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**Waldemar Dymarczyk**  
University of Lodz, Poland

## The War on the Wall. Polish and Soviet War Posters Analysis

**Abstract** Every war is not only the fight of the armies but also a war of the ideologies. One of the forms of the ideological war is propaganda posters. Over forty posters presented and analyzed in this article come from the Polish-Soviet war in 1919-1921. The research work is based on grounded theory procedures adopted for visual data analyses. Particularly useful was a method of coding families worked out by Barney Glaser and modified to the visual data analysis by Krzysztof Konecki. The author reconstructed several basic motifs, formal solutions, and communication strategies (i.e., continuity and continuation versus avant-garde and revolution, image of the enemy and "one's own" imagination, strategic conversion) used by artists-ideologists from both sides of the conflict.

**Keywords** War Posters; Poster Analysis; Polish-Soviet War; Grounded Theory; Visual Sociology

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A war poster from the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the most persuasive and common forms of communication between the center of authority and maximum number of recipients, while other mass media of communication comprised only press and rather uncommon radio and cinema. It transferred meaning in a shortened form, which was to be easily understood by a wide circle of population. It was a symbol of dominating ideology and a tool that activated masses. The authors of these pictures were often well-known artists, and

stylistics of these works of art corresponded with the dominating aesthetic principles. A poster was a vanguard of "image communication" that dominates nowadays. It may be presumed that also today, in a situation of a rapidly growing crisis, especially of an expected or already existing armed conflict, a propagating poster (e.g., in a form of a high-format billboard) would pose a significant weapon of political agitation, which is confirmed in subsequent political campaigns and social actions.

This analysis refers to a limited collection of posters. Namely, it is about Polish and Soviet propagating images created for the purpose of 1919-1920 war campaign. The presence of several basic motives, formal solutions, and communication strategies that can be seen in the pictures prepared by both sides will be pointed out, whereas others will present the specificity of each collection. An attempt to clarify the genesis of these similarities and differences will be taken.

### Sources and Method

Posters presented and analyzed in this article come from very rich resources of books and the Internet. Actually, it is hard to point all sources of the pictures presented below. The author explored collections of posters gathered in Polish museums (Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, Museum of Independence in Warsaw, Museum of Independent Traditions in Lodz), reproduced in historical publications, and dozens of Polish and Russian websites devoted completely or to a great extent to the art of a poster, as well as those that published reproductions interesting for him from time to time only.

Initially, the main criterion to choose particular materials that were subjected to exegesis was the frequency of their presence, not only within websites that they were copied from but also in books, magazines, and historic albums. The author did not use here precise calculations (among others because the sources were so numerous), only the fact of placing a poster multiple times in publishers of all natures was taken into consideration. Attention was also paid to posters whose contents and meanings were to some extent different from the ones that are promoted nowadays. This strategy seems to be adequate because some contents may be perceived controversial these days or recalled reluctantly. It does not mean that despite their lack or marginalization in contemporary publishers they did not influence the way of perceiving conflicts. It was also about obtaining data that would comprise different perspectives and motives of the posters' authors and propagators. Only the first stage of collecting the data was, to a great extent, subordinate to quantitative criterion. Then, choice of the posters and analyses conducted within the research took place according to procedures developed for the purpose of the grounded theory. It should be stressed that the methodology of grounded theory is very useful because of the possibility to get control over the unordered and often inadvertently collected data (here: the images stored on hundreds of websites, dozens of books, and many museums, and grouped in various configurations). Following this kind of data would be very difficult without clear and precise rules. Therefore, very important was the procedure of *theoretical sampling* (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; 1998; Strauss 1987; Charmaz 2006), supported by and mixed with a *constant comparative method* (Glaser and Strauss

1967; Glaser 1978; cf. Miles and Huberman 2000:179). The researcher looked then for such data that could be implemented and that extended the identified analytical fields, as well as for such ones that were new and often posed a contradiction to the provisionally formulated arguments. Eventually, thanks to the process of *dimensionalizing* the observed reality, a mosaic appeared, which comprised typical and non-typical motives of presentation together with their properties, conditions of occurrence, and all connotations. It needs to be emphasized that during theoretical sampling, and simultaneously in the process of dimensionalizing the observed reality (here: gathering collections of posters), the researcher reformulated permanently their provisional arguments in order

to eventually generate (in this case) a matter-of-fact theory of representing an enemy and a positive hero.

\*\*\*

The first stage of analysis was mainly about *open coding* (Glaser 1978; 1992; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990), that is, “transferring data” to a conceptual level, which gives a chance to “detach” from a strictly matter-of-fact field of analysis (here: conceptually and theoretically calling the items and “visible” situations on particular posters). For example, part of a poster presenting a fighter in folk clothing, holding a scythe placed vertically, was coded in the following way:

- a. a symbolic character → (references to national independence tradition)
- b. a character drawn with a thick line → (aim: emphasizing attributes)
- c. a representative of peasant class → (clothing, weapon: scythe, peasant physiognomy)
- d. determination in action → (determined look, tense muscles, “forward deflection,” strong grip of the weapon)
- e. character from the foreground

Therefore, it was about naming the identified pictures or their parts in different ways in order to obtain significant characteristics, which created a basis for developing relatively capacious categories (and their properties), and to notice relations among them.

Procedures developed directly for the purpose of visual data analysis turned out to be a very useful

tool in the process of “describing” and “naming” the analyzed pictures and their elements. Namely, it is about so-called *locating memo*, *big picture memo*, and *specification memo* (Clarke 2005:224-228). *Locating memo* is used for recognizing a social world (worlds) within which a given picture used to function (or still functions). For this purpose, a researcher needs to answer questions like: why have they become interested in this particular materi-

al, what is the genesis of a given picture, for what purpose and with what intentions was it created, et cetera. *Big picture memo* serves for answering the question: what can *generally* be said about a given artifact? This task will be easier to be carried out when the researcher at first describes their initial feelings they had while looking at the picture, then they describe the work as a whole (narratively), and at the last stage they divide the picture into sections or analytical parts in order to spot and review details or items put in further grounds. *Specification memo* comprises the most detailed analysis of a picture, poster, or a drawing as possible, according to a wide scope of criteria, for example, presence (or absence) of particular objects, frames and boundaries of a picture, particular grounds and their contents, the lighting used, colors, techniques, format, composition of the image and its location within the context of other works, criterion of uniqueness or ordinariness, symbolic references, and many others perceived by the researcher to be important. The procedures mentioned above were used at all stages of the research. There was a useful tool of matter-of-fact analysis, as well as the theoretical one. Not long after starting open coding, a procedure similar to *selective coding* was taken up (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990; 1998), which included generation, and later, *saturation* of significant categories with properties and characteristics that allow the embracing of them. This stage of the research used so-called coding families (Glaser 1978) adapted for the need of visual analyses by Krzysztof Konecki (2008). Shortly speaking, these are unifications allowing the ordering of the codes and relations between them into relatively coherent, analytically useful wholes.

The following families of coding were used for the purpose of this analysis (in a limited way that is possible to be used in case of posters):

- *family of interactions/actions* (e.g., gestures, behaviors, and posture of a body towards a potential viewer and other objects or characters present in the picture),
- *family of relations* (e.g., mutual relations of characters present in the picture; cooperation, opposition, fight, brotherhood, also relations between the characters and artifacts seen in the poster),
- *family of symbols* (gives a chance for interpreting a given picture in relation to meanings and values that go beyond a framework of a particular performance, allowing placing the poster within a broader cultural context),
- *family of emotions* (e.g., mental states of actors present in the picture, read from behaviors, gestures, and mimics—pride, shame, joy, fear),
- *family of kind* (i.e., certain conventional, culturally conditioned types of actions, read from the actors’ behaviors and from the whole situational context visible in the poster, and sometimes beyond the poster, e.g., male and female roles, defending a homeland, propagating a concept of revolution),
- *family of “social units”* (treated here as some exemplifications of social groups’ categories, e.g., working class, group of revolutionists).

Within the context of the posters' analysis an original family of coding was proposed, which can be determined as: **family of borrowings and references**. Because of the fact that propagating posters are highly commercialized performances, authors of these works make the most of the achievements of their predecessors, and they are (usually) very sensitive to equally conventional needs expressed by political decision makers—sponsors of their creativity. Therefore, it is interesting to draw attention to those inspirations. Though, it is needed to try to notice typical gestures and behaviors, typical symbols and icons, typical jargon and slogans (cf. Konecki 2008:105).

Eventually, the matter-of-fact analysis served to discover different relations among categories, that is, putting forward hypotheses, which is a stage that is called *theoretical coding (memos)* (Glaser 1978; 1998; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990; 1998). Shortly speaking, theoretical memos are “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser 1998:83). Therefore, writing theoretical notes (*memoing*) allows the researcher to understand relations between particular elements of a generated theory (notions, codes, categories together with their properties and relations between them), which means that they are able to achieve a higher level of conceptualization at every stage of analysis. In the above-mentioned case, the notes have become a basis for analytical findings, and they were incorporated into unified text of a report, and in a synthetic form, expressed explicitly in the summary.

## Historical Context of the Analysis

Posters that are analyzed in this text were created in relation to the war between Poland, which was reviving after 123 years of seizure, and Soviet Russia that was created as a result of the revolution in 1917. This conflict was of vital significance for both these countries. For Poland, this war was a chance to keep yet unstable independence, to determine its Eastern boundary, and to push (especially in a case of an effective alliance with an emerging state of Ukraine) a threat of Bolshevik revolution. For Soviets, on the contrary: the war created a possibility for exporting the communist ideology to Poland, and then to the Western countries (especially to the revolted Germany). The war started spontaneously and with no declaration at a time when after signing the truce on 11.11.1918, the German army started to retreat from Eastern Europe. The first battle took place in February 1919. Almost until 1920, the Polish Army achieved successes on the military and territorial fields. A significant part of the area of today's Ukraine, Belarus, and Latvia, and even Kiev for a short time, were occupied then. In May 1920, the Soviets took the initiative, and started to counterattack, and in the middle of August, they reached the outskirts of Warsaw. Occupying the capital city of Poland would be equal to losing the country's independence, and opening a route for fighting Western Europe. However, thanks to heroic defenses, breaking Soviet codes, and courageous envelopment, Poland won the battle. The Soviet army suffered great losses and was made to retreat. Since that time till the end of the war, the initiative was maintained by Poles. A significant part of previously lost terrains was regained, and So-

viets were made to negotiate peace. On 18.03.1921, a peace treaty was signed in Riga (see: Davies 2006; Zamoyski 2009).

Almost 1.5 million soldiers took part in a Polish-Soviet conflict. More than 100 thousand members of the Red Army and about 60 thousand of Polish soldiers died during the campaign. As a result of military actions, slaughtering, diseases and famine, ordinary people suffered great losses.

It is necessary to point out one of the most important political results of the war: on the Soviet side—failure of the plan for revolutionizing the whole of Europe and isolation of Soviet Russia, and on the Polish side—maintaining independence, but also failure of the idea of a Federation of Borderlands. The war meant economic crisis and strengthening of the mutual hostility in case of both countries.

## Poster War: Pictures' Analysis

### Continuity and Continuation versus Avant-garde and Revolution

Lasting versus change, tradition versus modernity is a universal motive and dilemma of art at the same time. It is also a clash of ideology and different visions of reality, strongly represented by the authors of propagating messages.

### Exemplum

#### Soviet Case

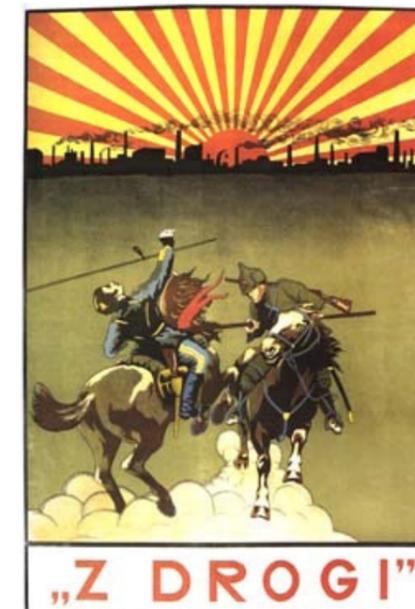
The Revolution “by itself” is not “full,” unless it is accompanied by a project of **export** beyond the boundaries of Soviet Russia. The announced change is an avant-garde project for Europe (including Poland), if not for the whole world.

Poster 1.



Long live the Polish Socialist Republic of Boards!

Poster 2.



Make way.

Poster 3.



Comrade Lenin sweeps rubbish from Earth.

“**Internationalism of revolution**” category is definitely in place in the case of the above-mentioned posters.<sup>1</sup> The closest target is Poland. There is also a project prepared for these circumstances: Polish Republic of Boards. Of course, this idea may be realized only through negation of the present (national) identity; also, through a negation of the old symbolic order (see the left lower part of the first poster).

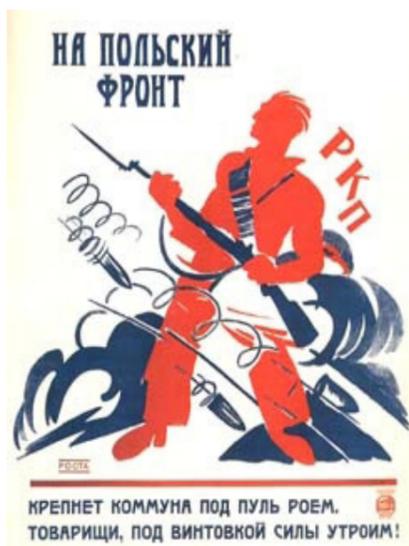
industrial dimension. A Soviet soldier brings “good news” about a country of milk and honey, and everyone blocking his way is doomed to failure. The last poster, entitled *Towarzysz Lenin oczyszcza Ziemię z nieczystości* (*Comrade Lenin sweeps rubbish from Earth*) informs that an aim of the revolution is the whole world. Therefore, it is needed to completely deal with the representatives of the “old order;”

Włodzimierz Majakowski, Kazimierz Malewicz, Wiktor Deni, El Lissitzky (actually, Łazar Lisicki), Włodzimierz Lebiediew, and many others are the creators who were not only inspired by the Western avant-garde (here: Cubism, Constructivism, Futurism) but they were also creators of innovative solutions in plastic arts in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Cubo-Futurism, Suprematism). In this context, an interesting example is posed by ROSTA's posters (Russian Telegraphic Agency). Works created under the tutelage of the agency were a *novelty* regarding the form, as to high extent they comprised comics<sup>3</sup> (sic!). In a case when a significant number of the revolutionary contents' recipients were completely or nearly completely illiterate, this way of transferring information allowed transferring uncomplicated contents to such an auditory in an interesting form.



Poster 8.  
R.S.F.S.R. Proletarians of all countries, join together! / A story about upstarts and a woman that would not like to accept the Republic.

Poster 4.



Poster 5.



Poster 6.



4. To the Polish line.  
5. We need to work. A gun is waiting at Your side.  
6. Hit the White with red wedge.

Soviet “statue of liberty” (a family of borrowings and references and a family of symbols) informs about birth of a new world (also marked symbolically), and this world has a clear industrial shape. The announced Arcadia will probably require transformation of “colorful” industrial peasants into industrial, unified (militarized and ideologized) workers. It is enough to destroy another wall, another poster does not leave any unclearness. The “Make way” slogan sounds as an ultimatum, leaving no alternative. A daybreak (a family of symbols) has obvious

in the global scale. Rubbish—a class of oppressors (a family of “social units”)<sup>2</sup>—needs to be absolutely swept.

An avant-garde social projects require an equally **avant-garde form**. Relative freedom, not limited yet by a social realist corselet, was present in new-wave artistic designs.

<sup>2</sup> The aim of this article is, among others, to show some methodological inspirations to the reader, which is why a description of the first category comprised names of the families of coding used herein. In the further part, in order to maintain clearness and coherence of the text, marking of the families of coding will be skipped.

Poster 7.



We made peace with Poland...

<sup>3</sup> A way of presenting the ROSTA's posters was extraordinary as well, namely, they were put in windows, usually of closed shops.

**Industrial** dimension of the revolution can be found in prophetic visions of techno-paradise, in a highly industrial version (see: Poster 1 and 2). Some chronically repeated items-symbols are worth noticing.

Hammers, factory, uniforms, anvils: these objects do not leave any doubts when it comes to the avant-garde power of the revolution (at least according to the generally known ideology). At the same time, a question whether it still is a class **in itself** or **for itself** is still open (Marks 1949). Artifacts visible in the posters show that revolution conducted by workers' hands has an absolutely modern and industrial dimension, and effectiveness of a worker is as important as the effort put by a member of the Red Army.

Poster 9.



8<sup>th</sup> convention powers Russia...

Polish Case

Referring to the category of “continuity and continuation versus avant-garde and revolution,” a collection of Polish posters may (despite several exceptions) be determined by two first terms. However, there is a question that arises immediately: what is the type of continuity and continuation? After all, Poland, as a state, when the conflict with Soviet

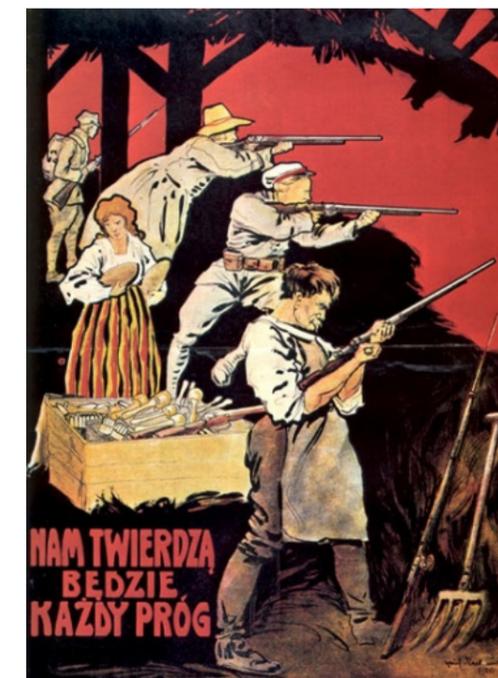
ets broke out, was just at the stage of establishing boundaries after over 120 years of seizures. Therefore, the authors of the propagating messages, first of all, referred to mythologized or even a mystic version of history and a specific “mission,” as well as to those elements of social life that during the time of suppression constituted national identity (cf. Dymarczyk 2008:55-65; Jarecka 2008:187-170).

Poster 10.



Each hit of a hammer is hitting the enemy!

Poster 15.



Every home will be our castle.

Allegoric pictures, first of all, put emphasis on religious dimensions of Polish identity. Defence against invasion is possible thanks to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, usually exemplified in the form of Poland—a caregiver and at the same time a prick of conscience of the whole nation. The religious dimension is what differentiates a bulwark of the civilised world and a barbaric East. Hussars, guarding the image of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, prove an inseparable relation of the nation with Divine Providence. They embody and at the same time guarantee the Polish catholic identity (cf. Jarecka 2008:164-167).

Actors of the drama—defenders of the country—are also worth noticing, especially their group portrait.

Poster 14.



Hey! Every Pole gets a bayonet!

It is worth noticing that the authors of these works emphasize an all-nation character of the war. Different social classes join together to drive Soviets back. A group of defenders comprises soldiers of common folks together with workers/craftsmen and peasants. Slogans put in the posters are quotations from the well-known songs created in order to support the national spirit under a threat to the state and during seizures.

An individual actor is also exhibited, who is often a person of the Head of State. Piłsudski is shown as a defendant of working classes, peasants, and workers. First of all, he is a man of Providence, who is hoped by the pious population to save them from wild and godless aggressors (see: Poster 17).

Poster 11.



Poster 12.



Poster 13.



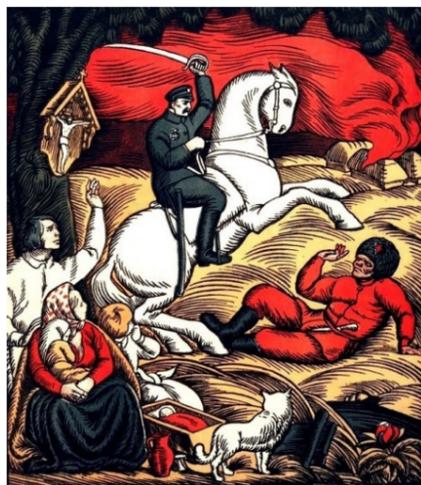
11. Polonia  
12. Your homeland calls you!  
13. Under thy protection, We seek refuge.

Poster 16.



*Józef Piłsudski. Prefect of State and the First Leader  
—the First Marshal of Poland.*

Poster 17.



*Józef Piłsudski*

20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Poster 11 and 12). Inspirations with realistic historical painting (Poster 16) and the art of Young Poland (Poster 17) are also visible.<sup>4</sup>

Continuity and continuation in the content and formal layers are the features characteristic of the Polish “line” of war poster. Independence that had just been regained, a need to unite the society into one organism, and a still unstable state would rather make the authors emphasize permanence and invariability of features, values, attitudes, and aspirations of the nation.

### Image of the Enemy

A war poster, as a propagating work directed to the masses, needs to speak in a maximally simplified language. A “stranger” (also “one of us”) plays clear roles, takes actions typical for them, and carries particular stigmata that allow recognizing them.

### Exemplum

#### Soviet Case

Images of Soviet social utopia require asking a question: who is the enemy of the Red Army? Who is the enemy of “the new?” Analysis of the posters shows several categories of enemies that need to be defeated. While these categories are not separate, they mix with each other, or simply some comprise others. The Red Army attack is attempted to be stopped by:

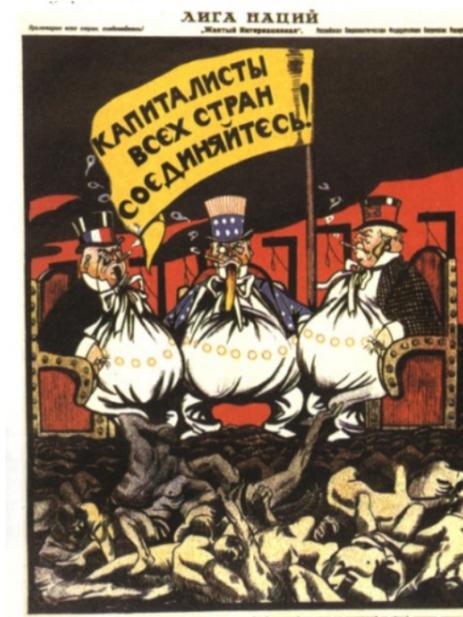
- general, world enemies of revolution—capitalists, imperialists (Poster 18 and 19),

<sup>4</sup> Among the well-known authors of Polish posters we need to list among others: Kamil Mickiewicz, Władysław Skoczylas, Kamil Babiński.

- internal enemies, that is, specifically shown counter-revolutionists and bourgeoisie classes (Poster 20 and 21),

- Poles and enemies (usually called by name) of the Soviet state that have an alliance with them (Posters 22-25).

Poster 18.



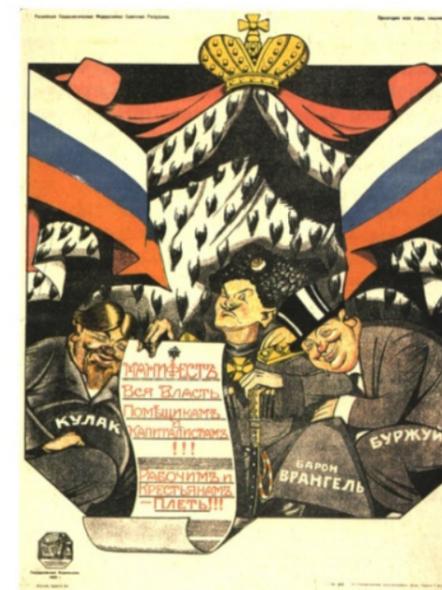
*League of Nations. Capitalists from all countries join together!*

Poster 19.



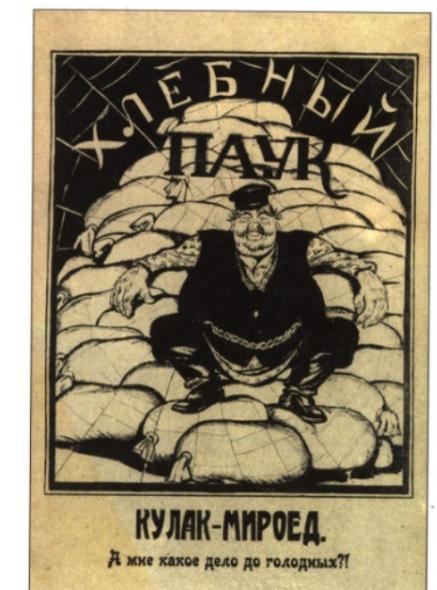
*Death of the world imperialism.*

Poster 20.



*Manifesto. All power for landowners and capitalists.*

Poster 21.



*Bread spider. Kulak—devourer of peace.*

From the formal perspective, despite quite a few exceptions, Polish posters are significantly different from the Soviet ones. For sure, they could not have been perceived as avant-garde works. On the contrary, in many cases, it is easy to find clear references to even Grottger Romanticism, Impressionism, and Symbolism of the

The last category of the mentioned ones, regarding the article's title, is an issue of special interest for the author of this analysis.

