSION

In a post-apocalyptic world, facing the lack of water, food, and fuel, mobs of remaining human beings live in a state of civil war. Amid the generalized barbarity, even before starting the battle for resources to fulfill basic needs, the survivors struggle to *style* themselves, to be distinguished from each other and from the oppressive environment that reduces them to the same miserable crowd. Clothes, fetishes, accessories, and adornments are improvised from the trash and waste left by a long-gone civilization. After creating a signature and recovering an identity through aesthetics, the individual, finally feeling as such, is ready to join the war for the means of subsistence.

Mad Max is not exactly *about* this, but this was the element of the film I had in mind while writing this article.

At home, at school, and in miraculous guidebooks on managing our own finances, we have all learned the hardly ever-obeyed moralist sermon that preaches: "first", we have to "guarantee" the "essential"; only then, "afterward", and even so, only if there happens to be some "spare" money, we can "spend" on the "superfluous". It is hard to refute this truism because this commandment is nothing but a tautology: of course, the primary comes first, and the secondary comes second. The questions the cliché ignores (and makes of such ignorance its main pillar) are: what is the "necessary" and the "unnecessary", the "nondisposable", and the "disposable" the "basic" and the "superficial"? Which goods or activities could contain each of these extremes? Where is the line that separates one side from the other?

Common sense tends to place under the aegis of the "fundamental" all that has a "function", a "practical application" and "usefulness", and to push to the "dispensable" pole all that regards idleness, leisure, pleasure and

<sup>7</sup> Ítalo's words were transcribed from the interview made on 11/07/2020

symbolic and spiritual life; in other words, in a comprehensive approach, all about the cultural realm. Actually, my own statement is contaminated with the preconception I intend to contest. After all, could not culture be “important”, with “function”, “application”, “usefulness”, and have an “end”, even if such a function is the lack of function, the usefulness is being useless, and the end is just an end in itself? As the Uruguayan writer says about his writing: “Because it is a useless work; for that exactly, I should do it” (Levrero, 2018 [2005], p. 536)

The belief in the supposed “irrelevance of culture”, rather than misconceived, is dangerous because it supports two directly related prejudices.

The first can be summarized in the adage that says that “poor people make poor choices,” especially about money: an insult generally targeted to low-income individuals who “dare” spend their scarce financial resources on cultural goods and services, or even on material items that are not among low-cost options. To some extent, this “argument” blames economically vulnerable people (and their consumption habits) for their own vulnerability.

The second derives from the first and implies expelling those with lower purchasing power from the cultural field, either as consumers or producers. As a consumer, the individual is ejected from the cultural field because, as the precept teaches, the “urgent” must be prioritized, and the “surplus” is kept aside for the “less important”. So, if culture is filed under the second category, and there is never spare cash, at the risk of being reckless and blamed for his own instability, one is sentenced to not consuming cultural goods and services. Regarding the producer, the outcome of the set of rules is that the “rich”, who have money already, are free to pursue their dreams, while the “poor”, who have not yet addressed the “most important” questions, should choose the most profitable job, despite liking it or not. So, participating in the cultural field is considered a divine right, a nobility title, a genetic trait, that is to say, an innate characteristic. Returning to our object, it is like ruling that Cid can be a musician, but not Ítalo.

Of all written here, this is the main conclusion I would like to point out: money (associated with values like functionalism, pragmatism, finalism, rationalism, asceticism) is an important element in our relationship with the cultural field, but not the only variable, nor the most relevant. An individual’s willingness and the right to participate in the cultural field are *not* colonized by the amount of money he possesses, nor are they directly proportional to the economic capital. Therefore, it is wrong to think or demand that a financially vulnerable person will want or should want less culture just because the “most relevant things” have not yet been acquired. Otherwise, if we believe that such “most relevant things” really exist, we should agree that culture is among them.

Parodying the final words of that which is probably the most famous manifesto in history (Marx and Engels, 2001 [1848]), we may conclude: “Workers of the world, unite! The idle, as well!”

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## Moritz Lazarus: A Marginal Man in the Centre of German Society

Mathias Berek <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Technische Universität Berlin*, GERMANY

\*Corresponding Author: [berek@tu-berlin.de](mailto:berek@tu-berlin.de)

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### ABSTRACT

German-Jewish philosopher Moritz Lazarus and his work are an example of how someone could live at the centre of society and still be marginalised, how living at the margins can shape the theoretic reflection on society, and at the same time how this theory can then become a part of political and social struggles to overcome marginality. He envisioned a social theory that included the idea of ‘objective spirit’, which was meant as the whole world of objective, human-made and historically emerged ideas, traditions, institutions and things – what we today would describe as culture. His ideas about group membership and society were pluralistic at best, if not constructionist: he rejected the idea that belonging to a collective would be determined by language, descent, ‘race’ or place. For him, it was the subjective act of taking part, not external traits that determined belonging. Lazarus’s ideas were accepted, absorbed selectively or contested, but, in the end, the ambivalence of their perception stems from the modernity of his questions and conclusions. Like many German Jews of this time, and according to his own ideas of belonging to a collective, Lazarus did not consider himself a stranger in Germany at all. Jews like Lazarus were actively co-constructing the national project – and in many cases without being questioned. He was a prominent representative of this era of national, liberal and idealist optimism that ended around 1879, when the pluralist liberal tradition was in less demand and modern antisemitism spread throughout academia and the educated public. Lazarus’s theory of culture based on and developed through plurality was rediscovered in the 1980s, and in many respects it is still useful as a descriptive as well as a normative tool to engage with the modern situation, owing to his own position at the centre and the margins.

**Keywords:** Germany, liberalism, idealism, antisemitism, German-Jewish history

### LIVING IN THE CENTRE

If you speak about the centre of Germany around the end of the 19th century, you probably provoke the imagination of a map of historical Berlin. This was where the Empire was governed from since 1871. It was the capital of the Empire’s most important partial state, Prussia, and also the rapidly growing city many people from all the Prussian provinces were moving to. One of those migrants was a young Jewish intellectual from the small town of Filehne in the province of Posen: Moritz Lazarus. And it was right in the centre of this Prussian and later German capital where he took up residence, soon after he had finished his studies and married Sarah Lebenheim. Her dowry and inheritance finally brought financial security into the life of the rather poor second son of a Talmud scholar. He could not only take up his project to write a psychology of everyday phenomena, but the two of them could also now afford an apartment at *Königsplatz*. Here, in the middle of today’s governmental quarter, between Chancellery and *Brandenburger Tor*, near the Swiss embassy, in the 1860s you would find a wide square, crowned by the *Siegesänne* with the golden Victoria statue on top, bounded in the west by Kroll’s famous entertainment establishment and Palais Raczinsky in the east – which only two decades later would be replaced by the

monumental new *Reichstag* building. From here, Lazarus could walk to most of the locations of his work and public events, like the Prussian War Academy, the Royal Library, the university, or the *Singakademie*.

My interest in this figure, who arrived in Berlin as a poor Jewish student and left it decades later as a famous and well-connected scholar, goes back to my studies in the philosophy of culture when philosopher Klaus Christian Köhnke introduced me to a fascinating early theory of culture. It was called *Völkerpsychologie* and devised by a man of the name M. Lazarus. You can translate the term for this discipline as psychology of peoples, social psychology, or proto-sociology, but none of these would grasp it fully (cf. Bunzl, 2003; Greenwood, 2003; Berg, 2015; Berek, 2018; Reiners, 2020).

What was so fascinating about it? First, despite its rather ornate language, it speaks to the present reader who is interested in overarching perspectives on society, its self-understanding and the way knowledge is flowing through it. What Lazarus devised in the 1850s and 60s has become a basic cornerstone of today's social sciences and humanities. He formulated theories of the relation between the individual and society, between the subjects and their social circles as well as their relation to the world of the 'objective spirit'. And 'objective spirit' here was not meant to be a metaphysical concept in a Hegelian sense. Lazarus meant the whole world of objective, human-made and historically emerged ideas, traditions, institutions and things – what we today would describe as culture in its broad sense. In addition, his ideas about group membership and society are pluralistic at best, if not constructionist. He rejected the idea that belonging to a collective would be determined by language, descent, 'race' or place. For him, it was the *subjective act* of taking part, not external traits that determined belonging. To put it how he phrased it in his introduction to *Völkerpsychologie* from 1860:

“A people is a number of humans who regard themselves as one people, count themselves as one people. (...) People is the spiritual product of the subjects who belong to it; they are not a people, they just produce it permanently.” (Lazarus and Steinthal, 1860: 35–36)<sup>1</sup>

The longer I worked with these texts by Lazarus, the more I wondered why he and the *Völkerpsychologie* seemed to be mostly forgotten in the disciplines that owe so much to him, mostly so psychology, sociology and philosophy. This was especially interesting because in his time Lazarus was a prominent figure and the *Völkerpsychologie* a well-known part of the contemporary philosophical and psychological debates in academia and society. So my question was: Who *did* take on *Völkerpsychologie* in the 19th century, and how and why? And why had it been forgotten so quickly at the beginning of the 20th century? There seemed to be a contradiction between prominence and exclusion, centre and margin, impact and forgetting, success and failure. This led me to my research on the perception of the work and public presence of Lazarus.<sup>2</sup>

## BECOMING FAMOUS: A BIOGRAPHY OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Before I turn to some findings from this research, I have to introduce you to M. Lazarus. He was born as Moshe in 1824 into a rather poor but well-educated Jewish family in the small town of Filehne in the Prussian province of Posen. Moritz, as he called himself after the naturalisation, after a short time as an apprentice, rejected his father's wish to become a merchant. Instead, he moved to Braunschweig to finish the German *Gymnasium* and in 1846 started to study at Berlin's Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität— philosophy and psychology, history, language and natural sciences like physics, botany and physiology (Leicht, 1912: 44; N. Lazarus, 1913; Leicht, 1924; Belke, 1971). During the revolutionary events of 1848, he was one of the editors of the journal of Berlin's citizen militia where he wrote for the political feuilleton (Berek, 2020: 51–54, 67–69). Shortly after having finished his dissertation on aesthetic education, he published his first book, *Die Sittliche Berechtigung Preußens in Deutschland* (Prussia's moral entitlement in Germany: Lazarus, 1850). It was a historical, ethical and political essay in favour of a Prussian leadership in the unification of Germany to come. Soon followed the first volume of his main work, *Das Leben der Seele*, (The Life of the Soul: Lazarus, 1856), a collection of psychological and philosophical essays, which laid the foundation for his mainstream fame but also for *Völkerpsychologie* and his academic career.

This started his ascent in German society. The second half of the 19th century was his time. Lazarus became a well-known person in many ways, not only as a popular philosopher and professor who had founded *Völkerpsychologie*. He also became a representative of liberal German Jewry when he co-organised and presided over the reform synods in Leipzig in 1869 and Augsburg in 1871. When antisemitism was introduced to universities and spread throughout the educated bourgeois milieu by the infamous tractate of Heinrich von Treitschke (1879, cf. Krieger, 2003), Lazarus was one of the first who reacted in public and from then on fought bourgeois and academic antisemitism (Lazarus, 1880). He was extremely well-connected to Berlin's and Germany's upper

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from German by the author, except marked otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> This research has been made possible through funding by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

bourgeois society, from writers like Paul Heyse, Theodor Fontane and Berthold Auerbach, artists like Clara Schumann, scholars like Wilhelm Dilthey or Georg Simmel, to politicians like Eduard Lasker, top-ranking army officers—or members of the Prussian court like Friedrich III, the 99-day-emperor. The salon of Moritz and Sara Lazarus has been described by contemporaries as one of the last great salons of Old Berlin (Weisstein, 1903).<sup>3</sup>

His career was one of those successful examples of Jewish Emancipation in the second half of the 19th century (cf. Sieg, 1996). His philosophical and psychological contributions were recognised in academic as well as public discourse and led to a professorship in Switzerland in 1860: the University of Bern established the chair for Psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* for him – the first-ever chair for psychology (Heller, 1986: 2). After only a few years, he was even elected dean of the faculty of philosophy and rector of the university. He was invited to hold public lectures and discussed the reform of the Swiss education system with the officials (N. Lazarus, 1910). At the same time, he maintained his social life in Berlin, for instance in literary circles like the *Rittli*, and even ran real estate businesses in Leipzig, where he purchased a manor in the outskirts. Only six years after his appointment to Bern, however, he returned to Berlin and started to teach as a professor at the Prussian War Academy, where he bore responsibility for the philosophical education of the officers. But he lost this position again due to its antisemitic director. In contrast to Switzerland, German universities refused to accept Lazarus as a full professor at any point during his life. Similar to many other Jews, he was limited to the post of honorary professorship (cf. Rürup and Nipperdey, 1975; Kampe, 1987; Pawliczek, 2011). Accordingly, Lazarus taught psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität of Berlin from 1873, after the minister of culture had awarded him an honorary, unpaid professorship at the faculty of philosophy – against the will of the members of the faculty. After many years as an unpaid professor and top-level functionary in multiple religious and charity bodies, but also after his businesses had mostly failed (as many did during the crises following the *Gründerzeit* boom), he retired in 1896 to Meran in Tyrol and also sold his manor in Leipzig. In Meran, he wrote his late work, *The Ethics of Judaism* which appeared in two volumes (Lazarus, 1898, 1911).<sup>4</sup> Lazarus died in 1903.

## BEING MARGINAL AT THE CENTRE OF SOCIETY

Like Georg Simmel's famous figure of the stranger (1971 [1908]), or like Robert E. Park's marginal person (1928; cf. also Hjortshøj, 2021), Lazarus lived in several cultures at the same time. And he was aware of this position in between. It allowed him a differentiated, distanced but also creative perspective on the material and meaning structures of his society. Even in his hometown in the province of Posen, he observed different ethnic, religious and language groups living together: Catholic Poles as well as German-speaking Protestants and Jews. Keeping his extensive Jewish religious knowledge, he fully acquired German classical education.

Admittedly, this hybridity of belonging to different worlds at the same time was not unproblematic for Lazarus. For instance, as a pupil of the Gymnasium, he struggled a lot to reconcile the traditional religious world he was brought up in and the intellectual realms of the Graeco-Roman classics he studied. His name is also quite telling. On almost every occasion he simply called himself 'Lazarus' or 'M. Lazarus'. Almost all the books and articles published in his lifetime appeared under this abbreviation. He even signed almost all of his letters like this. It was as if he wanted to avoid fully embracing the 'Moritz' and letting go of the 'Moshe'.

Lazarus was, however, no stranger in the eyes of his contemporaries. He was not the kind of foreigner who did not belong to the collective, as described in Simmel's conception. In his famous excursus on the stranger, Simmel had already distanced himself from the older understanding of the stranger as the "wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow" with his description of the "person who comes today and stays tomorrow." For him, the existence of the stranger was nothing but "a specific form of interaction", and even more: "naturally a very positive relation" (Simmel, 1908: 509).<sup>5</sup> The stranger, in this understanding, was part of the community, one that incorporated the simultaneity of closeness and distance. His attributes were flexibility, mobility, objectivity and freedom—traits that proved useful for both him and his community. But this positive description by the German sociologist of Jewish descent has to be put into its historical context. This context is already provided by Simmel himself through his references to the problematic relation between being Jewish and being or being made the stranger, or through his short remark about that other "kind of 'strangeness'" which "rejects the very commonness" between the stranger and the other members of the community (Simmel, 1908: 512; engl. Simmel, 1950: 407). Thus, Simmel's sociological conception of the stranger has to be understood as a "historical category", too (Köhnke, 2011). And in doing so, the difference to Lazarus's conception of belonging becomes clear. Simmel's positive description of the stranger also transports a somewhat apologetic hope that the position of the stranger as a part of the community can be legitimised even though the members of the collective that defines itself through the exclusion of the

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for the biographical details Berek (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Volume 1 has been translated to English by Henrietta Szold: Lazarus 1900-1901.

<sup>5</sup> Translated from Kurt Wolff (Simmel, 1950: 402).

(defined) stranger have marked him as being foreign. Lazarus doubtlessly had experienced exclusion in German society, but Simmel had lived until 1918 and seen the further development and spread of modern essentialist antisemitism that evolved in the last decades of the 19th century. That could explain why, although he conceptualised the stranger as an organic part of the community, in the end, he rather pessimistically affirms the stranger's status as foreign. Lazarus's conception of society has no place for such a position of a stranger as being continuously foreign and less close to the collective than the 'autochthones'. In his ideal society, everybody who contributes to the community and counts himself to it, no matter his descent, in fact becomes an equal part of it. One could say that Lazarus, by way of more positive experiences, had developed a more optimistic conception of society—and, of course, interpreted his own situation in the same way.

Lazarus was thus definitely a member of German society. That is the signature of his time, the second half of the 19th century, between the successful Jewish emancipation and the rise of modern antisemitism. Although many non-Jews were already feeling uneasy about that change, bourgeois Jews like Lazarus could experience steep upward mobility and social success. Like many German Jews of this time, and according to his own ideas of belonging to a collective, Lazarus did not consider himself a stranger in Germany at all. In his activities in favour of the reform of Judaism and his fight against antisemitism, he was a typical representative of liberal German Jews who saw themselves not only primarily as Germans but were also convinced that religion should be a private matter, disconnected from state affairs. The fact that the '*Judenfrage*' (the Jewish question) had been raised in the first place by the promoter of academic antisemitism, Heinrich von Treitschke, and others in 1879, hit Lazarus not primarily as a Jew, but as a German first and foremost:

“(…) the mere fact that it is discussed is more than a danger, it is a deep suffering, it is a disgrace! We do not care what answer will be given to the Jewish question. The fact that the Jewish question exists is a heavy suffering for the Jewish community in Germany, but a more serious one for the German nation. Gentlemen, the worst thing for us German Jews, especially for those who contribute so much to German culture, is one thing: our pride is broken. How proud we were of this German national spirit!” (Lazarus, 1881: 121)

Beyond this perception, there was an understanding of the German nation as a universalist, plural, modern, ethical and civilised project. That is the liberal conception of the nation that, much like Lazarus, most German Jews had in mind when they wholeheartedly took part in the construction of Germany during the second half of the century. Even when the later development of German history proved them wrong in that expectation, this development was not a necessary one, and Imperial Germany was without a doubt also a Jewish-German endeavour. With the '*Judenfrage*', however, the nation would cancel its membership in the European civilisation, Lazarus stressed:

“(…) the Jewish question, when it is posed, is not a question of the Jews, but of the Germans. The question is whether they want to stay within the club of civilised nations of Europe or whether they want to leave and fall back into the barbarism of the Middle Ages. I therefore expect the fight against antisemitism not only from the candidate whom I elect; I expect it from the government and the parliament; I demand and expect it from every man who stands up for law and justice; I expect it from the genius of the German nation.” (Lazarus, 1887: 16)

There is no doubt that Lazarus considered himself a patriot. He was assured in his pluralistic experience by his own social ascent, but also by his friends and acquaintances in culture and politics, the military and the court. Thus, he was convinced that this German empire had achieved everything Liberals had hoped for and that because of this it was to be defended against its enemies. He even set this goal before the fight against antisemitism, when, in 1887, he supported the conservatives in the parliamentary struggle about the military budget:

“In this German Empire, the liberal parties should be the real conservative ones. For whose ideals are fulfilled in it? It certainly was not the aim of the highly conservative party to create a unified Germany, under Prussian leadership, an imperial parliament based on universal suffrage, a uniform law for all of Germany, the civil equality of all denominations, and so on. (...) But we, all of us Liberals, and liberal Jews most of all, should go with the government, should form its firm support, in order to secure the existence of our *ideals, which have been fulfilled in all their essentials*, and to make their further expansion possible. We must be most concerned with the strength of the Reich, the strength of the government, under whose leadership the German nation will achieve in one age what it has longed for in vain for centuries.” (Lazarus, 1887: 26)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Emphasis in the original.



Lazarus had made his way to the centre of Imperial German society in the second half of the 19th century. He was one of those German Jews that actively took part in forming the German society that became a national state in 1871: as a professor and popular academic writer, as an official of German Jewry, especially in the struggle for reform and the fight against antisemitism, as a member of Berlin's cultural elite with close relations to writers like Theodor Fontane or Paul Heyse. His lectures drew large audiences. He presided over a number of associations, both Jewish and non-Jewish, from the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* to the *Deutsche Schiller-Stiftung*. Even if he stayed an outsider at the university, in the end, he had been a professor, dean and rector at several universities; and his social psychological ideas, his pluralist faith and his ideal-realist syntheses were widely known and met with much approval. At least temporarily. And he was looked upon favourably by the educated public. The capital's most influential newspapers like the *Vossische Zeitung*, the *Berliner Tageblatt* or the *National-Zeitung* have covered his career, his publications as well as his public appearances over decades. So one can confidently say that he was standing in the centre of German upper society.

An anecdote might underscore this. In the year 1884, the Schiller associations organised festivities all over Germany, celebrating the 125th birthday of the poet. Lazarus was giving the keynote at the corresponding event in Berlin. After the lecture, according to the story, Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm—and later Emperor Friedrich III—approached Lazarus and told him: “My dear professor, you will always remain our flag-bearer of true idealism” (N. Lazarus and Leicht, 1906: 189).

## MARGINALISING THE LIBERAL AND THE JEW

Which idealism is the Crown Prince referring to? The form and content of Lazarus's work were influenced by the universalist, humanist and optimistic spirit of a liberal intellectual tradition in 19th-century Germany. Lazarus stood for this liberal part of his generation as a person—with his national-liberal worldviews shaped by the values of enlightenment, with his non-polemical demeanour, with his refraining from party struggles, with his German-Jewish patriotism, and with his optimism about progress. He represented an ethically-idealist understanding of the civic culture-nation, the *Kulturnation*. And the Crown Prince was not only the hope of German Liberals.<sup>7</sup> He also was a declared supporter of German Jewry against antisemitic exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

The terms idealism and liberalism I am talking about here refer to certain strands of both that were dominant in a bourgeois German-speaking educated public between the revolution of 1848 and the conservative turn in 1878.

This idealism was building more on Kant than on Hegel, which means giving ethics an important place within it and avoiding substantialising statements: both *a priori* (notion) and *a posteriori* (perception) of the given were the ground for experience. This idealism incorporated materialistic elements and sometimes was called *Idealrealismus* (ideal realism). Most importantly, idea and ideal converged in idealistic ethics. It was referring to the enlightenment ideals of education and reasonable individuals. It tried to harmonise the progress made in the natural sciences with the heritage of philosophy, instead of deepening the gap between objectivist materialism and radically subjectivistic and metaphysical idealism. The immortality of the ideas it referred to was not meant ontologically but purely culturally and based on history: ideas were human-made and lived through human history where they formed human cultures and histories. With this, Lazarus and the *Völkerpsychologie* were joining figures in German philosophy like Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, Carl Prantl, Friedrich Ueberweg, Jürgen Bona Meyer, Hermann von Helmholtz or Friedrich Albert Lange. This *Neukantianismus* movement, as Köhnke (1986) has analysed it, was in part reacting to developments towards replacing philosophy with positivistic sciences. Instead, it aimed at a new synthesis, at integrating the knowledge from those emerging sciences into philosophy, it demanded a “new acknowledgement of the empirical” (Köhnke, 1986: 39). But at the same time, this liberation of the philosophical disciplines from the metaphysical method had to be pushed through “against the strongest resistance” (ibid.: 88).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the realistic idealism of Lazarus was no longer the old, speculative, metaphysical one but an idealism based on and controlled by empirical knowledge, particularly from psychology, linguistics and history. Rather than searching for the essence of the idea as such, it was looking for the empiric forms ideas have taken on throughout history and in different languages and cultures around the globe. Rather than speculating about the inner logic of ideas, it was interested in the functions they fulfilled in society, the laws or regularities they followed, how they spread, were used, changed, and influenced the thoughts and actions of living people. In this, he paid particular attention to the question of ethics as a system of ideal ideas that shape how people think they ought to act and how an ideal – i.e. just, emancipated and culturally advanced – society could be constructed.

<sup>7</sup> Even if that hope might not be fully backed by Friedrich Wilhelm's real convictions or political potential, cf. Müller (2011).

<sup>8</sup> For instance when he demonstratively visited a charity event at Berlin's New Synagogue in December 1879 and expressed his support for the Jews against anti-Jewish statements. Cf. Berek (2020: 406–407).

<sup>9</sup> Translations by the author.

The liberalism I speak of is the one connected to the history of the *Nationalverein* and to names like Gabriel Riesser, Eduard Lasker and Ludwig Bamberger but also Rudolf von Bennigsen and Heinrich von Treitschke. It was a liberalism of notability and educated elites, building on enlightenment's high esteem of reason, individual autonomy and education, but also the individual's ethical responsibility. Regarding society, it stood for maximal economic freedom and minimal interference by the state, but also a constitutional system with equal rights for everybody – provided they were male, white and well-off, of course.

Lazarus not only embraced these trends in liberalism and idealism but extended them. In summary, his liberalism was pluralistic and universal, and his idealism was ethical and realistic. The concepts of society he developed and spread in his speeches, articles and books were pluralistic in their conviction that a nation would always consist of diverse groups. They were universalistic in their perspective on humanity as the highest goal (although restrained by European colonial racism and German patriotism). They expressed a deep national-liberal belief in the state and the nation as guarantors for equality, education and progress. Finally, they considered ideas as the main foundation for ethics and society. Unlike Kant, Lazarus merged ethical ideas with physical, mathematical and logical ones under an idea of mankind in interaction. In doing so, he was one of the first to envision a philosophy of culture (Köhnke, 1984, 1990b, 2003; Lessing, 1985; Graevenitz, 1999). Ideas for him, however, had no agency of their own in history but were always dependent on certain material conditions in order to be successful. Of course, he was not alone in that position. But looking at the perception of his work in newspapers and journals, it is clear that he was a prominent philosopher to represent it – and in some respects, he was first.

But after the end of the 1870s, this pluralist liberal tradition was in less demand. With the crisis of political liberalism, its universalist ethical idealism – and its flag-bearers – also became marginalised. German nation and Christian religion went other ways than that of plurality and equality. So, one could say that Lazarus became obsolete together with and as part of the liberal era.

At the same time, antisemitism started to play a role in the perception of his work. Up until 1879, the reviewers and commentators of works by Lazarus had been aware of his Jewishness but did not make it a problem, mostly not even a topic. Lazarus was the celebrated orator, popular philosopher and *Völkerpsychologe*. A telling example was his presence at the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the University of Vienna, where representatives of many European, mostly German-speaking, universities gathered. Newspapers from Bern to Berlin and from Augsburg to Vienna reported on the event as well as on the delegation of Lazarus as Bern's delegate. At the opening ceremony, as reported by several papers, Lazarus delivered a patriotic speech on how the German spirit (*deutscher Geist*) would be fragmented in the realms of politics but united in the academic sphere. When he concluded that science should fulfil its high duty to unite this German spirit for the good of Austria, Germany, science, humanity and ideality of the human spirit, the applause, the papers wrote, was rapturous and the host of the event, the university's rector Hyrtl, hugged and kissed Lazarus. His Jewishness was only mentioned in very few cases, and all without any judgement.<sup>10</sup>

This perception changed with Lazarus's presidency at the Jewish reform synods in 1869 and 1871. Now his Jewishness began to be mentioned regularly, but still in a non-judgemental way: He was now *also* the liberal Jew, next to his other roles and activities. But with the antisemitism debate after Heinrich von Treitschke's infamous text from 1879, his Jewishness became a problem in parts of the public. Now Lazarus was perceived *first and foremost* as the Jew, particularly since he had started to speak up publicly against the antisemitism of Treitschke & Co. Even the part of his oeuvre that had no connection to Judaism at all was now increasingly perceived as Jewish.

By the end of the century, only a few non-Jews continued to accept him as a full member of the educated upper society. In a letter to a friend, writer Theodor Fontane—his long-time colleague in the literature circle *Rüttli*—mentioned Lazarus's 70th birthday and reported that almost no non-Jews had appeared at the celebration. For Lazarus, according to Fontane, this had been a huge disappointment in comparison to the events three decades before at the 500-year anniversary of the University of Vienna:

“(…) there will be many tributes and yet, last of all, disappointments and bitterness. The whole event, according to this report, was [shaped by] *Judenmischpoke* [Jewish mishpocha].<sup>11</sup> The only two points of light are Bern and the Schönefeld pastor because they are Christian, German, and national. I believe that our friend was longing for this; he was sure of the Jews' approval, if only out of esprit de corps. 30 years ago, as he appeared in Vienna as Bern's representative, the rector of the university hugged him and kissed him in front of the assembled people. This kiss is missing today.” (Fontane in a letter to Zöllner, September 18, 1894; Fontane, 1987: 385–386)

<sup>10</sup> For sources and interpretation of the events see Berek (2020: 189–199).

<sup>11</sup> Originally “Mischpoke”, this Yiddish term for family (networks) is mostly used pejoratively in German.

## REFLECTING MARGINALITY: VÖLKERPSYCHOLOGIE

The liberal and pluralist views that shaped Lazarus's political interventions were firmly grounded in the social-psychological concepts of culture and society laid out in *Völkerpsychologie*. If a collective like the nation is based on the actions and self-understanding of its members instead of assumed objective characteristics then 1) membership is by definition open to newcomers like immigrants willing to integrate, and 2) nobody can be excluded on the basis of certain characteristics, like Jews for their religion. In his reaction to Treitschke, the printed lecture *Was heißt national?* (What does national mean?), Lazarus wrote:

“The concept of the nation is grounded on spiritual, historical constellations intervening into naturally given differences; and what makes a nation a nation are not objective conditions such as descent or language as such but the subjective ideas of the members of the nation who are joined together in considering themselves a nation.” (Lazarus, 1880: 64–65)<sup>12</sup>

This is a direct reference to the introduction to *Völkerpsychologie* from 1860 quoted in the beginning. The establishment of this discipline started with the observation that the term *Volkgeist* (national spirit) is often used in everyday life, but hardly dealt with in science, especially in philosophy. *Völkerpsychologie* is supposed to close this gap by psychologically recognising the ‘essence’ of the *Volkgeist* and searching for the laws

“according to which the inner, spiritual or ideal activity of a people (...) goes on (...) [Spirit is] the lawful movement and development of the inner activity” (Lazarus, 1851, quoted from the re-edition in Lazarus, 2003: 4).

It was an open attack on speculative philosophy when he asserted that the new science had to proceed from the empirical facts instead of assumed constructs and ready-made *a priori* categories. Much later, critics would attack *Völkerpsychologie* for having no object at all, because there was no substantial collective psyche, but Lazarus already anticipated and rejected this criticism here by pointing out that even individual psychology by no means had a substantial individual soul to analyse, but only psychic *processes* and *progresses*, i.e., the *laws* according to which the inner activity of people proceeds. A substantial *Volkgeist* is not necessary in the first place to understand these laws, and *Volkgeist* is consequently nothing more than ‘the bond, the principle, the idea of the people’ (ibid.: 12). This is the anything-but-substantialist, or even explicitly anti-substantialist, relational-processual definition of *Volkgeist* by Lazarus, the conceptual core of *Völkerpsychologie* and its most influential part. It provided a fundamentally pluralistic if not constructionist understanding of membership in groups and societies.

Later, in his ‘Synthetic Thoughts on *Völkerpsychologie*’ (1865, re-edited in Lazarus, 2003: 131–238), Lazarus extended his non-Hegelian, non-essentialist interpretation of the notion of *Volkgeist* and developed it further into *objektiver Geist* (objective spirit). Even though Lazarus borrowed the very term from Hegel, he turned it against him by “de-metaphysicising” it, away from speculation about abstract reason and the essential existence of the spirit, towards an empirical analysis of its reality (Lessing, 1985: 61). Hegel defined ‘spirit’ as something substantial, as “individual, acting, utterly alive” (Hegel, 1917: 31), ‘national spirit’ as the spirit of a people in history that is able to grasp itself (ibid.: 42), while ‘objective spirit’ meant the “absolute idea” (Hegel, 1970: § 483) that manifested itself in law, morality and *Sittlichkeit* [ethical life]. What interested Lazarus more than abstract speculations was an ‘objective spirit’ as something *produced* and *created* by humans in their “spiritual coexistence” (Lazarus, 2003: 175). And he did not restrict the sense of ‘objective spirit’ to the realms of law, morality and the state but also included art, religion and philosophy (which Hegel had attributed to the ‘absolute spirit’). Moreover, for Lazarus *all* intellectual and material manifestations of human activity belonged to the world of ‘objective spirit’, which he paraphrased as the “content and form of the intellectual life”, including thoughts, views, beliefs, ways of feeling as well as materialisations as works of art, writings, buildings, tools, machines, products, but also rituals, abilities and institutions (Lazarus, 2003: 190). Or, as Köhnke has put it, the human ‘*natura altera*’ (Köhnke, 2003: XXXV), in the same sense as today’s broad understanding of *culture*: the world of objectified products of human expressions and actions that comes to exist through the action of individual humans and at the same time is existentially shaping every human being. This cultural theory of the ‘objective spirit’ was taken on by Dilthey, Simmel and their successors, and with his question of the conditions of the possibility of culture, Lazarus had laid the foundation for a study of culture that included the everyday world (Köhnke, 1990a; 2003).

The somewhat inconsistent use of terms by Lazarus and Steinthal, however, gave rise to substantialist misinterpretations, no matter how often they explicitly rejected them. But the concept *Volkgeist* by Lazarus and Steinthal also transported a certain contradiction in itself insofar as it emphasised the subjectivity and constructive nature of *Volk* (folk, people) and the interaction between the individual and the collectivity, but simultaneously

<sup>12</sup> Translation from Stoetzler (2008: 103), where also a complete translation of *Was heißt national?* can be found.

was embedded in normative and tendentially essentialising notions of *Volk*: In the eyes of Lazarus and Steinthal, the new science had the task of proving both causally and teleologically that the *Volk* is absolutely necessary in comparison with other groups – and that it is the ‘all-essential’ community (Lazarus and Steinthal, 1860: 5).

One of the most important tasks of *Völkerpsychologie* was to illuminate the relationship of the individual to the collectivity in its interaction, as Lazarus did in his conceptual article under the same title (1862, re-edited in Lazarus 2003: 39–129). His description of this relationship is proto-sociological. The self-awareness of the individual is based not only on its individual characteristics, inclinations, desires, attitudes, abilities, and property, but also on its *relations* to the whole:

“[S]ociety does not consist of individuals as such, but individuals exist and consist in and of society. Considered in abstract metaphysics, or going back to the real origin, we will have to imagine both members of the relationship, the whole and its parts, existing and acting simultaneously; but if we consider any historical moment, then we will even have to assert that logically, temporally, and psychologically collectivity precedes the individuals.” (Lazarus, 2003 [1862]: 82)

He meant this, however, not as the blind devotion of the subject to the collective or even its absorption in it, as his biographer Alfred Leicht imputed to him later (cf. Berek, 2020: 140–141, 497). For Lazarus, the relationship was more complex. For him, individuality remained ‘the foundation and the dignity of the human being [*der Mensch*] and everything human [*das Menschliche*]’ (Lazarus, 2003 [1862]: 107). He was not concerned with a collectivist philosophy of the *We*, but with a sociological re-foundation of the individual and of individuality at a time when the subject was often still understood as a monad existing somewhere outside of history and society. His theory culminated in an ideal conception of society in which society’s greatest strength arises from the highest possible freedom and individuality of every person:

“The greatest unity consists in the greatest effect of the individual on the collectivity (...) through the strongest intensification of individuality” (Lazarus, 2003 [1862]: 127).

The culture theory of Lazarus’s and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* culminated in the notion of *Mannigfaltigkeit* (manifoldness or multifariousness) which implies *difference* as well as *plurality*. The main idea behind it was to not just ‘accept’ or ‘tolerate’ diversity and difference between people but to embrace and cultivate this very *Mannigfaltigkeit* as the key feature of modern culture – or civilised society (cf. van Rahden, 2022). Marginality was a starting point for this understanding of society but something that should be discarded along the path of development. Marginality was built into this theory of culture and at the same time was a phenomenon that had to vanish because every subgroup and individual that wanted to was to become a part of the whole; nobody should be marginalised by exclusion from an assumed normality.

Accordingly, it is no surprise that Lazarus had no appreciation at all for theories about human ‘races’ that spread throughout academic and public discussions of his time and became the main foundation for modern antisemitism. Resuming the older scientific and philosophical debates between idealism and materialism, Lazarus aligns the reductionist and essentialist materialism in ‘race’ theories with the ethically and cognitively flawed political positions of the antisemitic parties:

“Anyway, this blood-and-race-theory is in its entirety a product of a general coarsely sensualist-materialistic worldview (...) The arousal of the meanest and basest antagonism, of racial or tribal hatred is the effect, sometimes even the cause of this materialism, always its accompaniment. I call it the meanest and basest because it is the most bestial, because it flares up among animals for no reason other than difference (...) If we have to talk about blood then, for my part, I declare solemnly that blood means bloody little to me, while spirit and historical evolution mean almost everything when it comes to the value and dignity of humans, individuals or tribes.” (Lazarus, 1880: 73–74)<sup>13</sup>

## INFLUENCING DISCOURSES

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, *Völkerpsychologie* proved to be a welcome part of the German national project, which was the explicit intention of its founders. Its subjective-dynamic definition of the nation struck a nerve among the educated, bourgeois, liberal patriots who saw themselves as supporters of a German *Kulturnation* (culture nation). That is one reason why *Völkerpsychologie*, in the understanding of Lazarus, was well-known in German-speaking feuilletons, the other lay in the second part of the endeavour: *Völkerpsychologie* meaning a characterology of people interested in distinguishing people according to their assumed cultural characteristics.

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<sup>13</sup> Translation from: Stoetzler (2008: 330).

As stressed before, the approach of Lazarus and Steinthal in no way meant the substantialist-biological *origin* model of collective belonging, but rather the dynamic-cultural *pluralism* model of socialisation. In the public perception, however, this reading of *Völkerpsychologie* was almost always marginalised, in part due to the wide scope of interpretation that it offered. Thus, proponents of folk psychological analysis could pick out only the comparative or chauvinistic elements of *Völkercharakterologie* (characterology of people) and thus negate the constructionist and individualistic elements. This selective perception can be found in the general press, in texts by sociologists from Gustav Schmoller (Schmoller, 2010 [1898]: 14) to Georg Simmel (1888: 47), even in Jewish and Zionist sources (Nordau, 1909: 136–139; Hurwicz, 1920: 6–9), and not surprisingly among National Socialist folk psychologists like Willy Hellpach (1938; cf. Berek, 2020: 252–289).

At the end of the 19th century, *Völkerpsychologie* was increasingly associated with Lazarus's Judaism – both by himself and by voices in the Jewish press. His social theory was interpreted as a bulwark of integration against the exclusionary attacks of the antisemites, but also as a contribution to the self-understanding of a German-national Judaism, with its subjective-dynamic definition of the nation. In terms of content, Lazarus's ideas thus also became interesting for cultural Zionism (Coralnik, 1903).

But probably the most important influence of this project of a social theory from the German-Jewish margin was the role *Völkerpsychologie* played historically as a predecessor of sociology, anthropology and the study of culture. Lazarus had developed a modern, pluralist and constructionist social theory that – through his pupils Georg Simmel and Franz Boas – shaped the development of those disciplines, especially through its understanding of society as constructed in plurality and diversity and also by marginal groups. Research since the 1980s has carved out in detail the far-reaching impact that Lazarus and Steinthal, as founders of a new, modern cultural science, had on sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, and cultural philosophy (Köhnke, 1984, 1990a, 1990b, 2003; Lessing, 1985; Kalmar, 1987; Graevenitz, 1999; Trautmann-Waller, 2008; Hartung, 2012). This had already been anticipated around the middle of the century by the cultural philosopher Ernst Cassirer (2004) who called *Völkerpsychologie* a psychology of symbolic forms, and Ferdinand Tönnies (1908) who had attested to its anticipation of highly modern thoughts from which sociology could still learn. As a discipline, however, it has undoubtedly failed in the eyes of researchers, due to internal contradictions such as the one between pluralistic cultural theory and Eurocentric characterology of people (cf. Graevenitz, 1999; Klautke, 2013), but also due to external factors such as the increasingly racist interpretation of the term *Völke* or the experimental-scientific development of psychology, not least through Wilhelm Wundt, who with his mammoth work of the same name was regarded as the new representative of *Völkerpsychologie*. In the second half of the 19th century, Lazarus's relationist-sociological and historical take on psychology remained just as prominent as he himself was considered one of the most important psychologists. At the end of the century, however, he and his approach have been increasingly marginalised by the individual-experimental strand of psychology that was on its way to dominating the discipline.

## CONCLUSION

Lazarus and his work are an example of how someone could live at the centre of society and still be marginalised, how living at the margins can shape the theoretic reflection on society, and at the same time how this theory can then become a part of political and social struggles to overcome marginality. Lazarus's ideas were accepted, absorbed selectively or contested, but, in the end, the ambivalence of the perception stems from the modernity of his questions and conclusions. He was a prominent representative of an era of national-liberal and idealist optimism that ended around 1879. Marginality, however, can also be constructed post festum. This article has demonstrated how Jews like Lazarus were actively co-constructing the German national project in the 19th century, in many cases without being questioned. This is something antisemitic non-Jews could neither bear nor reconcile with their idea of a homogeneous Christian nation. They had to wipe the traces of this German-Jewish co-construction from history and were widely successful in doing so. From a post-Shoah position, one can hardly imagine how normal the German-Jewish existence could be in the second half of the 19th century.<sup>14</sup> **Figure 1** might illustrate this normality. It shows the three presidents of the Jewish Reform Synod in Leipzig in 1869, Josef Wertheimer, M. Lazarus and Abraham Geiger. While this was an event of inner-Jewish relevance, the noteworthy fact about the picture and the article it accompanied is that it appeared on the title page of a popular German general illustrated journal, the *Leipziger Illustrirte Zeitung*. To consequently remove facts like these from German memory culture, as it has been done in the 20th century, was useful and indispensable for the homogenisation of the German nation, which culminated in its most radical implementation by the National Socialists.

<sup>14</sup> And not only in Germany, of course, see the situation in the Habsburg Empire (Hödl, 2013).



Obler Ritter v. Wertheimer.

Professor Dr. M. Lazarus.

Rabbiner Dr. K. Griger.

**Die Präsidenten der ersten israelitischen Synode zu Leipzig.**

**Figure 1.** Facsimile of title page, *Illustrierte Zeitung*, July 31, 1869, vol. 53 (July/December 1869), reproduction: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, permalink: <https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/details:bsb10498744>.

The case of the marginal man Lazarus in the centre of German society not only shows that homogeneity of modern societies is always a fiction and can only be realised by exerting violence. It also reminds us that such marginalisations can limit conceptual spaces, remove interesting if not promising ideas of how to organise society from the realm of the imaginable and thus limit the flexibility of society to develop and react to challenges. This also concerns (scholarly) thinking about society: the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal had been forgotten for decades and only began to be rediscovered in the 1980s, and then it turned out that the cultural turn they had proposed had since been reinvented.

Lazarus's theory of culture based on and developed through *Mannigfaltigkeit* (plurality) is useful as a descriptive as well as a normative tool to engage with the modern situation. His proto-constructivist, voluntaristic take on the relation between the individual and its society provides answers to some of the major questions bigger societies

still struggle with: how to negotiate the needs of dominant and marginal groups, how to balance the inseparable and mutually essential relations between tradition and transformation, the subject and its collectives, the ideas and the structures, the particular and the universal, or the local and the global. And a closer look at the inner contradiction between this pluralistic theory and Lazarus's own affirmation of the nation can be taken as learning material on how the impact of such ideas is being sabotaged when one holds on to others that are incompatible. In the case of Lazarus, that led to the widespread selective public perception of the *Völkerpsychologie*, where mostly the folk characterology part had been embraced, not the more progressive pluralism and proto-constructivism. In a time where increasingly large parts of democratic societies also redevelop an inclination towards the certainties and homogeneity of the tribal fire (Bauman, 2017), the thought of Lazarus, how it was shaped by his marginal situation, but also how it shaped his world and changed his situation, at least for a certain period, has some old-new answers to those challenges. Lazarus's theory delivers intriguing arguments that strong collectivity can be firmly grounded in individualism and that the problems of complex modern societies will not be solved by absolutist answers but always by looking for the relations. And all that, in no small part, can be attributed to his own position at the centre and the margins.

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## Sociology of the Contrapuntal: The Holocaust and the Rhetoric of Evil

Andrea Lombardinilo <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Gabriele d'Annunzio University, Chieti-Pescara, ITALY*

\*Corresponding Author: [andrea.lombardinilo@unich.it](mailto:andrea.lombardinilo@unich.it)

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### ABSTRACT

The essay dwells on the construction of a sociology of the contrapuntal that revolves around the social and symbolic patterns concerning the representation of mass human annihilation, as in the case of the Holocaust. In this view, Roger Silverstone's metaphor of media contrapuntuality – inspired by the analysis of some narrative masterpieces focused on imperialistic and colonial exploitation – may support the development of a sociological pathway supporting the analysis of the “rhetoric of evil” historically permeating the reflection on the refusal and the oppression of Otherness. Contrapuntuality deals with communication, memory and identity, since the rhetoric patterns of media discourse are shaped not only by the negative issues, but also by good deeds and intentions that rarely are attractive to journalists. The proposal of such a sociology of the contrapuntal, inspired by the counterbalance of good and evil in the public sphere, complies with the increasing complexity of our mediascapes, in which mass massacres and identity annihilation, including the Holocaust, are constantly media represented, in line with the need to contrast cultural marginalization and existential displacement.

**Keywords:** media, displacement, Holocaust, memory, contrapuntuality

### INTRODUCTION

The essay deals with the relationship between sociology, memory and cultural displacement, inspired by the commemoration by the European Commission President von der Leyen of the victims of the Holocaust delivered on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023, in reference to the construction of a wider European community founded on the struggle against antisemitism and racism: “Remembrance is not an aim in itself. We must go a step further. We must foster Jewish life. Europe can only prosper when its Jewish communities prosper too. We will work towards a European Union free from antisemitism and any form of discrimination. For an open, inclusive and equal European society” (von der Leyen, 2023). By the same token, the essay deals with the sociological and communicative patterns of the Holocaust in the annual celebrations of the liberation of Nazi camps through memory and information. As a result, the International Day of Holocaust remembrance represents the will to remember the slaughter of six million Jews in Nazi concentration camps, in tune with a public narrative which involves mainstream and digital media.