Poster 22.<sup>5</sup>



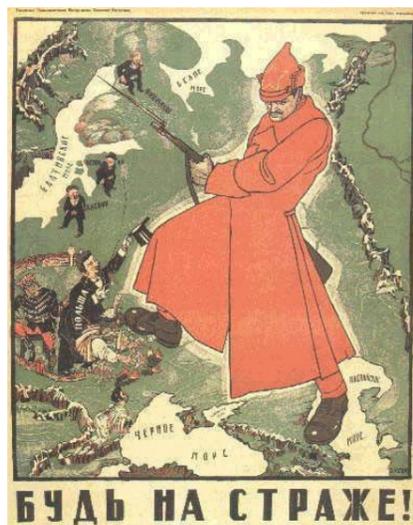
A king and a thug.

<sup>5</sup> Reproduction comes from the book by Aleksandra Julia Leinwand, entitled *Czerwonym młotem w orla białego. Propaganda sowiecka w wojnie z Polską 1919–1920* (Red Hammer Hits White Eagle. Soviet Propaganda During War with Poland 1919-1920). Description of the poster is an interesting and original example of the family of borrowing and references functioning: “Wiktor Deni’s composition (order of the characters with a king in the foreground) recalls a painting of Jan Matejko, *Stefan Batory pod Pskowem* (1872). The Polish painter was well-known and appreciated in Russia. The above-mentioned painting was valued by Russians. A Russian artist, who learned and started working before World War I, had to encounter at least a reproduction of his work. Deni in his poster does not correspond directly to *Batory pod Pskowem*, but location of the characters and lightness of the composition seem to prove the fact the graphic artist noticed a relation between the king of Poland and Russia through the works of Matejko. The character of Sawinkow bowing and scraping in front of Piłsudski makes us think about old Russians depicted by the Polish painter 50 years ago” (Leinwand 2008:180, reproduction, iconographic attachment).

Poster 23.



Russian landowner goes after a Polish lord.



Poster 24.

Guard!



Poster 25.

The last hour!

The above posters show Poles as active members of the world bourgeois-recreational coalition of the Soviet state's enemies. What is more, “Polish men” are quite often presented as initiators and leaders of the counter-revolutionary conspiracy.

At the same time, the abundance of propagating works “unmask” a neighbor of the proletariat's homeland as a usually submissive tool in the hands of protectors, mainly of bourgeoisie and Entente.

Poster 26.



26. A pig trained in Paris.

Poster 27.



27. Language of the League of Nations.

Poster 28.



28. Her Ladyship Poland. The last dog of Entente.

A distinctive feature of a Pole is their national clothing, more precisely speaking—gentry clothing. A typical Polish plutocrat-landowner wears a four-cornered hat, a confederate cap, and traditional clothing. He has a moustache; he is fat with a bloated face. His physical state, that is, “bodily abundance,” is probably a result of a lack of modesty in the matter of a diet. He can afford living a lavish life because he is a bloodsucker who exploits peasant classes with deliberation. He is an iconic representative of the leading class, fed with harm of the working population. At the same time, this is a grotesque figure—not a dreadful opponent, but rather a caricature of *ancien régime* (cf. Jarecka 2008:220-223).

Poster 29.



Peasant! A Polish landowner wants to make a slave out of you.

Poster 30. (cf. Poster 21)<sup>6</sup>



Ukraine bread.

A typical strategy in case of many conflicts, especially when it comes to representing them, comprises depicting an enemy as a representative of more mediocre species of fauna. Posters 26 and 28 represent a Polish opponent as a pig and a dog. The purpose of this **animalization** (cf. “animalistic perspective” [Konecki 2005]) is to **dehumanize** the enemy, which is not human as a result of this procedure, but rather a sum of negative connotations connected with the traditional understanding of animal attributes and “personalities.” A dog and a pig are impure animals, often located at the bottom of the hierarchy of the living, especially in Eastern traditions.

Polish Case

“Wild barbarians”—these are the words that describe the way in which Polish authors of propagating posters depict the opponents of their homeland.

<sup>6</sup> Posters 21 and 30 are an interesting example of the family of borrowing and references functioning. In this case, the level is drawn between “misdeeds” of internal enemy (kulak) and those of external enemy (Pole).

The Soviet aggressor is a creature of bloodthirsty instincts. A stranger from an “uncivilized world”: a murderer, brute, rapist, and destroyer (cf. Jarecka 2008:200-213). His patrons are also “hellish” **beasts**, bringing death and destruction.

While in the cases of Soviets depicting the enemy we experience animalization of the opponent, domestic authors go “a step further.” Animalization is replaced here with another category—**demonization** of the aggressor (Jarecka 2008:213-220). Demon is “something

Poster 34.



Bolshevik creature.

Poster 35.



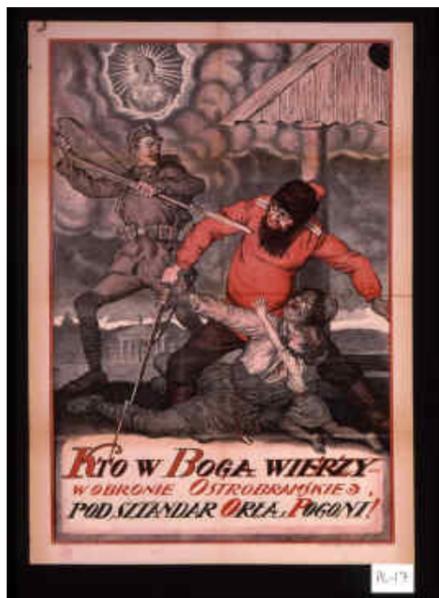
His program.

Poster 36. (see also Poster 40)



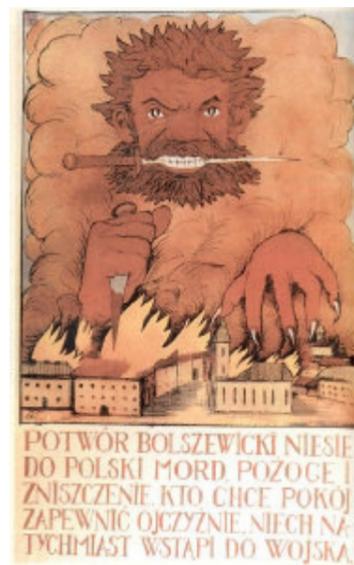
Bolshevik freedom.

Poster 31.



He who believes in God.

Poster 32.



Bolshevik creature brings murder, conflagration, and destruction to Poland.

Poster 33. (cf. Poster 17)



The enemy is coming—see what he holds.

<sup>7</sup> “If anyone saw this wave of Bolsheviks approaching us, they would have to be surprised with their appearance, as some were barefoot, others in slippers, others in some kind of rubber shoes, with hats on their heads, even female ones, winter caps or headscarves, or they went with bare heads, only their hair floated. They looked like some **demons**. Their guns hanged on ropes, or they did not have any ropes at all, but they had a lot of ammo in their pockets and they shot well.” From the memories of platoon sergeant Franciszek Krzystyniak (Knyt 2005:19).

<sup>8</sup> Poster 35 focuses, like a lens, iconic imaginations of the enemy and (almost archetypical) fears that these imaginations are accompanied by. The beast of the revolution is therefore a creature “not from this world”—an exemplification of evil, a devil or its work. Co-passengers of this revolutionary vehicle comprise wild Asians (“Bashkirs and chinks in a red cheka”), a political commissioner (“Commissionaire at a disciplinarian shall get his whip going”), ideologist-agitator (Trotsky?), revolutionary (“dyed”) German (sic!) officers and soldiers. The last case probably describes Ober-Ost—a German army that remained in the East—which is described by Norman Davies as: “some commentators tell that Hoffman [commander of the Ober-Ost army] played a double game; he was said to impel Bolsheviks for expansion towards the West, and Poles towards the East—hoping that he would earn on their conflict” (2006:40).

more” than even the most cunning, subservient, or stupid animal. This is a creature not of this world. That is why any human reactions are naturally strange to them. The only *raison d'être* of the demon is destruction and throwing the world into chaos. Only those that would entrust their faith to the Providence (see announcements on Posters 13 [*Under thy protection, We seek refuge*] and 31 [*He who believes in God*]) can effectively counter the power of evil. It is worth noticing that this motive, in its allegoric form, is strongly exhibited in Polish posters (see: Posters 11-13). The division line is clear—Christian frontiers of Western civilization, turned towards God, counter rhetorically atheist hordes of the “wild West,” which serve Satan.

The outlined axis of the conflict between Christian frontiers of the West and non-Christian, or rather anti-Christian “strangers,”

is emphasized by pointing one of the actors of this drama who actively creates the “Antichrist coalition.”

Poster 37.



*Jewish hands again? Never ever!*

Jew—an infidel—is a figure that perfectly fits the rhetoric of civilization war. He is identified (a red star inscribed in the Star of David, drawing of a star on a red banner, shadow of a Soviet soldier) with a strange aggressor, and even with a demonic creature (Poster 37). He is definitely reprehensible as he is a kind of a “fifth column” in the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “And here we reached the square of Kremlin, right after a wooden cross there is a delegation of Revolutionary Committee, its deputy and several hundreds of local inhabitants. Of course, all of them, almost with no exception, were raven-haired with aquiline noses. President of the Committee holds some kind of a tray with some bread on it. Giving me this gift...he welcomed our army as a winning army of Trotsky, which gives freedom to the working masses of the whole world. Paying this tribute, he gives the bread, about which he said that revolutionary army will have enough of it within the area of white Poland...We needed to thank the comrade president and the comrades immediately.” From the memories of lieutenant Stanisław Lis-Błoński (Knyt 2005:126).

Poster 38. (see also Poster 33)



*Help! Everything for the front! Everyone to the front!*

### Image of “One’s Own”

A war poster, similarly to a coin, consists of an obverse and a reverse. Countenance is ascribed to an enemy, but also to a brother in arms. Who is this “one’s own,” what are his attributes? A lot has been already said and shown in this article about it. However, it is worth systematizing and completing the dispersed observations.

#### Exemplum

In both Polish and Soviet cases, the main, positive characters of the drama are the representatives of the **lower classes**: workers, peasants, soldiers, and, to a smaller extent, their leaders (e.g., Poster 16 and 17). Actors of the drama carry easily recognizable

stigmata—symbols of the class affiliation. Posters 14 and 15 (*Hey! Every Pole gets a bayonet!* and *Every house shall be our castle*) depict the representatives of

working classes (workers, peasants), and, first of all (especially in the Polish case), ordinary soldiers acting hand in hand.

Poster 39.



*Take arms. Let's save the homeland!*

In the Soviet posters, actors of the drama represent similar environments, with a difference that peasants as positive heroes are shown relatively seldom. Characters in the foreground comprise workers (Posters 5, 9, 10). This is a significant difference. The industrial-revolutionary project versus traditional-national myth, this is the main axis of the conflict and actors depicted in the pictures that reflects this different perspective. The first of the generated categories, “continuity versus continuation and avant-garde versus revolution,” clearly emphasizes the dominating attitudes of the actors. Soviet eulogists of a “new tomorrow” usually comprise **deprived of any doubts, courageous, vigorous, and certain** revolutionists (Posters 2, 4, 10, 24). Agitators, soldiers, and workers have a clear task and a historic mission to fulfill, so any doubts are alien to

them. A group of Poles comprises, first of all, **determined and at the same time extremely exhausted** defenders of the country (Posters 11, 38, 39, 40). **Effort and suffering** are a part of a soldier’s faith, they are also a sign of defiance accompanying the defenders trying to save the country from the flow from the East, and as a consequence, from another loss of independence. Because there is no sacrifice that would be too big in the face of obvious threat to the nation’s being.

However, regardless of the distribution of stress, it virtually is a general war, a total 20<sup>th</sup> century war, activating masses and expecting engagement from them. It is not important that the mass hero (in the sense of quantity of the presented characters) is depicted less often than a single actor.

Poster 40.



*Take arms! Enroll in the Voluntary Army!*



Poster 46.



Together brothers!

In the tie of emergency, agitators of the Soviet Russia did not hesitate to come back to the rejected and reviled “God-homeland” rhetoric. The crucified (by an executioner—a Polish lord and Petlura, his Praetorian guard) Ukraine and a blown up Orthodox Church<sup>13</sup> (sic!) for sure belong to a discourse different from that of Soviet-revolutionary character. Similarly, using a language (and specific clothing) of the inhabitants of Eastern frontiers by a Polish propagator, leaves no doubts when it comes to the intentions that the picture was created with.

### Summary

In conclusion of the deliberations on representations of a Polish-Soviet conflict in posters, it is worth conducting some kind of a synthesis of the contents and meanings that are comprised within them. Integration of categories is a process that orders the dispersed theses, is a useful and necessary procedure,

<sup>13</sup> Poster 45 is a specific eclectic masterpiece. Next to an Orthodox church—comprised within an old symbolic-normative order—a fallen down pole of electric traction is presented in the foreground—a symbol of progress and achievements of the new authorities.

not only with regard to the used method of analysis (here: the grounded theory). Therefore, holding to a frame of division regarding the “Soviet case” versus “Polish case” criterion, we can come to the conclusions listed below.

War, from the perspective of Soviet propagators, is, first of all, a historic mission, going far beyond a “classic” conflict of hostile countries. An avant-garde form of representations cooperates here with an innovative concept of a designed social order. Not only Poland is an enemy (state), but also a class of oppressors (“Polish lord,” landowner, an internal class enemy, capitalist, Entente). Form of a message (e.g., Abstractionism, Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism) cannot be less important than “glowing” future concepts.

Marxists used to incorporate and understand, in their own way (in a *vulgaris* version), the theory of evolution willingly. A “natural” law of replacing less complex forms (simple and “primitive”) with more specialized ones (here: “more perfect”) is expressed in a way of presenting an opponent. Forms of life that are old and not so well adjusted to the new reality are doomed to failure. It is not a coincidence that the enemies are represented in forms of “lower” beings (dogs, pigs, worms), and apologists of the new order are almost perfect creatures (strong fighters with no disabilities). By the way, this way of representation is not contrary to traditional and relatively common images of an enemy (cf. animalization).

However, rarely, out of opportunistic reasons, the past, traditions, the old world of values and symbols

can be used instrumentally, in order to encourage unstable or resistant individuals and social groups (strategic conversion). Polish propagators used symbols, meanings, and forms that were borrowed by history and tradition. It is common to refer to 18<sup>th</sup> and (more often) 19<sup>th</sup> century techniques of depicting. “God-homeland” rhetoric, with all consequences, seems to dominate, and it has its explanation. What could the authors of the poster refer to? Only to romantic (formally conventionalized) visions or to the newly-Polish (livened up by the impressionist unrest) transformations of these visions. God, Nation, Homeland (all with capital letters) determined the framework of the world that was worth defending effort. A basic task was here to create a given (imagined) order. An “arrow of time” is undoubtedly turned backwards here.

Independence—predicted by a prophet, which means that it was regained by the will of God—can only be lost as a result of a conspiracy of the devil (not Christian) powers, negating all sanctities of the red atheists and infidels (e.g., Jews). Demonization of the enemy is a completely understandable procedure under such circumstances.

Threat to the state and national existence is real, so mobilization of all live power (masses: simple soldiers and peasants) is a necessary condition for an effective defense. Defiance against the invader is atoned with extreme effort, pain, suffering, and sometimes it means the greatest sacrifice.

Agitation (from time to time) used to be directed towards unstable individuals (mainly peasants) or non-Polish citizens of Poland.

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This article presents several capacious categories that emerged while analyzing a relatively rich collection of posters. Could we propose different ones? Of course. Data should be coded in many possible ways, which often results in discovering new categories and their properties. Moreover, the permanent coding and recoding demand was fulfilled by the author. However, eventually, some motives or topics (never mind the names) emerged multiple times. It confirmed the researcher in his belief that, finally, the obtained categories are strongly supported by data. After all, a poster may be perceived and analyzed as an artistic work, historic document, ideological manifesto, an artifact showing unconscious motives of actions, a tool of mass communication and manipulation in many different ways. It is impossible to count all aspects and variants. The conducted analysis is one of many possible, and its significance can come not so much from the originality of the theses, as from the fact of their constant confronting with a systematically enriched and recoded collection of data (posters).

Last but not least, the author of this article would like to thank his students<sup>14</sup> for help and inspirations, so needed during the process of its creation.

<sup>14</sup> Participants of the research seminar comprised: Małgorzata Akonom, Kamila Becherka, Agnieszka Brożyńska, Monika Ciepielak, Marta Gamoń, Olga Garbarska, Magdalena Gołos, Aleksandra Kurkiewicz, Maciej Małek, Ewa Mróz, Kamil Podawca, Marta Pokorska, Anna Sałacińska, Anna Sekielska, Katarzyna Smalczyk, Iwona Stelmasiak, Marta Twardowska, Bartosz Zadworski, Anna Zamolska, Ewelina Ziótek.

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## Appendix: Posters presented in the text.

### Poster 1.

*Niech żyje Polska Socjalistyczna Republika Rad! (Long Live the Polish Socialist Republic of Boards!)*, author unknown, Russia, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

### Poster 2.

*Z drogi (Make Way)*, author unknown, Russia, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 3.

*Tow. Lenin zmiata z Ziemi śmieci (Comrade Lenin Sweeps Rubbish From Earth)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, <http://www.plakaty.ru> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 4.

*Na polski front! (To the Polish Line!)*, Iwan A. Maljutin, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.plakaty.ru> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 5.

*Trzeba pracować. Strzelba czeka przy boku (We Need to Work. A Gun is Waiting at Your Side)*, Włodzimierz W. Lebediew, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 6.

*Czerwonym klinem uderzaj w białych (Hit the White With Red Wedge)*, El (Łazar) Lissitzky, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 7.

*Zawarliśmy pokój z Polską... (We Made Peace With Poland...)*, Włodzimierz Majakowski, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.plakaty.ru> (retrieved August 2011).

### Poster 8.

*R.S.F.S.R. Proletariusze wszystkich krajów łączcie się! / Opowieść o publicznych i babie, która nie chciała uznać republiki (R.S.F.S.R. Proletarians of All Countries, Join Together! / A Story About Upstarts and a Woman That Would Not Like to Accept the Republic)*, Michaił Czeremnych, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 9.

*VIII zjazd napędza Rosję... (8<sup>th</sup> Convention Powers Russia...)*, Iwan A. Maljutin, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.plakaty.ru> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

### Poster 10.

*Każde uderzenie młota – uderzeniem we wroga! (Each Hit of a Hammer is Hitting the Enemy!)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

### Poster 11.

*Polonia, Stanisław Bagieński*, Poland, period of the World War I (actually, a picture copied for propagating purposes), copy in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

### Poster 12.

*Ojczyzna wzywa was! (Your Homeland Calls You!)*, Bogdan Nowakowski, Poland, year 1918, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

### Poster 13.

*Pod Twoją obronę uciekamy się (Under thy Protection, We seek Refuge!)*, Karol Maszkowski, Poland, year 1919/1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

### Poster 14.

*Hej! Kto Polak na bagnety! (Hey! Every Pole Gets a Bayonet!)* Kamil Mackiewicz, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence Traditions in Lodz, also in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw and the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

### Poster 15.

*Nam twierdzą będzie każdy próg (Every Home Will Be Our Castle)*, Kamil Mackiewicz, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum, also in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

### Poster 16.

*Józef Piłsudski. Naczelnik Państwa i Naczelny Wódz – Pierwszy Marszałek Polski (Józef Piłsudski. Prefect of State and the First Leader*

Dymarczyk, Waldemar. 2014. "The War on the Wall. Polish and Soviet War Posters Analysis." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 10(4):6-31. Retrieved Month, Year ([http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php)).

—*the First Marshal of Poland*), author unknown, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

**Poster 17.**

*Józef Piłsudski*, Władysław Skoczylas, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

**Poster 18.**

*Liga narodów. Kapitałiści wszystkich krajów łączcie się! (League of Nations. Capitalists From All Countries Join Together!)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1919, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 19.**

*Śmierć światowemu imperializmowi (Death of the World Imperialism)*, Dimitri S. Moor (Orłow), Russia, year 1919, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 20.**

*Manifest. Cała władza w ręce obszarników i kapitalistów (Manifesto. All Power For Landowners and Capitalists)*, author unknown, Russia, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 21.**

*Chlebowy pająk. Kulak – pożeracz pokoju (Bread Spider. Kulak—Devourer of Peace)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1921, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 22.**

*Król i bandyta (A King and a Thug)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1922, in: A. J. Leinwand *Czerwonym młotem w orla białego (The Red Hammer Hits the White Eagle)*, Warsaw, 2008.

**Poster 23.**

*Za polskim panem idzie rosyjski obszarnik (Russian Landowner Goes After a Polish Lord)*, P. Abramow, Russia, year 1920, [http://www.wceo.wp.mil.pl/plik/file/WYSTAWY/Polsko-sowiecka%20wojna%20na%20plakaty\\_1920.pdf](http://www.wceo.wp.mil.pl/plik/file/WYSTAWY/Polsko-sowiecka%20wojna%20na%20plakaty_1920.pdf) (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 24.**

*Stój na straży! (Guard!)*, Dimitri Moor (Orłow), Russia, year 1920, <http://gallerix.ru/storeroom/> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 25.**

*Ostatnia godzina (The Last Hour)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, [http://dl.lib.brown.edu/Views\\_and\\_](http://dl.lib.brown.edu/Views_and_)

[Reviews/date\\_lists/1918-25.html](http://www.sovietposters.com/reviews/date_lists/1918-25.html) (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 26.**

*Świnia tresowana w Paryżu (A Pig Trained in Paris)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 27.**

*Język ligi narodów (Language of the League of Nations)*, Włodzimierz Majakowski, Russia, year 1920, <http://www.sovietposters.com> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 28.**

*Jaśnie wielmożna Polska. Ostatni pies Ententy (Her Ladyship Poland. The Last Dog of Entente)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 29.**

*Chłopic! Polski obszarnik chce cię uczynić niewolnikiem (Peasant! A Polish Landowner Wants to Make a Slave Out of You)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 30.**

*Ukraiński chleb (Ukraine Bread)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 31.**

*Kto w Boga wierzy... (He Who Believes in God)*, author unknown, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 32.**

*Potwór bolszewicki niesie do Polski mord, pożogę i zniszczenie (Bolshevik Creature Brings Murder, Conflagration, and Destruction to Poland)*, author: A. L., Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

**Poster 33.**

*Wróg nadchodzi – patrz co niesie! (The Enemy Is Coming—See What He Holds)*, Piotr Danya, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

**Poster 34.**

*Potwór bolszewicki (Bolshevik Creature)*, author unknown, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 35.**

*Jego program (His Program)*, author unknown, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 36.**

*Wolność bolszewicka (Bolshevik Freedom)*, author: „mjk,” Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 37.**

*Znowu łapy Żydowskie? Nie, przynigdy! (Jewish Hands Again? Never ever!)*, Piotr Danya, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 38.**

*Na pomoc! Wszystko dla frontu! Wszyscy na front! (Help! Everything For the Front! Everyone To the Front!)*, Edmund Bartłomiejczyk, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 39.**

*Do broni. Ratujmy Ojczyznę! (Take Arms! Let's Save the Homeland!)*, author: „Manon,” Poland, year 1920, [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Polish-Soviet\\_War](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Polish-Soviet_War) (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 40.**

*Do broni! Wstępujcie do armii ochotniczej! (Take Arms! Enroll in the Voluntary Army!)*, author: J. P., Poland, year 1920, in the

collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.

**Poster 41.**

*Oto czym kończą się pańskie pomysły (Here, This Is What Your Ideas End With)*, author unknown, Russia, year 1920, <http://hoohila.stanford.edu/poster/> (retrieved August 20, 2011).

**Poster 42.**

*Do broni! Ojczyzna was wzywa! (Take Arms! Our Homeland Calls You!)*, Zygmunt Kamiński, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw, also in the collection of the Polish Army Museum.

**Poster 43.**

*Na co wy czekacie? (What Are You Waiting For?)*, Tadeusz Waśkowski, Poland, year 1920, in the collection of the Museum of Independence Traditions in Lodz.

**Poster 44.**

*Oprawcy dręczą Ukrainę. Śmierć oprawcom! (Oppressors Torture Ukraine. Death To the Oppressors!)*, Wiktor N. Deni (Denisow), Russia, year 1920, in: A. J. Leinwand *Czerwonym młotem w orla białego (The Red Hammer Hits the White Eagle)*, Warsaw, 2008.

**Poster 45.**

*Wandalizm Polski (Polish Vandalism)*, Piotr Alakrinskij, Russia, year 1920, in: A. J. Leinwand *Czerwonym młotem w orla białego (The Red Hammer Hits the White Eagle)*, Warsaw, 2008.

**Poster 46.**

*Razem bracia! (Together Brothers!)*, Zdzisław Gedliczka, Poland, year 1920, reproduction in the collection of the author.

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## Anti-Oppressive Visual Methodologies: Critical Appraisal of Cross-Cultural Research Design<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract** The purpose of this article is to draw critical attention to the use of photovoice as an anti-oppressive method in research with Aboriginal peoples. In response to the historical vulnerability of Aboriginal peoples to research that “wants to know and define the Other,” anti-oppressive methods deconstruct taken-for-granted research models and focus on privileging Indigenous voices, political integrity, and justice strategies. Anti-oppressive approaches are connected to emancipation and cannot be divorced from the history of racism. Theoretically, photovoice aligns well with anti-oppressive goals, using photographs and storytelling as a catalyst for identifying community issues towards informed solutions. Having roots in Freireian-based processes, photovoice has the goal of engaging citizens in critical dialogues and moving people to social action. Drawing on our recently completed photovoice study, *Visualizing Breast Cancer: Exploring Aboriginal Women’s Experiences* (VBC), we demonstrate that photovoice seems successful in enhancing critical consciousness among participants, but that outcomes may not be disruptive. While photovoice has the potential to develop counter-hegemonic anti-oppressive knowledge, this may be lost depending on how the research process is encountered; thus, we propose the implementation of a revisionary model which incorporates a culturally safe anti-oppressive lens.