The communicative paradigms inspiring these celebrations seem to foster Zygmunt Bauman's interpretation of the Holocaust as the result of the “logic of modernity” in order to shed light on the social, cultural, religious and economic factors at the basis of Nazis persecution (Bauman, 1989). In this view, Bauman's interpretation of the Holocaust can be set within the wider sociological framework of fear and risk, as Erving Goffman (1961), Ulrich Beck (1992), Jean Baudrillard (1993), Richard Sennett (2013) and, more recently, Frank Furedi (2018) point out, in conjunction with the ethical approach also provided by Hannah Arendt (2006) in reference to the “banality of evil” in total institutions. This is why memory complies both with rhetoric and narration, in line with the communicative stereotypes and platitudes of the connected society highlighted by Roger Silverstone (2007: 85-90),

in reference to the contrapuntal patterns of media representations, as the dialectic of good and evil and the topic of cultural marginalization may significantly shape the infrastructure of contemporary public sphere. As von der Leyen (2023) assumes, “We cannot remain silent when injustice takes place, when massacres are committed. We have to call out antisemitism, antigypsyism and all forms of hatred and discrimination – be it on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability”.

As Silverstone (2007: 85) points out, Edward Said refers to the “contrapuntal as a metaphor addressing the structured complexity both of his own experience of exile and of the nature, principally, of the novel in nineteenth-century, imperial, France and Britain”, with particular regard to the narrative relevance given to emarginated, downtrodden and exiled people. In this view, the metaphor of the contrapuntal provided by Silverstone enables a different and more attentive analysis of the media rhetoric inspired by the representation of evil and the celebration of good, as the need to narrate and understand the persecution and the annihilation of the Other often complies with the media tendency to counterbalance the perspective of analysis, so as to understand why the Holocaust has to be considered “a test for modernity”, as Bauman (1989: 6-12) does. This scientific effort should aim at constructing the epistemological paradigms of a sociology of the contrapuntal that ought to dwell on the symbolic and narrative investigation of those actions of identity removal and discrimination that colonial policies, military invasions and mass slaughters have emphasized during the nineteenth and twentieth century (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). In this perspective, the metaphor of the contrapuntal can provide some useful epistemological keys linked to the complexity of our media scenario and the urgency of bestowing our narration with the fundamental cognitive and ethical elements provided by memory and heritage (van Dijck et al., 2018; Boccia Artieri, 2012; Appadurai, 1996).

## CONTRAPUNTUALITY AS A COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY

Marginalization, displacement and representation seem to inspire Silverstone’s analysis of contemporary media landscapes, as the innovation of communicative processes appears increasingly supported by the myth of connection and reticularization of experiences (Livingstone, 2007). Assuming that every communicative act may concern political and strategic implications, Silverstone deals with the role played by morality in the era of mainstream anxiety and hyperconnected exchanges, thus debunking the narrative aporias lurking in the media-sphere, especially in reference to the public discourse concerning the risks of integration and inclusion (Silverstone, 1994). By the same token, cosmopolitanism and pluralism seem to belong to the rhetoric of “politically correct” that often hampers the acknowledgement of the risks stemming from the failed osmosis between the local and the foreigner, despite the attempts of supranational institutions to support integration, as Bauman (2004) repeatedly pointed out in his most recent works dedicated to the future of the European Union.

Silverstone focuses on the media marginalization of cultural and social minorities, in a time ruled by the instantaneous sharing of images and contents, despite the increasing isolation of social actors and the digital projection of individual and collective experiences. What does cosmopolitan mean in the era of the secondary modernization probed by Ulrich Beck (1992)? How has inclusion to be set within the social patterns provided by Jürgen Habermas (2007) and Anthony Giddens (1990)? What role does marginalization play in the era of mainstream narratives investigated by Frank Furedi (2018: 207-236) in reference to the globalization of risks and uncertainty? All these questions seem to be taken into account by Silverstone in *Media and Morality* (2007), inspired by the need of investigating the fading away of morality and ethics from the contemporary communicative scenario (Dayan, 2007), in a time characterized by the growth of immigration, ethnical prevarications, new conflicts and the radicalization of poverty and exploitation:

The cosmopolitan individual embodies, in his or her person, a doubling of identity and identification; the cosmopolitan, as an ethic, embodies a commitment, indeed an obligation, to recognize not just the stranger as other, but the other in oneself. Cosmopolitanism implies and requires, therefore, the reflexivity and toleration. In political terms it demands justice and liberty. In social terms, hospitality. And in media terms, [...], an obligation to listen, an obligation which I will suggest is a version of hospitality (Silverstone, 2007: 14).

In media terms, the “obligation to listen” implies the obligation to inform, represent and express, despite the logics of gatekeeping and agenda setting that still nowadays rule the infrastructure of the public sphere (McQuail, 2013). This is why the metaphor of the contrapuntal gains a significant sociological relevance in Silverstone’s mediology, especially if we take into account that the author takes inspiration from Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and his cultural analysis of some celebrated novelists, such as Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and Albert Camus, to the extent that they succeeded in depicting the side effects of imperialism and colonization, along with the social inequalities stemming from slavery and discrimination (Silverstone, 2007: 88-89).

In this view, literature may support social criticism and cultural inquiry. Thus, the distance between civilized and uncivilized people may be interpreted as a lag of collective perception and media representation. In Silverstone's perspective, cosmopolitanism and inclusion are social processes that ought to be radically embedded in the "mediapolis" that new and old media shape within the open environment of daily exchanges, in which a new rhetoric takes form to express the stereotypes and commonplaces with the power to symbolically construct our social reality. Thus, the metaphor of the "contrapuntal" effectively expresses the mediatized complexity of our media-sphere, especially when communication implies reading, hearing and interpreting. The tenet of the contrapuntal, taken from the musical sphere, is inspired by the permanent counterbalances that public and institutional communication have to pursue to give voice to the contradictory events forming the ecology of information that we deal with, assuming that every informative input consists in textual patterns (Altheide, 2014, 2002).

This is why the literary analysis carried out by Edward Said in reference to the development of imperialism can provide some reliable heuristic tools to investigate the so called "rhetoric of evil" that both Richard Sennett (2008: 1-15) and Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 18-27) analyze through Hannah Arendt's writings. The contrapuntal is the result of a long process of intellectual meditation and emotional sedimentation, as some novels emphasize: "The generic argument is that literary texts both are, and therefore must be read as, contrapuntal. And indeed contrapuntality, if there is such a word, emerges as a product of the reading rather than writing, since the writer might not be aware of the otherness against which she is writing" (Silverstone, 2007: 88). Silverstone makes reference not only to the "sociologically identifiable subtexts" present in some important novels of the late eighteenth, nineteenth and even twentieth century, but also to all those textual products, including the informative ones, that contribute to the symbolic construction of our environment through the representation of those contradictions that exalt the struggle for life and need of resistance in dire straits. Therefore, it is possible to switch the metaphor of the contrapuntal from a narrative dimension to a sociological context starting from the epistemological role played by reading as it evolves through digitalization, at a time of misleading, unidentified forms of exploitation and colonialism (McEwan, 2018; Loomba, 1998):

But the contrapuntal also consists in the presence of oppositional and resistant writing, which in a colonial and post-colonial environment appears against but also alongside that of the mainstream. And finally the contrapuntal appears as a way of characterizing the process of reading in which novels are read again and read differently as time passes and cultures change. The significance of the contrapuntal lies in its doubling (or trebling or quadrupling), and the presumption is made that there is an identifiable integrity which is constituted, but at the same time disturbed, by that doubling (Silverstone, 2007: 88).

In this view, reading implies a permanent process of interpreting and semantic renovation through the acknowledgment of the mainstream dimension of our narrative patterns and interpretative paradigms (Wolfe, 2016: 131-169). While dwelling on the "oppositional and resistant writing" engendered by mainstream narrations, Silverstone provides an insightful sociological approach that resides in the interpretation of the "mediapolis" as the result of centripetal and centrifugal communicative thrusts, in tune with the need to juxtapose political and economic interests and public engagement. Our digital complexity confirms that the informative relevance of the "rhetoric of evil" complies with the semiotic attention paid to all categories of marginalized subjects who rarely find their place within public narrations, thus highlighting the "contrapuntal" dimension of public representations. The media translation of reality is usually inspired by the exaltation of risks and disasters, in line with the sharing of dematerialized simulacra that have the power to replace factual happenings with their iconic trace, as Baudrillard arguably posited: "Today the whole system is swamped by indeterminacy, and every reality is absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and simulation. The principle of simulation governs us now, rather than the outdated reality principle. We feed on those forms whose finalities have disappeared. No more ideology, only simulacra" (Baudrillard, 1993: 2).

The simulacrum of evil represents the most significant media keystone of our society, as the contrapuntal fascination of communication resides in the very balance of bad and good stories. This is why memory ought to play a central role in the sociological investigation concerning the construction of our collective identity, as Silverstone (1999: 128) points out in *Why Study the Media?* "To study the media's relationship to memory is not to deny the authority of the event which is the focus of recollection, but it is to insist on the media's capacity to construct a public past, as well as a past for the public. The texture of memory is intertwined with the texture of experience". The recollection of memory deals with the search for identity and the construction of a public discourse that might be as attractive as shareable from a civil point of view, as in the case of the Holocaust, that from a sociological perspective represents a fundamental example of contrapuntal narration, as the analysis of the Holocaust provided by Silverstone demonstrates. Assuming that "memory is struggle", it is possible dwell on the contrapuntal paradigms of the mediapolis in which we are imbued, since the relationship between memory and

information may engender a series of narrative pathways founded on the need for collective acknowledgement and public identity recollection (McIntyre, 2019; Curran, 2012; Chomsky, 2002).

## THE HOLOCAUST AS A TEST OF MODERNITY

We suspect (even if we refuse to admit it) that the Holocaust could merely have uncovered another face of the same modern society whose other, more familiar, face we so admire. And that the two faces are perfectly comfortably attached to the same body. What we perhaps fear most, is that each of the two faces can no more exist without the other than can the two sides of a coin (Bauman, 1989: 7).

In *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Zygmunt Bauman rebuts the stereotype of the Holocaust interpreted as a mere aberration and as an unexpected and unforeseen drift from the main road of civilization and progress. On the contrary, the Holocaust should be set within the development of modernity and its profound contradictions, effectively highlighted by Ulrich Beck (2016: 141-149) in reference to the side-effects of the “secondary modernization”. Considering the Holocaust as a “test of modernity”, Bauman pays new epistemological attention to the origins and the causes of the Holocaust, starting from the socio-cultural reflection on Adorno and Horkheimer’s “dialectic of enlightenment” (1972: 1-34). In this account Gerson and Wolf (2007: 11) argue that “the focus in sociology, much as in other disciplines, was on perpetrators rather than on victims as researchers grappled with the threat the Holocaust posed to Enlightenment ideals”. Bauman’s epistemological effort revolves around the perimetral definition of “sociology after the Holocaust”, along with the symbolic aporias of our social complexity and its identity short circuits. To the extent that the Holocaust is definable as “a test for Modernity”, the array of narrations, testaments, movies, diaries, documentaries dedicated to the persecution of the Jews represents the communicative legacy and contrapuntal information concerning one of the most dreadful massacres of the twentieth century, as Bauman points out:

The unspoken terror permeating our collective memory of the Holocaust (and more than contingently related to the overwhelming desire not to look the memory in its face) is the gnawing suspicion that the Holocaust could be more than an aberration, more than a deviation from on the otherwise healthy body of the civilized society; that, in short, the Holocaust was not an antithesis of modern civilization and everything (or so we like to think) it stands for (Bauman, 1989: 7).

While recollecting the tenet of the “memory of the Holocaust”, Bauman aims at impeding the interpretative simplification of the Nazi persecution of millions of actors marginalized for cultural, racial, sexual, eugenic reasons. In this view, the practice of memory can reveal the need for social identity and criminal acknowledgment (Murray, 1991). To say that the Holocaust cannot be considered as “an antithesis of modern civilization” means that progress implies development and improvement, but also cynicism, individualization and indifference, especially when ideological and political myopia lead to the annihilation of life itself (Palmer and Brzeziński, 2022). Therefore, sociology should frame such events within the institutional context which produced the theory of the “final solution” through the dissemination of camps that had to be functional to the criminal plan arranged by Eichmann and all the Nazi entourage.

The sociology of the Holocaust provided by Bauman seems to anticipate the sociology of the contrapuntal posited by Silverstone, even because it interprets the persecution and assassination of the Jews as a sociological fact so closely related to the civil, political, cultural, urban and social conditions ruling Germany in the first half of the Twentieth century. The Holocaust was not an incident of the history, but a consequence of society, as Bauman sharply contends: “The Holocaust has exposed and examined such attributes of our society as are not revealed, and hence are not empirically accessible, in ‘non-laboratory’ conditions. In other words, I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society” (Bauman, 1989: 12).

Since the sociology of the Holocaust has never really been developed, the sociology after the Holocaust deserves to be investigated and implemented. To the fore is the meaning of the civilizing process that Norbert Elias (1978) intelligently analyzed without neglecting Max Weber’s “vision of rationalization” that seems to foreshadow the myth of bureaucratization and organization pursued by Adolf Hitler at a paroxysmal level. This is why the Holocaust has to be interpreted as a relevant sociological field, in line with the “contrapuntal” representations provided by the array of narrations and movies dedicated to that unbelievable human disaster. The sociological keywords of the Holocaust are neither violence nor persecution, but civilization and modernity, as Bauman clearly argues:

Modern civilization was not the Holocaust’s *sufficient* condition; it was, however, most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern

civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable. “The Nazi mass murder of the European Jewry was not only the technological achievement of an industrial society, but also the organizational achievement of a bureaucratic society”. Just consider what was needed to make the Holocaust unique among the many mass murders which marked the historical advance of the human species (Bauman, 1989: 13).

The dialectics of sufficient and necessary conditions permeates all the theoretical reflections on the great and inescapable human contradictions, starting from the persecutions of Jews. As a result, the memory of the Holocaust entails the narration and the communication of the Holocaust, as Silverstone recalls in *Why Study the Media?* in reference to the role played by memory in our hyperconnected world, since “the texture of memory is intertwined with the texture of experience. Memory is work: it is never shaped in a vacuum, nor are its motives ever pure. Memory is struggle. And therefore it is wise to struggle over memory” (Silverstone, 1999: 128). The practice of memory is often interpreted as a mere recollection of facts and events, despite the fact that memory is more than knowledge and memorization. Assuming that memory is “struggle”, Silverstone emphasizes the cognitive dimension of such a process of knowledge, in which identity and the imaginary converge to shape the collective imaginary of the world.

Time and space cooperate to probe the contradictions and aporias of the human race, especially when evil inspires mass murders. It is no accident that the narration of the Holocaust is closely related to the tenets of social justice and cultural restitution, as every form of reparation risks being inadequate and inappropriate (Bajohr and Löw, 2016). Silverstone’s invitation to “consider the Holocaust” (Silverstone, 1999: 128) implies the need of justice and information about one of the greatest tragedies of the modern world, as Robert J. C. Young said (2016). Hence the analysis of the Holocaust through a sociological approach that might mitigate the emptiness of human existence, in line with the therapeutical force of memory: “Of course the media cannot be silent. And we must not be allowed to forget. But what should we remember and who has the rights of narration and inscription?” (Silverstone, 1999: 128-129).

The struggle for truth requires information and reliability of sources, insofar as ambiguity, mystification and opacity may hamper the process of documental restitution. In this view, Adorno’s considerations on history and truth inspire several epigrams of *Minima moralia* shedding light on the contradictory and contrapuntal patterns of human deeds, as remembering means also pain and suffering: “The expression of history in things is no other than of past torment” (Adorno, 2005: 49). Memory is struggle and torment, as we find out every year during the celebration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January) that turns into a media and informative globalized topic. The media narration of Nazi cruelty turns into the attempt to sublimate the force of evil and debunk that “rhetoric of evil” that Silverstone (2007: 56-79) focuses on while asking for a better convergence of media and morality. In this account, Hannah Arendt’s writings help us to understand the origins of evil and its social effects, as Sennett (2008: 286-296) also highlights. More specifically, it is important to emphasize that the rhetoric of evil is closely related to the “meditation of evil” (Silverstone, 2007: 61) imposing a sharp reflection on the communicative pathways that propaganda and coercion follow, often inspired by banalization and Manicheism. Indoctrination needs communication and persuasion, as Arendt points out in the epilogue of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958):

The point is that the impact of factual reality, like all other human experiences, needs speech if it is to survive the moment of experience, needs talk and communication with others to remain sure of itself. Total dominion succeeds to the extent that it succeeds in interrupting all channels of communication, those from person to person inside the four walls of privacy no less than the public ones which are safeguarded in democracies by freedom of speech and opinion (Arendt, 1958: 495).

To the fore is the ambiguity of communication in the presence of ideological and instrumental purposes which only the contrapuntal effort of research and narration can rebut, in the era of symbolic and semiotic overload (Craig and Tracy, 2020; Boltanski, 1993).

## TOTAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIETY: STIGMA AS A SOCIOLOGICAL KEYSTONE

The definition of the Holocaust as “a test for modernity” provides a series of sociological insights functional to the construction of a sociology of the contrapuntal probing the relationship of good and evil in contemporary media narrations, starting from the dynamics of discrimination and rehabilitation concerning marginalized and unrepresented subjects. When cultures are on the margins, media risk drawing on banalization and simplification, thus fostering a sort of representative standardization in tune with audience expectations. This is a symbolic tendency cleverly depicted by Ulrich Beck in his posthumous book, *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016), about the sharing of digital “politics of invisibility”:

Global risks are fundamentally characterized by the problematic of invisibility. This problematic of invisibility is intrinsically connected to the problematic of power. In order to analyze the new landscapes of relations of definition, it is useful to introduce a time-diagnostic dualism between a *natural* (“given”) invisibility of highly civilizational risks and *manufactured* invisibility (politics of invisibility) (Beck, 2016: 99).

The more cultures appear as marginal and peripheral, the more media tend to reduce the emphasis on the differentiation and diversification, as Beck duly underlines in reference to the manufactured politics of invisibility and visibility that deal with the dynamics of agenda setting (McQuail, 2013). The contrapuntal narration of our globalized civilization should revolve around the fluctuation between risks and advantages stemming from the process of technological sophistication that engenders all those symbolic biases ruling our hyperconnected environments (Castells, 2009). Hence the attention on life conditions within and without the total institutions including camps, barracks, asylums, covenants, in which the cult of individual personality still yields to the dogmatic respect of norms and rules. Goffman’s (1961) analysis of total institutions from the perspective of the mechanisms of exclusion and violence helps us understand the processes of annihilation of personal identity, as the possession of a stigma (either physical, cultural, behavioral or psychiatric) may itself determine the confinement and repression of posited diversities. In fact, the interpretation of stigma as a medium of “spoiled identity” has opened up very important epistemological pathways concerning both sociology and literature, as Goffman himself demonstrated in *Asylums* by means of several literary quotations. The convergence of literature, cinema and sociology highlights the numberless ways of representation of the behavioral rules imposed inside a total institution, since every social gathering has to be considered as a community, including the one constructed in a coercive way, as in the case of the inmates recovered in mental hospitals:

A community is a community. Just as it is bizarre to those not in it, so it is natural, even if unwanted, to those who live it from within. The system of dealings that patients have with one another does not fall at one end of anything, but rather provides one example of human association, to be avoided, no doubt, but also to be filed by the student in a circular cabinet along with all the other examples of association that can be collected (Goffman, 1961: 303).

Hence follows the need of investigating the way interned people adapt themselves to the specific norms of the total institutions, including Nazi concentration camps. As Goffman emphasizes, the underlife of a public institution is often characterized by a series of primary and secondary adaptations inspired by the urgency to survive within a coercive regime and to cope with the array of risky situations that might jeopardize the cohabitation with the other inmates. These are social and relational phenomena profitably described also by José Saramago in *Blindness* (about the confinement *extra moenia* of people suffering from a blindness outbreak) and Primo Levi in *If This is Man* (focused on his imprisonment in Auschwitz). The analysis of the adaptations imposed on inmates in hospitals, asylums, barracks and concentration camps sheds light on the sociological premises of total institutions and confinement. As Foucault underpins in *Discipline and Punish* (1979: 73-103), the strategy of control always complies with the social instinct to isolate and redeem those subjects who can represent a source of treatment and disorder.

In this view, the experience of the Holocaust can be described as one of the most dreadful and diabolic experiments of social cleansing by means of the technological and managerial development of Nazi Germany. *Schindler’s List* (1994), *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and *The Photographer of Mathausen* (2018) are good examples of the “contrapuntal dimension of mainstream narration of the Holocaust”, but not so clearly of the Holocaust as a consequence of modernity. The contrapuntal dimension of mainstream narration of the Holocaust resides precisely in the fluctuation of good and evil that always characterizes great human tragedies, since solidarity clashes with cruelty and generosity collides with cynicism. Those and other movies describe the need for contingent adaptations to unexpected conditions of life, as Goffman deals with the contingent adaptations of both inmates and soldiers in the same contexts:

It should be quite plain that primary and secondary adjustments are matters of social definition and that an adaptation or incentive that is legitimated at one period in a given society may not be legitimated at a different time in its history or in another society. [...] In American internment camps, access to a prostitute is not conceived of as a need to be honored within the establishment; some German concentration camps, on the other hand, did have this wider view of the essential and characteristic need of men (Goffman, 1961: 194).

Movies, diaries and literary narrations provide an array of descriptions of those primary and secondary adjustments that allowed people to cope with the process of identity annihilation, especially in the case of the cultural, religious and social displacement that marginalized subjects underwent because of their identity drift and cultural mismatch, thus making inclusion and integration an unfair challenge. The polysemic patterns of languages



allow us to unveil the unseen depths of human consciousness, to the extent that the constructions of nationalism and imperialism also resides in the marginalization of languages, religions and symbols. To the fore is the collision of the rhetoric of evil and the search for truth, that – for instance – Richard Sennett (2011: 3-44) investigated in reference to the confinement of Jews in the ghetto in Renaissance Venice. The coercive confinement of “detached people” in a ghetto has produced the gloomy imaginary of the Jews persecuted and stigmatized, as Shakespeare lyrically depicted in *The Merchant of Venice*.

The metaphor of society as a collective body shows not only a positive and functionalist influence, but it might be related to the growth of the sociology of the masses, with the focus on the laws of imitation and the criminal dynamics engendered by *The Lonely Crowd* probed by David Riesman (1950). This metaphor has of course lost its epistemological force in the era of connected globalization, but it has legitimated the exclusion and segregation of a series of publicly stigmatized subjects over the centuries, until the “final solution” supported by Eichmann through the segregation of Jews outside the urban boundaries.