**Keywords** Photovoice; Cross-Cultural Research; Visual Methods; Anti-Oppressive; Indigenous Research

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The use of photovoice while working with Aboriginal<sup>2</sup> peoples and communities is emerging in a number of contexts (e.g., see: Moffit and Robinson Vollman 2004; Poudrier and Kennedy 2007; Adams et al. 2012). Photovoice, which was designed as a strategy for health promotion (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang, Cash, and Powers 2000), aims to shift power dynamics through empowering community introspection towards enhanced citizen engagement and social change (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang 2003; Kubicek et al. 2012; Freedman et al. 2014). In response to problems with the historical vulnerability of Aboriginal people to scientific research that “wants to know and define the Other” (Tuhiwai Smith 2005:86), anti-oppressive research deconstructs taken-for-granted ways of doing research, from the choice of research methods, through data collection and analysis, to dissemination. Key principles of anti-oppressive methods are finding solutions together in researcher/participant partnerships, political integrity, and critical dialogue on racism and different forms of oppression. Anti-oppressive researchers (inclusive of anti-racist, postcolonial feminists, critical race feminists, black feminists, and more) place marginalized peoples at the center, challenging complacency and assisting in the development of counter-hegemonic discourse, and providing a basis for unifying political activity (Hill Collins 1998; Razack 1998; Moo-

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<sup>2</sup> The term Aboriginal is intended to be inclusive to all of the women whose stories frame these pages. The term Aboriginal peoples refers collectively to Metis, Inuit, and First Nations, and follows terminology used by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (Waldram, Herring, and Kue Young 2006:xi).

sa-Mitha 2005). Drawing on our recently completed photovoice project, *Visualizing Breast Cancer: Exploring Aboriginal Women’s Experiences* (VBC), we critically examine the potential of photovoice as an anti-oppressive approach to engaging in health research with Aboriginal peoples. In particular, we explore and discuss the extent to which visual methods, and specifically photovoice, can be redesigned to fit within an anti-oppressive framework suitable to research with Aboriginal women.

The history of colonization is important when gathering health data about Aboriginal peoples, and has led many communities to be “deeply suspicious” with respect to how data about Aboriginal populations are used (Marrett, Jones, and Wishart 2004:13). As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005:87) writes, “the history of research from many Indigenous perspectives is so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development.” Moreover, the use of visual images and photographs of Aboriginal peoples and communities have been the subject of great concern since they have often represented Aboriginal people from a colonial lens, effectively reproducing problematic stereotypes about who Aboriginal people are. In response to the problems of “Othering” and research vulnerabilities (Tuhiwai Smith 2005:86), anti-oppressive research approaches are connected to emancipation and cannot be divorced from the history of racism and other forms of oppression. Rigney (1999) defines three principles of Indigenist research (an anti-oppressive approach): privileging Indigenous voices, political integrity, and resistance. Redefining research is also about

rebuilding governance, restoring culture, and enhancing community. Anti-oppressive theories and research, more generally, understand the intersectionality of oppressions, the importance of difference, heterogeneity, subjectivity, situated telling, and multiple voices (Moosa-Mitha 2005). Anti-oppressive approaches and Indigenous methods focus on reintroducing the voices and experiences of more marginalized or oppressed peoples towards social justice and the creation of justice strategies (Wing 2003).

In principle, photovoice seems to align well with anti-oppressive goals. Informed by feminist epistemology, literature in visual knowledge and power, and based on the theoretical work of Paulo Freire (1970), this method aims to shift power dynamics through communal introspection (Burke and Evans 2011; Adams et al. 2012; Kubicek et al. 2012; Lai, Jarus, and Suto 2012; Freedman et al. 2014). Photovoice is intended to facilitate a deepened level of critical consciousness amongst participants (Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain 2006; Burke and Evans 2011), which is the impetus for realizing connections between personal and social issues, as well as enhancing collective responsibilities and community members' sociological imaginations. Considerable interest has been expressed with respect to the use of visual methods, especially photovoice and other arts-based methods, in research with Aboriginal populations (Poudrier and Kennedy 2007; Castleden and Garvin 2008; Adams et al. 2012). Declared benefits include the balancing of power between research participants and researchers, generating a historical visual record over generations (Adams et al. 2012), as well as

building capacity, skills, and appreciation of cultural choices (Castleden and Garvin 2008). Visual ethnography enriches textual and interview data by furthering the reconstruction of participant experiences (Konecki 2009). Less discussed are the anti-oppressive goals of visual methods, including the development of critical consciousness and development of counter-hegemonic justice strategies. Our purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive overview of the VBC research findings, but rather to explore themes arising about the anti-oppressive potential of visual methods.

The context for this discussion is provided through an overview of anti-oppressive theory and photovoice research. We then introduce the VBC research project and relevant findings, illustrating the potential and limitations of the photovoice method, as well as the risk that the visual images may continue to represent Aboriginal peoples from a colonial lens, reifying mainstream culturalized images. Our findings suggest that while photovoice has the potential to develop counter-hegemonic anti-oppressive knowledge, this may be lost depending on how the research process is encountered; thus, we propose the implementation of a revisionary model which incorporates a culturally safe anti-oppressive lens. The cultural safety lens simultaneously views individuals in their location, related to colonial marginalization (Browne and Fiske 2001; Anderson et al. 2003), moving beyond cultural sensitivity to an analysis of power imbalances. We suggest that photovoice methods are not anti-oppressive implicitly; rather, they are dependent upon the ethics and practices of researchers, participants, stakeholders, and policy makers.

### Anti-Oppressive Theory and Photovoice

Anti-racism (Okolie 2005), critical race feminism (Wing 2003), postcolonial Indigenous, and feminist theories (Anderson 2000; 2004; Browne, Smye, and Varcoe 2007) represent anti-oppressive theories (Moosa-Mitha 2005) and give rise to specific questions relevant for Aboriginal women's health concerns. By situating marginalized peoples voices at the center, anti-oppressive researchers provide a lens to understand how gender, racialization, class, and historical positioning shape their voices, experiences, and communities. With similarly stated objectives, photovoice aims to shift power dynamics through privileging community introspection, while inspiring critical consciousness towards addressing substantive issues at the community and structural levels (Wang 2003).

Originally, anti-oppressive theories brought in the notion of intersectionality of oppressions (Hill Collins 1998; Razack 1998). Authors such as Hooks (1989; 1990) and Hill Collins (1998) argued that we cannot single out, for example, racial domination because oppressions are interrelated. Anti-oppressive theories saw the elimination of all injustices as part of their emancipatory aims. In addition, identity is acknowledged as fluid and changing, not essential. The recognition of difference is important, along with acknowledgment of the dialectical relationships with relational, cultural, and structural factions. The anti-oppressive framework deconstructs the dichotomy of oppressed and oppressor, recognizing that people can speak from both locations simultaneously, as well as acknowledging the power found within the margins (Razack 1998).

Anti-oppressive theories emphasize the importance of agency and subjectivity. Beginning with the standpoint of the oppressed and hearing the voices that have traditionally been lost is essential, especially within enlightenment thinking (which spoke of the Other). Anti-oppressive theories recognize the difference between people's experiences and the similarities in the experience of communities. Patricia Hill Collins (1998; 2007), for example, brings forward voices and experiences of African American women, recognizing differences of experiences and similarities in collective struggles of communities: "the heavy concentration of U.S. Black women in domestic work coupled with racial segregation in housing and schools meant that U.S. Black women had common organizational networks that enabled them to share experiences and construct a collective body of wisdom" (2007:347-348). She realizes that African American women share certain discriminatory experiences regarding housing, employment, and being watched in everyday living experiences. In addition, although racism is more difficult to talk about in a context of colorblindness (Hill Collins 2012) or multicultural policies (Schneider 2008), these shifts are said to reproduce racial disparities through concealing differences (Hill Collins 2012) or legislating Otherness (Schneider 2008) under the guise of inclusiveness. "Multiculturalism has been attacked for offering a policy of containment, a policy which, by legislating Otherness, attempts to control its diverse representations, to preserve the long-standing racial and ethnic hierarchies in Canada" (Kamboureli 1996:11-12 as cited in Schneider 2008). Darias-Beautil (2000) argues that multiculturalist concepts of ethnicity refer to Othering others, while "white Canadians" are not categorized. Colorblind and

multicultural policies are criticized for leaving unaddressed the structural racial inequalities, which continue to persist (Hill Collins 2012).

Anti-oppressive theories aim to facilitate resistance through increased understanding of the intersecting and shifting forms of oppression (Moosa-Mitha 2005). The aim from this perspective is to understand multiple historical and current forms of oppression by reclaiming voices of experience. Anti-oppressive research must be critical and disruptive, and designed with an idea of the short- and long-term benefits for research participants, be they individual, social, cultural, and/or political (Moosa-Mitha 2005).

In theory, photovoice aligns well with the described anti-oppressive goals, using photographs and storytelling as a catalyst for identifying community issues and critically reflecting on these issues towards informed solutions (Wang 2003; Adams et al. 2012; Kubicek et al. 2012). Having roots in Freireian-based processes (Freire 1970; 1973), photovoice has the goal of engaging citizens in critical dialogues and moving people to social action (Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain 2006; Kubicek et al. 2012). Although implicit in the photovoice construct, the outcome of social action and community change is not as frequently discussed. Photovoice brings forth the voices of the participants and communities, often sharing insights never heard before (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001; Wang 2003; Chonody et al. 2013). However, what is discussed less are the developments of counter-hegemonic strategies and whether these outcomes fit with anti-oppressive objectives.

## Background and Methodology

The VBC research was undertaken in reaction to the prevalence of breast cancer and the calls for more research into the effect of race on cancer care and cancer experience (Gill and Feinstein 1994; Leedham and Ganz 1999). Funded by the *Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance* (CBCRA), this was the first photovoice project used to understand the meaning of breast cancer for Aboriginal women. A key theme resulting from the research was the intersection of multiple marginalizations (e.g., geography, gender, race, class) and how this bears on the needs and experiences of Aboriginal women. This research contributed to growing the knowledge of the link between social justice and health inequalities, as well as to a critical appraisal of cross-cultural research. Working alongside 12 Aboriginal survivors of breast cancer, we collected over 200 photographs and 28 interview transcripts. We recruited the VBC participants from First Nations News papers, breast cancer support groups, and through posters at Aboriginal agencies and cancer centers. We were honored to have Aboriginal breast cancer survivors from Saskatchewan share their stories with us through photography, one-on-one interviews, as well as focus groups and sharing circles. None of the women knew each other before participating in this study and many said they had always wanted to meet another Aboriginal woman who had the experience of breast cancer. Feeling impassioned by their newly formed relationships and the importance of their combined stories, all of the women requested to use their full identities, using their own names and photographs. We modified ethics accordingly.

The initial focus group was an opportunity for each of the women to share their story of breast cancer, be provided with a digital camera, and be invited to take pictures of their experience of breast cancer. Later, the women were asked to select photographs they had taken, and which were particularly meaningful, and discuss them in-depth in a one-on-one personal interview. The women were invited to take more pictures after individual interviews and focus groups towards individual realization of data saturation; indeed, some women had their camera for more than six months. The data collection in our study was continuous and the ongoing relationship building was an unexpected privilege.

The final two stages of the research involved a sharing circle for the women and a community workshop where the women shared their stories and pictures with community breast cancer stakeholders and community policy makers. To ensure that participants in our project were offered an opportunity to meet with relevant policy makers, connections were made with the relevant Health Regions, Breast Health Centers, Breast Cancer Action networks, Breast Cancer Community of Stakeholders, and Indigenous Peoples Health Research Centers. All of these agencies in Saskatchewan had expressed an interest in the findings of this research and in services that may better meet the needs of the Aboriginal women breast cancer survivors. Three outcomes of the community event were immediately evident. First, relationships were established between Aboriginal breast cancer survivors and interested community members. Second, findings were shared with

community groups, which built capacity and raised awareness in the area of Aboriginal women's experiences with breast cancer. Third, developments related to support, fundraising, and policy work were initiated.

Through this research, the participants, researchers, and community partners participated (in a self-reflexive way) to create a new understanding of Aboriginal women survivors' lives through collaboration. Given the incredible diversity in the background and experience of Aboriginal women across Canada and Saskatchewan, we did not pretend to offer an Aboriginal woman's perspective from the findings. We fully recognize that no such exclusive perspective can exist.

Through listening to their stories, we learned that these women shared diverse experiences of fear, fear of recurrence, isolation, problems with social support, shifting identities, pain, early menopause, body satisfaction and dissatisfaction, well-being, confusion, wisdom, laughter, strength, resilience, and hope. The narratives the women spend the most time developing are the ways that their stories shift by the interrelated influence of gender, race, class, history, and geographical space, and how these social forces shaped and limited the resources and survival strategies available to them. Following the anti-oppressive model, it is important that these women's stories be situated and understood in this context. The women's stories revealed some commonalities related to colonial histories, racism, and other experiences, yet they also reveal incredible diversities. The complexity of the women's experiences points to the importance of

employing methodologies that can fully appreciate complex intersecting of social forces and multiple agencies. The question is whether photovoice provides these tools and can be defined as anti-oppressive.

## Findings

Three key themes emerged relating to the anti-oppressive potential of photovoice. First, participants benefitted from the photovoice project on individual, relational, and community levels. Second, photovoice provides multiple opportunities for deepening layers of participant-led analysis and uncovers multiple social forces that affect participant experiences with breast cancer. This second finding is most important here, demonstrating that the photovoice method promotes, or at least enhances, critical consciousness through the act of photography. Through their photography, the participants linked personal problems to larger sociological concerns. Third, the participants expressed fear that their lives would be misinterpreted, analyzed here as a fear of Othering and culturalism. Overall, the findings suggest that photovoice research has the potential to be anti-oppressive, developing counter-hegemonic knowledge informed by voices typically marginalized or not heard. However, we argue that this potential may be lost, depending on how these images and the research is used and seen by others. Informed by the findings from insights of the VBC participants, this work supports a revised photovoice model and warns against culturalized reproductions of photovoice research with Aboriginal people. Our findings argue that

photovoice researchers must consciously situate themselves within an anti-oppressive framework. Our recommendation is a conscious application of a lens defined as “culturally safe” at each stage of the research process, including the photovoice data collection process and dissemination. We suggest that photovoice methods are not anti-oppressive implicitly; rather, they are dependent upon the ethics and practices of researchers, participants, stakeholders, and policy makers.

### Individual, Relational, and Community Benefits

A goal of photovoice and a key component of research with Aboriginal peoples is for participants to benefit individually, socially, and politically from their involvement. Although some of the women participants at first expressed doubts about the picture taking process and did not immediately see the intuitive sense in setting them loose with a camera, over time all of them saw the exercise as beneficial. For example, two of the women expressed uncertainty about what was expected from them. Sandra said: “I wasn’t sure what I was going to take pictures of...how to capture life.” A number of women shared concerns that they could not take pictures of natural medicines, Sweat Lodges, Sun Dance, or other ceremonies because they are sacred. Dorothy, for example, talked about wanting to take pictures of the medicine that she used to heal, but said she could not take these pictures because then the medicine would no longer work—its healing qualities would be given away. She feared that if she took a picture of natural medicines or ceremonies, they may no longer have healing properties. Despite

initial fears and hesitation, the women found creative ways to present spirituality and traditional medicines, and they all reflected on the importance and enjoyment within the photovoice process. Shelley, for example, remarked on the personal reflection the camera allowed: “This was a wonderful, wonderful exercise...it was a powerful exercise, I really liked it.” The participants also saw the potential of photovoice research to assist them to work together towards helping other Aboriginal women breast cancer survivors, making comments such as: “I pictured right away that it would help others” (Marion) or “I want to bring these pictures back to my community to show other Aboriginal women that they do not have to be so afraid of cancer” (Dorothy). Regarding the benefits of the research on an individual, relational, and political level, Tina said:

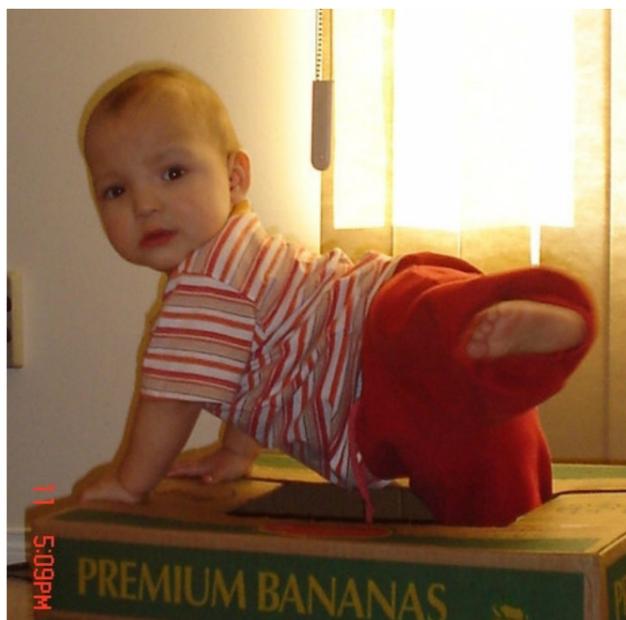
I need to tell you three [research team] that you do not know how much you have helped me... I didn’t know these ladies before. I only knew other non-native breast cancer survivors and I felt very alone and I will be forever thankful. I hear Marion’s story and I hear myself. I hear all the other ladies that we haven’t touched yet are longing for us as well.

As researchers, we learned the importance of listening to what the women needed in the research process. Picture taking was a personal journey and this could not be rushed. This meant that our own research timelines were modified, ethics amended, and data collection coincided with relationship building. We were reminded of the importance in qualitative research for researchers to be learners and listeners, not experts.

### Multiple Opportunities for Critical Consciousness

Photovoice is said to be a tool to develop further critical consciousness among participants, moving citizens to participate in social change and policy (Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain 2006). Findings here suggest that photovoice provides multiple opportunities for expression of diversity, as well as layers of critical consciousness, especially through photography, interviews, and sharing circles. The women demonstrated critical consciousness through the photovoice process, realizing shared struggles and concerns relating to cancer survivorship and being an Aboriginal woman.

The women in the VBC research talked about their shared experiences of racism. For example, Sandra talked about continued racism throughout her life and how this affected the trust she felt towards others, as well as the impact on her own identity: “Growing up as, as an Aboriginal woman in [name of the city], I mean, there’s very, dealing with the racism and stuff like...that’s something that was part of my everyday life.” Racism and fighting against racism are also [quite strikingly] expressed through their photography, symbolically as “fighting against it,” and through imagery of treatment and experience. Describing the picture below, Sandra spoke about her grandson, seen doing a karate step out of the box, symbolic to her of a brighter future, fighting against and being free from racism: “So, you know, my future is looking brighter...you know that, that we’re gonna break away from all of these horrible things... Racism...and he’s gonna make it better.”

Figure 1. Breaking away from racism.<sup>3</sup>

Margaret and Marjorie talked about the intergenerational impact of residential schools, the loss of culture, and what this has meant for their own health, as well as the well-being of others. As Margaret explains, “I’ve been an urban Indian for thirty five years in [name of the city]...people with Masters, with PhD’s...they have lost their identity...and parents have lost their parenting skills...and ours go back to years ago from uh...residential school survivors.” Marjorie talked about how violence against her at the residential school contributed to her resiliency and strength to be able to overcome and fight against her cancer:

In boarding school, they could say: oh, you’re this, you’re that, you stupid, whatever...like what you tried

to beat down in me, you brought something up that’s been hidden right along and brought it up and I’m a better person for it.

Other participants interpreted behaviors such as silence and anger, said to be typical of Aboriginal women, as also linked to historical oppression. The women spoke of the silencing of many Aboriginal women (on and off reserve) over time, linking this to historical assimilation, residential schools, day schools, histories of violence, and continued racism. Marjorie, for example, captures an intergenerational analysis when she spoke about women being unwilling to do self-examinations or to even talk about cancer. She explained:

With us there has been so much intergenerational damage...everything is very hush hush...we need to tell [each other] it is ok to take your shirt off and bra off—so what if you are lop sided, you are alive...but, we have been hushed...that’s how I view myself—the package is a little scuffed up...but, I am here...I am alive.

Marion spoke of her own experience and how silence was learned in her childhood at residential day schools. Day schools were government funded, church-run residential schools, but the children lived in boarding houses, orphanages, hostels, and convents rather than the dormitories used in residential schools:

I wasn’t in residential school, I was in day school, but the teachers were totally mean and I learned to be silent. Because I used to always get hit...I was just afraid...then I realized I couldn’t ask anybody to go

through cancer for me. I had to do it myself. That was the hardest thing for me, staying strong.

As is outlined in much of the literature on racism and health (Nazroo and Williams 2006), the women’s stories and visuality pointed to structural and institutional racism, which they indicated played a role in economic and social disadvantage; this can be viewed as centrally connected to their health, well-being, and experience of breast cancer.

The VBC women also identified sociological and environmental concerns, including problems with on-reserve housing, water quality, accessibility of health care and medical taxi services in rural areas, as well as socio-economic and financial issues related to health inequalities. For example, the VBC participants demonstrated ways in which resources and health strategies available to them were circumscribed by histories, race, class, and gender through the photographs. One example of connections between personal experiential accounts and social forces affecting their lives is captured by Sandra in her picture; praying at work. In this picture, Sandra not only reflects on her own socio-economic concerns but she relates this to concerns of Aboriginal women in general. She explains,

that was me on my knees at work. Just kind of praying. Lord please let me keep my job so I can feed my children...a lot of Aboriginal women have raised their children by themselves or run the home by themselves...if you are all that family has, then you’re holding up a lot of people and you can’t afford to be sick.

Figure 2. Praying at work.



Dorothy’s picture of her housing on-reserve also portrays a strong critical analysis of societal inequality. Dorothy said she moved into the city during treatments because of poor living conditions on-reserve. Through her picture, she described the housing and her environment. She talked about the wood stove in the picture, which is her only source of heat for cold Saskatchewan winters: “...that’s my heat for winter time...a wood [stove]...”

Figure 3. Living on my reserve.



Cheryl talked about food availability, crisis in communities, and violence:

<sup>3</sup> Photographs included in this article are reproduced with permission from research participants in the study entitled: *Visualizing Breast Cancer: Exploring Aboriginal Women’s Experiences*.

I think programs and things when they're dealing with Aboriginal people, they need to be realistic and look at the issues that are really facing them, you know the stuff, like whether its poverty or abusive relationships or FAS or, you know, there is all of these other things that can come in that, they're very prevalent in First Nations Society...I mean, you can't tell somebody who lives up in like...[where it costs] like twelve dollars for milk or...like how do you tell these women to eat properly.

All of the women described issues related to isolating conditions, poverty, family crises, and problems with alcohol, which were viewed as hindering their ability to seek medical information or attention and causing deeper distress. The key point here is that the women were moved to reflect on the broader context of their lives and the lives of others in their community through the process of taking and sharing their pictures. The women said that having the camera for a period of time (some up to six months) allowed them to think beyond their own experience to what other Aboriginal women may also be experiencing and what they would like to see change for women who experience future breast cancer diagnoses. Both the women and the researchers were amazed at the creativity and the potential for the women to express other social forces and realities, such as racism, spirituality, and environmental issues, through photography.

### Othering and Culturalism

Arising from the research were not only Aboriginal women's experiences of breast cancer but also

warnings from participants of practices of Othering and culturalism. These processes mean that stereotypical and often racialized assumptions of identity, culture, and difference are placed onto certain groups which are not reflective of actual identities (Browne, Smye, and Varcoe 2007).

The VBC women shared stories of their own discrimination within the health care system and support services, noting that visual images and information about breast cancer were often directed at middle class white women. They saw the production of their own visual images and stories of survival through participation in the photovoice project as being important for health care professionals/advocates, as well as other Aboriginal women with breast cancer; to know they were not alone and to identify ways of getting more information and support. What is most important here is that the women shared fears about the misuse of the pictures and how their lives may be viewed and (mis)understood. Embedded in a history where visual images of Aboriginal peoples have reproduced colonial stereotypes (Tuhiwai Smith 2005), our findings reveal the women's continued fear of culturalist understandings of their visual images and storytelling. Although not an exhausted list, the women expressed concerns that the pictures may lead to further Othering and stereotyping of: Indigenous cultures and healing methods, personal identities and expressions, and social problems.

Although Aboriginal people are more commonly using both modern and traditional methods towards healing, mainstream perceptions about

Indigenous healing and culture often continue to reflect colonizing attitudes (Robbins and Dewar 2011). The women spoke of traditional Indigenous approaches to healing and their fears about how this practice is perceived.

Although many of the women used traditional medicine to heal, many hid these practices from their doctors, support workers, nurses, and social workers. For example, many of the VBC participants talked about the importance of First Nations spirituality in healing, shown, for example, in their pictures of rocks, a drum, a sash, and colors.

Figure 4. Spirituality.



Mary said that "...traditional friends and the ceremonies and healing medicines helped [her] heal emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically." However, the women also feared that their behaviors, which they defined as outside of the mainstream mentality, would be judged. As a result, these women hid an important part of themselves. Similarly, although the women wanted to share the importance of traditional practices visually with other Aboriginal women survivors in the VBC photovoice project, they feared that this may be misunderstood unless understood in the context of

Indigenous knowledge systems, culture, and history. This is upheld in the literature on traditional medicine. Frideres (1994; 2009), for example, argues that many Aboriginal patients may heal themselves and not follow specific medical orders and, as a result, risk being labeled "irresponsible" or "incapable."