Unlike the camp, the ghetto had the function of safeguarding the “collective body” of the Jewish community and, in the same way, of making segregation a sort of social and cultural protection from external interferences. The pogroms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exalted the practice of violence as a popular reaction, as Bauman constantly outlines in reference to the Jewish persecutions. Thus, the confinement of persecuted people outside the city limits paradoxically highlights the need of conserving the “collective body” of society, in line with the planned endeavor to remove the spurious and stigmatized elements. Once again, Sennett’s analysis of the Renaissance Venetian ghetto highlights the practice of cultural confinement seen as a social need, in tune with the politics of visibility and invisibility that gain new forms in the contemporary society:

The belief in organic community, a belief held in opposition to the forces of modern capitalism, thus came in more modern times to be embodied by those who were marginal; segregation was made into a positive human value, as though the segregated had been kept from contagion. Ghetto-space was idealized as ‘real’ community, as an organic space. The Jews of Renaissance Venice were the first to think of their segregation as containing, ironically, this positive virtue. (Sennett, 2011: 7)

Despite the ideological drifts of the twentieth century, the experience of the Renaissance ghetto still provides useful cultural insight to better understand the contrapuntal patterns of the contemporary narration of segregation and isolation, along with the fear of contagion that we all underwent during the Covid pandemic, in which isolation was often described as the only way to survive and cope with the uncontrolled spread of a virus that has profoundly transformed social and relational interactions (Boccia Artieri and Farci, 2021).

## MEMORY AS THE SIMULACRUM OF OUR INFORMATIONAL PATHWAYS

Ahead of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recalled the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto on 19 April 1943, along with other revolts against the Nazi regime in the concentration and death camps in Treblinka and Sobibor or the Bialystok Ghetto. Her message emphasized the resistance of Jews against the Nazis and their system of physical confinement and suppression. Speeches and communications delivered every year on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day share a sort of memorial narration tending to unveil an alternative side of history and exalt human solidarity among those who shared such a traumatic experience, in line with the social and cultural impact of collective traumas highlighted by Jeffrey C. Alexander (2012). Resistance, opposition, resilience, aggregation, solidarity, courage, are some of the keywords that seem to inspire this contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust, as von der Leyden comments: “Still today, and forever, we can learn from the strength, courage and the determination of these poorly armed Jewish fighters and partisans, who carried out revolts successfully against all odds, and an almost certain death. They fought in the name of justice. They were determined to fight back” (von der Leyen, 2023).

The metaphor of fight despite all opposition inspires an array of communicative products focusing on the Nazi assassination of millions of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, disabled persons discriminated for their own social and cultural identity. The Nazi justification for the mass extermination of these groups went beyond “social and cultural identity” - it was primarily racial cleansing and eugenics. Their fight ought to be our fight, to the extent that the unification of Europe cannot be jeopardized by the rare but alarming outbursts of antisemitism, nationalism and racism (Habermas, 2012). The countless alarm bells punctually emphasized by the media impose the sharing of remembrance as a civil medium, in line with the need for debunking stereotypes and commonplaces about the alleged passivity of the victims: “Antisemitism led to the Holocaust but did not end with it. Antisemitism is again on the rise in Europe. So is Holocaust denial, distortion, trivialization, which is fueling antisemitism and has corrosive effects for collective European memory and cohesion” (von der Leyen, 2023). The construction of the

European Union depends on real inclusion, respect and truth, even though the “lure of technocracy” investigated by Habermas (2015) does not facilitate the circulation of information and the economic justice that are fundamental to the pursuit of the European endeavor. This is why the rhetoric of evil is often counterbalanced by the tale of good deeds and charity so carefully depicted in *Schindler's List* and *Bastards without Glory*. These movies exalt not only “how fear works”, but also how love can redeem, as Beck emphasizes in *A God of One's Own* (2010) in reference to the confinement of Dutch Jews in the death camp in Dachau.

The humanitarian relevance of life within the concentration camps deals with the contrapuntal relevance of the relationship between media and morality investigated, before Silverstone, by Robert M. Baid, William E. Loges and Stuart E. Rosenbaum in a volume edited in 1999, *The Media & Morality*, in which they “explore the relationships between the media and the subjects of press attention, audiences, and advertisers and attempt to define the obligations of the media in these relationships. In most cases the assumption is that the greatest risk is harm to audiences, or to the public” (Baid et al., 1999: 13). Media risks usually depend on unreliability of sources and manipulation of information, along with the narrative bias that may alter or modify the public and journalistic representation of historical events. Hence follows the need to reflect on the fear of the foreigner and the displaced at a time ruled by media simulacra and connected representations, as Sennett (2011: 27-42) does through the analysis of the modern process of ghettoization and Baudrillard (1998: 87-98) argues in reference to the transformation of history into media simulacra (Latouche, 2016, 2019). More specifically, Baudrillard's metaphor of “the perfect crime” revolves around our anxiety for virtualization and simulation that we claim to achieve by the illusion of public engagement through mainstream images. In this context, the “removal of the Otherness” is only a consequence of our individualized socialization: “Whether denied by racism or neutralized by different culturalism, those cultures were faced, at any event, with a final solution” (Baudrillard, 2008: 123).

Even though Baudrillard deals with the side-effects of cosmetic surgery, it is no accident that the replacement of bodies with their iconic simulacra is closely connected to the social perception of the other and the aesthetic paradigms already observed by Guy Debord (2014: 7): “As long as necessity is socially dreamed, dreaming will remain necessary. The spectacle is the bad dream of a modern society in chains and ultimately expresses nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep”. In this account, the physical removal of the other and, in some cases, of self, implies the substitution of reality with its partial narration, in tune with the symbolic selection of signs, information and contents, as Scott Lasch (1979) emphasizes in reference to the cult of mass narcissism. What does Baudrillard mean by “the right to difference” and cultural universalism? Does he deal with the symbolic backlash engendered by media hypertrophy and communicative complexity? The “final solution” evoked by Baudrillard in reference to the “perfect crime” of reality accomplished by television is one of the most relevant sociological insights inherited from Hannah Arendt's philosophical thought, as the replacement of life with its changeable simulacra implies the underestimation of the existential uncertainty linked to post-modernity (Villa, 1992).

Thus, the final solution recalled by Baudrillard seems to hint at the loss of working identity the Second World War left us, as Arendt (1998: 9) seems to underpin: “The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence”. Human existence depends on the objects and meanings imposed by craving for consumption that is inevitably triggered through consumption and its symbolic fueling. The removal of Otherness is fostered by the physical and psychological shifts produced by the myth of sterile alterity that aims at discriminating, isolating and confining all those subjects stigmatized for their lack of cultural compliance. To the fore is the physical confinement of prisoners within prisons and other surveillance structures, as Baudrillard underlines in *The Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993 [1976]) in reference to the historical dimension of such social endeavor:

A simple examination of the evolution of the death penalty in ‘materialist’ terms (of profit and class) should leave those who wish to abolish it in perplexity. It is always through the discovery of more profitable economic substitutes, subsequently rationalised as ‘more humane’, that the death penalty is curbed: hence prisoners of war are spared in order to be made slaves; hence, in Rome, criminals were sent to the salt mines; hence the prohibition of duels in the seventeenth century, the institution of forced labour as a corrective solution, the variable extortion of the labour force and the ergo-therapeutic retraining of the Nazi camps. There are no page miracles anywhere: death disappears or subsides when the system, for one reason or another, has an interest in it (1830: the first extenuating circumstances in a trial involving a bourgeois). Neither social conquest nor the progress of Reason: just the logic of profit or privilege (Baudrillard, 1993: 36).

Once again, the “therapeutic” function of forced labour evokes the array of movie and literary representations inspired by the Nazi management of death camps, in which the invisibility of death excluded the practice of violence in its most paroxysmal dimension, as Bauman repeatedly points out in *Modernity and the Holocaust*. In this

view, the metaphor of the Holocaust as “a test for modernity” seems to match Baudrillard’s interpretation of violence as the result of “the logic of profit or privilege” that unfortunately belongs not only to present times, but more extensively to human civilization. It is no accident that the documentary and movie representations of the Holocaust are closely related to the force of images and their emotional impact, to the extent that the images testify to the cruelty and the inconceivable planning of such huge massacres, as in the case of the Twin Towers attacks in New York. In other words, mainstream and digital technologies determine the replacement of reality with its iconic reflection, as broadcasting makes virtualization and simulation two fundamental narrative and semiotic processes of our contrapuntal communicative patterns (Postman, 1993).

Nonetheless, political interference, economic exploitation and military supremacy cannot be considered as a mere heritage of the past, since oppression and violence are still practiced with the purpose to marginalize and suppress the Other, as we currently see in the Russian-Ukraine War. Only shared images make our world true and alive, as Baudrillard cleverly realized about the media rhetoric of our time, ruled by the use of metaphorization and metalepsis, which is a figure of speech consisting in a particular and rare metonymic process in which a word or a phrase from figurative speech is used in a new context. Broadcasting has the power to turn absence into presence, as Silverstone arguably notes: “In this, Jean Baudrillard was right when he argued that the Gulf War did not take place. Television intervened. It did not connect. Technology can isolate and annihilate the Other. And without the Other we are lost” (Silverstone, 1999: 137).

The exclusion of the Other may lead to annihilation and oppression, as the array of narrations focusing on the misfortune of Jews across the centuries shows: “By constructing cultural traumas, social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations, not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering, but may also take on board some significant moral responsibility for it” (Alexander, 2016: 3). Technology can even sharpen the process of discrimination of marginalized cultures that we undergo in the era of hyperconnected relationships increasingly attuned with symbolic and visual standardization (Touraine, 2021). “Without the Other we are lost”, despite the several attempts of some populist politicians to stigmatize the tenets of inclusion and respect of the Other. The sophistication of evil rejected the recourse to public and unjustified violence within the camps, as the project of the final solution required more sophisticated means of annihilation and suppression. Likewise, in postmodern narrations violence must not be displayed, in line with the treacherous ambiguity of a post-modernity characterized by the end of great narrations. The risk of this communicative tendency is mere habit, since “technology can annihilate distance in the opposite way. It can bring the Other too close, too close for us to recognize difference and distinctiveness” (Silverstone, 1999: 137).

## CONCLUSION

Just as Silverstone’s metaphor of the contrapuntal deals with the representation of cultural exclusion and civil oppression, Bauman’s analysis of the Holocaust demonstrates that it is possible to focus on the dialectics of good and evil, inclusion and exclusion, oppression and social redemption from a sociological point of view, with specific regard to the persecution of the Jews in the twentieth century. This sociological approach deals with the communicative and emotional impact of such collective traumas, along with the ethical narration of daily life debunking the stereotypes of the “rhetoric of evil” exploited by pundits and politicians, but also the occasional scholar.

Bauman showed that the Holocaust can be investigated as a sociological laboratory to analyze not only the drift of rationalization and the effects of reification on human beings, but also the representative complexity of such human annihilation. To the fore is the narrative counterbalance between negative factors and positive deeds, as information often deals with alternative stories or concealed elements (Higdon, 2020). Roger Silverstone’s metaphor of the contrapuntal enables us to frame narrative and media representations from the point of view of the discriminated, the poor and downtrodden, often depicted by literature and movies. The sociology of the contrapuntal should deal with migration, displacement and oppression, as in the case of those colonial and postcolonial actions described by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*. This is an aspect thoroughly probed by Silverstone: “Displacement and settlement; permanence and instability; the welcoming and the rejection; migration is marked by contradiction and not a little conflict. Migrants leave, arrive, stay and move on. They have few rights of passage. And their displacement, changing through the generations, leaves a trace across culture, like that of snail on a wall” (Silverstone, 2007: 82).

Since migration can be compulsory and coercive, it has relevant social effects in terms of inclusion, discrimination, displacement. Nonetheless, the human myth of the foreigner is one of the most significant cultural displays in history, as in the case of the Jews confined within the Renaissance Venetian ghetto. Narrative contrapuntality resides in the counterbalance of the social premises founding old and new phenomena of cultural marginalization, so as to contrast the media rhetoric of evil through the narration of resilience and resistance. The contrapuntal representation of the Holocaust has recourse to the uncovering of the private dimension of spoiled

existences, whose individual and collective drama still lives through the force of memory, even before the Nazi dominion. For instance, Roberto Benigni's movie, *Life is Beautiful*, insightfully emphasizes the contrapuntal dimension of mainstream communication that can combine "alternative imaginaries" and "memories of the past" (Silverstone, 2007: 96). The epistemological force of the metaphor of the contrapuntal resides in the mainstream dimension of such a representative effort, in which the recollection of identity, truth and ethics complies with the polyphonic patterns of collective traumas, since "diasporic cultures can only be understood in their relationship to the multiple contexts of cultures that are both present and absent" (Silverstone, 2007: 98).

Antisemitism and racism are two historical scars that in the nineteenth century led to political and institutional short circuits, as in the Dreyfus Affair, defined by Hannah Arendt (1958: 10) "a kind of dress rehearsal for the performance of our own time". A few decades later, the Nazis demonstrated that evil can be rationally planned and managed on a mass scale, thanks to the high degree of technological and functional sophistication fueled by modernization. These are some of the issues that a sociology of the contrapuntal might investigate, so as to strengthen the convergence of sociology and Holocaust studies (Gerson and Wolf, 2007) and shed light on the rhetoric of evil and good that often permeates our daily media narrations, in a world ruled by new forms of discrimination and confinement and ghettoization that a sociology of the contrapuntal and displacement ought to investigate further (Somayaji and Dasgupta, 2013).

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## Positionings Towards the ‘Work-Dogma’ from the Margins: Making Sense of Vulnerabilities and Inequalities in the Interview Situation

Ruth Manstetten <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Giessen, GERMANY

\*Corresponding Author: [ruth.manstetten@gcsc.uni-giessen.de](mailto:ruth.manstetten@gcsc.uni-giessen.de)

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### ABSTRACT

The norm of wage labor imposes itself on the unemployed as a material, legal and symbolic-discursive order. As ‘deviants’ from the norm, unemployed people are often confronted with pejorative judgments or social exclusion in everyday life. This paper asks how differently positioned unemployed people living in precarious circumstances position themselves in relation to the norm of employment and critique its accompanying social order. Based on the experiences with 25 interviewees, the paper argues that the social inequalities and power relations associated with the work-dogma permeate the research situation itself. This epistemic tension provides a methodological opportunity to place the interview situation and the mutual address between researcher and interviewee at the center of the analysis. Inspired by *Situational Analysis* (Clarke) and *Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis* (Bosančić), a heuristic is developed that focuses on inequalities and vulnerabilities in the research situation. The analysis of the interview dynamics reveals different modes of self-positioning with respect to the wage-labor norm, ranging from an embarrassed subordination under discursively transported subject positions to forms of critical appropriation and affective rejection. By identifying different self-positionings that challenge the norm of employment, the paper situates itself in ongoing debates within critical sociology, feminist epistemology and social philosophy about possibilities of criticism from the margins, arguing for a pluralistic and relational understanding of subversive practices and articulations of critique.

**Keywords:** interview situation, wage-labor norm, vulnerability, unemployment, qualitative methods

### INTRODUCTION

Recent decades have witnessed a multitude of social crises and transformations, including pandemics and high unemployment rates alongside the rise of automation and digitalization, challenging social orders that link livelihoods predominantly to gainful employment (see, e.g., Weeks, 2011; Ferguson, 2015; Srnicek and Williams, 2016; Benanav, 2020). Despite these developments, debates about a decentralization of wage labor still tend to occur on the fringes of society while in most countries employment continues to be seen as the norm to secure one’s own livelihood. Modern welfare states are still configured around the ideal of an ‘active and employed citizen’ (Gross et al., 2020: 2). In the German context, on which I will focus in the present article, the ‘work-dogma’ (Frayne 2015) is imposed as a material, legal and symbolic-discursive order.

On an institutional level, for example, insurance systems, laws and labor market policies privilege those who are employed (Englert et al., 2012; Lang and Gross, 2019), while job centers and employment agencies put pressure

on those classified as unemployed via an activation paradigm that supposedly increases their willingness to work (Dingeldey, 2007; Dörre, 2014; Senghaas et al., 2019; Traue et al., 2019).

The wage-labor norm is also visible as a symbolic-discursive order that strikes a clear division between allegedly active, independent, moral and hardworking employees and the allegedly passive, dependent, immoral and lazy unemployed. In media and daily life, such discriminatory attributions are often reproduced as defamatory social caricatures like the 'social parasite', the 'poverty immigrant' or the 'welfare queen', all of whom are portrayed as abusers of the welfare state (Oschmiansky, 2003; Lehnert, 2009; Romano, 2018). Thus, unemployment often leads to stigma, exclusion and material deprivation, placing many of those affected in a particularly vulnerable and marginalized position (Gurr and Jungbauer-Gans, 2013: 339).

Nevertheless, positionings of people outside of wage labor are not homogeneous, but are often connected to institutionalized and discursive 'deservingness-criteria' that provide an answer to the question 'who should get what and why' (van Oorschot, 2000). This leads to non-working people being confronted with the norm of employment in different ways, based on assumptions about their health, gender, affiliation, neediness, etc.

Against this background, the question arises to what extent the unemployed affirm or challenge the wage-labor norm and its associated institutionalized orders. As 'deviants from the norm', it seems likely that they have a certain interest in articulating a critique of it. However, the very effectiveness of the work-dogma could also suggest that they seek an affirmative relationship with it in order to avoid further social exclusion.

When I began to search for answers to this question, based on 25 qualitative interviews from my PhD research with the unemployed, I realized that forms of resistance and compliance with the wage-labor norm appeared not only in interviewees' responses to my questions but also in their interactions with me. I assumed that this might have something to do with the fact that the research situation could also be understood as an encounter between a person who conforms to the labor norm (the researcher) and a person who deviates from it (the participant). From this perspective, the participants seemed to follow very different ways of dealing with their positions as 'deviant' from the norm of wage labor in the interview situation, including hiding, revealing or negotiating vulnerabilities, inequalities or power imbalances. The present paper demonstrates how the analysis of interview dynamics and the relationship between interviewer and research participant can provide insights into different ways of affirming, challenging or critiquing the wage-labor norm from the margins.

This approach is inspired by previous methodological contributions that have shown how the social interaction in research settings is often affected by social inequalities and the negotiation of hierarchies and power dynamics (see, e.g., Davies, 2007; Berger, 2015; Hamilton, 2020; Frers and Meier, 2022). Instead of asking how these inequalities impact the co-construction of knowledge as it is often discussed, I explore this epistemic tension by understanding the research situation itself as worthy of analysis. In doing so, my contribution follows Frers and Meier (2022: 656) who claim 'that a critical reflection of inequalities in research relations can also be a contribution to research on social inequalities in general'. Methodologically, the present paper develops its own heuristic, inspired by *Situational Analysis* (Clarke, 2005) and *Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis* (Bosančić, 2021), paying particular attention to practices of mutual forms of address between researcher and interviewee and exploring different ways of self-positioning in the research situation.

Previous studies in the German context have highlighted that the wage-labor norm is rarely questioned from the margins (Bescherer et al., 2009; Englert et al., 2012; Dörre, 2014). These studies provide valuable insights but focus primarily on the statements and narrations of unemployed people. My research aims to complement them by exploring how normative orientations can also become visible in actions, affects and ways of dealing with vulnerabilities in practice. By shedding light on the way in which research participants interpret and appropriate the research situation itself and how they address me, I demonstrate how different ways of self-positioning can also be understood as affirmation or critique of the wage-labor norm and how they correspond with verbalized critiques.

With this approach, this article also presents empirical material relevant to broader epistemological debates in the fields of critical sociology and standpoint theories about whether people 'on the margins' of society or occupying specific oppressed or subaltern positions are epistemically privileged or disadvantaged by their specific social standpoint and, therefore, more or less capable of criticism (see, e.g., Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2003; Hill Collins, 2009; Fricker, 2010; Celikates, 2019; Hilscher et al., 2020).

Historically, marginalized groups of poor and unemployed people were often seen in one of two ways. They were either viewed as possible *revolutionary subjects*, for example, by famous scholars such as Marcuse (1998), Fanon (1963) and various anarchist thinkers, or they were defamed as the so-called *lumpenproletariat* following accounts of scholars like Marx and Engels, who contrasted them with the working class and portrayed them mostly as amoral, passive and incapable of critical actions (Bescherer, 2013; Barrow, 2020). These attributions were also taken up in later research on the unemployed, for example, when they were portrayed as passive and lethargic in the famous study on Marienthal (Jahoda et al., 2021) or when thinkers like Bourdieu (1999) or Castel (2017) were skeptical about the critical potential of the unemployed in their work on the precariat. However, this prompts the question



of whether stereotypes portraying unemployed individuals as passive are inadvertently perpetuated in some sociological contributions and whether potentially ‘obstinate’ (Dörre, 2015: 10; Marquardsen and Scherschel, 2022) forms of expressing critique from the margins are being sufficiently acknowledged.

Focusing on the interview situation itself and analyzing it as a possible *site of critique* allows us to step away from generalizations of epistemic privileges or disadvantages. Instead, this approach provides the means to closely examine the various forms critique can take and to investigate how they intersect with different mechanisms of inequality in specific contexts.

The present paper has two primary objectives: first, to develop an analytical heuristic for understanding inequalities and power dynamics in interview settings; second, to examine different affirmative and subversive practices and forms of critique emerging from marginalized positions in relation to the wage-labor norm. The paper contains three further sections. In the next section, I outline the methodological framework underpinning the study. Then, I present an in-depth analysis of various cases that illustrate diverse self-positionings towards the work-dogma from the margins ranging, for example, from *embarrassed subordination* to *critical appropriation* or *reflexive questioning*. In the conclusion, I synthesize these findings and offer a theoretical reflection on their broader implications.

## METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The following analysis is based on an interview study conducted between 2020 and 2022 with 25 unemployed people living in different precarious circumstances in Germany. Emphasis was placed on recruiting a heterogeneous sample of interviewees, including single parents, refugees and elderly people, to capture a wide range of experiences and perceptions. The in-depth interviews focused on the respective life situation of the interviewees and their experiences of being unemployed within their social environment, with authorities and in their everyday life. The interviewees received an expense allowance of 30 euros in cash.

Given the possible vulnerability of the interviewees that requires certain ethical consideration (see, e.g., Aldridge, 2014; Shaw et al., 2020), special measures were taken to avoid risks like (re)stigmatization, (re)victimization or ‘poverty voyeurism’ on the part of the researcher. This included allowing the interviewees to suggest an interview location, ensuring their comfort and agency in the research process. This also provided insights into how the interviewees themselves understood the research situation and what setting they felt was appropriate. Typical in-depth interview techniques were used (Helfferich, 2011), such as very open questions, with interviewees advised that they could answer with what was important to them and that there were no ‘wrong’ answers or time limits.

During the fieldwork, it became clear that this relatively free scope I granted to the interviewees was perceived very differently. I realized that they addressed me in different ways: some highlighted my role as successful academic, others emphasized that I am young and female, still others used the interview as an opportunity to meet a patient listener with whom to discuss their problems. It became obvious that ‘in an actual, lived research situation, multiple various identity markers and their combinations should be considered’ (Kaaristo, 2022: 746). These different interactions with interviewees highlighted that possible hierarchies between me and them were not rigid, but embedded in processes of negotiation and self-positioning. Following Meier and Frers (2022: 656), who suggest to look for ‘productive uses of such power troubles for analyzing social inequalities’, I decided that the interactions in the interview situations were themselves worthy of investigation and could provide important clues to my research question. Thus, the research interactions became the starting point for my analyses of self-positionings towards the wage-labor norm. I developed a heuristic inspired by the combination of two methodological approaches: Situational Analysis and Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis.