Acknowledging the importance of sharing cultural images and themes, Sandra expressed her fear that all of the participants would be viewed with the same cultural lens. Sharing her own picture of "Indian art," she noted that "We are not all beads and feathers."

Figure 5. "We are not all beads and feathers."



Sandra said that she used this visual image not to celebrate her culture (which she also wanted to do), but rather to represent how traditional culture and Aboriginal identity has shifted from an authentic identity to a performance. For example, she said:

This is our spirituality and...some people will just perform for you, for white people...cause that's what you do, you put your, your regalia on. You know, there was a time for spiritual dances and for things like that, now it's more of an entertainment thing for others.

Her picture of masks symbolized her struggle to make "other people feel comfortable," as well as the larger Indigenous struggle of inauthentic identity. Speaking to issues of racial identity, as well as cancer experience, she said: "I wear masks to make other people more comfortable."

Figure 6. Masks.



Although the women wanted to have their Aboriginal identity and continued effects of colonization acknowledged, they feared that this would be used to solely define all of their experiences. Sandra identifies the importance of realizing multifaceted identities in the following picture, by visually depicting her fear of being misrepresented, yet pride in standing inside a traditional tipi, as well as in front of her modern university.

Figure 7. Multifaceted identities.



Sandra described a number of things about this picture. This picture embodies her current pride in Aboriginal women's successes and embraces tradition, yet the bare skins of the tipi were said to represent her fear—of both cancer, as well as continued racism based on her "Indian" identity. She talked about the skins missing on the tipi, which she told us is symbolic of her being exposed, and the university where she received her degree. She said that she was trying to hide and explains that:

...you can very much see that I am an Indian. This one...is a tipi. It's a skeleton, the skins are missing, so I'm exposed is what I'm saying...you see the past...and the present. That's me inside of there, you know. I'm trying to hide, but I'm not hiding...you can very much see. You can see that I'm an Indian, for me, I can see that, you know. This is where I went to university, too. That's where I got my degree.

We suggest that the pictures of masks, spirituality, and multifaceted identity not only provide descriptions of the women's cancer and life experience but are powerful examples of the fear of Othering and culturalism.

As described above, the women shared their experiences of anger, silence, poverty, homelessness, and conditions on-reserves. They also spoke about being survivors of intimate partner violence, childhood abuse, and/or residential school violence. Some of the women said that these experiences contributed to their silence about breast cancer and violence, but many also indicated this contributed to their resilience and strength to overcome and fight cancer. Their words are powerful and humbling. For example, Cheryl said: "I've been 25 years with an abusive husband verbally...so I guess that I had to be strong. If I could live through that, I thought that chemo would be easy." Sandra similarly shares: "cancer rocked my soul like my husband did—beat me—and cancer did the same, it beat me."

The VBC women shared their stories of struggle in multifaceted contexts, representative of political,

economic, and historical realities. They did not want their stories and pictures to represent them as being more different than other women experiencing breast cancer, but they also did not want to miss sharing their worst stories symbolic of Aboriginal peoples' struggles more generally.

### Discussion

The findings suggest that photovoice research has the potential to be anti-oppressive, developing counter-hegemonic knowledge informed by voices typically marginalized or not heard. They also help to inform a revised model of photovoice research, which includes a conscious application of a "culturally safe" lens at each stage of the research process, including (and especially at) dissemination:

Table 1. Model of Photovoice Process, Culturally Safe Lens, and Anti-Oppressive Outcomes.



Source: self-elaboration.

Cultural safety is a lens which simultaneously views individuals in their location related to colonial mar-

ginalization (Wood and Schwass 1993). The idea of cultural safety is that researchers, policy makers, and

health care workers ensure the effect of history, especially colonization is understood when addressing Aboriginal women's health concerns (Browne and Fiske 2001). This does not mean simply being sensitive to cultural differences or specific needs, but acknowledging inequalities and the effects of colonization and neo-colonialism: "[c]ultural safety moves beyond notions of cultural sensitivity to an analysis of power imbalances, institutional discrimination, and the nature of the relationships between the colonized and colonizers as they apply to health care interactions at the macro and micro levels" (Browne and Fiske 2001:8-9). Applying the lens of anti-oppressive theory to cultural safety draws attention to social positioning within historical and social changes.

A lens of cultural safety helps unravel the complex ways in which the women have had their rights respected or have been disempowered and how this treatment has affected their health and well-being. This same lens may therefore reveal "taken for granted processes and practices that continue to marginalize Aboriginal voices and needs" (Anderson et al. 2003:199). This lens points to cultural histories, identities, and social problems being subordinated through processes of culturalization and Othering. As such, applying cultural safety to the process and dissemination of photovoice findings helps ensure these taken-for-granted practices, which may contribute to the furthering of marginalization viewed differently—towards a counter-hegemonic discourse, which will influence health care practice informed by a different world view.

The culturally safe anti-oppressive lens ensures that the development of knowledge begins with Indig-

enous peoples' perspectives, deconstructing social constructions of identity, culture, and Othering. This perspective warns against assumptions about class, cultural, and racialized identities, which often inform medicine and mainstream theories of "risk" for ill health and social problems. The cultural safety lens identifies the wider determinants of health evident in the intersection of class, culture, racialization, historical subjugation, and gender, and ensures the visual images do not blame individual women and/or entire groups of people/cultures for lifestyles associated with ill health.

When applied to the process of photovoice, this culturally safe lens helps to ensure the respectful and dialectical development of critical consciousness. Part of this is ensuring that the Indigenous knowledge is respected through the use of what Castleden and Garvin (2008:1401) define as a "feedback loop," "seeking input from the entire community at regular intervals" on the research process and dissemination. It was reinforced in the VBC research that photovoice with Aboriginal peoples demands a prolonged immersion in the research process in order to build rapport and trust, as well as support the development of relationships among the women themselves with the community stakeholders and researchers.

Through encouraging the women to keep the camera for the time they need and ensuring a feedback loop (Castleden and Garvin 2008), the analysis of photographs became intersubjective and layered in meanings. Following this lens, visual images were examined for their individual meaning, their social and cultural contexts, and the women's interpretation of what lies both internally and beyond the image. His-

torically, sociological interpretation of photographs has been done using a positivist paradigm providing evidence for so-called "objective research" (Stasz 1979). Our goal towards anti-oppressive culturally safe research had a social constructionist view to understand the meaning of the photograph from the taker's perspective (e.g., see: Tagg 1988). In addition, we appreciated that the women, the research team, and all other viewers of the pictures would bring their own social position and interests to the interpretation of the photographs. The task for interpretation became as much to understand the individual representations and interpretations as it was an examination of the women's and researchers' position in the social world and how this shapes the viewing of social realities.

When applied to the analysis and dissemination of the women's images of traditional healing practices, identity, or social problems discussed, the culturally safe lens ensures the women are not relabeled as "irresponsible" or "incapable" or as resistant patients (Frideres 1994; 2009). The women put forth this level of complexity and we argue that it then also becomes the responsibility of the researchers and community stakeholders (who may also show the women's pictures) to ensure dissemination of the visual images is placed in the historical and neo-colonial context.

A culturally safe lens ensures the women's visual images on cultural and spiritual healing are presented using their own words and context. This means that the women's perspectives of the importance of these practices are understood as noted above, but also within the backdrop of their historical importance, as well as of wrongdoings, including crimi-

nalization of spiritual practices and the implications of mainstream medical bias (see, e.g., Frideres 2009). A culturally safe lens also helps to ensure that these images are presented alongside current calls for restoring traditional practice and Indigenous knowledge towards increasing the health and well-being of current generations (see, e.g., Mitchell and Maracle 2005; Martin-Hill 2009).

Cultural safety applied to Aboriginal identity ensures that while there is a focus on the similarities in the women's experiences, the visual images are viewed with an appreciation for the "differences" among the women. It is well established that Aboriginal identity represents a "living entity" adapting to multiple roles representative of generational, locational differences, as well as experiences of the women as members of particular subgroups (e.g., Inuit, Metis, First Nation, Cree, Ojibwa, and the list goes on), gender, and current realities of living in a diverse society (Frideres 2008). While understanding the women's images in a way that realizes the context of colonial domination and how "authentic" nativeness has been typically understood (see, e.g., Monture-Angus 1995; Lawrence 2009), the women's photovoice images must also speak to their multifaceted identities and challenge assumptions about homogeneity.

A culturally safe lens sets the social problems the women discuss (e.g., racism, conditions on-reserve, food security, and poverty) in Aboriginal people's location on the margins of the political economy and their unequal health status. The challenge is to acknowledge the inequalities that the women are attesting to, while using this lens to ensure that their images

and words are not used to create further difference, culturalism, and Othering. Worst case scenarios have been misused as symbolic of pathological peoples and culture, and attention is taken from wider economic, social, historic, and economic contexts of people's lives. "Culturalism diverts our attention" (Browne and Fiske 2008:10) from "the burden of history" (Browne and Fiske 2008:9) and constructs people as "more different [from "us"] than they really are" (Varcoe and McCormick 2007 as cited in Browne and Fiske 2008:11).

Part of the problem of culturalism is identifying how particular "social problems" become marked as Aboriginal or cultural problems. Previous research on Aboriginal self-government has shown how Aboriginal governors are recognized as governing citizens with specific ill health, usually seen as "urgent moral needs" rather than being viewed as governors of citizens of good health. Non-Aboriginal governors, on the other hand, are not similarly forced to contend with what Aboriginal governors may recognize as urgent needs in non-Aboriginal communities. In other words, "white" governors are "dissociated from discredited subjects" and not contending with health issues directly associated with racialized identities. Aboriginal governors, on the other hand, "are associated with discredited racial subjects as defined by racial ethnic identity" (Fiske and Browne 2006:98). It is in this context that the women's pictures must be understood.

We argue that the photovoice images risk being viewed as stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples and culture, and that the culturally safe lens helps to emphasize an Indigenous voice while putting forward the link to the impact of colonialism and social violence against Aboriginal people.

## Conclusion

This paper discussed the potential of photovoice as an anti-oppressive method, suitable to research with Aboriginal peoples. Findings suggest that photovoice has the potential to develop counter-hegemonic anti-oppressive knowledge, but that this may be lost unless participants, researchers, and stakeholders intentionally and thoughtfully apply a culturally safe anti-oppressive lens.

The photovoice process was shown to facilitate a deepened level of critical consciousness among the VBC participants, as well as provide a balance of power between researchers and participants, uncovering voices not often heard. Other benefits were increased appreciation of cultural understanding, relationship developing among participants, and increased capacity and skills building. However, the photovoice process was not intuitively anti-oppressive. Limitations included the risk that pictures produced may reify mainstream culturalized images. This was evidenced in the women's fear of having social problems, spiritual practices, and identities misunderstood or culturalized. The flip side of the fear of culturalism was that their stories are not shared and research is not done. This was also not a solution the VBC women wanted to consider. Alternatively, only the positive experiences within the health care environment and positive experiences of their health, strength, and resilience would be shared, but the women did not want to miss sharing the worst stories, examples of racism, and examples of continued oppression through colonization and neo-colonialism.

We envision modifying photovoice by including a culturally safe anti-oppressive lens. The stories and

pictures of the VBC women must be linked to the effect of colonization and neo-colonialism, recognizing the burden of history: forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples through appropriating lands, outlawing spiritual and cultural practices, forced indoctrination into dominant culture through residential schools, forced marginalization on-reserves, and continued discrimination and racism. This also includes culturally safe instruction for anyone displaying photovoice findings. An anti-oppressive lens suggests that we must not privilege cultural difference, but name relationships of economic disparities and power relations linked to health and address them.

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Our findings point to the potential of photovoice to the development of critical consciousness among the participants, and the importance of deliberately situating this process within a culturally safe lens to achieve anti-oppressive outcomes.

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## Making Play or Playing the Game? On the Question of a “Cleft Habitus” at the Doorway to the Art Field

**Abstract** This article concerns the question of how marginalized individuals at the doorway to the art field manage their position of uncertainty, what Bourdieu calls a “cleft habitus,” and in some cases challenge the repressive norms. Bourdieu’s perspective on how historical crisis prompts change at the macro level is used to view how “micro crises” in the lives of individuals leads to resistance against normative requirements. The article suggests that within situations of micro crises individuals assume three strategies to handle the contradictions they are faced with: 1) expand upon their cultural capital (these resources can then be used in opposition to the institution of the field within which they were accumulated in the first place); 2) move to an alternative scene and audience; or 3) create a new or emergent future horizon through which they can reinterpret their past and present situation.

**Keywords** Micro Crises; Cleft Habitus; Future Hope; Future Expectations; Artistic Performance

*To pass freely through open doors, it is necessary to respect the fact that they have solid frames. This principle, by which the old professor had always lived, is simply a requisite of the sense of reality. But, if there is a sense of*

*reality, and no one will doubt that it has its justification for existing, then there must also be something we can call a sense of possibility.*

Robert Musil

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In the first volume of his novel *The Man Without Qualities*, Robert Musil plays with the idea that there are two kinds of people: those with a *sense of reality* who understand what can be carried out and realized, and those with a *sense of possibility* whom we label utopians, idealists, or downright fools. The peculiar feature of the latter is not only that they miss noticing whether certain doors might be closed or not; they also possess “an ability to conceive of everything there might be just as well,

and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not” (Musil 1995:11).

Such individuals, according to Musil, can thus look at the future either more or less realistically, anchoring their view of it in the world they have already experienced, or letting their eye be guided by dreams and fantasies. His categorization is a playful one, but nevertheless related to a classical sociological problem; ultimately understandable as the question of what shapes individuals’ ability to act beyond the everyday routine and—further on—to challenge their prevalent situation. Historians and sociologists have, quite similar to Musil, described how history appears changeable and something more than the sum of experiences, when our views of the future embody creative and “unrealistic” expectations. These analyses are often connected to descriptions of the modern project’s politicizing tendency and the concomitant rise of new “isms,” or the founding of the ability to reshape horizons of expectation through the activities of social movements. Change is thus understood as imaginary that has real effects when the symbolic conceptions to make the future, as something beyond the current, are translated into concrete collective actions (e.g., Bourdieu 1988; Fantasia 1988; Koselleck 2004).

Such processes do not only unfold at the level of the group. In this article, the question of social change and social reproduction is explored at the individual level. The main question guiding my examination concerns the possibilities of individual agents to free themselves from repression. I investigate the means and visions that might be activated in the process of individual transformation. To a large extent my analysis is framed by Pierre Bourdieu’s approach. Even though most so-

ciologists might overlook Bourdieu’s perspective in this context, I will argue for its usefulness.

While Bourdieu (e.g., 1988) has accounted for the ways that moments of *historical crisis* can promote social change on a collective, macro level, I will focus on the micro aspects of social life and how, what I call *micro crises* can allow individuals to offer resistance to normative requirements. Micro crisis can create situations of uncertainty for those in marginalized positions; an ambivalence which may create pain, shame, and can reproduce social circumstances; but may also contain the possibility of going beyond the familiar.

Empirically, my arguments derive from a qualitative study of the careers of artists and visual arts education in Sweden. In this article, I pay particular analytical attention to the stories told by one female art student whose social background complicates her ability to navigate the school environment, and who therefore must creatively improvise to gain a measure of recognition within it. This student eventually turned away from a career in art, instead turning art into a hobby and becoming a police officer. I explain why she responded in this way, and also how she used her response to oppose exclusionary social regulations at the school. In the concluding section, I argue that individuals within similar situations of micro crises can assume three strategies that enable them to break with social rules and repressive norms. In that way, the empirical case is used as a metaphorical technique that is employed to clarify and develop certain theoretical arguments which can best be demonstrated and understood in a concrete, interpretive context (cf. Bourdieu 1996).

## Methodological Framework

In February 1999, I conducted ethnographic research in a school offering preparatory training in visual art and sculpture. In Sweden, preparatory art schools provide a form of education that students commonly attend before applying to one of the few university-level programs that offer more prestigious academic education in fine arts. I spent two weeks observing classroom instruction and interaction, and conducted interviews with students, faculty, and school administrators. My purpose was to provide specific material for follow-up interviews with a small sample of female students to understand in depth the reasons why some individuals give up their initial dreams of being an artist, while others continue along their chosen career path.

Seven women were chosen to represent a range of differences and contradictions reflected in art education in the Swedish art field. Their background in art, their professional interests, and dreams of their future were very different, signifying a spectrum of economic risk-taking in making career choices. At one end of this spectrum were those who wanted to work as independent artists. In the middle of the spectrum they tended to express an ambition to develop creative abilities, but in fields that promised more economic security than independent arts practice (i.e., crafts, design, publicity, advertising). At the other end of the spectrum were those who planned not to practice their art professionally, viewing it instead as something to pursue on the side as a hobby. One of them taking this latter stance was “Linda,” whose case is taken up in more detail below.

The sample of female art students reflects a degree of heterogeneity that, in another kinds of categori-

zation, might be seen as uniform in terms of, say, gender, ethnicity, or class. To date, these women have been interviewed over the course of 15 years.<sup>1</sup> Empirical materials collected over time can be helpful to avoid reducing phenomena to essential and causal explanations on the basis of just one occasion or event (Bourdieu et al. 1991). Despite several interesting sociological studies built upon life history data (e.g., Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame 1983; Elias 1993; Messerschmidt 2000; Connell 2006), it is uncommon for a sociological study to so deeply analyze individual actors over time, and to focus broadly on experiences beyond one’s professional career to those that include the other spheres of life.

The purpose of this method is to avoid the problems of essentialization and “othering” by analyzing *dissimilarities among women* instead of *differences between women and men*. Moreover, this method permits one to see differences that are “internal” to each of the women interviewed—that is to say, differences displayed by the subject over time, and when moving from one environment to another (Braidotti 1994). This latter perspective provides the basis for framing my analysis around data from six extended interviews with only one actor. Moreover, tracing the life path of Linda will serve as an example of a clarifying *deviant case* that is able to reveal something essential about the logic of the art field, norms, and rules which I will discuss next (Platt 2000; Bettie 2003).

<sup>1</sup> To date, I have conducted in-depth interviews with the women in 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003/2004, 2008/2009, 2011, and 2012. The material provides part of the data for a research project funded by The Swedish Research Council (ref. 2008-1304). In addition to this qualitative material, the research project is also built upon a survey sent to professional visual artists in Sweden.

## The Field of Art and Its Specific Rules

Embarking on an artistic profession can be characterized as a risky endeavor in which high investment can be expected to yield significant returns in only a few individual cases. In Sweden, professional artists generally have long educations that, despite their considerable investment in educational capital, result in a precarious position in the labor market that includes high unemployment and low income. Investigations by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee (2011) show, for example, that even if two of every three artists in Sweden have at least some years of post-secondary school education (compared to one of every three in the country’s total population), the median income of Swedish artists (in visual art and design) is nearly 40 percent less than that of the total population.

For those who embark on such an insecure career path, it is an advantage to possess some form of “venture capital” (Flisbäck 2013), an additional stock of resources that can provide one with basic security. Not surprisingly then, it is students from well-educated homes who come with pre-existing familiarity with the arts that dominate higher education programs in arts in Sweden. It is a pattern that seems difficult to change as the proportion of art students from working-class backgrounds has remained steady for over a century, compromising 10 to 15 percent of the total group. Furthermore, like the Swedish art scene more broadly, the student bodies of arts programs are also made up primarily of those coming from the larger cities (Gustavsson and Börjesson 2008).

Despite broad uncertainties plaguing artists’ working life in the West, the number of trained profes-

sionally practicing artists has increased over the past two decades (Menger 2006; Røyseng, Mangset, and Borgen 2007; Forsman 2008). The growing numbers of those striving to enter the field make the competition more and more intense for the few established positions within reach. For Bourdieu (1996; 2000), the art field is of special sociological interest on this account in its conditions of extreme competition the social exclusionary processes become particularly pronounced. At the same time, however, social structures tend to be removed from sight because of an ideological framework that others have called a *talent ideology*, peculiar to artistic modernism in which artistic talent is proclaimed to be an inborn gift that, regardless of circumstances, will eventually always flourish and be rewarded (Nochlin 1973).

Like other distinct fields in modern society, the field of artistic production has emerged in a historical process of differentiation and specialization (Elias 1993; Bourdieu 1996). Sociologists and art historians have linked the origins of the contemporary field and the notion of art to the modern project developed with a specific, clearly-defined knowledge, and that remains relatively autonomous from competing societal interests. Within the contemporary field of art, one can detect remnants of modernism’s avant-garde romanticism that approaches artistic work as a striving for individual development that maintains precedence over the need for security in everyday life. It is a perspective in which artistic activity is looked upon as basically the opposite of the mundane world of material necessity, repetitive household work, and caring for friends and family (Bourdieu 1996; Pollock 1999). The notion of the art field as autonomous carries the idea of an artistic vanguard whose creations

the public will only come to understand in the future, logic which Bourdieu (1996) characterizes as *the economic world reversed*. To be able to afford this kind of work investment, however, one must have in one’s possession a sufficient amount of resources that enable one to make decisions about career and life that do not center on securing the stability of one’s material conditions. Just as with the value of vintage wine that only goes up with time, what is expected of aspirants in the art field is to have enough temporal distance from necessity, a position achieved over the course of a generation, at the least. To enter the art field, one needs to have developed the proper predisposition to operate within it, an embodied “practical sense” that Bourdieu calls a *habitus*.

### Habitus, Social Change, and Its Limits

My concerns rest on the issue of how actors make creative use of cultural meanings and their varying amounts and forms of capital (e.g., symbolic, economic, social) to both change and reproduce their social situations within the framework of what seems possible to them. In this examination, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is useful for allowing one to explore temporal sequential processes in which actors develop images of self in relation to previous and present social settings (cf. Potter 2000; Vaughan 2002; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008) and, as I will stress, in their outlook towards the future.

Habitus can serve as a tool to examine how emotions steer our life projects, influence our judgments of taste, and affect our values. Our habitus both aligns us with the prevailing valuations of a specific field, and also enables us to adapt to them (or fight to ad-

just the rules) (Bourdieu 2000:160-161; 2004:109-110, 372-374; 2008:89). Sociologists have sometimes interpreted—and criticized—habitus as internalized dispositions that activate mechanical responses formed in prior social situations. One recurring problem with these criticisms is that they tend to take habitus as only an orienting force socially imprinted by the past, while missing the equally important flexibility and temporal dynamic in the concept (e.g., Alexander 1995; Sayer 1999; 2005; Archer 2000; 2012; Bettie 2003; Beart 2012). From my perspective, one’s habitus is neither a static base imprinted in early life, nor an effect of socialization that follows a linear chain. As Marcoulatos (2001:4) points out, habitus is “the living energy of individuals who emerged as such within the particular environment.” Individuals pursuing their life projects always find themselves situated in different fields and spaces at different points in time. The individual mark of each one’s habitus is thus always a relatively unique set of life experiences that unfold over time and that combine in different social settings. In other words, our habitus is created processually in the face of the rules and rewards derived from diverse and simultaneously constituted social environments (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 2000; cf. Potter 2000:242; Vaughan 2002; Peters 2011:68).

Another often unrecognized merit of the concept of habitus is its potential to reveal how *social change* takes place and allows room for improvisation, within *limits*. For example, the ability to change one’s appearance and behavior, which might be assumed to result from mental reflection on one’s own actions, may remain hampered by a body that is unaccustomed to the new ways of bearing and expressing itself. What might be expected in a new space may

be too far removed from the practices previously inscribed in the self and the body (Bourdieu 2008:86).

What may appear to some critics as a logical contradiction with the concept of habitus (Alexander 1995), actually reflects the necessary complexity of an analytical tool for comprehending “dialectical movements between different levels of analysis” (Potter 2000:242). Furthermore, when there is an asymmetric relation between the resource expectations set by the institution or environment and the actual capital possessed by a social actor, a sense of insecurity and self-doubt may result from the actor’s habitus being caught in contradiction (Bourdieu 2000:163).

This feeling of being deviant, which derives from a position of marginalization, can create three possible responses by agents in dominated groups. One possible reaction to feelings of otherness can be a rejection of the values held by the established group in favor of an alternative or “counter” culture (Bourdieu 2004). A second response is when the repressed understand their marginalized position as something caused by their own actions, thus becoming victims of what Bourdieu has termed *symbolic violence*. In such cases, the actors are bound by situations in which they have internalized the views and interpretations of the dominant, which are then taken for granted (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:120-122; Bourdieu 2000:138-141). A third response can occur when individuals with a *cleft habitus* accept the established rules, but whose feeling of sharing the common belief system creates a critical, creative, and reflexive eye. This critical stance towards the established logic may lead to attempts to resist these conditions, while also, paradoxically, sustaining a longing for recognition and a hope for the

future (Bourdieu 2008:100, 107). As I have noted, this article aims to understand the concrete circumstances in which individuals engage this third approach.

### The Future as Something Beyond the Present

To emphasize how individuals’ perspective of the future affects their ability to challenge and reproduce social conditions, I (re)turn to the classical work of Kurt Lewin (1964; 1999). Lewin claims that an individual’s actions always take place within a *life space*, which consists of the individual and their subjectively experienced surrounding situation. It is not only the present that exists in the life space of an individual, the past, as well as the future are also always current. In the life space occurs a dynamic interaction of different temporal conditions that change through reflection, new experiences, and social interaction. For the individual, new events may change the view of the past, adjusting old perspectives and memories. The individuals’ desire for a different future, along with reflections on present and past behavior, may give rise to a change in their current situation. According to Lewin (1999) who distinguishes between *hopes* and *expectations* for the future, the temporal irregularities of social life generate new experiences that are more than just additive. While expectations may be based on realistic experiences, hope can have an utopian dimension and creative potential. From this perspective, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that what is a plausible expectation for one actor may be a distant hope for another, depending upon the particular characteristics of one’s habitus. The distinction between hopes and expectations can thus become a useful supplement to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.