### Mapping Relations of Social Inequality with Situational Analysis

The perspective of *Situational Analysis* (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2018, 2022), which is inspired by feminist epistemologies, prominently criticizes the idea of a disembodied relationship between interviewees and interviewer. It is particularly suitable here as it emphasizes that ‘we are, through the very act of research itself, directly in the situation we are studying’ (Clarke, 2005: 12) and thus calls for reflection from the outset on the research situation, its inherent inequalities and the role of the researcher within this situation. By drawing on Haraway’s (1988) notion of situated knowledge, Clarke furthermore stresses the partiality of all perspectives and one’s multiple positionings within the world.

One of Clarke’s main strategies to analyze *situations* is to map ‘the major human, nonhuman, discursive, and other elements in the research situation of inquiry and provoke analysis of relations among them’ (Clarke, 2005: xxii). I used such a mapping for the following analysis of the interview situation, as it makes visible the location within social relations of inequality of interviewer and interviewee. This mapping, illustrating our diverse connections to discourses, institutions and social networks, highlighted the dominance of the work-dogma. The

interaction of my interviewees with authorities, friends or with prevailing discourses was predominantly influenced by their status as 'unemployed' and by their necessity to sustain themselves outside of wage labor. In contrast, my position as a university-based researcher placed me in a distinctly different context. In a second step, I focused on the very relationship between me and the interviewees to understand questions such as: What happened there? How did we address each other, given our multiple but different positionings? Which identity markers, such as gender, citizenship, age or class, were emphasized in the interaction? Which were concealed, ignored or passed over? Using this method, it became apparent how our interaction was influenced by various dimensions of inequalities and how these were replicated, to varying degrees, within the research setting. These references to inequalities also proved particularly insightful as they invariably entailed forms of self-positioning that underscored aspects such as commonalities, differences or hierarchies between us. To refine the analysis of *self-positionings*, I then incorporated Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis as a complementary method.

### Analyzing Self-Positionings with Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis

*Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis* (ISA) (Bosančić, 2014, 2021) offers a methodological approach to research normative orders and modes of action, thoughts, and perceptions of people in an empirical 'double perspective' (Bosančić, 2021: 143). It is therefore suited to understanding the effects of, and responses to, the wage-labor norm in the interview situation.

Following basic concepts of American pragmatism, symbolic interactionism and the sociology of knowledge, ISA is based on a 'minimal anthropological understanding of the subject' (ibid: 144) that sees human beings as situated within symbolic and normative orders but not completely determined by them. ISA suggests addressing the question of power effects of these normative orders empirically and to investigate their internalization and the *creatively obstinate self-positionings* of subjects towards them. ISA calls these 'resignification processes' (ibid: 145) that take place when people are addressed by discursive orders and confronted with the corresponding subject positions.

Following the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, ISA defines *subject positions* as

“discursively constituted subject ideas, model subjects and identity templates that suggest to possible addressees how they have to shape their self in order to be ‘successful’ in certain contexts, for example, to receive recognition or to be perceived as ‘normal’” (ibid: 147)<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the wage-labor norm, it becomes evident that prevalent societal perceptions often associate the subject position of 'unemployed' with attributes such as laziness, dependency or exploitation of the welfare system, underpinned by a notion of personal culpability for one's unemployment. Consequently, these subject positions often imply that the unemployed must either be 'activated' to contribute meaningfully to society or possess a socially acceptable justification for their inability to engage in the workforce such as older age, illness or having caring responsibilities for children or older relatives.

In the case of research about unemployment, the interview itself can be understood as a situation in which the interviewees are addressed with the subject position of 'the unemployed', evoking this 'resignification process'. Even if the researcher – hopefully – does not make any pejorative or stigmatizing comments, the very announcing of the topic of study as 'something about unemployment' activates these specific normative and symbolic orders.

The concept of self-positioning that Bosančić develops thus encourages the analysis of different *interpretations, appropriations or rejections* of these subject positions. He describes these as 'a tentative, precarious, dynamic, changeable and unfinishable process of coming to terms with normative demands and identifications' (ibid: 148). Merging this with Situational Analysis for my research entails understanding the relationship between researcher and participant as a situation where, in acknowledging or ignoring various inequalities, a corresponding *self-positioning* in relation to the norm of gainful employment is conducted. This perspective enables an exploration of forms of critique that transcend binary classifications like 'capable of critique' or 'incapable of critique', or adherence and non-adherence to the employment norm. In my analysis, I have concentrated on these nuances, examining interview excerpts, self-representations and behaviors to discern tendencies towards affirmation, appropriation or rejection of specific subject positions connected to unemployment. Since normative orders are also accompanied by certain 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1979), special attention was also paid to affects and emotions accompanying the self-positionings.

The following analysis therefore focuses on the normative order of wage labor within the research relationship, combining the relational approach of *Situational Analysis*, which emphasizes the situatedness and embodiment of both interviewer and interviewee, with *Interpretative Subjectivation Analysis*, which explores self-positioning towards subject positions outside wage labor.

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<sup>1</sup> Translations from German into English are by the author.

## NAVIGATING THE WORK-DOGMA: INEQUALITIES, VULNERABILITIES, AND MODES OF CRITICISM

In this section I will present an in-depth exploration of various cases from my interview study, drawing upon field notes, interview excerpts and autoethnographic reflections. This examination aims to address key questions derived from my methodological framework, such as how interviewees shaped the interview setting, their engagement with me in highlighting or obscuring social inequalities, their self-positioning concerning non-wage labor, and the implications of these positions for possibilities of critique. I will also deal with the connection between performative responses to being ‘unemployed’ and verbalized forms of criticism during interviews.

In my analysis I identified a variety of distinct exemplary modes of self-positioning in relation to the wage-labor norm. I will present six of these modes in more detail and show how they become visible within the research situation. I will loosely juxtapose cases that share structural similarities, such as age, gender and challenges related to migration and asylum policies. This approach will implicitly reveal contrasts and similarities concerning social inequalities and welfare state classifications. Finally, I will summarize my primary findings in a table.

### Embarrassed Subordination

In the following account of *embarrassed subordination* toward the norm of wage labor, I explore the case of Bärbel<sup>2</sup>, an elderly woman. When I met Bärbel to conduct the interview, I was surprised that I could not remember her face. I knew I must have given her the research project flyer at a food bank, but apparently, she had not spoken to me or asked me any questions at the time, but had contacted me afterwards. In my field notes, I wrote about my arrival in her tiny apartment:

“She greeted me hastily, quickly closed the door behind me, and barely looked me in the eye as she immediately directed me to a chair to sit down. I was surprised that she closed the windows despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic”.

I also noted a comment that Bärbel made about the television hanging on the wall before starting the interview, in which she said:

“My brother gave me this huge thing. I’m sure one immediately thinks that fits: social welfare and then such a big TV”.

Through her comment about the television, Bärbel directly identified herself as a welfare recipient and addressed the common societal suspicion that welfare recipients unjustly enjoy ‘luxuries’ like large televisions. She clearly felt the need to explain this to me, as if to anticipate and defend herself against any derogatory thoughts I might have had about her as I looked around her flat. Thus, following Bosančić (2021), she referred to the subject position of the ‘welfare recipient’ living a good life at the expense of others. Her way of ‘coming to terms with normative demands’ (ibid.: 148) in our relationship was to justify her ownership of the television by emphasizing that it was a gift. In doing so, she distanced herself from these prejudices but simultaneously reaffirmed the symbolic and discursive order connected with it through her justification.

During the interview, her way of dealing with the wage-labor norm became more obvious. She frequently addressed me as a successful academic, while framing her own life choices in contrast either as naïve missteps or as self-inflicted failures. My way of dealing with these references to hierarchies based on employment status was to respond to her in a particularly friendly and affirming way to make her feel more comfortable. Nevertheless, her narrations degenerated into an individualizing form of self-condemnation and self-loathing. This was particularly noteworthy because her story simultaneously revealed a variety of difficulties she faced from a very young age within patriarchal structures. She became a single mother as a teenager and later lived in several violent relationships, one with a more affluent man who exploited her labour for his business without providing her any payment or social insurance.

While Bärbel openly talked with me about her vulnerability connected to her poverty, her loneliness and the moral condemnations she faced, she also told me that she mostly tried to hide her life circumstances in other interactions: “I always keep an eye out to see if anyone sees me when I go to the food bank”. So, every time she went to the food bank or the job center, she feared that her neighbors would see her and judge her for receiving benefits and help. Her shame meant that she had mastered the art of being invisible and moving inconspicuously. I retrospectively understood that this was the reason why I did not initially recognize her and why she closed the windows so fast: she did not want anyone to hear our conversation.

<sup>2</sup> All names of interviewees have been anonymized.

This pattern aligns with Georg Simmel's (2013) observations on shame. Shame is triggered when a norm is subjectively perceived to have been violated. So shame (re)confirms power relations by degrading the person who, in feeling shame, acknowledges his or her subordination (Neckel, 1991). So in Bärbel's case, the deep-seated shame that drives her can be interpreted as an acceptance of the prevailing wage-labor norm. Although she clearly suffers from the norm of wage labor and the associated stigmatization and material restrictions of being unemployed, her shame prevents her from adopting a clearly critical perspective. Consequently, in her interview, I struggled to identify any explicitly articulated forms of critique of the work-dogma as she mainly blamed herself for her situation. At the same time, it is remarkable that Bärbel agreed to talk to me at all, as she usually tried to hide her life circumstances. This could be interpreted as an attempt at quiet criticism, since ultimately her stories were a detailed testimony of the scars and suffering that a life in poverty, exclusion and as a 'deviant' can mean for those affected. With a wink, one could say that Bärbel would perhaps like to leave it at the classical division of labor between 'ordinary agents' and 'critical sociologists' (Celikates, 2019): She provides me with the stories as an interviewee, but leaves the work of developing a possible critique from them to me.

### Distanced Critique

In this section, based on the case of Heinz, I explore the mode of *distanced critique*. Upon initial observation, Heinz and Bärbel might appear to share similar circumstances: they are of comparable age, living alone in modest apartments and relying on supplementary pensions because of prolonged unemployment. However, a closer examination reveals stark contrasts in their responses to these conditions.

I approached Heinz because I knew he was politically involved in the unemployed movement and had experienced many years of poverty and unemployment. We arranged to meet for an interview in a green area not far from his neighborhood. As we sat down in the sun, Heinz pulled a book on the unemployment movement out of his backpack and asked me if I would like to borrow it. In my field notes, I wrote:

“Somehow, we ended up discussing some political and sociological literature on unemployment even before the interview started”.

By giving me reading suggestions at the very beginning of our meeting, Heinz let me know that our conversation would be more of a discussion between experts than between researcher and affected person; or perhaps even between 'established expert' and 'novice', given the 30-year age difference between us. In contrast to Bärbel, who made herself small and subordinate to me, Heinz confidently drew on his knowledge and experience as an unemployed person in his interaction with me.

Heinz's self-positioning in relation to the norm of wage labor became clear right at the beginning of the interview, when he described his life situation as follows:

“After a long period of unemployment, paid for by the job center, I am now a social pensioner. This means that I have less pension than I'm entitled to and I get the rest from the social security office”.

Instead of justifying or explaining his unemployment, he simply stated who pays for his livelihood. Viewed through the analytical lens of ISA, the subversive element of this narrative becomes visible. Heinz subtly engaged with the subject position of the unemployed, who are often viewed as illegitimately benefitting at the expense of others. Yet, instead of adopting this moral judgement, he presented living on welfare as completely legitimate and normal by not offering any explanation. Even the reference that he would be entitled to a higher social pension suggested a critique of the existing social system, while emphasizing his own 'deservingness' against the typical 'deservingness-criteria' in public discourses.

Throughout the interview with Heinz, it became apparent that his responses to my interview questions often transcended his individual experiences, favoring a broader, collective perspective on poverty and unemployment. He adeptly interwove specific challenges with a more generalized social analysis, radically challenged prevailing notions that equate work with happiness and questioned distributional logic predominately based on wage labor. So, Heinz's approach aligned more closely with what is often referred to as external or 'reflexive-distanced' critique (Bohmann et al., 2010: 57). Unlike a critique rooted in personal experience, his perspective was informed more by his understanding of societal mechanisms on a broader scale. Thus, I categorized his self-positioning as *distanced critique*: it radically questioned the norm of wage labor and was articulated from the position of external observer or expert rather than affected person.

However, Heinz also shared experiences that demonstrated how he practically applies his distanced critique in everyday life. For example, he told me about his time living in a community-oriented shared flat, where residents collectively sought alternative living arrangements beyond the constraints of employment, sharing resources and building solidarity. This aspect of his life, as well as his activism, reflects an 'engaged' critique, effectively bridging his theoretical perspectives with concrete, lived experiences. The divergence of Heinz and Bärbel in their self-

positionings illustrates the spectrum of responses to the norm of gainful employment in my sample. Heinz and Bärbel represent opposite ends of this spectrum, from a deeply internalized acceptance of societal norms to an externally focused critique. The subsequent case studies occupy the intermediate space in this continuum.

### Reflexive Questioning

Martin's case exemplifies a dynamic interplay of *distanced critique* and *embarrassed subordination*, reflecting a persistent tension in navigating the norm of gainful employment. Martin reached out to me after seeing an advertisement I posted on an online forum for the unemployed, seeking interview participants. He attached his CV to his email, somewhat resembling a job application. Our meeting occurred on a rainy autumn day at the train station in his small town. I noted in my field journal:

“We are roughly the same age, and it felt as though we could have been university classmates. The ease of our conversation was striking as we walked to his flat. His formal email had not prepared me for this.”

At first, the relationship between Martin and me seemed defined by our similarities, facilitating an empathetic and dynamic conversation: He was just a few years older than me, shared an interest in political and philosophical matters, and appeared genuinely excited about my research, keen to discuss his experiences and viewpoints. However, once we sat in his neat apartment, with the recorder on, our stark differences became evident: While our paths initially paralleled - he with a humanities bachelor's degree and I with one in sociology - our journeys diverged thereafter. My path smoothly transitioned to a master's and then a doctorate, while Martin's career path stagnated. Despite good grades, he lacked the confidence for a master's in humanities and struggled to find suitable employment, ultimately relying on welfare for several years. Our meeting stemmed from our differences: my role as a university-funded researcher and his status as long-term unemployed.

During the interview, Martin seemed acutely aware of these disparities, linked to the wage-labor norm. At times, he, like Bärbel, resorted to self-justifications, particularly when discussing the challenges of job hunting. However, unlike her, he would occasionally pause and reflect on his narrative:

“I've applied for every job there is - but you see, I'm starting to justify myself again. That's the thing - you always feel the need to say: Look, I tried. I tried.”

Here, Martin directly addressed the subjectifying effect of the employment norm under the neoliberal activation paradigm, constantly attempting to demonstrate his activity and motivation. Through the analytical lens of ISA, it's almost palpable how Martin strove to shape his self in a way that would garner recognition or be seen as 'normal' (Bosančić, 2021: 147), although he was obviously critically reflecting on this mode.

Later in the interview, Martin became more explicit about how he perceived my position, stating:

“I automatically place myself at a lower level. You're affiliated with a university, I'm unemployed - that's why I feel the need to justify myself to you, to explain why your taxes support me.”

He thus perceived our interaction not merely as a research relationship (which his formal e-mail suggested) or a generational connection (as I had thought on our way from the train station) but primarily in terms of my role as a taxpayer and his as a welfare recipient. He pointed out that his responses were influenced by his deviation from the wage-labor norm and the vulnerability he felt in the interview. Here, he implicitly touched on the widely discussed methodological issue of how knowledge co-production in interviews is shaped by our unequal positions (see, e.g., Davies, 2007; Berger, 2015). By articulating this, he simultaneously critiqued and somewhat undermined this inequality effect.

When asked about his views, Martin – similar to Heinz – offered well-informed and critical perspectives on the work dogma, discussing concepts and authors related to degrowth or unconditional basic income and showing interest in livelihoods beyond employment. Drawing from his experiences, he also articulated a strong critique of the stigmatization of the unemployed in public discourse and by state authorities like job centers. He clearly understood and rejected hierarchies based on the work-dogma, yet in social interactions, he still subordinated himself to these structures. This became evident when he portrayed himself as the 'ideal' job seeker, relentlessly writing applications, and avoiding casual conversations to dodge the dreaded question: “What do you do for a living?”

In contrast to Heinz, who somehow succeeded in translating his *distanced critique* into everyday practices, Martin displayed a dual attitude towards the wage-labor norm: cognitively and reflexively, he presented a sophisticated 'external' critique, yet his actions and emotions seemed to affirm the norm. The interview became yet another arena where he was confronted with the dissonance between feeling less worthy as an unemployed person and his critique of a social order that hierarchizes based on employment status. However, the interview fulfilled a dual role: on one hand, it provoked self-justification in Martin, thus reinforcing the prevailing wage-labor norm; on the other

hand, it prompted a *reflexive questioning* of these very normative conditions, highlighting his internal conflict between subordination to and critique of the wage-labor norm.

### Performing Non-Identification

In contrast to Martin's approach, my interaction with Chris, a male participant in his forties, presented a distinct set of challenges. We convened at the location he had suggested on a sunny day, and upon arrival, I immediately noticed the deserted nature of the place. At first, there were small things that made me feel uncomfortable: sometimes he struck a slightly flirtatious tone, then he addressed me primarily as a young woman or moved a little closer to me. Later, his narratives became more sexualized and aggressive, accompanied by inappropriate comments about my appearance. This shift in conversation transformed the interview setting into an uneasy and challenging environment. I found myself struggling to maintain the professional boundary as a researcher, feeling increasingly unsafe due to his remarks and behavior.

I prematurely terminated the interview due to growing concerns for my personal safety. This experience not only highlighted the complexities of power dynamics in interview settings but also emphasized the importance of ethical considerations and researcher safety in fieldwork. While my focus was often on the vulnerability of the interviewees, my encounter with Chris underscored the need to consider my own vulnerability (Bashir, 2020). This aligns with a growing critique by (feminist) researchers of the prevailing androcentric assumptions in qualitative and ethnographic methods and discussions about the problem of sexual harassment in fieldwork (see, e.g., Hanson and Richards, 2017; Kloß, 2017; Harries, 2022).

However, I was also interested in the question of how to analyze and understand this interview if I did not want to regard it as a 'failure' (Eckert and Cichecki, 2020). From the point of view of ISA, the focus is on the question of the extent to which Chris's behavior can be seen as a form of self-positioning in relation to the subject position of the gainfully employed. After all, it is precisely people like Chris, as middle-aged, able-bodied men, who are particularly confronted in public discourse with the demand to work for wages. Against this background, it was striking that Chris agreed to an interview on the subject of unemployment but then often did not take my questions seriously and instead told stories in which he presented himself as a masculine hero. His behavior undermined the intended dynamic of a research interview, which in this case was for me to be recognized as the researcher and for him to talk about his experiences as an unemployed person. Instead, by addressing me as a young woman, he shifted the focus to gender and age, dimensions in which he could assert a sense of superiority according to societal norms. This approach allowed him to sidestep the marginalized subject position of being unemployed, thereby concealing his own vulnerabilities by simultaneously highlighting mine. His behavior also entailed a denial of any suffering or vulnerability linked to the norm of gainful employment. He *performed a non-identification* with the norm, but did not *verbalize* any critique of it. Chris's case exemplifies how alternative identity markers can be used to navigate and resist marginalizing positions, albeit in a manner that eschews vulnerability and critique.

### Critical Appropriation

Turning to the case of Said, I encountered a markedly different approach in the interview setting. Upon arriving at his apartment in a remote district, I was greeted by what felt like a 'welcoming committee' consisting of Said, his parents, teenage brother and uncle, all of whom had fled Iran. Their warm reception, complete with tea and snacks, set a tone of respect and hospitality. Said and his family clearly valued the opportunity to share his story, which they deemed important and worthy of wider dissemination. Said himself articulated this sentiment during our conversation:

"You know, you and I talking now will help others someday. People will hear this, read this and see, aha, a person has experienced such terrible things and they will understand how hard it is".

This statement reflected his conscious decision to use the interview as a platform for public advocacy. In the interview, Said addressed me mainly as a witness or spokesperson to the injustices he had endured, presenting himself first and foremost as a victim. He envisioned the interview as a means to build a collective understanding, reaching out to both empathetic audiences and others in similar situations, emphasizing they are not alone. We therefore both had a clear agenda in participating in this interview situation: I wanted to conduct my research and he hoped to raise awareness about the problems faced by asylum seekers without a work permit.

Unemployment in Said's narrative was intricately tied to his residency status, which had been in limbo for years. His experiences as a refugee, living without a residence or work permit and relying on the benevolence of others, were central to his account. His story was thus deeply entrenched in external categorization processes: his eligibility to stay and work in Germany hinged on the classifications imposed by the welfare state and authorities. Therefore, he perceived his deviation from the norm of gainful employment not as a personal failing but as a consequence of these external classifications, which he deemed unjust. In his narrative, he frequently invoked the moral principle of equality, highlighting its violation in his treatment. His approach represented a form of *critical appropriation*, since

he adopted the classifications of the welfare systems, yet positioned himself as a victim of these circumstances. His critique, born from his experiences of suffering, focused on the intersection of wage-labor norms and asylum policies that systematically exclude and devalue specific refugees. Thus, his criticism was directed less against the wage-labor norm itself, but against the exclusions it produces through its link to asylum policy. In this respect, Said's case has some overlaps with Shania's.

### Affective Rejection

I met Shania in a park on a sunny day. In my field notes, I wrote sentences like "She greeted me with a wide and open smile" or "As we are of the same age, I thought that passers-by will think we are friends as we sit down on a bench in the shade". During the interview, the more questions I asked, the more Shania opened up. I noted:

"I got the feeling that she was waiting for my reactions, trying to find out if I am 'on her side'. So, I gave her the approval she seemed to be waiting for: in small gestures, I mirrored her emotions by laughing, nodding or gasping in indignation at the right moment".

Towards the end of the interview, she told me:

"I think I never told someone all of this except from my family in Kenya. Sometimes you need someone to listen to you, maybe like in therapy. There are not many people who don't judge you if you talk to them. People already told me that I am lazy, but it's not true. I thank you for your listening. I feel better now, I feel happy."

The way Shania interacted with me in the interview showed that she needed time to build trust. I interpreted this in relation to our identity markers: I, positioned as a White person from a university doing my research 'on' her, positioned as a Black unemployed migrant. Once she seemed to feel safe, she displayed more of her emotions. She changed from angry to ironic to desperate when she talked about her experiences as a Black woman in Germany with a young child and looking for a job, and she told me about the harmful experiences of being classified as non-belonging, lazy and non-professional:

"Tell me, how that makes sense? [laughs out loud] I always try to see everything in a positive light, but I just don't understand it. We all know that we have a problem with placements in daycare centers and kindergartens, don't we? How am I to blame? [...] I want to work, but I don't have childcare for my child".

(...)