Similar to what can be experienced at a collective level, individuals’ images of the future may have the transcendental power to change current circumstances when a seemingly “unrealistic” sense is translated into concrete practices. At the macro level, this point has been put forward by Bourdieu in his analyses of social change. According to Bourdieu (1988; 2000:229), each relatively autonomous social field, with its shared definitions concerning values (as the art field), has its own chronology, which—despite fierce competition for positions—contributes to the sense of unity among its actors. A unanimous sense of time among actors gives a field a certain stability, contained within what Bourdieu (1988) has described as an *illusio*; a collective belief that it is worth accepting the rules of a game in which everyone is given equal possibility of participating and that playing the game is worth the investment.

*Historical crises* can disrupt the *illusio*, breaking the temporal order and causing the rules of the game to lose their hold on participants. In crises, Bourdieu observes (1988), actors within one field can come to reflect upon their own situation in light of the situation of actors in another field. The mirroring of situations across fields can be similar to an act of solidarity, whereby the different times of the different fields become synchronized, and give rise to a shared desire for change. When the habits and routines of the everyday are broken, optimism about the future spreads among those who previously saw themselves without a means to exert influence. A historical crisis, explains Bourdieu—specifically referring to the student rebellion in May 1968—represents the *critical moment* when “the ordinary experience of time, as a simple re-enactment of a past or a future inscribed

in the past” (1988:182), may be broken, and anything can suddenly seem possible.

In other words, crisis represents a social situation standing outside of the everyday, arising when actors operating within a given institutional framework have accumulated sufficient amounts of resources to enable them to *distance themselves from the everyday rules of their field*. According to Bourdieu (1988), in a crisis, these resources can then be used in opposition to the very institutions of the field within which they were accumulated in the first place. Capital deemed to be of value and serving as an instrument of domination at one point provides soil for social change at another, becoming a useful tool for critical scrutiny of existing power relationships. Paradoxically, then, symbolic capital can be a powerful instrument for dominated groups when, as it is revealed, it can expose the symbolic violence operating in and through all forms of power. My own research on individual actors’ lives and their efforts to change course or resist suggests that this same explanatory framework can be usefully applied at a micro level as well, as I will demonstrate next.

### Uncertainty in an Artistic Career

Linda, born in 1977, grew up in a small, rural community with few connections to the world of arts. Nevertheless, among her family members there was a certain aesthetic sensibility. Linda’s father liked to color ready-made pictures that he bought from the local hobby store; one of her uncles used to paint in his free time; and an older sister with an interest in the arts encouraged Linda in her creative pursuits. While these practices need to be considered to understand

Linda’s decision to apply to art school, the amount of cultural capital possessed by her family did not derive from legitimated or institutionalized artistic accomplishment. As Linda recounted, in choosing an occupation, it was economic security that had to be the primary consideration. Her stress on economic security was an attitude that clashed with her general understanding of artistic occupations as being demanding and “tough,” but ultimately rewarding of talent and effort for those with patience and perseverance. Many times she has asserted that: “There are so many financial problems you have at first before you become famous” (Linda, 2002).

When Linda began studying at art school, what she had in mind was a career as a part-time artist, figuring that, perhaps, she would supplement her income with work as a furniture maker or as an art teacher. By the end of her second year at school, she had put aside completely her dream of pursuing art as profession and had begun to view the prospect of working in fine arts as a proposition that was simply too risky. When the other art students were busy preparing applications for university programs in fine arts, Linda submitted her application to the police academy instead. Today, Linda works as a police officer, while still showing her work in art exhibitions and doing paintings for a commission.

### Proximity to Life’s Necessities

At the art school, the students tended to be accorded a different status depending on how they saw their future as artists: the higher the economic risk of their future career plans, the higher the cultural

esteem they enjoyed among their peers. Harboring notions of financial security signaled the absence of a desire to commit the kind of time and energy necessary for serious art-making activities. To downgrade one’s art practice to the level of a hobby was generally viewed as abandoning the life of an artist for other projects and pursuits. Linda’s plan to combine art with other gainful employment was thus perceived as violating the selflessness of the artists’ ethos.

Linda’s mother is a secretary, and her father a medical doctor, the first in the family to attend university. A generation back, Linda’s family members had been farmer and factory workers. We might hypothesize that Linda had not yet achieved enough temporal distance from a family situation where the necessities of the natural and social world still shaped or determined her life decisions. In interviews, Linda has often expressed an attitude that art should speak and appeal to the masses and be sellable. So, for example, after an exhibition in 2001, Linda noted that she had “showed some aquarelles, maybe a bit because I knew that people would be, like, more into buying that sort of stuff.”

Linda’s goal of seeking recognition from a broader public was treated as a problem at the art school. At one of the faculty meetings that I attended, the art works shown at a recent graduate exhibition were discussed, with some of the students being noted as particularly deserving of praise, while a few were talked about as being more questionable in terms of the quality of their work. One of these latter was Linda, whose art was explicitly criticized for catering too much to popular taste.

## Few Entrances to Learning the Rules of Art

The students at the art school were taught the modernist way of looking at art production, which promulgated that all types of art expression could be utilized for one’s creative purposes as long as they were previously untried. The didactic aim was that the students would find their own unique artistic language. For those students with knowledge of art history and familiarity with the field of contemporary arts, this type of pedagogical approach opened up a wealth of possibilities. These students tended to approach their teachers with more ease and with the language and body of knowledge that could be used to discuss their art, all things that someone like Linda lacked. For her, this relatively freewheeling pedagogical style was a significant source of insecurity.

As previous studies from Sweden show, the quality of learning experience in arts programs depends to a large extent on the individual students’ own ability to take the initiative in seeking supervision; with those failing to meet this expectation deemed unfit for the rigorous demands of the profession, an elitist attitude that tends to pervade the educational institutions through which artists enter the field (Edling and Börjesson 2008; Edström 2008). Such an individual-centered pedagogy and meritocratic approach give rise to the operation of a *hidden curriculum* at school, whereby students with high amounts of cultural capital gain advantages by having a preexisting familiarity with the values and knowledge taught, including the ability to read and interpret the school’s system of codes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). For Linda, the unstructured program of study at the art school

proved a disadvantage, while the more formalized instruction and learning structure that she encountered at the police academy suited her much better.

In her artistic expression, her life style, and her goals, Linda represented a fish out of water at the art school. Her “sporty” clothing style, short hair, and the fact that she exercised regularly contributed to her becoming, in her own words, something of an “outsider” among the other more bohemian dressed art students. Her feeling of a lack of acceptance in the arts program made it more difficult for her to become acclimated to the environment. After a while, she turned elsewhere, making friends outside the school.

Both Linda’s appearance and attitude reflected her marginal status at school, as well as in relation to the system of belief that has governed modern art. The modernist creed long advocated by the cultural avant-garde imposes a logic requiring the artist to be preoccupied with the creation only of work that is new and original, that the public will likely only understand in the future, if ever (Bourdieu 1996; Bloom 1997). Even though it is a requirement that has been challenged by the postmodern turn in art in recent decades, it was the modernist logic that dominated the school environment in which Linda was acting.

## Deviating From the Norm at the Entrance to the Art Field

Individuals like Linda, who go against prevailing norms and lack access to the legitimate resources and recognized practices, can, in this scenario, easily become “stigmatized” in their social environment. Treated as an “other,” Linda and several of her class-

mates reported how she was seen as “lesbian” and “unfeminine” by other art students, due to her appearance. Projections of her as a deviant in the scholastic entrance to the art field were thus framed in terms of the representations of sexual “otherness” in the society. Moreover, Linda described her isolation at the art school as something that only got worse over time. After a while, she started avoiding going to parties with her fellow students, having been treated particularly offensively on one such occasion. Among the partygoers, there had been a group of men who had begun asking questions about her androgynous way of dressing, which they found disturbingly “different” from the normal. Soon enough, they, as Linda herself put it, also “made attempts at physical closeness” while harassing her with obscene comments. The following quote can be read as describing an extreme example of what she often had to face for having been relegated to the status of an outsider in the school environment. At a party with her schoolmates:

This one guy from my class, he was really drunk and was screaming obscenities in my ear: “Hey you, you know what they’re doing out there in the bathroom? They’re busy having sex in there.” I got a bit angry with him, and I turned around and said: “You know what? Why are you screaming in my ear? I’m not deaf!” Then he tried to put me down even more, and started saying that I was being so “bitchy.” (Linda, 1999)

Linda’s story can be interpreted as one of failed attempts to adjust to a lifestyle that would better blend in with that of the other art students. Sometimes this could be a matter of assuming a “more feminine” exterior. All in all, it thus appeared that Linda’s habi-

tus not only failed to represent the socially approved norms for how an *art student* should look and act like but also diverged from the notion of how a *female heterosexual* art school student ought to be like.

## Parodying the Art Field’s Prescriptions

With her deviant habitus (represented by the combination of her specific endowment in inherited capital, her previous experience, her future life goals, and her present appearance), Linda was a “challenge” to the other students’ belief in the art game, or *illusio*; the collective belief that playing on the art field is fair and worth its effort (Bourdieu 1988). She was punished for this in a classic gendered way, such as when the harassment was directed at her female body. Despite being the subject of brutal treatment, Linda was able to critically examine the domination to which she was subjected, refusing to simply settle into the marginalized position that she was being relegated to. An example of this was Linda’s input at the art school’s student exhibition when, besides exhibiting traditional watercolor paintings, she also contributed a solo performance work. When we met in 1999, Linda recounted this event, supporting her story with photographs. In her performance, she had “dressed up” in a short skirt, high heels, acrylic nails, fake eyelashes, and a blond, long-haired wig, serving home-baked cookies to those in the audience. The performance was entitled: “I Want to Become a Police Officer.” It was an outrageous performance, intended to be provocative, and it illustrates the theoretical issues we have been considering.

Linda’s performance can be interpreted as an attempt to resist submission to the repressive norms of

a school that stands at the doorway to the art field. While defiantly displaying her newly chosen occupation (police officer), Linda was simultaneously testing a means of artistic expression that was new to her. In that way, she not only challenged the restrictive position but also stretched herself by trying out a medium for creating art works that were not sellable. In addition, through the overdone sexy-girl look, she made a caricature of the demands for more conventional codes of feminine appearance and behavior. In the following quote, Linda describes how she had made an effort to imitate La Cicciolina, the Italian singer, politician, and porn actress who in the 1990s became well-known in the established art scene as well, due to her collaboration and marriage to the well-known American artist Jeff Koons:

I dressed up as a kind of “Cicciolina.” It was such a great thing to do, even though I looked like a transvestite and the cookies didn’t taste good. But, the thing in itself was damn fun; it was great. (Linda, 1999)

Even if she herself did not formulate it explicitly, Linda’s performance can be seen as a critique of the established art scene, stereotypes of (heterosexual) femininity, and demands for adjustments to the norms of the art school. Although Linda’s teachers reportedly considered her performance to be too populist (a stance at odds with the formula for becoming a successful artist), Linda reported that several of her fellow students expressed great respect for it and began to look at her with fresh eyes and a newfound admiration.

It may seem ironic that it was when Linda had made up her mind to leave the school that she started receiving recognition from others, a recognition prompted

by her challenge and parody of the marginalized place to which she had been previously assigned. Next, I will look more closely into the social factors enabling Linda’s attempt to break from the mold.

### Concluding Discussion

In this article, I have been highlighting Linda’s performance and her new choice of occupation as an example of how social change and social reproduction can act at the same time and be present in some of the very same processes. Due to her deviant habitus, the exclusion process, and the hidden curriculum of the art school, Linda shifted her aspirations towards another occupational career, while at the same time challenging her marginalized place. Drawing on a form of artistic expression that fits well into the game of the art field, she was able to reveal the art school’s, more or less hidden, repressive norms and prescriptions. In this way, we may say that Linda was able to *visualize the symbolic violence* that she had been the object of.

I would argue that the emotional strength for Linda’s performance had grown out of her feeling and experience of a *cleft habitus*. The disjunction between Linda’s habitus and the common belief system at the art school, combined with an acceptance of and longing for the dominant group’s recognition, gave rise to a sense of possibility and the hope of freeing herself from uncomfortable feelings of estrangement. Linda’s actions may be described as a micro crisis that emerged in opposition to the *illusio* maintained by other students. It can be seen as comparable to Bourdieu’s (1988) historical crises (macro crises), where actors’ field of vision expands to cover, or focus on, other fields, thereby exposing a social institution

to the critical light of alternative perspectives. Such reflexive acts disrupt the routine adjustment of the habitus to objective social conditions, thereby releasing actors’ initiative and giving rise to new ideas and visions of “thinkable” futures. This new-born hope of a different future can serve as a breeding ground for resistance to the *status quo*.

For Bourdieu (2001), the questioning and criticism of the dominant thought patterns reflected in this process is approached primarily as a collective matter of institutional change, since the influence of individual actors is generally marginal, and since the punishment meted out for resistance tends to be both too obvious and too serious in its consequences. The oppositional creative play that Linda enacted could be interpreted as a personal project laden with private significance, while the other actors around her stayed on within the game of the art field, playing along and reacting accordingly. Yet, in my view, it would be a mistake not to pay attention to the significance of the kind of micro crises that her case represents, for it can provide an opportunity to shed light on how social life is produced and reproduced through the experience of an individual actor. It should be emphasized that individual actors contribute significantly to their own social fate, at the same time as they may actively resist the influence of external interests in shaping it. As sociologists, we need to develop adequate explanations for simultaneous and cross-cutting processes and influences. In my study, this has been possible with the help of the specific, qualitative empirical material where I follow a limited number of actors in depth. In the final section, I will discuss three possible conditions that helped make it possible for Linda to dare to take an oppositional public stance.

### A New Future Horizon

Being in the art field entails a great deal of freedom in which pride of place is given to individual creativity. For those without the resources to orient and cope in this openness, however, a strong sense of uncertainty can prevail. Linda’s case offers examples of how difficult it can be for an actor who lacks adequate knowledge (i.e., cultural capital), or whose habitus is oriented towards a life in which material necessity determines priorities, to find one’s way into the artistic domain. With the art schools’ loosely structured curriculum and with the task of finding one’s creative expression falling on the individuals themselves, it becomes imperative to master the prevailing cultural codes. Linda’s failures in this regard have made it increasingly difficult for her to orient herself in the arts environment. Instead, she turned to another career more attuned to her habitus.

Yet, a *new future horizon* opened up for Linda when she made up her mind to enroll in the police academy, which meant that she could find a more relaxed freedom in her relation to the game of art, as well as to the dominant rules of social interaction at the art school itself. The new horizon of her future helped to lessen the social pressures of having to fit into her present environment. Thanks to this fact and to the friendships she made outside school, Linda became less vulnerable to criticism from her teachers and fellow art students. This newfound reflexive distance then provided her with the strength to enable her to rise up and challenge her confinement to a marginal position as a deviant.

The ability to depart from the old and break new ground is always based on hopes that have a certain

foundation in reality: although crises can produce a sense that the cards in the game have been shuffled anew for a new deal, one’s winnings and losses are always carried forward to the next round. This can be considered the bodily character of social experience, the embodiment of social and cultural experiences in one’s habitus, which holds important consequences for one’s sense of self-confidence and thus one’s ability to raise one’s voice in opposition to make a different future (cf. Bourdieu 1988; 2008). Linda’s life choices and attitude towards the art field provide an illustration of the kind of fragility from which those in the first and second generation moving up the “class ladder” typically suffer (cf. Bettie 2003). In Linda’s case, the result was that she was left with a distinct feeling of deficiency, which prompted a yearning for recognition.

### Change-Enabling Capital

It is within the habitus, where past and present practices are embodied, that attitudes towards the future are formed. It occurs with the convergence of two forces as the pragmatic orientation of one’s sense of reality meets the reality-transcending pull of one’s sense of possibility, producing an orientation towards the future. It was Musil (1995:12) who came close to expressing this perspective when he proclaimed that “[i]t is reality that awakens possibilities, and nothing would be more perverse than to deny it.” In order to be able to take the initiative in her quest to be noticed and acknowledged, Linda first needed an emotional safety net—a sort of venture capital—to fall back on in case her attempts failed. That is what a new future horizon and new friendships offered her. In addition, Linda also needed sufficient cultural capital.

Despite the negative experiences during her time in the arts program, Linda had evidently accumulated enough *cultural capital* to know *how, where, and in what form* resistance to the prevailing codes could be staged. This is the second factor to which I want to draw attention with regard to enabling Linda’s performance. The artistic training that she received helped her to both learn the craft of art and to understand the norms of the field of culture production. For her performance on the opening night of the student exhibition, Linda resorted to artistic tools and means of expression that were neither material, nor marketable, the obverse of those characteristics that she had previously valued.

The artistic forms that Linda utilized for her resistance might also be viewed as a prerequisite for her parody. Thanks to its being staged as a performance, her oppositional play, despite the seriousness of its undertones, was shielded in a certain way by being presented and understood as “only a game,” much as Clifford Geertz (1973:450) showed in his classic essay on the Balinese cockfight. The illusory dimension present in all sport and in all art has the essential function of softening the consequences of these kinds of subtle symbolic criticisms of the hierarchies that operate in everyday life.

Even though my analysis has been developed and made at the micro-sociological level, it has similarities with Bourdieu’s approach and assumptions at the more macro-sociological level. Linda’s example shows that attempts to change repressive situations take place when the marginalized succeed in acquiring some of the cultural capital held by institutions, while going on to deploy this capital as an instrument to undermine the symbolic power derived from these very resources.

### A Scene and an Audience Beyond the Ordinary

Linda’s attempt to act independently at the exhibition involved improvisational opportunities that required a certain technical mastery of art as a craft, as well as knowledge of the art field’s rules and norms. Yet, as so many cultural analysts have shown (e.g., Huizinga 1955; Geertz 1973; Bourdieu 1988; Butler 1997), the rule-breaking and the improvisation enacted through this kind of play also require for their actualization a physical scene beyond the space of the everyday. It, too, affords the kind of distance necessary for an act to have effects as an intervention in the struggle about redefining dominant beliefs and values. The opening night of the student exhibition offered Linda such a place for her performance, a scene beyond the ordinary where she succeeded in changing the way other art students viewed her. At the same time, and in the same space, she found a new audience that helped her to have the courage to break with her inhibitions within the art school. In other words, the visitors at the exhibition were not only proffered home-baked cookies, but something of Linda’s new self as well.

### Epilogue

By way of conclusion, Linda’s story illustrates the fact that the outcome of the social game in the art field, as well as in all other fields of human practice, can never be predetermined ahead of time. There is always some room for play that can enable a new sense of possibility to emerge, creating a scope for individual maneuvering in social situations. Neither the games called forth in the field of art, nor

Linda’s life trajectory can be understood without account of the unforeseeable possibilities in both.

I have pointed to the significance of the dynamic in the art performance itself, but I would also draw attention to the fact that Linda’s performance was more than a longing for others’ respect, or parody of the power relationships of the art institution. The performance was also a source of durable, creative pleasure. In her preparation, Linda gained a stronger, more consistent sense of self-respect with regard to the craft of art and, in this way, restored her love for artistic expression.

So, to put it in Musil’s terms, within the limits of reality, Linda recovered a sense of possibility for future art practice that had been overtaken by feelings of insecurity produced by her experience at the art school. In this paradoxical way, both social reproduction and social change occurred simultaneously. Later, in 2011, when describing how she found herself, more or less unconsciously, transferring her pleasure in art to her first-born daughter, three-year old Maria, she noted:

I can see that Maria has a good eye for what’s around her. She can analyze paintings really impressively. We were sitting at the table, just now before you came, and she said: “Mommy, look at this apple! Do you see how it looks?” And I, too, sometimes say to her: “Look how nice this is, Maria; what a beautiful flower! I’d like to paint a picture of it.” (Linda, 2011)

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## Collective Patterns of Teachers' Action: A Documentary Interpretation of the Construction of Habitual Knowledge

**Abstract** This article presents a research project carried out by academic researchers and practicing teachers who made an attempt to reconstruct the complexity of school reality and understand the cultural activity of the teams of teachers and students. We gained entirely different pictures of schools, filled with a unique language and symbols, specific organizational culture, exceptional sensitivity, methods of expressing understanding or disapproval of particular ways of perceiving in the school reality. A particular asset of our method of cultural studies is sensitivity to varieties of local determinants, focusing attention on conjunctive action patterns and cooperation with social actors.

**Keywords** Cultural Practices; Conjunctive/Habitual Knowledge; Patterns of Orientation; Teachers; School; Documentary Interpretation

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School reality covers a complex whole determined by the course of events, space dynamics, and complexity of social relations. A school in its activity creates a unique organizational culture, informal action patterns which differentiates it from other schools despite formal and organizational similarities (Deal and Peterson 2009; Clandinin et al. 2010). In the language of the documentary method applied by us, we refer to *conjunctive* action patterns, as opposed to *communicative* action patterns. The communicative patterns are closely related to formal goals and they are relatively easy to describe. Whereas the conjunctive patterns are the result of everyday life and thus they are inscribed and included in the uniqueness of local context, history, and hands-on experience of a particular school, its location, size, and architecture, as well as in the work of teachers and other numerous elements, which make every single school one of a kind.

Conjunctive patterns can be described as the culture of a society, habitus, tacit knowledge, mentality of a team, cognitive habits, and *obviousness* in perception and evaluation of the reality shared by a particular team. Individual, as well as collective statements of the teachers enabled us to compare their personal strategies of the school reality trouble-shooting with collective orientation patterns, which are activated during conversation and the common search for solutions. We observed that individual strategies are not directly translated to group action patterns and there are various ways of combining individual and group practices. At the end, we gained two entirely different pictures of schools, filled with a unique language and symbols, specific organizational culture, exceptional sensitivity, methods of expressing

understanding or disapproval for particular ways of perceiving the school reality. At the same time, we noticed some individual discrepancies, different acting strategies, and unique individual motives. We were interested in relations between collective commitments of a group of teachers and remaining individual action. We also observed to what extent the collective patterns of orientations and actions are hard-and-fast.

### Conjunctive Patterns in Teachers' Actions

Since the teachers work for one particular school, they tend to share common experiences and work out similar patterns of orientation, which are characteristic for a given school. A category of orientation *pattern* is both theoretically and empirically rooted in the documentary method of social research (Bohn-sack 2003; Krzychała 2004). This method specifies relatively stable, cognitive, and emotional perspectives, which on the one hand stem from the interpretation of everyday activity, and on the other is the basis for interpreting new experience. The category of orientation pattern assumes mutual reference of reality and system of meanings: the experience of being a teacher affects the orientation pattern and also acquired sources of conjunctive knowledge that determine style and fluency of a teacher's work.

In the simple way, orientation pattern can be defined as pragmatic knowledge of acting and knowledge in acting. Those two levels of knowledge "of" and knowledge "in" acting are analytically described as *communicative* knowledge and *conjunctive* knowledge. Describing and reconstructing this knowledge is not, however, that obvious. When we ask pupils

and teachers “What is going on at school?” or “What do you do at school?” we receive quite similar and schematic responses referring directly to commonly recognized functions of a school. From those responses we can draw the conclusion that teachers at school do whatever should be done at schools. They basically do similar things. This level of knowledge of acting is defined as *communicative* knowledge. “Communicative” rules are closely combined with formal objectives and they are relatively easy to *describe* and *express* (hence the term “communicative”). Nevertheless, we carry out similar tasks in a different style, in a different atmosphere, with different fluency and efficiency—in our own specific way, which is defined by conjunctive knowledge “in” acting. It stems from everyday practice, experience, direct relations, and numerous hours spent together. It is *inscribed* and *included* in the character of local and hands-on experiences of a given school, particular team of the teachers and pupils’ community (hence the term “conjunctive”). We can say that conjunctive code of practice comes down to a question “How do you do whatever you do at school?” or “How do you handle this, whatever happens at school?” These questions will not help us too much since conjunctive orientation patterns fall outside direct descriptions, they cannot be asked just like that. They are rather characteristic for intuition, non-verbal communication, feeling, a sense that something works for us, that something goes well, smoothly, or that something simply appeals to us. They can also be defined as the “culture” of a community, “mentality” of a group, cognitive “habit,” and “obviousness” in perception and assessment of the reality shared by a given group. These patterns decide, if someone who does not share our everyday experience, may

know what is the formal role of school and what happens at school, but they fail to understand the essence of work in “our” school, joy and fears connected with “these” struggles, and challenges undertaken by teachers and pupils.

*Conjunctive knowledge*—let us refer to the sociology of knowledge by Karl Mannheim (1992)—means atheoretical knowledge inscribed in acting, based on practice, internalized also at the level of feelings and sensation of the body. Referring, on the other hand, to the theory of Pierre Bourdieu (2004), we can identify it with *habitus* of acting individuality, with a pragmatic outline of perception, with a physical and mental predisposition to specific, symbolic behavior, with *practical mastery*. “Practical mastery is built by the sense of place, the sense of case, the sense of borders which make an individual find their unique place” (Kopciewicz 2007:73). Conjunctive knowledge expressed by practical mastery is perceived as cognitive obviousness and even illusion. *Illusio*, as a practical belief of teachers, is the result of including “me in the world” and “the world in me” (Bourdieu 1988). Pierre Bourdieu wanted to express the gist of this practical faith and therefore he opened the theory of acting on the notion of game. *Illusio* would be responsible for such ways of being in the world, or rather “being busy” by the world, which means that an acting individual cannot act against something (s)he was conditioned to be the stakes of social game. *Illusio* combining individuals giving and taking in socializing game is what makes the thoughts and actions of both sides of this relation conditioned and modified without assistance of this what is privileged in scientific theory, for instance, without agency of re-

flection, understanding and awareness (we would call it communicative knowledge). *Illusio* may be called well-grounded illusion with reference to necessity, rightness, and importance of the undertaken actions by individuals participating in that game (Kopciewicz 2007:74).

And here comes the key question: Does conjunctive knowledge have only an individual character? Is it also a collectively shared resource of obviousness? We have no doubts whatsoever when it comes to communicative knowledge. Reference to the formally specified tasks of school “concerns” everyone. The roles are determined and focused on the major goal which is efficient functioning of the institution of education. Communicative patterns of functioning in school allow teachers to communicate and cooperate. But, are habitual patterns of teachers’ actions mostly of an individual nature? Is it true that they stem from individual discrepancies related to sex, professional experience, personality, and/or the biography of particular teachers? Do teachers carry out their tasks in their own specific way even though the tasks seem the same?

In our opinion, the answer is negative and confirmative at the same time. The teachers act in their own individual way and it is impossible to find uniform, conjunctive codes of practice. Nevertheless, the world of teachers is *social* to a greater extent than just through coexistence of all formal rules and standards at school. Acting at a given school becomes social experience *per se*, so it requires inter-subjective agreement, not only with the reference to formal objectives but also with the reference to informal rules of cooperation and rivalry.

Conjunctive patterns of orientation and activity are also of an inter-subjective nature: they are created in the course of social history and allow participation in a commonly shared world: “most of our thinking is rooted in collective activity” (Mannheim 1992:25) and even “intention of perception and possibility of comprehension on various positions depend on living space in which they are created and exist” (Mannheim 1992:232). Bourdieu shares this view when he emphasizes that *habitus* is formed by “objective social structure” (2004:45), determined by its place in social space, constantly improved by “commitment in social games” (Bourdieu 2004:62), confirmed by relations with other people. School is no exception—it is also such a space of experience. In this space, local rules, which “apply to” everyone, are crystallized. Due to similarity of experience of work in a certain school, actions are determined not only by the logic of the educational system but also by social logic of work in a certain team of teachers. Conjunctive patterns of action, even though they are not usually subject to reflection and they are not written down, shape the relations and ways of dealing with the problems. There is even more to that: they very often decide what is perceived as a problem, how such a problem is presented, and what we define as its solution. Conjunctive patterns of action are “local” wisdom and efficiency, and at the same time “local” habit, routine, and sometimes “local” limitation and a barrier to progress.

The task of understanding the school reality undertaken by our research team can be defined as an attempt to reconstruct conjunctive activity patterns of teachers, which are the outcome of the *experience of being a teacher* at this very school and not the other,

patterns dependent on personality and individual style of work, the nature of the pupils' community, certain significant tasks and the school's history, its location, size, building architecture, and many other elements which make each school unique. These patterns, although to some extent they include a fraction of general routine of "teacher's work" and "work at school" as such, basically have unique and individual character. This task becomes a challenging one as their reconstruction must exceed the level of overall and universal theoretical categories which we could generally adopt as a key to analyze any school.

Conjunctive action patterns at school are of rather constant character; they do not come from situation but from communication and direct impacts of teachers and pupils. Young people come to school and leave (on an everyday basis: from classroom to classroom, from a school of a lower level to a school of a higher level), and the specific climate and culture of the last school depends on expectations towards students (rights and duties: communicative patterns). On the one hand, students bring in the values and rules characteristic for the district in which a school is located (environmental conditions), and on the other—they are expressed without words by school facilities, as well as attitudes and the teachers' styles of work.

### Documentary Interpretation of the Action Patterns

In order to understand conjunctive (habitual) action patterns, we cannot settle for declarations, simple descriptions, and rational grounds. The majority of

conjunctive rules "in" acting stays beyond conscious motives. This perception marks key rules of empirical reconstruction of action patterns. In the field research, we do not expect ready-made explanations and direct justification from acting persons. We register various social practices and we analyze what action patterns are *documented* in these practices.

In interpretation, we use experience from work with the documentary method. This method directly refers to sociology of knowledge of Karl Mannheim (1992). We also drew from the achievements of the Chicago School (cf. Glaser and Straus 1967; Mead 1968; Blumer 1969; Goffman 1974), referring to its ethnomethodology and analysis of conversation (Sacks 1964; Garfinkel 1967). The documentary method is now being developed by Ralf Bohnsack and the team of co-working researchers (2003; 2004a; 2013; Krzychała 2004).

In practice, we carry out the task of documentary interpretation by observing free actions, in our case, actions of teachers at school. We have the greatest experience in analyzing group discussions when teachers freely talk about their school and its everyday problems (this method is different from the *focus group*). We also use one-to-one interviews, observations, and, more and more often, video records and photo documentary, as well as different types of documentation of the school reality (students' essays, teachers' notes, posts put on the boards, etc.). The common feature of all these methods is the fact that they allow us to register common actions of teachers in which they activate spontaneously the same conjunctive rules of communication as in everyday situations. It is not

an assumption taken *a priori*, but we interpret the same type of action that is registered, and we define meticulously if it is a self-propelled action or if it is a reaction to the presence of a researcher. Habitual action patterns are especially vivid when the group acts spontaneously.

Through comparative interpretation, we register communicative processes of the group, specifying from what positions they take actions, in what mental structures they perceive problems and solve them, how they see one another, how they interpret reactions of other people, and how they understand different social situations they participate in. In an analytical manner, we can differentiate here instrumental actions taken in order to produce certain effects and situational actions which stem from an intuitive reaction to a given situation. So, the question is what do teachers talk about and what do they do.

In all those cases, we ask parallel questions: can we notice repeatable patterns, which are independent on instrumental and situational conditions, in different actions. If a group communicates freely and its members understand one another, this communication is based on common resources of conjunctive knowledge. We are asking not *what* the participants are talking about, but *how* they run a discussion. We are asking not *what* the social actors are doing, but *how* they carry out particular tasks. We are interested in *modus operandi* of social activity, style, fluency, specific ways and frames in which problems are addressed, practical rules and obviousness accepted in action. After we identify and describe *habitus* of work of a given team of teachers,

we ask one more question: in what social experience a given action pattern was created, in what context it was practiced, improved, and consolidated. A key task of documentary interpretation is a reconstruction of **social experience** which lies at the grounds of analyzed resources of atheoretical knowledge. "Genetic analysis defined generally as documentary interpretation aims at the processual reconstruction of structure of the course of social experience, at the reconstruction of habitus and modus operandi, recognized as both habitual and incorporated forms of action, and as a basis and condition of action practice as such" (Bohnsack 2004b:21). The process of gaining conjunctive knowledge in the course of experience explains at the same time the logic of defined social practice unexhausted in subjectively declared *motives to*. In that way, we exceed duality of dispute over objectivity and subjectivity of individual (or group/collective) social orientations. Experience lying at the ground of a certain type of atheoretical knowledge is objective, independent on will and communicative intention of our respondents. The space of experience does not depend on the respondents' intention.

We would like to mention one more feature of documentary interpretation. Reconstruction of given social spaces of experience does not come down to static description of a "field" and calculating "properties." It is most of all a reconstruction of process, history, origin, mode, and way of acquiring given orientation patterns in the stream of experience. Documentary interpretation does not concentrate on isolated, abstract, one-dimensional aspects of socialization. It is a multidimensional interpretation if we take into account simultaneous overlapping and modifying

numerous action patterns related to experience of gender, biographical experience, experience of common work in a given institution, experience of living in a given city, ethnicity, school socialization, family, and professional experience. In this way, in a multidimensional manner, we reconstruct experience of the teachers (cf. Krzychała 2007; Krzychała and Zamorska 2008; Zamorska 2008). In this interpretation, we make use of combining various methods of observation and registration of experience.

The examples we are going to present are drawn from two research projects carried out by the University of Lower Silesia together with teachers in 2007 and 2008 in various primary and grammar schools of the southern region of Poland (Krzychała 2007). We are going to refer to selected topics broached in group discussions and photo documentaries registered in three schools (to date, nine schools took part in two stages of the project). In each school, we first conducted a two-week observation among all students. We accompanied them during all formal and informal classes and activities. Then, we asked students to prepare photo documentation presenting "our" school. Each group was also involved in group discussions. Simultaneously, we observed teachers' interactions with this class; we had brief, impromptu talks with the teachers and more in-depth interviews. Comparison of individual statements and observations of groups of teachers were of special importance to us.

We also conducted two discussions of each group of teachers. We prepared them according to our own convention of evaluation workshops. Material registered at school was subjected to discussion of teach-

ers during their first meeting. We invited them to analyze the photo documentation prepared by "their" students and excerpts of group discussions which were held in "their" school. At that stage, teachers discussed the topic of the school reality, and proposed different ways of solving problems. These discussions were registered as well. Prior to evaluation workshops, we handed the teachers transcripts of their discussion, and during the next meeting, we analyzed action patterns of the group of teachers. At this level of evaluation, we did not focus our attention on the question "what is our school like," but on the process of constructing meanings as a group, so "how we interpret our school." In the middle of the workshops, the interviewer "withdrew," and the teachers continued to analyze the functioning of their team. They brought new contexts, asked new questions, and completed previous topics.

#### Example I: School as Training of "Puppies"

We will start the presentation of the first exemplary orientation patterns of teachers from reconstruction of social and cultural examples of teachers from a big-city school (this school has a working nickname "the school of rules"). During the first meeting, one of the teachers introducing us to the atmosphere of the school, said: "we are the school which has some standards." In the course of getting to know the character of this group of teachers and their way of addressing the school reality, we decided that the quoted sentence can be treated as a key to understand what is going on in that school.

In the teachers' opinions we found only two types of students. The first of them are kind of grammar

school students who can get involved in work, have knowledge, work well, are organized. The other group (minority) infringes the established borders and questions the established order.

**K11:** ((K: female teacher, M: male teacher)) We can see here clearly that at this stage of two years ago, so fun, laughs.

**K3:** Like puppies.

(...)

**K3:**                   └ There are three people, listen.

**K2:** No, but I rather generalize. Such terms as loose, trips, student pranks, lack of consequence.<sup>1</sup>

Grammar school students who meet the school requirements and those who failed to do so are subject to the same pattern of perceiving students who, at that age, cannot be partners in the everyday decision-making process.

The teachers work out the standards of their school. They create an order of the school reality introducing clear norms and rules for students, defining in this way the frames of roles taken by them. In the excerpt quoted above, K3 justifies the rightness of the style of collective action. Students are like *puppies* who would preferably spend their time playing and do not know yet what matters in life. Therefore, the adults' task, or even duty, is to make decisions for them and make sure that they fulfill tasks given to them.

Created collective order, focusing on fulfilling the principles of the curriculum referring to teaching and bringing up, requires commitment from

<sup>1</sup> For signs used in the transcript of group discussion, see: Appendix.

all teachers. In everyday meetings, during the exchange of remarks on current events, stories about school experience, traded gestures, the participants express understandable approaches and actions shared by them. An example of exchanging sort of instructions on how to deal efficiently with everyday situations could be the registered excerpt of the discussion between female teachers:

**K3:** I kicked up a big stink after a Polish lesson. It was in December. In December, they did something like this to me, they did something like this. I will tell how it was. It was about entering the classroom. They were somewhere else, taking pictures for some calendar, I mean boys. It was 2 days before holiday. And entered as a herd (whack). And I tell them, no boys, please leave the room, come back and knock. So you can imagine how they knocked (wham wham wham wham). Come in. And listen, they didn't come in. They didn't come inside, they sat on the stairs and I said OK. Now sit here, I call the headmaster, it happened to me for the first time, but I said I won't let go, I won't let them behave like this because of me and because of them, because it is all about them, they must know how to behave properly.

**K2:** No, listen, we have to be strict, because they really. I have a feeling they wait for such signals. And this is not.

**K5:**                   └ Yes, yes.

**K4:** Generally, each of them is like that, but when one shows them something

**K3:**                   └ Yes. Exactly.

**K2:**                   └ So we support it, and it is how it starts.

Presenting the incidents with students being late for the lesson, K3 is interpreting this event in line

with a collective orientation pattern, which in the case of this group of teachers is connected with the order described above based on rules determined by teachers and students' duty to respect them. Attitude towards law and consequences stemming from obeying or breaking the rules determines the whole group of teachers to such extent that they are not able to interpret that situation in any other way. The solution applied by K3, involving the use of force and domination, is the only way of acting available in the space of common orientation patterns. Each time when the topic of improper, that is, different than the standards of students' behavior specified by school, was raised in discussion, the teachers reminded each other about the necessity to execute commonly set requirements. We can say that they impose this collective order on one another.

We had an opportunity to participate in everyday life of this grammar school. We looked at this institution from different perspectives and through numerous questions we had. One of the ways of an insight into the school reality we employed was to ask students to prepare a photo documentary. We have seen great coherence and coexistence of the world of teachers and the world of students. Even the teachers have seen it: "The class has a number of problems, and they focused only on one of them." The students know very well what is important for the teachers and they are well aware of the work of teachers' strategies. During conversations and in the course of preparation of the photo documentary, they had exactly the same categories which are vital for the teachers, and they show their contrast. The teachers believe in the significance of acting together in line with the fixed rules. In the photo

documentaries, the students focused on showing the shortcomings of this persistence or its pointlessness. The teachers stress the importance of the distance which helps to retain authority: teacher chief, authority, leader, whose opinion students do not have courage to challenge, whereas students show the "leaders" in ridiculous situations and tell anecdotes connected with funny behaviors of the teachers who religiously obey the fixed order.

The teachers' opinion of *puppy-like*, immature behavior of the student "who has to be kept in reins" is reflected in the students' documentary. Next to the pictures that register a teachers' struggle to maintain discipline, there are also the pictures of places and situations in which students feel grown up to some extent. On the premises of the school, the following is the meeting with a person from building maintenance, who acts friendly and takes them seriously. There are also pictures with siblings and peers. Comments on the picture showing a couple hugging and smiling, they "say yes, yes, this is the biggest. They are dating and this is the only case so far in our class." The next pictures are of their football team, the boys drew each other moustaches.

Teachers, on the other hand, perceive adulthood of their students as another game that grown-ups should control. The ideas of children are taken with a pinch of salt, and to discipline children, or even set the boundaries to the game, is deeply ingrained in teachers' *habitus*.

We have registered many situations in which teachers give students ready-made methods to improve their behavior, and they want them to be applied im-

mediately. Personal commitment of the teachers and their readiness for sacrifice (as it was in case of the head teacher above) in solving difficult, conflict situations are the result of the fact that the teachers as the group aim at persistent observance of school standards. This collective orientation pattern is automatically activated in various situations different than set requirements of educational institutions. With their prompt and efficient reactions to failures in meeting the requirements or expectations of the school, the teachers aim at restoring the order and bringing the situation to the point "as it is supposed to be." In the course of group discussions and during individual interviews, the descriptions of students' problems are on the periphery, they occur only to prove the efficiency of teachers' reactions (e.g., X truants, but he doesn't any longer, Y was isolated by the peers and (s)he is sitting with his/her classmates taking part in group work). The teachers do not shy away from talking about hardships, they do not underestimate them nor hide them, but they respond to all attempts to question the school rules or disregard the duties. As a team, they have built a common, *possible world*, which they reckon the most appropriate in the context of their own school and problems they have to face every day. This orientation on common educational goals (school's standards), the experience of working out (in small groups, during conversations with a headmaster, during the school's staff meetings) different issues enable them to act and react to the appearing difficulties.

#### Example II: School as a Country Community

In our research, we have registered such discussions of the teachers for whom the awareness of

social marginality of student's social environment becomes one of the central elements of collective orientation. We are giving the example of a team of teachers from one of the schools in a village (dubbed as "village school"). The teacher answered the question of the interviewer: "What is the school you work at like?"

**K1:** It's a village school (hmm) and when it comes to a number of students, it gives a great opportunity of work for us and the children, I think so, and for sure (hmm) it allows to (hmm) know each student not only by his or her first and last name, but also their family situation. Therefore, no one is anonymous, we know about everything, and it surely makes our work easier.

Teacher K1 does not describe the school in the category of organizational structure; she gave no details concerning building's equipment or activities taken at the school. The central element here is the environmental identification ("village school"). The teachers work with a relatively small group of students. There is no anonymity, each student is well-known to teachers ("by his or her first and last name"). The teachers are familiar with the family situation of the students ("we also know their family situation"). Clarity and privacy of school society is valued as one of the basic assets of the village school ("very good working conditions for us and the students").

The further course of discussion allows us to add that the knowledge of students' situations does not only stem from a small number of students at school. The teachers have been familiar with the problems of the village community for some time

(even from “previous generations”), and those problems are the hardest to deal with while working with students (“it influences their opportunities for development”).

On the one hand, the teachers emphasize cultural diversities among students (“the environment is very diversified”), nevertheless, in their discourse, the opinion prevails that the environment of the students is homogenous (“village school fosters social uniformity”), marked with collective economic and cultural marginality and serious problems (“children from run-down territories—these are most of those children; there are plenty of children whose parents became alcoholic”). Decline is nothing new, it is a frequent mark of an environment reproduced from generation to generation (“parents live at such a low level, life standard, and the same situation is with children”). The decline also determines barriers which hinder full development of children and take advantage of education (“the children are neglected, not properly looked after, they have also limited access to some books”). This picture cannot be changed by the presence of other children (“from such families [uhh] intelligent people”) since those children who inherit this decline prevail. Exceptions to the “standards” are perceived as something unorthodox. The teachers feel sorry for the children as they know that their childhood is complicated and they have a more difficult educational start.

Struggling with the effects of financial and cultural poverty determines elementary frames of orientation for the team of teachers. Later in the discussion, the teachers describe meticulously the problems they are facing at their school. All those problems

stem from low economic and social status, as well as the lack of educational support from the parents. Below we are quoting two statements which followed the question: “What problems do you deal with at school?”

**K2:** Should it concern teaching or

**P:** [ both teaching and raising.

**M1:** I worry most about disproportions between the students, sometimes huge.

I teach language so it seems to me that in this area it is easiest to see the differences. Take, for example, the sixth grade. If someone is at the elementary level, right, he or she is about to finish this level. Somehow he or she moves to the next level more smoothly. Whereas some have only really basic knowledge and very poor vocabulary, and they know nothing (uhh). I've noticed those disproportions in all grades except for the youngest ones. Among those children, the level is rather balanced. And, for example, in fourth grade (uhh) or in fifth grade, and especially sixth grade

**K1:** [ big disproportions

**M1:** the most important.

And in the consequence, this is the biggest problem because it is work which is too diverse, for some, it is very easy, and some cannot master it at all, and learning tenses or intonation is far more complicated.

((voices from the hall))

**K1:** As far as I'm concerned (uhh), the big problem I'm dealing with is that it is so hard to arrange a trip. It is the question of money, of course. At this moment we have plenty of such projects which are subsidized, but before that a trip to a cinema or to a theatre was very rare because when organizing such a trip, we faced so many problems that some children could afford to go and

some couldn't. We wanted those kids to see something apart from ((the name of the village)) and the surroundings. It was also a shock for me. Another problem is of organizational nature. For example, when the children are supposed to bring something to handicrafts classes or arts, they are not able to bring or prepare everything. So, we cannot do everything that we planned during the lesson. When it comes to the problem with bringing up the children (mmm), the problems are quite typical (.) °anything comes to your mind°?

We have decided to quote here quite a big excerpt because it contains detailed descriptions of problems observed by the teachers. We can also see here important features of the collective orientation patterns. Sharing one orientation pattern does not mean that the teachers describe the school reality in the same way. Habitual structures of experience may be similar in spite of differences in topics the teachers talk about. We can observe “various” problems, but their “core” will be similar. The foreign language teacher sees the problems related to language learning. The other educator, teaching handicrafts and arts, draws attention to financial problems connected with organizing trips and taking part in her lessons. Those problems, however, have one thing in common: they focus on inequality and disproportions between possibilities of different students. Here, we can see the essential heuristic nature of documentary interpretation according to which it is not enough to answer the question, what our respondents talked about, but we are looking for the answer on how they present their views and how they respond to the statements of the fellow teachers. In the quoted statement, teacher K1 is confirming the observations teacher M1 gave, she is

sharing the same opinion on significant differences between the students. What is also characteristic for both statements is that they refer to the lowest end of the economic and cultural scale. Other teachers do not exist in their statements.

It is also worth stressing one more feature of collective *habitus*. The common pattern of orientation does not need to be experienced as the identification with collective standards. The collective patterns of orientation account for not only individual variations and shades (connected with, e.g., teaching different subjects), they do not even require direct contact (interaction) and common group action. The decisive part refers to the fact of sharing a structurally similar experience. The common pattern of orientation can be worked out by the teachers through a literally common commitment in creating one strategy of school activity as it was in the case of the “school of rules.” The teachers can also work separately in different schools or in their own classrooms; nevertheless, they will share a common experience. In our case, it is first the community at work in similar organizational conditions of the same or similar school (a lesson as a basic form of working with students, structuring schools into forms, small number of forms at school), but also the community of living in the same city or village. Both quoted statements show the individual experience of the teachers (“I worry about it most; as far as I'm concerned; it was a shock for me”) which involves them emotionally (worries, shocks) and influences their own professional identification. Common *habitus* can be experienced individually. Sharing a common pattern of orientation does not have to lead to taking common actions.

The statement of K1 ends with the question aimed at other teachers: "When it comes to the problem with bringing up the children (mmm), the problems are quite typical (.) °anything comes to your mind?" The statement begins with an indicative sentence ("when it comes to...") which is to present the problems with upbringing ("the problems are quite typical"). After describing the problems categorized as *teaching* problems, the teacher is trying to talk about problems with *bringing up the children*. Nothing, however, comes to her mind. In that case, she addresses the question to her fellow teachers (with a quiet voice), but there are no new proposals to discuss concerning that area of school. This is an empty topic for the teachers. Nevertheless, they are willing to talk again about the family situations of their students.

The teachers see the "village school" as a place which "creates very good conditions of work for us and children." Why is not this chance and knowledge of the family situation of each child ("by first and last name: are well-known to us") used? Exactly for the same reason: because it is a *village* school. And we are not talking here about the location of the building, but about where the teachers belong. In this structural way, the teachers also describe functioning within the environment of the students and their own actions. They do not see this paradox. We can talk here about "the blind spot," about getting entangled in their own cognitive perspective, if we quote Mannheim (1992:232) again "the intention of seeing and the possibility of understanding in various positions depends on a life space in which they were created and applied." Not only did those teachers grow up in the same

environment, they also accept local *habitus* as their own and group pattern of orientation, even though they have worked in the sector of education. One of the crucial elements of that orientation is (sub-conscious) transfer of rules which prevail in the village community of their school. The teacher has no requirements towards the students apart from those posed by the ethos of local environment. In their educational work, the teachers base on the capital which was taken from the socializing of primary groups (family and informal ties). The collective memory of social hierarchy of inhabitants is revealed here. The relations are regulated mostly by personal contacts and relatives (friends and foes). The teachers, as "friends," respond in the same way to their students' behavior.

The same refers to the rule of not interfering in other peoples' business, or even pretending that we do not see those problems (probably the same rule applies to making domestic violence and alcoholism taboo topics). The perceived problems can be easily explained ("there is some natural information that someone kicks another person"); if people can, they just walk by ("I try to be neutral and do not interfere because I think it is a better solution") and avoid direct confrontation ("so I have to be careful and don't provoke certain situations which...can cause such situations). So a paradoxical connection: the same social experience which allows teachers to "understand" children and create a small, non-anonymous community also stops the potential of critical social change. A school with educational requirements is alien to students and teachers, and students who have some educational aspirations have to count on themselves. Mini-

malist thinking in respect to education applies to students and teachers alike. Everyone must fulfill his/her own duties, the school works without any reservations and mainly because nobody (neither parents nor teachers) demands a lot when it comes to learning.

These observations also confirm findings from our other research in which students prepared photo documentation of their school. In the village schools with a similar social structure as described above, in the perspective of teachers, there are no borders between school and local environment. The school is not taken formally. The students do not identify themselves with their forms, but rather with social categories other than school environment. The teachers keep close relations depending on the fact whether they are relatives and close friends. For them, the experience of school is rather associated with commuting (rather long distances), and breaks and free time spent with their friends in the afternoon. In the big-city schools, students clearly draw the line between free time shared with their friends and their commitment to their form during the lessons. The school has its own rights which are restricted to its premises and regulate school life in the period of *being-at-school*. Students habitually feel that difference (just like students with whom they work methodically). They emphasize their commitment to a group as educational, yet formal, function of school (lessons, quizzes, portraits of teachers). This part of the documentary of the students of the "village school" did not appear at all. Educational logic is beyond comprehension and the school's requirements are invalid.

### Collective Concern (Taking Care of) About the Orientation Patterns

We would like to broach one more topic showing the process of shaping the collective orientation pattern. Apart from descriptions of group patterns of orientation, equally important is to find out how strong and valid these patterns are. Is it possible to move around different types of orientation? Can different patterns of educational actions coexist within one school? Do individual teachers have to adjust to the existing patterns? "Forces dominating in different aspects of the school reality affect professional *habitus* of teachers, and dispositions rooted in them open and close certain possibilities for teachers to act" (Kopciwicz 2007:109). Is critical questioning of the existing reality and opening new opportunities possible?