"Everyone says 'oh, you just want to sit at home, you foreigners, you come to this country to sit around and take tax from the Germans'. That's not true! Come to me and ask me - I've applied and I'll show you where I'm looking to study and find work, but I'm not getting anything. And then you tell me I just sit at home and get your taxes [laughs out loud]".

Based on her own experiences, Shania criticized a number of structural problems within the labor market that are intrinsic to being Black, being a mother and being a non-native speaker. Shania was unemployed because her Master's degree from Kenya is not recognized in Germany and she refused to earn a living as a cleaner, which was often suggested to her. Generally, therefore, she was oriented towards the norm of employment and was keen to find work, but refused to take just any job. Her critique, then, was not of the wage-labor norm per se, but of the unequal possibilities of meeting it at all, and how this translates into racist, sexist and classist stigmatization.

By reacting with anger, irony and despair to marginalizing classifications and dominant subject positions, Shania showed that she did not want to submit to them. The irony served as a way to distance herself from a social order that discriminates against her. With her anger, she furthermore rejected the submission to hierarchies and defamatory categories. It became obvious that Shania had a strong sense of injustice fueling her criticism of racist and patriarchal social structures.

Since Shania interpreted the interview as a therapy-like encounter that brought her relief, she also legitimated retrospectively that she put her feelings and her vulnerability at the center of our interaction. The fact that she saw me in the therapist-like role also meant that she did not feel ashamed or tried to justify herself to me, but revealed emotions and feelings that she would otherwise keep to herself while I gave her space, asked questions and assured her anonymity as a 'professional listener'.

However, it became clear that her *affective rejection* of negative classifications was mainly reserved for the interview situation and, even though she sometimes imagined herself standing up and speaking out against the injustices she faced, she told me that she mostly remained silent in other interactions. Ultimately, it seemed to me that Shania's

anger, which she combined with a precise critique of social structures, was nevertheless overshadowed by two other paralyzing feelings: powerlessness and hopelessness.

**The Pluralism of the Social Criticism from the Margins**

**Table 1** summarizes the main findings by focusing on three key aspects that are closely connected to the different ways of self-positioning towards the norm of wage labor: (i) ways of addressing the researcher in the research interaction; (ii) ways of dealing with the subject position as being unemployed/as a welfare recipient; (iii) ways of dealing with vulnerability in the interview situation. These three aspects highlight the complexity and possible entanglements of the various self-positionings.

**Table 1.** Summary of the main findings

<b>Self-positioning towards the wage-labor norm</b>	<b>Address researcher and respective self-positioning</b>	<b>Dealing with social position as 'deviant from the norm'</b>	<b>Dealing with own vulnerability within the interview</b>	<b>Source of criticism</b>
<i>Embarrassed subordination</i> (Bärbel)	Successful - failed	Being ashamed of it	Defensive, oscillating between reliving and hiding it	Possibly pain and vulnerability
<i>Distanced critique</i> (Heinz)	Expert - expert	Fighting it on a societal level	Theorizing, objectifying	Rooted in social analysis
<i>Reflexive questioning</i> (Martin)	Taxpaying – receiving social benefits	Justifying it	Reflecting it, recognizing it during the interview	Rooted in social analysis and reflection on own experiences
<i>Performing non-identification</i> (Chris)	Young woman – masculine hero	Performing non-identification by dominant behavior referring mostly to identity markers such as age and gender	Concealing it, emphasizing the interviewer's vulnerability	Unclear
<i>Critical appropriation of negative classifications</i> (Said)	Witness/spokesman – victim	Suffering because of it	Narrating it, revealing it	Rooted in own suffering and ideal of equality
<i>Affective rejection</i> (Shania)	Therapist – client	Angry and disappointed rejection of discriminatory classifications	Revealing it within the interview	Rooted in anger and despair in combination with structural analysis

First, the table shows how differently the interviewees addressed me. Second, these addresses were usually very revealing in terms of how the interviewees dealt with their position as 'deviant' and corresponded with emphasizing, rejecting, or justifying their position. Third, the findings emphasize how the focus on one's own vulnerability within the interview can sometimes be the starting point for criticism (as in the case of Said) or at other times for affirmation of the existing order (as in the case of Bärbel). Fourth, the analysis also suggests that critique can embody both 'internal' and 'engaged' as well as 'external' and 'distant' roots. This is in line with theoretical debates about proximity and distance in forms of critique, which often distinguish between engaged-subversive or internal critique, rooted in personal experience and concrete practice, and reflexive-distant or external critique, based on (universalized) norms and abstract knowledge (Bohmann et al., 2010; Celikates, 2019). Although the position of the 'marginalized' is often more closely associated with engaged-subversive critique, my findings show that being affected by marginalization does not mean that the source of critique is primarily based on one's own experiences. In my case studies, it became clear that critique sometimes emerges from dealing with everyday hurdles and struggles, which sparks an interest in a broader understanding of contexts. On other occasions, an understanding of larger contexts transforms everyday experiences. Sometimes respondents found themselves in internal conflicts, struggling to reconcile different forms of affirmation and critique. In this case, it was not entirely satisfactory to reduce the complex (and sometimes contradictory) self-positionings of my interviewees to single terms. However, the distinction made here between embarrassed subordination, distanced critique, reflexive questioning, performing non-identification, critical appropriation of negative classifications, and affective rejection shows one thing above all: the diversity of forms and modes of expression of affirmation and critique of the wage labor norm.

This table should not be seen as an exhaustive list of forms of expression, but rather as an illustration of the myriad ways in which respondents navigate the classifications of the welfare state and the marginalizing subject positions associated with the wage-labor norm. What is not emphasized here, but is interesting for further considerations, is that the exploratory cases presented here also reveal variations in the attribution of causes of



suffering and thus in the objects of critique. For example, those who have been negatively affected by border regimes and frustrating experiences with asylum policies seem to be more likely to identify structural causes of unemployment, in contrast to German citizens without political affiliation, who tend to individualize these causes. While the critique of single mothers or refugees rather seems to focus more on problematic intersections of the wage labor norm with policies of belonging and care, it also addresses the wage labor norm less directly. Thus, these entanglements between the forms and content of critique require further research.

## CONCLUSION

Adèle Clarke (2005: 14-15) sharply criticizes the idea of giving voice to the marginalized through research, arguing that all research reports bear the signature of the researcher. The present paper has not attempted to give voice to the marginalized, but it does claim to offer some insights into the plurality of these voices. Most of the unemployed feel compelled to position themselves against the ‘work dogma’ at almost every step they take, be it on the way to the food bank, where they either try to hide in shame or walk with their heads held high, or in the context of small talk about how they spent their day. The interview situation, in which they are asked directly about their unemployment, is one of many situations in which they are confronted with their ‘deviation’ from the norm of wage labor and must somehow position themselves. The findings of this article have shown how the analysis of the relationship between interviewer and research participant can therefore provide important insights into the question of self-positioning and critique in relation to the norm of wage labor.

As a first step, I presented a methodological approach that places inequalities, vulnerabilities, and self-positionings in the research situation at the center of analysis. Inspired by situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and interpretive subjectivation analysis (Bosančić, 2014, 2021), my analysis showed how practices of mutual address can be a starting point for gaining insights into how interviewees challenge the norm of wage labor.

In theoretical and public discourse, it is often asked whether the poor and marginalized are, to paraphrase Reese (2008), ‘too stupid to fight back’. This casual exaggeration is to some extent in line with previous studies on the question of the orientation of the unemployed towards the norm of gainful employment. They tend to conclude that the unemployed predominantly do not question the norm of gainful employment and thus, of course, do not question the normative and institutionalized order that contributes to their social exclusion.

My findings paint a different picture here: the main finding of this work is that there is a great variety of self-positionings in relation to the norm of wage labor, which cannot simply be reduced to a dichotomy of orientation and non-orientation towards it. Instead, critiques of the norm of wage labor emanating from marginalized perspectives are sometimes verbalized in clearly articulated perspectives, but sometimes expressed in more subtle ways, e.g., in affective reactions that contradict the prevailing rules of feeling, in vehement rejections of stigmatizing attributions, or in reflexive questioning of hierarchies based on employment status. The result is a complex situation in which respondents sometimes challenge the norm, sometimes subordinate themselves to it, or sometimes say one thing and do another. Thus, my findings show that critique from the margins is often multifaceted and contradictory, and can manifest itself in subtle, *creatively obstinate self-positionings* (Bosančić, 2021). Specifically, I have argued that different modes of self-positioning towards this norm can be distinguished, namely *embarrassed subordination, distanced criticism, reflexive questioning, performing non-identification, critical appropriation, and affective rejection*.

The interview situation itself can play different roles in this context. My research has shown that it can be the platform on which interviewees first develop their critique, a medium through which they seek to be heard more publicly, or a setting in which they feel inhibited from expressing their thoughts openly because of the norms and inequalities at play. However, it also becomes clear that many acts of critique expressed in the anonymized interview settings are hidden in various social interactions due to prevailing normative orders and the dangers of stigma and exclusion.

The findings support the standpoint theory idea that different modes of critique are intertwined with positionings in symbolic and institutionalized orders, although these orders do not dictate the potential for resistance and critique. Thus, it cannot be assumed that marginalized perspectives inherently confer epistemic privilege, but they do reveal the multiple perspectives and strategies of resistance to the work dogma. The unemployed, who are embedded differently in understandings and materializations of deservingness as refugees, mothers or activists, also have different insights into the functioning of the work dogma as an instrument of domination and marginalization. With Haraway’s (1988) understanding of situated knowledges, one could emphasize the partiality of all perspectives here. Subsequent analysis following Haraway could attempt to condense and link these perspectives in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the wage labor norm.

While it is this partiality and heterogeneity of perspectives ‘from below’ that makes them so valuable for a complex understanding of the workings of the employment norm and the possibilities for challenging it in the face of current crises and developments, it is also this very heterogeneity, isolation and fragmentation that contributes

to the fact that these voices, and their forms of critique against the dogma of work often remain unheard and unseen.

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## Belonging and Otherness in Postmigrant Society: Experiences of Young Women of Turkish Background in Germany

Pınar Gümüş Mantu <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Justus Liebig University Giessen, GERMANY

\*Corresponding Author: [pinar.guemues@sowi.uni-giessen.de](mailto:pinar.guemues@sowi.uni-giessen.de)

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### ABSTRACT

The social position of women of Turkish background has often been questioned on the basis of the dominant societal perception imaging them as being isolated in the domestic sphere, oppressed by traditional, cultural, and patriarchal norms, and thus unable to integrate into the broader German society. Although the younger-generation women, born and/or raised in Germany as children of Turkish migrant workers, to a great extent actively participate in public life via education and the job market, at a discursive and social-relational level they are still often perceived and categorized as the non-German and the non-European Other. This paper takes a closer look at the gendered and racialized experiences of young women of Turkish origin by paying special attention to how othering relates to belonging in the postmigrant social context in Germany. On the basis of ethnographic field data collected via in-depth and expert interviews, it intends to engage in a critical-reflexive discussion from the perspective of a social group that has long been imagined as dwelling at the margins of society. Drawing upon recent discussions on the culturalization of migration (and integration) issues, the paper traces the current articulations of the culturalized perceptions of 'the Turkish woman' through the reflections of young women of Turkish origin, and discusses belonging in light of their experiences of exclusion and otherness. Taking a critical approach to studying the concept of integration as a discursive historical process, the paper suggests that the self-positionings of the research participants have been substantially affected by the mainstream integration-centered discourse and its interfaces with othering. However, young women's active and subversive ways of dealing with these exclusionary discourses and practices point to a rather critical view of belonging, articulated through a stated consciousness of the past and present context, and claims for recognition in postmigrant Germany.

**Keywords:** belonging, Turkish postmigrants, postmigrant Germany, otherness, young women of Turkish background

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

As the largest population categorized as persons with a 'migration background'<sup>2</sup>, and as the descendants of guest-worker migrants, who have 'unexpectedly' settled in Germany, the presence of people of Turkish origin in

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<sup>2</sup> For a critique of the use of the qualifier 'migration background' in connection with the process of ethnicization, see Horvath (2019); for a discussion of the social construction of the Other in the German context from 'foreigner' to 'migration background' [...*vom Ausländer zum Migrationshintergrund*...], see Mannitz and Schneider (2014).

German society has mostly been discussed in negative terms in the discursive and political sphere. During the last decades, in the aftermath of the developments in the political sphere addressing integration as a key process in achieving a diverse German society<sup>3</sup> and a dialogue with the Muslim communities<sup>4</sup>, the public and political discourse regarding the Turkish population in Germany has mostly been limited to and shaped by integration-centered discussions. The problematizing and continuous evaluation of its ability or (lack of) success in adapting and integrating into the cultural, social, and economic spheres of German society have been framed in mainstream discourse mostly in terms of the low levels of participation in education and the labor market<sup>5</sup>. Representing the largest group within the Muslim population in Germany, Turkish inhabitants have also been subjected to the process of stigmatization of Islam (Kaya, 2012) and the “negative feelings that are predominant in Germany regarding integration of ‘the Muslim’” (Foroutan, 2013b), and they commonly embody “the figure of ‘the Muslim’ as the ‘non-German’ other” (Foroutan, 2013a). Critical perspectives mainly in the fields of sociology and related disciplines have uncovered the drawbacks of immigrant integration policies and discourses (Anthias, 2013; Korteweg, 2017; Schinkel, 2018). The particular manifestations of the limitations of these policies in the German context have been also discussed in terms of their paradoxically strengthening binary oppositions such as ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ or ‘migrant’ vs. ‘native’ rather than providing the ground for inclusion and participation as intended (Hess and Moser, 2009). However, there is still a considerable lack of knowledge and deeper understanding of the experiences of social groups with a migration background beyond the metaphor of integration.

Gender has a particular significance in this picture, as the gendered operationalization of integration discourses accompanied by a culturalist bias disproportionately distorts the perspective on women’s experiences in the postmigration context. Women’s nonparticipation in the public sphere has been seen, rather shortsightedly, as a mere result of traditional cultural norms, or their being fixed in their social reproductive role as mothers, and their social position has been pragmatically reduced to their potential/responsibility/incapability to facilitate younger generations’ integration processes<sup>6</sup>. Lately, women of Turkish background have been imagined and classified within the formalist binary scale of either unable or unwilling to integrate (echoing the stereotype: religious, not working, low German language competence)<sup>7</sup> or successfully integrated as exceptions (exemplary success stories particularly in the job market or cultural field). There is a need for a nuanced understanding and critique of this sort of integration-centered view of women of Turkish origin in Germany.

The topic of how migration background impacts socio-economic participation in German society remains under-researched. Structural factors, discrimination, and exclusionary attitudes are interwoven in this picture. The second generation of Turkish migrants in Europe has been generally characterized by poor levels of education; however, they are still more upwardly mobile than their parents (Thomson and Crul, 2007: 1033). A recent study on the situation of female immigrants on the German labor market based on data from German Socio-Economic Panel reveals that even though second-generation Turkish women “catch-up with their male counterparts regarding educational qualifications, they have on average lower employment probabilities and earn less compared to them” (Salikutluk et al., 2020: 27). Relatedly, research focusing on employment opportunities of female migrants in Germany shows that “Turkish migrants (signaled by a Turkish name) are discriminated against at a significant level [sic], in particular when their photograph shows them wearing a Muslim headscarf” (Weichselbaumer, 2016: 17). Recent research on educational integration of the third generation of Turkish migrants<sup>8</sup> in Germany indicates that they achieve lower levels of educational success compared to their majority peers (Hunkler and Schotte, 2023: 394). A comparative study conducted with future teachers in the German education system found out that Turkish-origin students are faced with an “attributional bias”, meaning that they are judged more harshly and held responsible for their academic underperformance, downplaying the responsibility of the educational system (Frohlich et al., 2016: 84). Although the younger-generation women, born and/or raised in Germany as children of Turkish migrant workers, to a great extent actively participate in public life via education and job market, at a discursive and social-relational level they are still often perceived and categorized as the non-German and the non-European Other.

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<sup>3</sup> The call for the first Integration Summit (Erster Integrationsgipfel) followed by the first Integration Plan launched in 2007 (Bundesregierung, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> The foundation of German Islam Conference (DIK: Deutsche Islam Konferenz) in 2006, (Deutsche Islam Konferenz, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See the newspaper article on Welt-Online as an example (Lauer et al., 2010).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on migrant motherhood with an intersectional perspective in relation to citizenship, see Erel et al. (2021), for a discussion on motherhood in the context of migrant care work, see Lutz (2016).

<sup>7</sup> One of the most striking versions of this stereotypical image, the ‘*Kopftuchmädchen*’ (Girl with the headscarf) as used by Thilo Sarrazin, could be given as an example, see Frankfurter Allgemeine (2009).

<sup>8</sup> The authors also point out that the group of third-generation Turkish students in their study was small, so “the findings are tentative and should be interpreted with caution” (Hunkler and Schotte, 2023: 395).

This paper aims to investigate recent articulations of this othering in the postmigrant context and scrutinizes the experiences of gendered and racialized forms of exclusion and stigmatization of young women of Turkish descent in Germany. The discussion on how these experiences of othering that span generations have been reflected in young women's sense of belonging is inspired by the conceptualization of belonging as a process and outcome of boundary and border-making (Anthias, 2021). Following critical epistemological feminist perspectives at the intersection of migration and gender, this paper intends to translate its research subjects' experiences of gendered subordination into "a source of alternative knowledge production" (Lutz and Amelina, 2021: 68).

## INTEGRATION AS DISCOURSE: GENDER, CULTURE AND OTHERING

Critical approaches to the concept of (immigrant) integration has been one of the central issues of the critical reflexive turn in migration studies (Amelina, 2020; Nieswand and Drotbohm, 2014). On the basis of research on the Sharia debate in Canada, the Dutch integration debates, gender-based violence in the UK and Canada, as well as the headscarf debates in Europe, Anna Korteweg discusses how integration discourses cast immigrants as "racialized and gendered subjects", and how these racialized gendered groups then turn out to be "the subject of abjection onto whom generalized social problems are projected" (Korteweg, 2017: 432). Korteweg suggests studying integration "not as a category of analysis but as a category of practice"—applying Roger Brubaker's perspective (2013) about the category of the Muslim—in order to enable a focus on "social, cultural, and economic processes that produce groups in ways that move beyond integration discourse" (Korteweg, 2017: 440). Based on empirical comparative research on Muslim communities and integration regimes of Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, Ayhan Kaya draws attention to the process of stigmatization of Islam, and Islamophobia as a form of governmentality operating as cultural racism in Europe (Kaya, 2012: 201 ff.). He argues for "transnationalizing integration", mainly referring to migrants' "transnational space" including the social, political, cultural, and economic interactions in the country of origin, the country of settlement, and other localities (Ibid, 225 ff.). An analysis of the EU immigration and integration policy chain discusses how immigration and integration policies construct categorizations which engender stratification, inequality, stereotyping, and discrimination, all of which in many cases persists for generations (Mügge and van der Haar, 2016). Research based on monitoring immigrant integration in the Western European context has been also criticized as a "neocolonial form of knowledge production" (Schinkel, 2018).

Focusing on the genealogy and development of the integration paradigm in the German political sphere and public discourse since 1970s, Sabina Hess and Johannes Moser emphasize how the notion of integration has been framed within the confines of the concept of 'cultural integration' focusing sharply on the fields of language, culture, and history, and expecting extraordinary achievements (*Sonderleistungen*) from the migrants in these areas, reflecting the deficit-oriented approach (*Defizitansatz*) toward migration (Hess and Moser, 2009: 12). German language competence and how migrants adapt to 'German values' seem to be the main areas in which migrants find themselves constantly evaluated, along with the related question of their willingness and ability to integrate. The narrow focus of Germany's official integration policy on the individual, embodied in the slogan '*fordern und fördern*' (challenge and support), relates to unsubstantiated perceptions according to which immigrants have insufficient social contact, poor language competence, and low educational achievement (Schönwälder, 2010: 155).

Tracing how gender is conceptualized in migration research in the German-speaking context, Helma Lutz and Anna Amelina (2021) draw attention to the trend during the late 1970s and 1980s to focus on the 'visualization' of women, often accompanied by a portrayal of migrant women as victims of patriarchal power relations, particularly in the case of Muslim women from Turkey (Lutz and Amelina, 2021, with reference to Huth-Hildebrandt, 2002). This trend relates strongly to the culturalization of migration and integration issues. An "ahistoric conceptualization" of Turkish or Muslim culture, which is assumed to be static and frozen in time and resistant to transformation through migrants' experiences in the German context has shaped the mainstream understanding of the life-worlds of Turkish migrants in Germany for a long time (Çağlar, 1990: 13). Critical perspectives show that the difficulties Muslim women face in several fields, such as language, education, or professional opportunities<sup>9</sup>, "are not discussed in the context of discriminatory institutional structures but as family structures primarily defined by (backward) traditions and (religious) fanaticism" (Bischoff, 2018: 32)<sup>10</sup>. Research reveals how policy frames of spousal migration in Germany—usually equating migration with forced and arranged marriages in the case of Muslim-Turkish communities—have been formulated as being intrinsically connected to the

<sup>9</sup> For a critical historical analysis of gender- and ethnicity-specific patterns in immigration and labor market policies in Germany challenging the shorthand explanations that relate Turkish migrant women's low levels of participation in the job market either to their unwillingness or to their traditional Turkish-Muslim culture, see Erdem and Mattes (2003).

<sup>10</sup> For a qualitative work tracing the image of the "adolescent girl who is tightly controlled by her 'traditional Turkish' family" in multiple areas of German mainstream culture, see Ewing (2006).

problems of female subordination and integration deficits in a highly gendered way (Block, 2014: 253). Another study on public political debates reveals how patriarchal Turkish migrant masculinity was presented by the politicians as a hindrance to integration not only for the men themselves, but also for the women and children around them, pointing to the damaging effects of patriarchal Turkish customs on younger generations (Scheibelhofer, 2014: 194 ff.).

The culturalization of migration issues has been tightly interconnected with othering processes and the related continuous (re)production of binary oppositions such as us/them, migrants/natives, modern/traditional, as well as various complex gendered articulations of those binaries. The ways in which representations of immigrant culture vs. national culture constantly constitute and construct one another in various spheres of social life, alongside the perception of immigrants as threats to national culture and fears of ‘cultural loss’, have recently been revealed in an anthropological examination of this field (Vertovec, 2011: 245). The idea of *Leitkultur* (predominant culture)<sup>11</sup>—relating to the idea of *Heimat* (homeland) defining those who belong and the others who do not—has been examined in light of its recent significance for migration debates in Germany, underlining its exclusionary potential:

[...] the idea of *Leitkultur* does not express a demand for mere integration, but rather for complete assimilation and, even more, the annihilation of the immigrant’s self. That way it also produces a massive stigma toward any notion of Otherness. (Ahrens, 2021: 328)

How the cultural difference paradigm has manipulated the perspective on the social reality of Turkish migrants in Germany has been extensively discussed alongside a plea for problematizing the notion of cultural difference and critically engaging with the classical understanding of culture particularly in migration research (Sökefeld, 2004: 27–28)<sup>12</sup>. Nieswand and Drotbohm discuss the concept of culture as one of the intellectual crisis areas of migration and diversity research, in addition to the crisis of conceptualization of society and the categorical differences between ‘foreigner’ and ‘native’ (Nieswand and Drotbohm, 2014: 17). The cultural interpretation of social problems results in holding the foreign and inadequate culture or rather religion of the migrant responsible for the migration-related tensions in society, but not the failures of political inclusion attempts or racism in immigration societies (Ibid: 19)<sup>13</sup>.