We are in a position here to give a clear answer to those extreme dilemmas. The material we gathered allows us to assume that the power binding habitual forces of orientation makes teachers stand up for the agreed order. Below we are giving two examples when certain teachers try to introduce a new concept to an existing discourse. This new notion is alien to the dominating pattern of orientation. In both cases, the registered discussion took place when commenting on the photo documentaries prepared by the students. In both cases, the students criticized the teachers' conduct, and they tried to tell the teachers about the experience of "alienation" at school (it was also confirmed by the author of the said documentaries). The excerpt quoted below comes from the meeting of teachers from the "school of rules," and it presents the reaction of the students to a disclosure of the official discourse of the school.

**K1:** Of course. When looking at it from a distance, I see it wasn't a big deal.

**K2:** No?

**K1:** It wasn't tasteless after all. This is a Horse—Chief, this is Miluś, nicely written, with care.

**K3:** | But it is at school and, I don't know, I guess at this age one shouldn't do such things.

**K2:** | But notice that they, as the girls said, that it was that moment when they could do it, and they were aware of that it is just

**K4:** | But they should know if a person wants to be involved in it, it can't be like that.

((voices overlap, impossible to understand))

**K3:** They are just not good students, they learn in such way that I should concentrate on each of them.

He must feel the situation. It can't be like that. No one is making it public.

**K1:** For me, personally, it is funny, they showed what they can do. There are teachers, there are people from maintenance who they can be friends with. In the meaning of this word, there is no distance and everything is made for fun, it is funny. We shouldn't take it so seriously. Psychological aspects of this picture, because it is not shown here. For me, personally, it is a joke. Let's laugh at it. We laugh at different situations, you should smile as well.

**K2:** Cool K1, but we don't know if Mr. X wants to be treated this way, to be called Miluś.

((voices overlap, impossible to understand))

**K3:** For me, it is not funny at all: "He is always angry and mean (uh), Heniu."

Isn't it? There is nothing to laugh about, I'm sorry?

**K5:** Exactly.

A category of joke and laughter introduced by K1 does not agree with other teachers. The idea that the said documentary does not have to be an illustration of breaking the rules, making fun of the teachers, and registering it was immediately criticized by other teachers. No one, even for a moment, makes an attempt to give up their own beliefs and accept the proposal offered by K1 to look at the school from students' perspective, as a joke. Categories of laughter and friendly relations with school staff and the students are not acceptable in the collective reality. They are immediately questioned and excluded from the course of conversation. From this piece of conversation we can see how committed some people are to retaining the existing order. In the following statements, they refer to the hierarchical division of roles, respectively connected with age and even loyalty towards the school ("making public things that we should keep to ourselves"). The aim is not entirely present in one's own arguments and talk with K1, but rather confirms unanimously how good the existing order is. The group does not start a discussion, does not consider alternative interpretation because they know how everything should look, and guard the sanctity of the existing rules. The rules agreed by the school's staff are the basis of teachers' consolidation, who referring to those agreements, give themselves and one another explanations connected with the behavior of certain members of the community. After K1 is "taken to task," she remains quiet and she does not speak for the rest of the meeting. During an individual interview, she explains to us her strategy:

Children know me from school not only as a teacher who teaches something, but also as a human being.

At that moment, children are more open and honest. Building relations is the basis of this job, if there are no relations, there is no way to do this job...If there is a problem, then we solve it with each of them individually, I say I finish the lessons at this time, come over and we can talk. And come over, there are no conversations in a group with 15 listeners, our conversations are face-to-face. And each of them is interesting and is an individual. Each child is a human being. They act differently in different situations. Their behavior is different in family home, in a group, or during individual conversation. Now, we have to either take everything together into account or be able to separate it.

We can clearly see here what students at that school want: they want friendly relations, kindness, and trust. They also want to be treated seriously and individually. Moreover, different ways of solving problems appear. Instead of generally binding principles, such as: rules, their observance, consequences, there are: honesty/credibility, explanations from a students' side, and some solutions agreed by a student and a teacher of this particular situation. The teacher is the only one to abandon the collective mode of thinking. Looking at her position among other teachers, we have noticed that she is allowed a lot of leeway. The uniqueness that she brings to the collective mode of thinking is associated with the way of interpreting situations taking place at school. However, the frames of common vision of school remain intact—it is an institution which efficiently fulfills educational requirements. K1 has a different set of reactions to everyday problems, but she meets the expectations. Quickly and efficiently she gets rid of obstacles in the process of teaching, and she takes care to meet the high standards of the school.

We have noticed that in the group mode of thinking it is possible to work out *illusio*. From this angle, we are going to take a look at another discussion registered in the "school of rules." The topic of the conversation was a previous discussion on the photo documentary. The teachers analyzed the stories they had told before in the perspective of new questions. We wanted to find out how the teachers would deal with confrontational questions. Is persistence in obeying the established rules the only way to regulate school life? What are they missing when they concentrate only on disciplining students?

In the discussion, we could observe stages of reflection over collectively established patterns of orientation. Reluctance to undermine or even question the established order was so strong that the teachers became defensive when we only made an attempt to negate them: "we meet the standards of upbringing, they know what is expected from them, it must be like that. This is what upbringing is about." In the course of discussion, however, they started to notice other ways of interpretation of the situations at school. They gave the example of a school trip to one school in Italy. Reminiscing about different events (disco, stay at the hotel), they emphasized many surprising differences in conduct of Polish and Italian teachers. The clash of freedom and friendliness of the Italians where teachers and students had a good time together and rested with strictness versus the constant need for control of Polish teachers made them analyze spontaneously the effects of different styles of upbringing.

And here we can see a paradox. The teachers are aware that the relations with students can be built in

a different way. What is more, they see flaws of their collective action pattern. They also give the example of numerous everyday situations that contradict the rationale of *illusio*. Such an example could be the repeated statement that kids must be looked after all the time because they are not able to make smart choices for themselves, but at the same time they talk about situations in which students surprised them with their mature and reasonable behavior. We expected that at this point they would start to change the orientation. Nevertheless, it was a premature expectation. Although they were aware of shortcomings of their strategies and discrepancies between reality and the argumentation of their own beliefs, they retained the established order which regulates their roles related to their tasks. Why? It was purely a communicative discussion; conjunctive fluency remained intact. The teachers did not test this new strategy and they did not experience it in the spontaneous context. At the end of the second discussion, they tried to collect their findings and reflections on themselves. They raised issues that go beyond their tendency to concentrate on the rules and consequences of obeying those rules.

And I will concentrate more on individuality, and I'll try to get to each student and not just look at do's and don'ts. Besides, we, as teachers, often...we rarely talk about even those chairs or papers. It works very well, but we have to remind ourselves all the time, repeat, and enforce it. If I repeat it, it will work.

In this excerpt, there are two orientation patterns. First is connected with looking at the school reality, with taking a single student into account. In the course of discussion, the teachers several times got

back to the topic of relations with students, and tried to get an insight into a students' world. It helped them form new observations: "As a teacher, I have such reflection. I really look from the perspective of school standards rather than the individual needs of a student, and it is a mistake." The interlocutors see the new perspective in thinking about the school reality. But, the attempt to translate those theoretical statements to everyday life triggers the existing pattern of orientation and well-established solutions (repeating, reprimanding, demanding). Using new alternative solutions is more complex and must be worked out at the level of predisposition and practical fluency.

### Conclusion

In the examples from our research, presented in an abridged version, one can see the complexity of everything that creates the school culture and gives it a unique and a one-of-a-kind character. In the analysis of empirical material, we focused on reconstruction of the orientation patterns of the teachers, process of their creation, and possible change. Reconstruction of the conjunctive knowledge which teachers use allows us to understand what is going on in a given school, character of applied practices, and relations between various everyday incidents. Uniqueness of the methods of work and atmosphere of a particular school are not the only outcomes of teacher and student meetings and tasks given to educational institutions.

Both individual and community need a commonly created, possible world with established social order within which beliefs, orientations, and actions

of particular persons are understood. At the same time, the collective mode of thinking about the world and ourselves is crucial for creating the identity of a given social group. Jerome Bruner coined the term "folk psychology" (or *folk social sense, common sense*) which includes some predictable models of life, normative descriptions of the world, and some common practices shared by the members of a given community. We comprehend ourselves and the world within the borders of *folk psychology* of a given community we perceive as "us" (Bruner 1997:33-36). Reconstruction of conjunctive patterns of orientation and action is impossible without understanding the *folk psychology* of the community in which the school works. The experience of being an inhabitant of a village ("village school") brings in other knowledge, beliefs, and the sense of obviousness in understanding the school and one's role in that school. This knowledge is different from experience of life in a big city ("school of rules"). Local context of community work permeated also with the personal story of each teacher. In the everyday work of each team, we could observe some

kind of mediations between common *illusio* and individual ways of interpreting events and strategies of actions. We saw the power and rigidity of collective patterns of orientation, determining understanding of education and the schedule of work accepted by the group. Each team worked according to its own order, which became a censor of perceiving the school's reality by given people.

The method of double discussion gave the teachers a space for discussion over a collective and so far unquestionable obviousness. In a spontaneous way appeared very important questions about the meaning of the recognized strategy of actions and the need to refer them to, or even confront them with, personal experiences. The research we conducted in each school lasted two months. It is not enough to observe all the changes taking place in the collective patterns of orientation. However, the process of reflection and working out obviousness shared by a group has led us to new questions about conditions of possible changes (working out) with the collective patterns of orientation.

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## Appendix: Signs used in the transcript of group discussion.

It can't be said	
└ so exactly	The beginning of overlapping sequence uttered simultaneously
<u>emphasize</u>	The text presented with raised voice, stressed
°Maybe°	The text presented with quiet voice
(5)	5-second pause
(to you)	The text is not clear, probably this word was used
((yawning))	Comments, remarks on non-verbal gestures
P	Interviewer
K1, K2...	Female teachers
M1, M2...	Male teachers

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## Role-Identity Dynamics in Care and Household Work: Strategies of Polish Workers in Naples, Italy

**Abstract** Migrant household work is a global phenomenon present across geographical contexts. Employing a household worker, especially a worker coming from another country, is a symbolically complex situation that requires interpretive work and negotiations of role-identities from interactional partners. There has been much debate about how to define the relationship between a domestic and/or care worker and her/his employer. It has been argued that the preferred definition by workers themselves is one that centers on work (Anderson 2000). In contrast, “fictive kinship” appears to be the employers’ almost universal strategy, which is usually portrayed in the literature as an exploitative practice (Romero 1992; Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Constable 2003; Lan 2006; McDowell 2006).

In this paper, I offer a conceptual grid that consists of hierarchy/equality and distance/intimacy dimensions to examine complex relationships between domestic workers and employers, elaborated during the case study of Polish migrant domestic workers in Naples in 2004. Within the investigated site some elements of the traditional model of service culture have persisted. Migrant workers who come from a post-communist country, and who have rather egalitarian attitudes, have been confronted with these elements. The result has been a clash of definitions over the household worker’s role. Polish women developed two contrasting ways of experiencing and coping with it.

The strategies identified in the workers’ narratives are professionalization and personalization, and they refer respectively to emphasizing the professional and the personal dimensions in relations with the employer. They manifest themselves on the levels of action (as narrated by the workers) and narrative construction. The strategies on the level of action aim to shift the situation in a desired direction; the narrative strategies aim at framing the situation in a desired way within a narrative. The text underlines the diversity of migrant response and tentatively assesses the output of different strategies.

**Keywords** Household Work; Poland; Italy; Women Migrants; Work Relations; Symbolic Interactionism; Role-Identity

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One of the key topics in the literature on domestic work is the problem of power and resistance (cf. Groves and Chang 1999), and more generally, the issue of relationships between the employers and household workers. This paper, as much of the literature, focuses on the relations between household workers and their employers, making the case study of Polish women working in Naples a starting point. Data gathered during the research, and especially workers’ narratives, reveals tensions that emerge when the different ways in which household roles are perceived clash with one another. In some cases, interviewees reported, for example, reading books by the workers as problematic for the employers or wearing a uniform (an apron) as problematic for the workers themselves. Some employers, as it transpires from workers’ narratives, were declaring cordiality, whereas others strong distance and hierarchy. Most of my interviewees did not accept either of the two models (called here fictive kinship and overt degradation). What I found out and present in this paper

were the two fundamental ways of experiencing and acting in an oppressive work environment. I will describe the opposing strategies of domestic workers confronted with the oppressive situation: professionalization and personalization; that is, respectively, emphasizing either the professional or the personal dimensions in their relations with the employer.

Throughout the process of analysis, I have found the framework of symbolic interactionist role-identity theory an apt tool to describe what is happening within the data. I analyze the relationships by placing them on a grid of two dimensions: hierarchy/equality and distance/intimacy. I apply the same grid to review existing concepts of relationships and to highlight similarities, as well as disparities with my approach.

This article contributes to our understanding of the everyday experience of domestic work by systematic analysis of identity strategies in oppressive situations. While there is emphasis in most of the literature on

resistance and strategies, I argue that strategies make part of general ways of experiencing the situation.

The first section discusses the research context of Polish migrant women undertaking domestic jobs in Naples; the second section is devoted to methods of my study; in the third section, I offer a concise description of the phenomenon in study, based on survey data; the fourth section discusses the relevant literature and the theoretical framework; the fifth section depicts the dynamics of defining a domestic worker, one that consists of description of the employer's strategies reconstructed from workers' narratives (fictive kinship, overt degradation, friendly professionalism), and the workers' responses to oppressive employers strategies, namely, professionalization and personalization. The final section concludes that treating the relationships with employers as "game" rather than "drama" or "ritual" is a more safe strategy within the investigated context of oppressive work situation. Throughout this paper, I focus on the workers' perspective as the only one included in this study, and whenever I recount employers' actions, these are reconstructed from the workers' narrative and represent the workers' points of view.

### Polish Women on the Move: Migration and Domestic Work

Migrations of Polish women to Italy to undertake domestic jobs form part of the global trend towards the increasing feminization of labor migration (cf. Momsen 1999; Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Willis and Yeoh 2000; Sharpe 2001; Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2004). According to official Italian data, females constitute 70% of all Polish immigrants, and nearly 80% in the

province of Naples (ISTAT 2008). Economic migrations from Poland to Italy in form of tourist trips that also had a political context (especially after martial law was introduced in Poland in 1981) are charted from 1971, with numbers exceeding popular destinations like the U.S.A., France, and the UK in some of the years (Stola 2010:488-489), and they have continued after the end of the Polish People's Republic in 1989 (Iglicka, Barsotti, and Lecchini 1999; Iglicka 2001:42-49). The research reported in this paper, undertaken between March and October 2004, was done in a period marked by the Poland's accession to the EU (May 01, 2004), which meant a change of migrant status of Polish people in Italy, who after the accession no longer had to apply for the stay permit (see more in the section on professionalization strategy [p. 102]). However, the institutional change, as Näre (2012) and Kaczmarczyk's (2008) studies demonstrate, migration to Italy does not seem to have been affected by Poland's accession to the EU in May 2004 as the traits discerned in the 1990s and during my study in 2004 have broadly continued. The recent Italian data reveals that in 2011, there were 109,018 registered Polish citizens in Italy, which makes Poles the ninth biggest nationality group registered in Italy (ISTAT 2014). According to the Polish estimates, there are currently 97,000 Poles residing in Italy (GUS 2013).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Poland is a country with long emigration traditions (Iglicka 2001). Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 was followed by high levels of emigration to those countries that opened their labor markets, mainly the United Kingdom and Ireland (Kepińska 2007; Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008). After the accession, migration became a strategy of those people who were younger, better educated, and who came from the larger cities (Kaczmarczyk 2008), whereas throughout the 1990s and until early 2000, it continued to be a choice of the older, less educated, and those who come from small cities or rural areas (Okólski 2001), but for Italy these traits of migrants from Poland persisted after the accession (Kaczmarczyk 2008).

The global trend towards the increasing feminization of labor migration in Italy can be charted from the late 1970s (Miranda 2002). In the 1960s, the female quota was around 30%, in 2000 and 2008, it was 50% (Marchetti 2001; ISTAT 2008). The rising proportion of women in labor migration is caused by, among other factors, the rising demand for domestic service in the receiving countries, as this sector is the main employment area of migrant women (Marchetti 2001; Miranda 2002; Vianello 2014).<sup>2</sup>

The institution of domestic help has a long history in Italy, and is part and parcel of Italian social life. Though the domestic sector is characterized by a low level of registration, even official figures prove its significance. According to the Italian social insurance agency (INPS, Istituto Nazionale di Previdenza Sociale), in 2012, there were 999,000 persons registered as household workers, over 80% of whom were migrants, and it is estimated that there may be in fact twice that number if unregistered domes-

<sup>2</sup> Italy, a country which has a long and rich tradition of emigration, has become an immigration country since the 1970s (Pugliese 2002a). At the beginning of 2011, there were four and a half million registered migrants in Italy, over eight percent of Italian population (ISTAT 2014). Countries like Italy, Greece, and Spain share some characteristics: the emigration tradition, the demand mainly for seasonal workers in agriculture and domestic services, unemployment among the local population, and the presence of an extensive *economia sommersa*—an "underground economy" (cf. Pugliese 2002b; Boffo 2003; Reyneri 2004; also referred to as "Mediterranean migration model" [King 1993]). Those phenomena that are linked to the Mediterranean migration model are particularly applicable to the southern part of Italy, which is known as the Mezzogiorno (cf. Putnam, Leonardi, and Nannetti 1993), and, moreover, the above-mentioned characteristics are particularly true of Naples, where one can also observe an exceptionally high percentage of unregistered migrations (Näre 2012). Italy is regarded as a pioneer of immigration trends in Southern Europe, namely, in the process of forming "the Mediterranean migration model" (King 1993). A poor and rather non-restrictive immigration policy is one of the reasons that make Italy an attractive target country (Anthias and Lazardis 2000; Näre 2012).

tic workers are also included (UIL website 2014). There also exist in Italy elaborate legal regulations regarding work contracts with a household worker<sup>3</sup>; the presence of active domestic workers' trade unions should also be noted (Andall 2000).<sup>4</sup>

From among the factors accounting for an increase in the demand for household workers in Italy, three can be emphasized. Firstly, the transformation of the Italian family model: the rising employment rate of women (Anthias and Lazardis 2000), and the growing share of nuclear families, which translates into growing share of households composed of elderly people (Scevi 2003). Secondly, the aging of Italian society, which has resulted in an increasing number of dependent persons (who are especially advanced in age) (Scevi 2003; Nanni and Salvatori 2004). Thirdly, the deficiencies of the public sector when it comes to attending to the needs of dependent persons have also been emphasized (Nanni and Salvatori 2004; Sciortino 2004).

Besides the above-mentioned socio-demographic conditions, some authors draw attention to the status dimension of employing a domestic worker, particularly in households where the woman employer undertakes no professional activity (Anderson 2000:14). Employing a household worker would then be a means of creating and reproducing the family prestige. The status dimension is particularly important in the context of Southern

<sup>3</sup> The basic regulations are contained in the Civil Code from 1942, Act on the protection of domestic employment from 1958, collective labor agreement from 2001 (Ghera 2003:349), and very recent new collective labor agreement (July 2013).

<sup>4</sup> A detailed discussion of the legal regulations concerning the work of domestic workers in Italy by Jacek Korniak is included in an appendix to a paper written by Kordasiewicz (2005).

Italy (cf. Miranda 2002; Zanfrini 2004:189). In many areas, the traditional culture of service has persisted, which manifests itself, for instance, in the fact that in some households domestic workers wear a uniform—a special apron. Apart from its practical advantage, it also plays a representative role and visually marks an identity that is different from those of the other household members.

### Research Methods and Researcher's Role

While undertaking research on Polish women working in Naples (from March to October 2004), I used in-depth interviews, observations, and a self-administered survey. I collected 220 surveys (these had been distributed at church masses held in Polish in three churches in Naples) and conducted 14 in-depth interviews. Interviews and surveys were prepared and conducted in Polish by the author, who is also of Polish nationality. Qualitative data was analyzed with the assistance of the ATLAS.ti software.

The three methods I have used: observations, in-depth interviews, and surveys allowed me to target three different populations, and were biased in their own ways. I have gathered ethnographic insights about the migrant center milieu, biographic/migrant career information on migrants inside and outside that group, and some general data on the population attending Polish masses, not necessarily making part of the migrant center, and not necessarily representative to the whole Polish population in Naples, as church non-goers tend to be younger and less feminized population. Despite this bias, in the absence of knowledge of total population, the survey allowed me to reach out to the Polish pop-

ulation out of my qualitative sample, include, and learn about migration patterns of more people, including, for example, men, and it enabled me to have a bigger, however biased, picture of the Polish migrants in Naples. In this paper, I will concentrate on data stemming from in-depth interviews, I will also provide some general characteristics stemming from the survey data in the next section.

Throughout my research, I have found the constant comparative method, one of the chief principals of grounded theory strategy, useful (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967:101-116; Strauss 1987:82-108; Konecki 2000:60-76). I have included and consequently compared living-in and out domestic workers, younger and older migrants, women participating in the migrant center activities and those outside migrant center. My sample was a diverse group: the age of the participants at the moment of the interview ranged from 22 to 54, the age at the first arrival to Italy ranged from 18 to 48. The length of stay of the subjects differed from 7 to 136 months; the year of their first coming to work in Italy was between 1993-2004. They were coming from rural parts of Poland (7), cities below 100,000 inhabitants (5), and two from cities over 100,000 inhabitants. Most of the interviewed subjects were coming from south-eastern parts of Poland (11), most had secondary education, and all of them were working in domestic and care sector as cleaners, housekeepers, nannies, or elderly care workers in Naples and its whereabouts.

At the beginning it was difficult for me to find Polish women in Naples. Natives commonly mistook Ukrainian women—who were more and more present in Italy at that time (cf. Vianello 2014)—for Polish

migrants, and their hints were misleading. Finally, I had managed to contact the milieu concentrated around the Polish church and one of the migrant associations. I also searched for contacts outside this milieu to have a more diversified sample. The interviews were conducted in the Polish migrant center, in parks, at interviewees' homes (in case of living-out domestic workers). I have participated in a twice-a-week gatherings, during the household workers' days-off, namely, Thursday and Sunday, including the festivities, I have participated in tending for the place of gathering, bringing in food for common meals, and helped in adding new books to the list of the center's book collection. I was an overt observer, taking notes and pictures from time to time. I was tending to be a "marginal native" in order to have the access to the research site, but at the same time remain independent (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I have helped one woman who was out of job and consequently lived at my flat for a month, and I was asked to prepare a short information paper on how to study in Italy, which was published in the parochial/migrant bulletin.

As a Polish woman, I found myself in a favorable position in regard to access to the group. However, my situation as an international student on a scholarship vividly contrasted with the economic hardship of the members of the investigated milieu. As I observed, my attitude towards the group studied could be referred to as "stratocentric," *per analogiam* to "ethnocentric." I have discovered to be evaluating the migrant women's behaviors according to my social background, for example, silently criticizing some of them for not studying the language of the host country, which in my view was one of the few possible

benefits from the stay in Italy available for them (cf. Kordasiewicz 2005; Bobek and Salamońska 2010).

Another tension point between the subjects and myself was that in Naples there was a widespread opinion on Polish women working there as either household workers or prostitutes. Very often in my interactions with natives (outside the university, and when I was not conducting my research) it was assumed by the Italians that I worked there as a domestic worker. Each time I engaged in explaining what my position was, therefore aligning with the aspect of my identity that clearly distinguished me from the subjects. My research then relied on what Clifford Geertz (2001) called "anthropological irony": the constantly negotiated illusion between the researcher and the members of the studied group that they can be partners—in the research process and in life.<sup>5</sup>

### The Characteristics of Polish Migrants in Naples

The self-administered survey conducted in the course of my research revealed a high female predominance (89%). As far as the degree of regularity is concerned, 30% of respondents declared they had obtained a "stay permit" (*permesso di soggiorno*), and 23% said they had a work permit. Respondents of the survey come from small centers or rural parts of the country: besides young female

<sup>5</sup> Despite the "anthropological irony," I have also made friends with some of the subjects, which confirms the fusion of research and private life in the anthropological practice, stressed by the same Geertz (2001:39): "[t]he outstanding characteristic of anthropological fieldwork as a form of conduct is that...it forces this [occupational and extra-occupational spheres] fusion. One must find one's friends among one's informants and one's informants among one's friends."

migrants there is also a middle-age group (48% are over 40 years old); they have been educated up to the secondary level, and have little experience in the labor market. In most cases, I was dealing with incomplete migrations that are characteristic of the current Polish social landscape: family bonds in Poland remain strong, therefore the money earned as a result of emigration is remitted in order to maintain households in Poland; visits back home to see the family are made relatively often; and a majority of people do not envisage staying in Italy for good (cf. Okólski 2001).

The common occurrence of the two forms of work—live-in, which is blended with living together with a family or a person for whom the household worker works, and live-out, which means that the domestic workers live on their own and work in one or, more frequently, several houses—in the domestic service sector is emphasized in the literature (Momsen 1999:13-14; Anderson 2000). Accordingly, I have found two basic types of domestic work in Naples: live-in work, which is also termed “around the clock” work, “working day and night” (*a giorno e notte* and *a venti quattro ore* in Italian), as well as live-out work, termed “by the hour” (*a ore* in Italian).<sup>6</sup> Persons working “by the hour” are most often employed to do the cleaning, and less frequently combine this activity with care work. These two types of tasks are most often combined in a “day and night” working situ-

ation. Out of the 14 participants of in-depth interviews, half of them were currently working in the “day and night” mode, and other subjects had experience with this mode at the beginning of their migration.