The very definition of culture itself has been discussed as problematic as it is primarily associated with non-Western and minority cultural groups and used as if it were the main source of people’s identity and the determinant of their actions (Phillips, 2010: 60). Focusing on honor killing and forced marriage debates in the Netherlands, Germany, and Britain, Gökce Yurdakul and Anna Korteweg illuminate how these relate to the political marginalization of the immigrant communities, as the “so-called backwardness of Muslims in particular is interpreted as their failure to accept gender equality norms” (Yurdakul and Korteweg, 2013: 205). Discourses based on the naturalization and essentialization of cultural differences also illustrate how the categories of Islam/Muslim as the cultural Other function in the construction of European culture itself, namely, the “seemingly peripheral discourse about the racialized, gendered Other reveals the tensions at the heart of the formation of the new Europe” (Yıldız, 2011: 72). Rostock and Berghahn argue that gender equality turns out to be “a useful tool to secure the image of a modern and emancipated German society” as a marker between Christian occidental ‘us’ and the (Muslim) ‘Other’ (Rostock and Berghahn, 2008: 358). Janine Dahinden et al. examine, from a boundary-work perspective and along the axes of ethnicity, religion, and gender, how the binary between ‘the equal European women’ and ‘oppressed Muslim women’ is constructed by young adults in Switzerland (Dahinden et al., 2014).

Drawing from Anne Phillips’s discussion on culture regarding the migration/minority context, which emphasizes that cultures do shape but not determine who we are and what we do as individuals in society (Phillips, 2010: 67), this paper underlines the necessity of a critical lens in the analysis of culture. Relatedly, it employs a reflexive stance in order to avoid the trap of reproducing the understanding of Turkish/Muslim culture as determining the lives of migrant women. Rather, it investigates how young women of Turkish origin actively negotiate the (transnational) ‘cultural’ context they live in, and therefore it focuses on their individual agency rather than on a group-oriented interpretation of culture.

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<sup>11</sup> As translated in the article by Ahrens (2021).

<sup>12</sup> See the edited volume by Sökefeld (2014) for a range of works dealing critically with the notion of cultural difference and providing alternative perspectives for discussing culture in practices of Turkish inhabitants of Germany.

<sup>13</sup> “*die fremde und unangemessene Kultur, bzw. Religion der Einwanderer [...] nicht die mangelnden politischen Inklusionsbemühungen [...] oder der Rassismus in den Zuwanderungsländern*”



## BELONGING IN A POSTMIGRANT CONTEXT

The term postmigrant, particularly relating to the conceptual potential it offers for understanding the current social transformations in European immigration societies, has been recently explored as a critical intervention in migration studies, sociology, pedagogical, and cultural and literary studies (Gaonkar et al., 2021: 19). Naika Foroutan spotlights the question of what happens after migration, and offers an alternative framework for studying recent social transformations in immigration society beyond the limitations of the notion of integration. Focusing on several levels of interaction processes in the postmigrant society (micro relationships between individuals as well as macro processes of structural changes and policies), this approach underscores the ambiguous and ambivalent, as well as the always-transforming character of the postmigrant society (Foroutan, 2019: 155 ff.). Erol Yıldız, in his elaborations on post-migrant perspectives particularly in the urban context, defines postmigrant as a shift of perspective (*Blickverschiebung*) as it takes the voice and experiences of migration as a point of reference. Therefore, he puts the emphasis on the political potential of such a perspective in terms of questioning social relations of power and dominance (Yıldız, 2016: 72). The postmigrant conceptualization figures as a critical intervention in migration research as it calls for relocating migration as one of the main categories for social analysis, however, not as the deviation from the ‘normal’ order of the nation-state, but rather as a current constructive fact of contemporary urban societies, particularly in the European context.

Postmigration as a concept has been widely used as an explanatory analytical frame particularly in case of the cultural practices of younger generations with migration histories/experiences in Germany and Austria. Yıldız and Ohnmacht argue that the young people of the postmigrant generation are not only passive subjects affected by the racist and ethnicizing discourses they face on a daily basis, but they also develop empowering convivial everyday practices and generate options for resistance (Yıldız and Ohnmacht, 2021: 164). How second- and third-generation young people from migrant families develop active and individually-oriented life strategies and self-positioning practices ranging from subversive and creative to practices of resistance under discriminatory and stigmatizing conditions has been studied with a particular focus on marginalized urban spaces from a social work perspective (Yıldız, M., 2016). Erol Yıldız and Marc Hill, in their analysis of the ‘in-between’ experiences and senses of belonging of postmigrant generations who emigrate to Turkey after growing up and living for years in Germany, criticize the perspectives fixed to local normalities either in Germany or Turkey and offer a new perspective for understanding the resistance of these generations referring to “mobile senses of belonging” (Strasser, 2009, cited in Yıldız and Hill, 2017: 284). Focusing on experiences of children of migrants in school and urban-neighborhood context, another recent study investigates how social marginalization, discrimination, and social control impact an ambiguous sense of belonging to Germany (Tize and Reis, 2019: 122). Structural discrimination (in access to services such as housing or employment due to cultural and language barriers) or discrimination in person-to-person interactions (racist and discriminatory encounters based on religion or ethnicity) then become the background for the “powerful and shared identity marker” of “being a foreigner – and therefore not belonging in Germany” (Ibid: 135).

Gaonkar et al. describe three different trends of conceptualizing postmigration within the German-speaking academic field: (1) postmigrant generation, with a focus on experiences of the descendants of migrants silenced in public discourse; (2) postmigrant society, with a broader focus on conflicts, obsessions, and negotiations in the society shaped by past and ongoing migrations, including conflicts around representation, racism, and structural exclusion; (3) postmigrant as a critical analytical research perspective which questions the established approaches in migration studies (Gaonkar et al., 2021: 19 ff.). In his article titled “When do Societies Become Postmigrant?” Kijan Espahangizi emphasizes the importance of a perspective grounded upon the history of knowledge in dealing with issues of migration and integration, and relatedly defines postmigrant as:

an analytical perspective that allows for the examination of the extent to which notions of migration, integration, diversity, racism, multi-, inter- and transculturality have, in recent decades, created not only new opportunities for inclusion (for some), but also new distinctions and configurations of exclusionary structures. (Espahangizi, 2021: 66)

Drawing upon this perspective, this paper investigates how the notion of integration has been effective in the production of various configurations of otherness and exclusion in the case of young women of Turkish background. Relatedly, this work aims to make the perspectives and experiences of the postmigrant generation visible with a particular focus on gendered forms of racialization and exclusion, and to contribute to a better understanding of the postmigrant society in Germany in terms of conflicts and negotiations.

Regarding its focus on belonging in postmigrant context, this work is mostly inspired by Floya Anthias’s perspective in studying “belonging, non-belonging (or differential belonging) as a process and an outcome of boundary and border making and the marks these leave on human experience, location, and modes of identification” (Anthias, 2021:24). In a similar vein, this paper explores questions of how discourses on integration

(and migration) relate to social boundary and border making practices, and how these interfaces are reflected in young women's articulations of a sense of belonging. It aims to explore how young women of Turkish origin reflect on processes such as social exclusion, stigmatization, and racialization in several areas of social life (for instance, education, work, social participation, etc.), and engage with them by setting symbolic boundaries while producing their self-representations. In doing so, this work also investigates the "difference made by the content of symbolic boundaries in the construction of cognitive and social boundaries" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002: 187). Within this framework, the concept of 'translocational positionality' (Anthias, 2009) provides a productive analytical tool to look closer at the experiences of young women with a migration history from Turkey in Germany. Firstly, this approach enables a translocational understanding in terms of the "interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization" (Ibid.: 12). Secondly, the conceptualization of "positionality" opens up the space for scrutinizing belonging at the intersection of structure and agency:

Positionality combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities: as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings: as process). That is, positionality is the space at the intersection of structure (social position/social effects) and agency (social positioning/meaning and practice). (Anthias, 2009: 12)

Inspired by this approach, this paper develops an analysis of its research participants' sense of belonging from a cultural-sociological perspective, particularly zooming in on the ways they position themselves in relation to their social locations regarding gender, racialization, othering, and exclusion.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Empirical discussions in this paper are based upon a preliminary field research<sup>14</sup> conducted between January and October 2021, including five in-depth (online)<sup>15</sup> interviews with young women of Turkish background aged 21–31, and two expert interviews (one online, one in person). Young women were either students or active in the job market at the time of the interview. One of the expert interviews was conducted in an integration office and the other in a youth office. The interviewees in in-depth interviews were all members of the third or fourth generation, born and/or raised in Germany as a result of their families' migration from Turkey under the guest worker program that had started in the late 1950s and continued until the 1970s. The interviewees were all living in the state of Hessen, coming from different cities and villages. Interviews were carried out bilingually, in Turkish and German, in most of the cases switching between the two<sup>16</sup>.

The field research was conducted using an ethnographic approach, in order to gain a thorough understanding of everyday lives of young women with migration history from Turkey. Close, methodical contact with research participants provides the researcher with extensive and complex data that cannot be gathered otherwise. In this sense, ethnographic research is a "scientifically motivated" way of "delving empathetically into the complexity of the culture and political world of the people" (Bray, 2008: 301). Employing the ethnographic approach and aiming at developing an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences contextualized in social relationships, this research is conducted not 'on', but 'with' its research subjects, and defines the research process as a space of reflective discussion and knowledge production inclusive of its participants.

In-depth interviews were planned as semi-structured conversations with the research participants. Rather than being solely a methodological tool to extract data from the interviewees, in-depth interviews are seen as "exploratory in nature and cooperative in terms of knowledge production" (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018: 173). Therefore, interviews could potentially point to new/unexplored discussion points/topics for the research, and were conceptualized as a cooperation between the researcher and the research participants as well as an opportunity, and a process of producing collective knowledge on the topic. They aimed to collect detailed data primarily on individual experiences and family migration history. Focusing on everyday life experiences of young women, they sought to examine how women of Turkish origin viewed their relationships with others in society, how they reflected on their experiences relating to the notion of integration, and how they negotiated and/or responded to the mainstream ways of categorizing and imagining the "Turkish woman" in the German context. Expert interviews were organized as structured and topic-focused conversations which provided insights into the articulations of the concept of integration and the notion of cultural difference in official settings from the perspective of practitioners.

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<sup>14</sup> This phase of the field research is described as preliminary, since field research is planned to be continued with more interviews.

<sup>15</sup> All the interviews conducted during this period took place online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and contact restrictions.

<sup>16</sup> The quotes from the interviews used for research purposes have been translated into English by the author.

Interview data were transcribed and thematically interpreted in several rounds of close reading, during which the transcripts were annotated in detail as the first step of the analysis. These notes were then organized under codes relating to the main concepts of the research such as integration, belonging and otherness, and they therefore “speak to the conceptual framework, research questions, or themes which derive therefrom” (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018: 184). How pieces of data in each interview relate to one another and how they contribute to a larger narrative or provide contradictory perspectives under same codes was studied in detail. Inspired by the perspective of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), this research tends to define the way it works on its topics as ‘a way of seeing’ underlining the self-reflexive understanding of the researcher as an active composer of the research analysis (and data) rather than just ‘objectively’ applying some predetermined procedure to the data collected. Relatedly, the researcher has employed a reflexive research practice in line with Iosifides’s assertion that “being reflexive about our own positions in social settings, own thought categories, beliefs, emotions, points of view, conceptual schemes has to be an explicit and vital part of our research endeavors” particularly in migration research (Iosifides, 2018: 103). This entailed constant reflection on her own social and educational status as a postdoctoral researcher, her recent migration biography from Turkey, language (in)competence and relationship with languages in use during the field research.

## EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

The interpretation of the data shows that young women of Turkish origin experience a considerable discrepancy between social integration (i.e., participation in education or the job market) and everyday sense of being included. Latent processes of othering and exclusion, particularly in gendered forms, still effect ordinary experiences of young women of Turkish background in Germany in a substantial way. In this context, belonging could be understood as a field of struggle along the lines of binaries such as ‘us vs. them’ or ‘foreigners vs. Germans’. Young women’s experiences also reveal the aspect of inherited otherness which they take over from the previous generations, particularly from their mothers, but live through and reflect on in novel and changing ways. The discourses on integration, although mostly engaged with in a critical way, still seem to form a reference point in defining young women’s self-positioning and sense of belonging in the postmigrant context.

### “Where Are You From?”: Belonging as a Field of Struggle

Although all the respondents were either students or active in the job market, born and/or raised in Germany, and have a profound knowledge of the German language and culture—in that sense, ‘perfectly integrated’ members of society—they mostly reported instances of othering and the impossibility of avoiding being perceived as migrants or foreigners. In some cases, the emphasis on outward appearance (as a sign of not being European/German/white) was particularly striking as it evoked the racialization process as embedded in everyday life, i.e. the job market, education. A student of sociology reported as follows:

We have to define ourselves so [as migrants]. Even if our attitude or the way we speak and behave does not reveal it, our outward appearance makes it visible in any case. I have a Turkish passport, and because of this I usually get eliminated in job interviews, because [the passport makes it] obvious that I am of Turkish origin. Actually, I say that I am Turkish anyway! But on the other hand, that I am German too! This is a difficult situation. I am fourth generation, but still, I cannot situate myself properly. Even if I feel German personally, outward appearance is always a problem, a lifelong one! People keep asking, “Where are you from? Where are your parents from?” (A3, 22, student)

The fact that the interviewee describes her outward appearance as a ‘problem’, as it reveals that she is not ‘fully’ German even though she also feels as a member of German society, is striking in terms of demonstrating the burden of the individual experiences of being the Other in society. In this context, even acknowledging one’s own sense of belonging becomes a space of struggle. Experiencing continuous subtle or open denial of her being a full/native/normal member of the broader society, the interviewee shares the difficulty in ‘situating herself properly’ even though she feels German and Turkish at the same time, confirming her dual sense of belonging to the two social contexts that she relates to.

Being often subjected to insistent questions about one’s origin has an exclusionary effect, and it was a common experience reported in other interviews as well. For the interviewees, such questions act as a reminder of their migrant background and signal the continuity of their status as foreigners. This proves the mainstream perception of the Turkish inhabitants of the postmigrant society as ones not ‘coming from Germany’ even though they were born and raised in the country. As constant reminders of Otherness, these questions, as discussed in the influential work of Mark Terkessidis, function as daily tools of othering and part of the latent systemic functioning of the ‘banality of racism’ (Terkessidis, 2004).

Another question reported in the interviews had to do with whether or not people with a migration background had plans to return to their 'home country'. One of the research participants, born and raised in Germany, obtained her BA and MA, and was a doctoral candidate and research assistant at the university at the time of the interview, definitely fits the profile of a very 'well-settled' individual with a migration background in terms of educational and socio-economic integration parameters. She recalled a conversation she had had with the director of the school in which she was doing her internship during her university studies:

He said: "Would you consider going back to Turkey?" Going back? What does this mean, really? I never lived there! How should I go back? I said: "No, I do not have any such plans." He said: "There is a big potential there. You speak German very well," and then he added: "Perhaps you could have more opportunities there." What was he trying to say? That doors were closed for me here? That I could not get a job I wanted here? (A4, 28, student, employed)

These 'potential return' questions are quite common and work in a very similar way to the ones about a person's 'actual origin', namely, as reminders of not belonging in Germany. Members of the postmigrant generation are apparently still expected to go back to their countries of origin, even though their families have lived in Germany for generations. Moreover, this example lays bare that despite all the legislation aimed at inclusion, and all the on-paper anti-discrimination measures, the invisible symbolic boundaries in everyday interactions are still very much in place and they solidify structural boundaries, in this case by implying that the chances are low for the candidate to get a job in Germany because of her 'migration background'.

### **Representing 'The Cultural Other'**

The cultural essentialist view articulated through exclusionary and stigmatizing practices directed against members of society with a migration background has also emerged as a recurrent theme in the interviews. Issues such as the headscarf or school trips arise as symbolically loaded topics, as if they described the 'Turkish/Muslim culture' or explained the behavior of the members of this group. One of the interviewees, a psychology student at the time of the interview, remembers an anecdote from her elementary school years. Questions aiming to detect 'the cultural signs' apparently work in a way to further exclude the child in this educational setting, rather than support her in terms of participation:

She [the teacher] asked: "Does your mother wear a headscarf or a hijab?" I still do not know, to this day, why she asked this question. I have no idea! Or there were some school trips including overnight stays. Once, I was unable to go because we could not afford a ski holiday. My teacher said, in front of the whole class: "Why are you always excluding yourself from the things we do?" She said that in a way, as if my mother and father did not allow me to go to school trips because I am a girl, a Muslim, and Turkish. The children at school are usually not aware of what they are saying when ridiculing something, but they [teachers] should be more careful. For example, after this, a girl approached to me and made fun of it: "You cannot stay with a boy in the same room. That is why your mom and dad do not allow you to go skiing." (A2, 21, student)

This quotation is a clear example of how culturalization of migrant issues makes socio-economic (and other structural problems and hierarchies) invisible. Even though her parents were both university graduates (one with a degree from Germany and the other from Turkey), they had been working low-paid 'migrant' jobs with night shifts and long working hours. As a consequence, they could not afford to pay for her school trip or attend all of the parents' meetings that usually took place in the evening. The culturalized shortcut way of interpreting situations like this one not only obscures social stratification based on structural differences, but also strengthens structural boundaries and divisions based on stereotypical images and exclusionary discourses. Below is a similar account in which the interviewee makes a strong claim for belonging in both German and Turkish society at the same time, despite the dominant and widespread insistence on the imagined cultural difference/otherness, particularly in the case of women of Turkish origin:

One can be Turkish and German at the same time. You do not have to decide for either one. I think that German society, which expects from you to be a German, is not ready for integration. This is mostly about women. For example, a few weeks ago, my friend's boyfriend asked me: "Does your father choose the man you will marry?" I laughed a lot. In a job interview, since I have a Turkish passport, the lady there asked me: "Does your father force you to keep your Turkish passport?" No! I do not want to pay 300 Euros for a German passport at the moment and therefore I postpone applying for it. (A3, 22, student)

The above examples reveal how the stereotypical image of the Turkish woman as oppressed by the patriarchal and archaic norms and traditions is still effectively shaping the mainstream view of women of Turkish origin. Being in education, having a university degree or having a job does not shield one from this prejudice or othering in general. On the contrary, it is still a 'surprising coincidence' that young women of Turkish origin can go to school, have a job or make their own decisions. An interviewee narrates that she still has to convince others that she is not oppressed in her family, particularly regarding her freedom in terms of education. She has been very successful during her whole educational path in Germany, obtained her high school diploma, and even worked in her free time giving private lessons to several younger students. At the time of the interview, she was pursuing a BA to become a teacher:

They are usually surprised, and always [wonder] if we are under pressure. I say that it is not the case in our family. If you want to, you can go to school [university], if you do not want to, then you do not go. I have chosen to go to school. (A1, 31, student)

As it has been discussed in the previous sections of this paper, there is a troubled and complicated interface between the concerns about gender equality in the context of migration and integration, and the racialized discourses based on the image of a homogenous patriarchal Muslim/Turkish traditional culture. Insisting on identifying women of Turkish descent as a social group deprived of gender equality is very much related to the European self-image as the modern Western civilization protecting gender equality. According to this discursive frame, potential agency and active critical engagement of young women regarding the cultural practices in their family histories seem beyond imagination. This way of seeing young women not as individuals but as representatives of a 'culture' of which they are also seen as 'victims' becomes evident as a way of reinforcing the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' and a strategy of continuous migrantization and othering in the postmigrant context.

### **Otherness as a Gendered Inheritance**

Most of the interviewees referred to their families' migration stories as they shared their reflections on integration and sense of belonging in society. It was significant that in all interviews they told stories of their mothers as cases of non-belonging. As women of the first and second generation, their mothers usually did not or could not work, or worked publicly invisible care or cleaning jobs. Relatedly, they mostly had very limited contact and opportunities for learning and practicing German. Observing their mother's experiences has obviously influenced younger women's ways of weaving their own positionality in German society. In many cases, serving as interpreters for their mothers—who had faced language barriers and were often judged because of their lack of competence in German—they not only observed, but actively participated in this context. An interviewee, whose mother migrated to Germany to get married, recounts an anecdote from a hospital, where she accompanied her mother as her interpreter:

Then I remember, we were there to pick up my brother and the nurse asked my mother: "Why can you not speak German? You have been here for 19 years!" My mom said: "I understand a little bit." Then the nurse said: "If you had learned just one word every day you would have memorized a whole library by now." On the one hand, the nurse was right. However, she had never been in this situation. I do not think that they have the right to judge or give advice on this. (A4, 28, student, employed)

Witnessing the embodied experience of 'voicelessness', in terms of not being able to express oneself in the public space due to language barriers, creates important first-hand 'historical' knowledge for the younger generation. They have observed at close quarters what it means to be speechless in social life, and they describe their own positioning in relation to this, as they now have the required tool – language. The below quote by an interviewee, who was working as a secretary at the time of the interview, is telling in this sense:

For example, our mothers or the previous generation, they could barely speak German. They could not express themselves. In order not to say something wrong, they always stayed silent and stood aside. Now, [younger women] all speak very well, they can adapt. Things has changed and will be even better. (A5, 23, employed)

The boundaries built around language in the case of previous generations crisscross several fields of everyday life and portray a broader disconnect in the social and public sphere. This theme has also emerged in an expert interview, where the practitioner working with young people reflected on the job preferences of young women of Turkish descent and how this related to their witnessing of their mothers' migrant experience:

Boys [young men with a family history of migration] often do not continue their education. However, girls usually go to university, in order not to experience the weakness and helplessness that their mothers have experienced, in order to be informed and aware mothers themselves someday. They all pursue good jobs. The ones who had difficulties always prioritize education in their lives. These children lack something. When someone feels some sort of absence, then she knows how valuable [the missing] thing is. Being a teacher is one of the favorites, being a doctor, or a lawyer. (E2, youth expert)

The findings of this research hint at the importance of scrutinizing the generational transfer of migrant experience/history related to belonging and otherness, and trigger further questions regarding the articulations of inherited otherness in postmigrant context. How does witnessing and inheriting their mothers' experiences of being 'the migrant Other' impact the way in which young women with migration history from Turkey negotiate belonging in the postmigrant context today? How do they reflect on their everyday experiences of exclusion and racialization in relation to their familial memory of othering? What are the gendered ways in which these experiences of being the Other are rearticulated through conflicts and negotiations within the dynamics of the postmigrant society?

## CONCLUSION

The fieldwork conducted with young women with migration history from Turkey (born and/or raised in Germany, currently studying and/or working) indicates that they have a high level of awareness of the structural boundaries they experience in everyday life, such as othering and exclusion in an educational setting or the job market. Moreover, they historicize their family experiences of being 'the migrant Other' in society, particularly referring to and comparing their own experiences with their mothers', namely women of the first and second generation of Turkish migrants in Germany. Relatedly, their reflections reveal that their experiences of exclusion, migrantization, and othering are in a way inherited. However, they evidently engage with this inherited knowledge in an active way, building agency within the broader context of these structural boundaries and border-making practices. Their response to the persistent racial, cultural, and stereotypical imaginings and ways society reacts to them is based on critical belonging. They are critical in terms of setting clear boundaries to protect themselves from exclusionary and stigmatizing incidents they encounter in social settings by questioning, rendering them meaningless or sometimes reacting actively by making fun of them. They claim a sense of belonging against the background of this critical engagement and continual othering that comes with being a young woman of Turkish origin in postmigrant Germany. The discussion in this paper also stands by the point that the limited concepts of integration "say very little about how the members of the postmigrant generation manage to cope in globalized everyday life" (Rotter and Yıldız, 2021: 188). However, a critical analysis of the concept of integration seems to be still analytically productive in revealing the effect of this historical discursive phenomenon in everyday cultural practices connected with social boundaries and belonging. This critical analytical engagement contributes to a deeper understanding of postmigrant realities and raises nuanced questions that go beyond integration-centered thinking on inclusion, dialogue, and belonging in the postmigrant society.

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Comment Piece

**“We All Share the Same Language” Elias Sime: Eregata, Arnolfini, Bristol,  
October 21, 2023 – February 18, 2024, Exhibition**

James Baggott-Brown <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bath Spa University, UNITED KINGDOM

\*Corresponding Author: [j.baggott-brown@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:j.baggott-brown@bathspa.ac.uk)

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**ABSTRACT**

A review of the exhibition Elias Sime: Eregata at the Arnolfini gallery, Bristol. The Exhibition is the first solo exhibition in Europe of Sime’s work. The review explores the Zoma project, a network of arts centres in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, created in collaboration between Sime and the curator and cultural anthropologist, Meskerem Assegued. The Arnolfini exhibition is discussed in relation to its central theme of networks, both local and global; networks that consist of stories and knowledge, commerce and waste.

**Keywords:** global communication, networks, art, Elias Sime, exhibition

**“WE ALL SHARE THE SAME LANGUAGE” ELIAS SIME: EREGATA, ARNOLFINI, BRISTOL, OCTOBER 21, 2023 – FEBRUARY 18, 2024, EXHIBITION<sup>1</sup>**

Sitting in the valley of the Entoto Mountains above Addis Ababa, and on the verge of completion, is the third iteration of an extraordinary project, the Zoma Museum and, now, Zoma Village. This is the result of a long-running collaboration between the artist Matias Sime, and curator and anthropologist Meskerem Assegued.

The initial Zoma (known locally as ‘Little Zoma’), in the Mekanisa area of Addis Ababa, was purchased by Sime and Assegued as a home for Sime, an artist residence and gallery. The appearance of the property is of a *gestamtkunstwerk*, with each and every surface a part of the breathtaking whole; from the paving tiles leading to the building’s entrance, engraved with images of local wildlife, to the mud-built walls, and the beautifully decorated timber walls of the interior, which is inhabited by traditionally hand-carved wooden furniture. In her essay for the catalogue that accompanies the Arnolfini exhibition, Nana Biamah-Ofusu describes this building as ‘a convivial space, designed for gathering, sharing stories and the act of dreaming’.<sup>2</sup>

The second iteration of Zoma, Zoma Museum, expands the scope of the first with the addition of a school, library, restaurant, amphitheatre and herbal gardens. Here, the artist’s home-as-artwork becomes a space for community. The project, funded largely by the sale of Sime’s artwork, offers an alternative space for learning, for the children who attend school there, and for members of the wider local community. The school, and Zoma as a

<sup>1</sup> *Elias Sime: Eregata*, Arnolfini, Bristol, October 21, 2023 – February 18, 2024, Exhibition

<sup>2</sup> Brace, G. (ed). (2023). *Eregata* (Bristol: Arnolfini, October 21, 2023 – February 18, 2024, Exhibition Catalogue): 68.

project, follow a traditional approach to education, 'ye kes timirt bet', which, as Biamah-Ofusu explains, 'long before standard Westernised learning, provided literacy education to young children in this region'.<sup>3</sup> Here, children

'are exposed to nature, where general sciences are taught through planting or looking after the cows who are also residents here, where art and physical exercise are intertwined with play and gardening, And where Amharic (a semitic language descended from Ge'ez) is taught with the same significance as the English language.'<sup>4</sup>

The latest instalment of the project, Zoma Village Entoto, is an altogether (even) more ambitious centre for art, community, education and story-telling. Here are more galleries, artists' studios, living spaces for visiting artists, scholars and students. Although this latest aspect of Zoma seems more directed towards art-workers and less toward the local communities of Addis Ababa, its location above the city is as symbolic as it is practical. The knowledge developed, shared and curated at Zoma Village Entoto will, inevitably and deliberately, inform the projects and initiatives that take place in and around the other two locations ('Little Zoma' and Zoma Museum). Zoma is, unquestionably, a model for holistic arts, cultural and social education and community development that should be seen as a model for societies in which learning has become secondary to data and political point-scoring. It might also be considered a model for the reinvention of the Western arts centre, in that Zoma is inherently asset-based, accepting and celebrating what is there in the local community and building from that. In this sense, Zoma and Sime's artwork are inextricably linked, using materials, knowledges and language shared and exchanged between communities.

The current exhibition, the first in Europe of work by Elias Sime, is the result of a visit by Arnolfini staff to the Zoma projects. The gallery's director, Gary Topp, has described how the qualities of the Zoma project 'speak to the Arnolfini's own determination to be a civic space with many different values, communities and purposes at its heart'<sup>5</sup>, demonstrating a continuing commitment to developing the gallery as a hub for diverse creative communities.

The exhibition is titled Eregata, an Amharic word with a complex meaning whose nearest translation in English is 'serene'. The Amharic language significantly predates other Northern Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Arabic, suggesting an ancient and rich history of oral and written tradition. The work exhibited here represents twenty-two years of artistic practice, but also an engagement with millennia of story-telling traditions, both local (to Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, and Amharic-speaking communities) and global. Throughout this time, Sime's materials have ranged from repurposed fabric, clothing and buttons (materials crucial to existence and survival) to recently defunct electrical and computer components (technology so crucial to the sharing of knowledge and stories over the last half century). The collection of works on display tell stories of networks, both local and global; networks that consist of stories and knowledge, commerce and waste.

Eregata begins on Arnolfini's ground floor with a series of works from Sime's *Tightrope* series (2014-present). This series is largely constructed using reclaimed electrical (and occasionally mechanical) components, either hanging on the walls of the gallery mounted on huge two-dimensional panels, or in the form of hollow curved quarter-sphere sculptures sitting on the floor of the gallery space, like modular panels from some defunct 1980s spacecraft.

The first of the wall-hung pieces, *Tightrope: 99*, is impressively large at 200 × 481.3 cm. Consisting of thousands of pieces of circuit board, dismantled, cut up and rearranged, the physicality of the work is unavoidable. Yet, from a distance, it has the appearance of mid-century Modernist painting, mainly of greys and browns composed in asymmetric geometric patterns across the surface of the panel. The dull colours are punctuated by tiny flecks of red, orange and blue. The resistors, capacitors and transformers, long since redundant as electrical components, become aesthetic components of an absorbing work of art. The focal point of this piece is a circle of green circuit board, dropping out from behind a wall of grey-brown just left of centre in the bottom third of the panel. However, this partial circle functions as more than a formal component of an abstract arrangement, but also as a literal focal-point, pulling the eye's focus from the overall composition of the panel, to the fine detail of the circuit boards themselves; from the big picture to the intimate stories of the panel's inhabitants, whose previous existence might have involved the transmission of data across the globe.

This metaphor is also present in the works that consist – sometimes in part, sometimes entirely – of electrical wire that has been braided and woven together in patterns that represent the serene rippled surface of a flowing river, or a calm but ever-shifting ocean. *Tightrope: (20) While Observing*, a similar size to *Tightrope 99*, is made up of 72 rectangular panels, all consisting of orange electrical wire apart from the top-right module, which is a combination of blues and greys, mixed like pigment on the surface of the panel. Again, from a distance the

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 7

impression is of mid-century Modernism, or perhaps the modular minimalism of LeWitt or Stella. However, once again, close-up it is difficult not to read the materials through the metaphors they offer of networks, connections and the transference of information. This interpretation is further supported by the metal nails that hold the wires in place. Sime himself has stated that he ‘prefers things to have been touched or been in contact with people’,<sup>6</sup> and these currents of communication are populated by so many ant-like travellers.

However, the materials used by Sime in these works speak also of another global network, the largely unregulated export of electronic waste from Europe to African nations (Maes and Preston-Whyte, 2022). Sime takes materials that are damaging local eco-systems and have become a health hazard for local people, and repurposed them to tell a more hopeful story.

Sime’s work is rife with contradictions; between old technology and new, hand-made and machine manufactured, local and global, nature and culture. The earlier reliefs, here exhibited in the smaller first-floor gallery, are testament to this, especially when exhibited within sight of the most recent works in the exhibition; more panels covered with braided electrical wire, but this time spread over symbols and figures from Ethiopian folklore. These earlier pieces are made from fabrics, used and discarded clothes, and buttons. Here the matrix consists of stitched and woven fabric rather than braided wires, and the buttons, which have previously held together clothing now do much of the compositional heavy-lifting. Nonetheless, just as Sime sees little difference between these materials and the technological components of the later work, they hold stories, memories and knowledge in much the same way.

Hanging in one of the smaller galleries are reliefs consisting of woven threads, found fabrics, clothing and buttons. *What is Love? 1* involves a symbol that Sime has returned to across his oeuvre, the turtle, although this is the reptile’s only appearance in the current exhibition. Here, yarn is painstakingly stitched onto canvas, representing an undulating grey landscape taking up the bottom two-thirds of the canvas. The top third, a sky, or perhaps more likely due to the subject-matter, the edge of the sea, is stitched from yarns of pale blue and white. In both the yarn and electrical wire pieces, Sime’s colours mix on the surface of the canvas or board. From a mass of red in the form of an anthill or termite mound, crawl hundreds of small, bright red-orange turtles, heading in all directions, but apparently aiming for the sea/sky. In an article for *Surface Design Journal*, A. M. Weaver has interpreted Sime’s use of the turtle symbol in relation to characteristics ascribed to the creature by various African mythologies; ‘patience and endurance’, ‘intelligence and prudence’, and the wisdom of elders (Weaver, 2010, p. 28).

On the same wall hangs another relief, whose textured surface is created from layers of clothing fragments; in the top half of the canvas, a sky of largely muddy browns on top of mid- and pale-blues, the bottom half a road of darker browns, punctuated by patches of cadmium red. Between land and sky are vertical rectangles of reds, greens and black, perhaps representing buildings that line the road on which two over-burdened donkeys trudge across the picture (one has already exited the canvas at stage right, only its rear legs and tail visible). The palimpsest of fabric suggests that this is a scene repeated over and over in the same spot over many generations, at the same time absolutely local to this place, yet a representation of universal experiences of work, drudgery and the transportation of goods (including clothes and fabrics).

This work tells stories more local to Addis Ababa. Alongside more wall-based pieces and larger sculptures, one also encounters hundreds of smaller pieces of hand-made pottery, or models made of mud and straw (the same materials made to build much of Zoma village). In one room, these are small mud and straw models of televisions, frogs and apes, punctuated by traditional Ethiopian jugs. In another room, a wave of ceramic pots, made in collaboration with a community of potters in Addis Ababa, flows below more wall-based panel works from one end of a long wall to the other. These were inspired by one of the research trips Sime made to South-Central Ethiopia with Assegued, where they met ceramicists working with traditional local techniques. This time, tacit knowledge flows from human to human, region to region, and is now spread beyond national borders through this exhibition and many others across Africa, Europe and North America.

As with any artist’s oeuvre, there is weaker work in this exhibition (IMHO, to borrow a term from today’s networks). Tucked away in a smaller gallery on the second-floor is a series of works titled *Tightrope: Echo*, made between 2021 and the present. These consist of cut-up circuit board mounted on board, each with a megaphone (also covered in circuit board) placed onto the surface. The metaphor of the megaphone feels clumsy and on-the-nose compared with the visual and metaphorical complexity of the other works, and their visual composition feels secondary to this. These works shout without saying much, where at its best, Sime’s work transforms humble materials into visual stories that cross cultural boundaries. The work embodies tensions between humans, nature, society and technology, but seems to suggest an optimistic view of technology’s ability to transmit knowledge globally. However, there is some inherent warning here that, without tacit knowledge and traditional skills, and without ways in which to share it, there is much to be lost. In Sime’s own words, ‘If you pull it too tight, it will break’.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Elias Sime: Eregata*, op. cit., wall text

<sup>7</sup> *Elias Sime: Eregata*, op. cit., wall text

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## Book Review

# Shakespeare and Social Theory: The Play of Great Ideas

Philip Miles <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Bedfordshire*, UNITED KINGDOM

\*Corresponding Author: [philip.miles@beds.ac.uk](mailto:philip.miles@beds.ac.uk)

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**Keywords:** Shakespeare, social theory, literary criticism

Shore, B. (2022). *Shakespeare and Social Theory: The Play of Great Ideas*. Abingdon: Routledge.

At the heart of Bradd Shore's book *Shakespeare and Social Theory* lies a question of why, after four centuries, Shakespeare still *matters*. Scholarship attendant to this query continues unabated, each 'take' on the drama (and poetry) attempting to broadly reappraise the plays and sonnets, to revisit existing debates, and interpret the narratives, rhythms, form, and 'ideology' of Shakespeare's words within diverse discourses of modernity. Terry Eagleton challenged us in the 1960s to 'deepen our own understanding' of industrial society via Shakespeare's work (1967: 11) and, by 1985, Dollimore and Sinfield's 'political' Shakespeare partially delivered a developmental discourse that Raymond Williams argued was an overdue sociology of the literature/text and drama that diminished extant, stubborn orthodoxy in Shakespeare studies and turned instead to a search for that elusive 'something' that exists beyond conservative modes of narrow classification (1994 [1985]: 282). Such compatibility continues to exist, linking contemporary literary criticism with social commentary that enables a vividness of insight that itself simultaneously induces further 'theory' and critique. In our times Shakespeare's work is channelled through notable intersectional blending: race, sexuality, gender, personal biography/identity, emotions and affect, and power – the latter two being particularly apposite in this uncertain age (Craik and Pollard, 2013; Greenblatt, 2019). Shore contributes by providing his reader with a sophisticated entrée to explore the existence of that 'something' spoken of by Williams but, as Morris Weitz (1975: 29) cautioned, philosophy of literature can resemble a search for something *that isn't really there* whereas the conveyance of philosophy *in* literature exposes truth without detriment of the text (1975: 29). Shore's approach is an efficacious example of the latter in being a volume that is dedicated to exploring Shakespeare via what may be considered *constructive distortions* and *exposures of partially-concealed narratives* of the 'social', embodying history, emotion, sexuality, politics, and reason that serve to drive the reader toward an appreciation of the complexity and timeless elegance of Shakespeare's works.

Ostensibly, this book is divided into a variety of close readings of a chosen set of works. To commence, Shore states early that the volume is not concerned with the problematics of philosophy *per se* but, instead, is aimed at connecting inherent dramaturgy of theatre with changing times, creating a 'holographic' way of seeing Shakespeare's 'ethnographic' observations on the structure of society, social change, social and cultural reproduction, and the omnipresent intrigue at the top of his society that results in the empowerment of an audience. Shakespeare, says Shore, was 'the participant observer of his world' (54), creating a form of reportage of fluid social transformations familiar to his audience while partially concealed in the functional entertainment of popular theatre for the masses. To expand these ends, Shore proceeds to utilise close readings of a handful of the plays – *Hamlet* in particular, along with *A Winter's Tale*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Julius Caesar*, and *King Lear* but not, somewhat surprisingly, *Macbeth* – and succeeds in isolating core dynamics that are, naturally enough, of interest

to the attendant sociologist. We engage with otherwise ‘traditional’ themes of power, love, family, age, vanity and so on that resonate with audiences, connecting text, reader, and viewer seamlessly via an ‘externality of script and stagecraft’ that is ‘wedded to emotional realism [...] a marriage of script and feeling’ (176). The metaphor – and its uses – are explicit and powerful, later suggesting that a writer who uses this approach well ‘has a powerful tool for playing with a reader’s inner life’ (222). Maybe this is the thrust of the book? Shakespeare’s ability to incorporate his audience, to solicit empathy and anxiety, sympathy and hope is central here in understanding the *sociological* as both, to borrow from Abrams (1971), a mirror and a lamp reflecting and illuminating social life and conscience, reflections of the machinations of the outer world and the elements of what it is to be human in the Shakespearean text. Indeed, throughout the work, Shore is careful to combine this ‘human’ element of the author and text with discussion of reception and of historical strictures and, while not advocating Harold Bloom’s quasi-abstract conclusion regarding Shakespeare as the ‘original psychologist’ (1999: 714), he is determined to continue to invoke the essence of observation of the dynamics of society both as body politic and the personal-political. The distinction, perhaps, is that Shakespeare (like Pepys) survives and dominates as a record of a time period; whether this qualifies as proto-social theory is moot. For instance, one is quickly aware of an apparent lack of distinction between ‘social’ and ‘sociological’ and, to further such confusion, whether the *anthropological* is the driver of the ‘social theory’ utilised as a primary foundation of discussion. While sociologists pop up in discussion occasionally, one is often left considering such utility as a technique for continuity rather than insight, the dominant style and approach settling in quickly as resembling (erudite) literary criticism rather than a sociological close reading. While the dramaturgical, phenomenological, and structural are utilised to decent effect in argument, one is left continually yearning for greater integration of modern social theory and, if possible, some progressive sociological analysis that separates itself from the anthropological and the vicissitudes of literary form.

However, despite such doubts as to the distinct cogency of its intended impact, this is a scholarly, informative, and thought-provoking contribution to the wider academic Shakespearean canon. *Shakespeare and Social Theory* appears, paradoxically, a book searching for a *solid motif* but is perhaps best enjoyed – and understood – via the deliberative and analytical segmentation of its subject matter and as representative of a critical appraisal of themes and their diachronic and synchronic value. When this is achieved, Shore’s book relaxes and the argument disentangles itself from an otherwise multifarious combination of criticism, anthropology, and social commentary. This is, simply, a fine book of literary criticism; it does not comfortably integrate itself into the sociology of literature – or literary sociology – tradition but, in that way, it succeeds and thrives. In essence, the theoretical thrust of the book is arguably summarised succinctly by the author in his closing paragraph; the ‘subjunctive space’ that Shakespeare creates (or, that field of thinking, of imagining, of opening up and seeing somehow beyond the normative narrative of the play itself) is where the essence of the writing and, perhaps, the reception of performance, lies. To borrow from Giddens (1984), the *social theory* here is merely the dualism of meaning, a two-way dialogue of time, space, drama, observation and anthropology on one hand and the reception of audience on the other. In other words, Shakespeare embodies the essence of the ‘double hermeneutic’ of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage and beyond.

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## Book Review

### Toward a Gameic World

Callum Thomas Furlong McMillan <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *University of Leicester*, UNITED KINGDOM

\*Corresponding Author: [callummcmillan@hotmail.com](mailto:callummcmillan@hotmail.com)

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Whaley, B. (2023). *Toward a Gameic World*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

A fascinating insight into the nature of national trauma and anxiety-based phenomena within a series of four specific games (three of which I've played myself), *Toward a Gameic World* explores a fresh and distinctly Japanese interpretation of narratology and ludology, specifically exploring Hiroki Azuma's 'gameic' framework (2007) – meshing the ludology of games with a local context that spreads as far as literature, amongst other forms of media. As such, I find this goes beyond the traditional ludonarrative interpretations I have seen (Frasca, 2003; Nitsche, 2008) and experiments within video game-based analysis, already cementing it as something academically novel and relevant. In addition, the games chosen are highly rated and have sold many copies, thus being central to the video game zeitgeist in which not all games survive the test of time in terms of relevancy.

As for how Whaley's text contributes to this debate, this takes place over a series of stratified chapters, each one covering a key aspect of this 'gameic' framework, or more specifically, a type of engagement with societal anxieties. After the introduction introduces the basic theory for this textual exploration, the first chapter, '*Limited Engagement*', discusses the *Disaster Report* (known in Europe as *SOS: The Final Escape*) series of games and their relationship with Japan's history and anxieties around earthquake disasters through their pseudo-realistic gameplay and narratives, citing in particular the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and how this affected release cycles of the series and public consciousness around this type of media. The second chapter, '*Distanced Engagement*', takes the reader through a brief explanation of the Japanese birth rate 'crisis', and how the government's obsession with the issue is reflected in anime, manga, and other forms of Japanese media, and focuses primarily on the ATLUS video game *Catherine*, and how its marriage and relationship-based plot grapples with these anxieties (and how this is contrasted against the puzzle-horror-dating-sim gameplay). The third chapter, '*External Engagement*', centres nuclear weaponry and the USA as a historical and national fear dating back to the Second World War, which renowned game designer Hideo Kojima explores in his period piece *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, part of a wider series that draws on this nuclear spectre, as well as exploring the horrors of war through integrated gameplay and narrative decisions that show unique and compelling game design. The fourth main chapter, '*Connective Engagement*', explores a much more social anxiety and moral panic that shows itself often in Japanese media – in this case, the concept of the *bikikomori* (a loose translation would be shut-in), which deals with partial to total social withdrawal, classically associated with young men and teenagers. This idea is discussed in regard to the Nintendo DS game *The World Ends With You*, which battles the concept not only in its narrative, but also in unique social gameplay mechanics that would become common throughout the DS and later 3DS eras of handheld gaming, incentivising socialisation as an additive to traditional structures of play. As for the conclusion, Whaley brings these four titles together in a welding of this 'gameic' framework to what we might consider 'high art' or 'culture', which remains, at least outside

Japan, a hot topic (Berger, 2002) in regard to video games' role compared to the lofty heights of literature and theatre, or more recently cinema and television.

Ultimately, although anyone who plays a substantial amount of Japanese video games will be quite familiar with the concepts and anxieties discussed within this book, I believe it's of a very high value to those who are *not* familiar with video games – specifically, the readers that Whaley refers to towards the end of the text, which may not yet see the true value and depth of video games in a sociological, historical or, indeed, 'gameic' context, seeing the art form as childish, or without any academic value of note. Of course, there are other concepts that emerge in Japanese media and video games that could be added to the text, although I admit that could hinder the flow of the text and perhaps make it overlong – for instance, governmental corruption (as discussed with the recent assassination of Shinzo Abe), as well as the slowly growing awareness and criticism of nationalism and ethnocentrism in a post-Imperial Japan are some topics that can be readily and deeply connected to video games (*Shin Megami Tensei IV*, for one).

Overall, as an academic who works very often with Japanese media and video games, I can give this a solid recommendation for anyone interested in the fields of Japanese or Media Studies, the work overall being very well referenced, and with sufficiently detailed notes that explain any concepts the reader may be unfamiliar with that pertain to specifics of Japanese culture or games in general, and screenshots help illustrate the points made in a visual context as well, which works well given the media involved.

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