Live-in domestic work is often the first job undertaken by Polish women in Naples, and usually the worker obtains a fixed monthly salary and is provided with bed and board. None of the subjects could speak Italian at the time of their arrival. At first, they worked without a permit; then, with time, part of them applied for an extended stay and a work permit. The work was associated with significant isolation from one’s social environment (staying in the household throughout the week with the exception of two afternoons off). For new migrants, working “day and night” is the most straightforward working pattern as it ensures employment and resolves accommodation problems. The requisite qualifications are relatively easy to meet, but this is reflected in lower remuneration.

The principal career model for people taking up domestic jobs described in the literature is a transition from the live-in mode to the live-out mode (Anderson 2000; Miranda 2002). This was the most frequent transition scheme marked in the surveys (23 respondents), but the most common (124 persons) path among migrants consisted of preserving the “day and night” model for a considerable length of time, sometimes over a period of several years. It appears from the interviews that not all of the individuals regarded the transition into the “by the hour” working mode as being desirable—stability is a big advantage of live-in work.

### The Dynamics of Household Worker’s Role Definition

The domestic service situation is said to entail the intrinsic ambiguity of the blurring of the public/private sphere (Aubert 1956; Momsen 1999; Yeoh and Huang 1999; Anderson 2000; Miranda 2002; Mariti 2003). This ambivalence is reflected in a variety of ways in which interviewees in my study refer to their own and their employer’s social role. The role names can be sorted into those referring to the domain of work (worker, boss, employer), and to the world of servanthood (*cameriera* [housemaid], servant, slave; *signora* [lady/madam]). Apart from that, there exist names referring to the demographical dimension (girl: for the domestic worker, and woman for the employer, grandmother and granny in reference to the elderly person that they take care of), nationality (Pole, Italian, my Italian), and functions (cook, cleaner, girl to clean, to assist, to care, domestic help). In Italy, there is also a term that none of the subjects used, “COLF” (*collaboratore familiare*, family assistant, or collaborator), that has been promoted, among others, by the church-led domestic workers’ union ACLI-COLF, alongside with the traditional vision of subservience to the family, and it has been criticized by the scholarship for minimizing the worker’s agency (Andall 2000:148).

Taking into account the variety of names and the stigma attached to domestic work, I chose to use the names connected with the social world of work that conform with the perception of most of the subjects in the study, namely, “domestic worker” and “household worker” interchange-

ably, and “employers.” I want to underscore that despite the critique of the notion “domestic work” as stigmatizing (Cohen and Sanjek 1990), I apply all the terms in a neutral, descriptive, and egalitarian way.

### Theoretical Framework: Applied Symbolic Interactionism

In my analysis, I have been inspired and have systematically applied the symbolic interactionist framework to the world of domestic work. I found symbolic interactionism particularly fit for rendering the dynamics of the role negotiations that take place when a foreign domestic worker is employed. In the analysis below, I mostly use the following terms, which stem from the symbolic interactionism tradition: **symbolic area**: a category of meaning constituting a point of reference for an interaction model, for example, the world of service, the world of work, family, friendship in professional relations; **relational model**: the entirety of relations referring to one symbolic area that manifest themselves in a **set of** characteristic **practices**. Relational models are: *overt degradation*—the world of service; *fictive kinship*—family; *professionalism*—work; and *friendly professionalism*—friendship within professional relations (cf. Kordasiewicz 2008). **Interpretation framework** is a perspective of a social actor interpreting a given situation through the prism of symbolic areas, for example, the world of work, and contains in itself the **definition of the situation**, which includes **role identity** (the way of interpreting a social role by the actor, cf. McCall and Simmons 1966). **Identity strategy** is a set of practices resulting from the

<sup>6</sup> The types mentioned above are internally diversified forms, the most important factor apart from the domicile is the method of payment: once a week, once a month, daily, predefined sum or hourly wage. In case of live-in work, I encountered a case where it was part time work combined with studies (cf. Kordasiewicz 2005).

adoption of a particular interpretation framework, which aims to define the situation and one's role in a way desired by the actor. Identity strategy is a set of practices that employers and the domestic workers use in order to shift the definition of the situation and role in a desired direction. In the analyzed material, two kinds of identity strategy are present: *professionalization* (which emphasizes the professional aspect of the relationship) and *personalization* (which emphasizes the personal aspect of the relationship). Identity strategies manifest themselves on the **interactional level** (specific actions, e.g., towards employers, as narrated by workers) or on the **narrative level** (in the manner of constructing one's own role in the narration). All of the terms written in italics have been worked out in the course of the analysis or, as in the case of the "fictive kinship," stem also from analysis of other authors (see above). None of the above expressions belong to the interviewees' vocabulary. I refer to a couple of concepts by Erving Goffman: non-person treatment (1961) and game, drama, and ritual framework (Piotrowski 1998), as well.

### Relationships Between Domestic Workers and Employers in the Literature

Relationships between employers and domestic workers constitute one of the key themes in literature throughout decades and geographical and ethnic contexts. The two dimensions that, in my opinion, pervade the analysis of various authors are distance/intimacy and hierarchy/equality. Within hierarchy I distinguish between total hierarchy characteristic for the traditional role of servant, and formal or partial hierarchy compatible with profes-

sional relationships. The above-mentioned dimensions constitute a powerful tool to systematically order the analysis. Below, the reader will find a table on which I have placed existing concepts, as well as those proposed in this paper.

The proposed models of "overt degradation," which I understand as a relationship that is distant and hierarchical (in its total mode), have strong similarity with the concepts of deference (Rollins 1985), asymmetry (Glenn 1986), and distant hierarchy (Lan 2006). The "fictive kinship," that in my analysis is a relationship characterized by total hierarchy and intimacy at the same time, has been thoroughly analyzed under this or "one of the family" label by Romero (1992), Anderson (2000), Parreñas (2001), Constable (2003), Lan (2006), and McDowell (2006), among others.

A lot of space in the literature has been dedicated to the dynamic and processual character of the phenomenon of negotiating the roles and definitions. However, the names such as "personalism" or "business-like relationship," as well as others, suggest a rather stable model or a constant attitude towards the relationships. I propose to focus on the dynamics itself by analyzing personalization and professionalization, and *not* personalism and professionalism, which at best could be called "target situations" for the strategies I study. The identity strategies that form the focus of the paper are: professionalization, by which I understand aiming at the relationship that is distant and hierarchical in a formal/partial way, characteristic to the world of work, and personalization, by which is understood aiming

Table 1. Relationships between household workers and their employers in the literature.

	Symmetry (equality)	Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance ↑ ↓ Closeness	Relationships Between Persons (K)	Keeping Safe Distance (L), Distancing (H-S)	Deference (Roll) Asymmetry (G) Distant Hierarchy (L) <b>Overt Degradation (K)</b>
	Personalism (L)	Business-like Relationship (R, H-S) <b>Professionalism (K)</b>	<b>Fictive Kinship /</b> "one of the family" (A, C, K, L, P, R) Maternalism (Roll) / Seeking Patronage (L)
		<b>Friendly Professionalism (K)</b>	
		Personalism (G, H-S)	

Source: self-elaboration.

A: Anderson (2000), C: Constable (2003), G: Glenn (1986), H-S: Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007), K: Kordasiewicz (concepts in bold), L: Lan (2006), P: Parreñas (2001), R: Romero (1992), Roll: Rollins (1985). Not included were: Lan's "highlighting previous positions" and "obscuring previous positions," as they may be used in many relationships of varying degree of intimacy.

at a relationship that is distant but at the same time marked by equality. These identity strategies also have certain affinity with the concept of business-like relationship (Romero 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007) and personalism in the formulation of Lan (2006) respectively.

Despite the nuances, I have decided that some of the concepts share their position with respect to the dimensions analyzed, so I placed them together. I made a distinction between personalism as understood by Lan (2006) and that of Glenn (1986) and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007). Lan's personalism seems

more equality than intimacy oriented, and hence closer to the target situation of the personalization strategy, namely, what I call "relationship between persons." Hondagneu-Sotelo and Glenn's personalism is portrayed as reciprocal intimacy, and asymmetry is viewed as a part and parcel of it.

### Employers' Strategies

When working in Italian households as domestic workers, Polish women initially encounter three kinds of employers' practices, which I reconstruct on the basis of employees' accounts. Among these,

two are found to be unacceptable by the majority of the subjects, while one is considered to be acceptable. The not accepted ones are “overt degradation” and “fictive kinship,” both of which fall into the category of total, informal hierarchy, which will be discussed in more detail below. On the other hand, “friendly professionalism” is accepted.

“Friendly professionalism” is constructed as a non-problematic situation. It denotes a relationship model where the professional and personal dimensions of the relationship are balanced. From a professional point of view, this relationship can be characterized as one that contains various elements, such as satisfactory remuneration, and the observance of employee’s rights (as far as working time and breaks are concerned). In the cases described, the migrant is legally employed and has a work contract in which insurance contributions and taxes are paid. The interpersonal relationship is one that is full of respect, appreciation, warmth, kindness, and friendliness. Karolina,<sup>7</sup> a 36-year-old live-out cleaner, who recently had begun to study at the Neapolitan University and combines work and study, explains:

As I already told you, it is not a prestigious occupation, for sure...I do nothing else but clean, iron, stack up their underwear, wash the water closet, so the tasks that are, maybe not degrading, but that don’t give you any sense of satisfaction or fulfillment. But, they [the employers] are able to treat me in a way that

I don’t feel the burden, I don’t feel degraded. They treat me with respect. And I respect them in turn.

The high importance of both these dimensions of work (professional and interpersonal) becomes apparent when an offer for a “replacement opportunity” was overheard in an informal job center near the church where Polish masses are held<sup>8</sup>:

Giving up on my by-the-hour job, is anyone interested? Salvator Rosa [subway station], five hours daily, 300€ per month. The woman’s very friendly. She’s pregnant with her second child, so she’ll need “day and night” later on. I wouldn’t leave this job... [but I have to go back home].

Apart from information on the location, remuneration, and character of the job, the type of relationship with the employer is also mentioned, and is considered to be important. “The woman” is willing to be on friendly terms with her household worker, and this is viewed as being an asset.

The “friendly professionalism” model in the researched cases is actively co-created by individuals taking up the job of a domestic worker. This type of relationship depends on the good will of both sides and their mutual compatibility, as with other types of work. This kind of relationship applied only to a minority in my study—two out of 14 persons worked in a “friendly professional” relationship. They are linked by the fact that neither belongs to a milieu that routinely congregates

around the Polish center and their migrant biography lacks an episode of oppressive “day and night” work. “Friendly professionalism” is a type of relationship that developed only in the case of household workers working “by the hour.”

The two types of unaccepted relationships occur within the “day and night” work model.<sup>9</sup> They have common features, mainly, in general terms, poor working conditions: continual demands for work, sometimes for over a dozen hours daily, with no free time, and low pay. This is accompanied by a hardly tolerable “day and night” work mode, which results in feelings of confinement and isolation.

These unfavorable conditions may manifest themselves in two forms: either the employers imbue the chore with an element of degradation (“overt degradation”), or they try to alleviate the hard work by ostensibly accepting the worker into the familial community (“fictive kinship”). Under the term “overt degradation” I would include (as perceived by domestic workers) a tendency on the part of the employer to exclude the household worker from interactions and defining her as a socially inferior being; “fictive kinship,” on the other hand, denotes (as perceived by domestic workers) a tendency on the part of the employer to include the household worker into the network of unreciprocated familial community responsibilities. These strategies constitute sets of practices which will be described below.

### Overt Degradation

Employers’ actions that are experienced by Polish women as degrading can be grouped into three categories. Two of them (emphasizing the role and non-person treatment) are actions taken on the employer’s own initiative, while punishing for going beyond one’s role occurs in response to the domestic workers’ actions which I classify as “personalization” and analyze in the section on this strategy.

The first group of actions that serve to highlight the household worker’s role includes: the requirement that a special apron, which socially marks the worker’s function and distinguishes her from the “real” family members, be worn, and the introduction of spatial separation for meals and, sometimes, watching television (the domestic worker in the kitchen).

The apron is an inflammatory element in interactions between employers and household workers. Some of the employers put strong pressure on their employees to wear the apron, and this meets with fierce resistance in return; Olga, currently a 26-year-old live-in part time housekeeper, who combines work and study, refers to one of her previous live-in full-time jobs:

They [the employers] told me to wear an apron, I told them I wouldn’t. [And so?] I told them I wouldn’t stay, that I was leaving. Finally, I stayed and didn’t wear the apron.

The apron is a symbolically marked element which makes domestic workers feel that they are being pushed into a servant’s role. They rebel against be-

<sup>7</sup> It should be mentioned that the quotations included in this article are to enable an analysis of the described aspects of the domestic workers’ situation and are not intended to introduce the respondents themselves; that is why only selected quotations are present. All the names appearing in the text have been changed.

<sup>8</sup> Replacement opportunity denotes working as a substitute for a temporarily unavailable household worker during her absence (vacations), usually over one to three months. In close proximity to the church, the church-attending group came into direct contact with outside-church population.

<sup>9</sup> It is possible to have an oppressive live-out situation, as is the case of some Ukrainian women working as domestic workers in Poland (Kordasiewicz 2009). By definition, though, live-out work offers more independence because it separates the dwelling from the workplace.

ing required to wear one in a more or less open manner.

The separation of dining tables and resting rooms is also interpreted as a symptom of being treated as a servant. Teresa, a 22-year-old, currently a care worker for an elderly woman, referring to a previous live-in housekeeper job, said:

[At the previous job] I was always eating alone, they were eating separately, I was eating in the kitchen. And now this is a different story: I eat in the dining room, together with “grandma” [the elderly woman she is taking care of], and everything is fine. There, where I was eating alone, I was simply a servant.

An escalation of behaviors that underline the role of a household worker takes place in the presence of third parties (like guests), and takes the form of more rigorous requirements concerning their attire, adopting a supercilious tone of voice, and having the domestic worker do things that the “madam” normally takes care of herself.

A second set of practices, which can be described as non-person treatment, denotes treating household workers as socially transparent. It is reflected in the following practices: quarreling in the domestic worker’s presence, making the household worker serve breakfast in bed, not reprimanding children for insulting the domestic worker. That is how Krystyna, aged 27, working as a live-in housekeeper, describes her first day in Italy:

During the first day of my stay in their house, the married couple quarreled, and they were yelling at

each other God only knows how loudly. And it was then when I decided I wouldn’t treat them seriously as they don’t treat my person seriously. I wasn’t prepared that in a guest’s presence, because, potentially, I was a guest in their house, one can quarrel to that extent, not paying attention that you are watching it, that you don’t understand a single word.

Household workers faced with such practices report feeling embarrassed and excluded. The *non-person treatment* phenomenon was worked out by Erving Goffman (1961:45; 1969:151). A non-person is “a person who is not there,” for whom “no impression need to be maintained” (Goffman 1969:151). Judith Rollins (1985:209-211) rightly calls upon the fact that it is in congruence with the vision of an ideal servant—subservient and invisible (cf. Glenn 1986:157). Such role was assigned to, among others, former servants and slaves in the presence of their lords (cf. Elias 1983:48). In the conclusions section, I further develop an interpretation of the non-person phenomenon in the investigated site.

### Fictive Kinship

Fictive kinship encompasses a set of actions on the part of the employer: a declaration that they will include the domestic worker within the family community, informal awards instead of remuneration, allowing the worker to have an afternoon off as if it were a gift (and as though the employees were not entitled to a rest), as well as giving her gifts of items that are no longer needed in the household (for example, garments). All these practices make more distant the formal, contractual definition of the situation. Polish women in any case believe that the kinds of

statements these employers make (such as: “you are a part of the family,” “we’re your friends”) are essentially false (ostensible) and instrumental, as exemplifies Lucyna, a 54-year-old live-in housekeeper:

They play a game with our feelings. And we say to ourselves: “I will stay with the ‘grandma’” because we feel pity for her, because she says she is unwell, so we stay longer with no extra pay...and there is a method of employers: “*Tu sei brava persona, bellissima, brava* [you are a wonderful person, beautiful, wonderful], they flatter you, it lends us wings, and we toil more and more. Or, even they tell us: “You are part of the family, you are like family,” and we, Polish women, are easily taken in, so she treats me as family... We will never be “family!” It is just business, you are needed, you are *brava* [wonderful], if they don’t need you anymore, you are no longer “part of the family.”

The “fictive kinship” practices essentially serve as a tool to psychologically extort the greatest amount of work without proportional remuneration (among other things, working with no rests or waiving one’s time off is required) (Kordasiewicz [2008] extensively describes the types of practices used by employers). “Fictive kinship” is employers’ strategy often described in literature (Romero 1992; Anderson 2000; Parreñas 2001; Constable 2003; Lan 2006; McDowell 2006). It is worth noting that in certain contexts household workers also employ the (fictive) kinship strategy, for the purpose of entering into social networks of employers, as is the case of Ukrainian women working in Poland (Kindler 2008), or as an identity strategy, protecting them from the degrading “servant” label in the case of migrants from the former USSR in the U.S.A. (Solari 2006).

Practices of “overt degradation” and “fictive kinship” sometimes occur simultaneously in one employer’s actions. The interviews I conducted revealed cases of “sweetening,” a general degradation by means of familiarizing gestures; or familiarization is exposed by pointing to elements of open oppressiveness (this is the most commonly referred case in the literature, cf., e.g., Anderson 2000:122).

### Domestic Workers’ Responses

In response to oppressive work, a series of strategies undertaken by the household worker may come to the forefront. The subjects occasionally decide to give up their job and move to another job, either within the live-in system or transfer to a live-out system. Abandoning a live-in job without first finding another job is, however, risky: the domestic worker relinquishes not only her work but also her accommodation. It also happens in certain cases that after an initial negative experience, a person may abandon the migration project and return to Poland. A graph is included at the end of the article that represents possible actions on the part of household workers in an oppressive work situation (see: Figure 1).

In two cases, there was an acceptance of an oppressive work situation in a “fictive kinship” variant. Both of the women mainly worked for aged people, and in elderly care, most of the times, the employer of the care worker is the child or child-in-law of the elderly person, and therefore the relationship between the care receiver and care worker is not based on the power of the employer over the employee; as such this was excluded from further analysis. Out of the remaining 12 cases, eight respondents appeared

to adopt a professionalization strategy, another two a personalization strategy, while the remaining two found themselves in a situation that I diagnosed as being unproblematic; that is, “friendly professionalism.” The article analyzes professionalization and personalization strategies as contrasting ways of experiencing and coping with the problematic situations of live-in work. The professional framework is the type that predominates in the studied context. I give consideration to the personalization strategy despite its significantly lesser presence in the analyzed material because of the theoretical importance of this phenomenon, as it constitutes deviant case (for a summary on the deviant case, see: Silverman 2004:180-184), or even contrasting cases (Schütze 2008) in relation to the professionalization strategy that predominates (theoretical sampling, see: Glaser and Strauss 1967:45-78; Silverman 2004:105-108).

### Household Workers’ Strategies: Professionalization

The professional framework constitutes the most frequent way of interpreting relations with the employer, and appeared in 8 of the 14 cases that are analyzed. The features women under study had in common were participation in the Polish center and having experienced harsh labor conditions at the beginning of their migrant career. The latter feature suggests that the professionalization strategy is a defensive strategy against oppressive work forms. Participation in the Polish center seems also to be important when it comes to developing the strategy. Some of the women in the study regularly met with other migrants during their time off; this perpetuated the conviction that their situation was

one of “economic migration,” which helped to prevent them from becoming completely immersed in the oppressive interpersonal environment. During these meetings, they shared with each other their personal experiences and the strategies they used in difficult situations, and one of their approaches was the professionalization strategy. For example, photocopies of regulations concerning domestic work contracts translated into Polish were distributed. Some of the respondents told me that they were trying to persuade other migrants to adopt an approach which I call “professional.” Only those from outside the Polish center circles developed another interpretation framework, that of “friendly professionalism.” The material gathered does not contain, however, enough documented cases to allow for a systematic comparison of the groups, the interpretations being of a hypothetical character.

The formation of professional framework may sometimes be the result of a sudden conversion. Lucyna managed to endure daily twelve-hour shifts of hard work, which was coupled with a familiarization attitude from her employer that “gave a big boost” so “you worked until you dropped.” She reported that such a turning point occurred when she saw her employer throwing into the dustbin an unread Christmas card from a former domestic worker:

It was a Polish girl [one of the previous cleaners]... [the employer] praised her work...but when the girl sent a Christmas card, I found it in the dustbin. It was unopened, with best wishes inside, so they weren’t interested in it at all, she didn’t even care how I might feel seeing this. And I said to myself: “No more! I’m done with my work, and that’s the end of it!”

The throwing out of the Christmas card is interpreted by Lucyna as conflicting with friendly or, even more generally, human-to-human relationship (the importance of Christmas in Polish culture is particularly significant). By this gesture, the employer contradicted the existence of any real ties she had created with her former household worker, and those that she currently had with Lucyna. Lucyna formulated a new action plan: a lack of personal involvement, and defined her relationship with the employer solely on a professional basis (“I’m done with my work, and that’s the end of it!”). The expression “I’m done with my work” also relates to completing daily tasks and the beginning of the time off—until Lucyna’s conversion this spare time had been systematically filled up by the employers. It conveys a resolution to make a clear distinction between working time and time off (the question of spare time is an important point in the negotiations with employers).

The professional framework can be seen in the women’s narratives in several ways. The framework manifests itself on the level of interactions related by the respondents, and in the narrative itself (Kordasiewicz 2008). The significance of the professional framework on the narration level becomes apparent in a number of different ways. Firstly, when the economic reasons for coming to Italy are emphasized (“I came here to work”). Secondly, the migrant women use the professional world’s formal vocabulary (such as overtime, employee’s rights, professional experience, working time, trade union regulations, earning for one’s pension, or expressions that describe one’s own role and the role of the partner with whom one interacts as a pair—employee-employer).

Thirdly, they critically assess, from the perspective of the present professional framework, behaviors prior to the conversion. Fourthly, they make an attempt to present oppressive working conditions as professional duties (through statements: “that’s what the job is like,” “these are my duties”), like in what Aneta, a 25-year-old live-in nanny/housekeeper, says:

That’s what the job is like, that’s what the people are like, if I had a *cameriera* [housemaid], I suspect I wouldn’t be a better madam, I am very demanding. But, it is true, they have their Italian ways [of dealing with servants], like, I will just throw it here because I feel like it, I won’t go there because I am too tired, because I have a maid to do such things, I won’t put the jug back in the kitchen because you are to do it, I pay you for this...however, I must admit I didn’t have major problems like scarcity of food or exploitation. Well, maybe there is some exploitation, but I don’t treat it this way, I take it as part of my duties.

Once “some exploitation” is named “part of my duties” or “that’s what the job is like,” the employer’s demands stop being experienced as degrading and exploitative.

On the level of interaction, I would include among the professionalization practices negotiating work conditions and aspiring to regularize one’s stay and work in Italy.

It is interesting to note that “formal professionalization” is a strategy employed to counteract, on the one hand, generally poor working conditions and “fictive kinship” practices (as in Lucyna’s case),

and on the other, degrading practices, as in the case described below. Here, Katarzyna, a 42-year-old live-in nanny/housekeeper, considering switching to a live-out work, speaks of the process of battling for the observance of employee's rights:

I tried to claim my rights, and step-by-step I reclaimed everything...the rights to have a rest...to have two hours of rest time every day and...that my night time rest is also respected, so I must have at least that minimum of eight hours rest at night time. In the house that I work in, my employee's rights are respected.

Katarzyna alludes here to formal regulations concerning the work of domestic workers. Those regulations constitute for her something to aim at in the long process of negotiating work terms and conditions (even in the case of irregular work). Her interview also serves to illustrate a work situation which is characterized by a considerable distance between the family members and the household worker (the presence of degrading practices), which Katarzyna summarizes in the following way:

I must know my place, the children are of the greatest importance, then their parents...I can't expect to be treated the way they treat their children, or their equals, their Italian friends. I'm a Pole, and I'm a servant, after all. They don't usually get in my way, and I don't engage in their family life; these are simply our two [separate] spheres, our lives, we just take care of formal issues.

In the above example, we deal with an oppressive, overtly degrading situation. Nonetheless, Katarzyna is focused on the professional dimension of the relationship with her employers. In her account, she expresses

an acceptance of the permanently lower position she occupies in the household that is epitomized by her referring to herself as a "servant." The professionalization strategy is used as a defense against degrading practices: all of her attention was focused on enforcing her employee's rights—a strategy that ultimately proved to be successful. It can also be noted that the strategy essentially rules out the possibility of creating a close personal relationship between the worker and employer.

Regularizing one's stay and work constitutes the crowning achievement of the professionalizing strategy. It is a means of restricting the power employers can exercise over domestic workers by subjecting it to external law regulations (Anderson 2000:169). The process of regularization takes long time and requires a great deal of determination. One of the respondents described it in this way: "bit by bit I struggled, I went to places, I begged, I talked, and I got this legalization last year" (when the interview was conducted, she had been staying in Italy for five years, and the regularization took place in her third job there). Małgorzata, a 30-year-old woman, currently cleaning live-out for many families, whose migrant career began with an exceptionally oppressive work situation where she also had to deal with the threat of sexual harassment, speaks of obtaining extended stay and work permits in this way:

And then moving to work "by the hour," I realized that, first of all, this is the kind of job where you don't get abused, because I met some really wonderful people who got those papers for me.

Małgorzata implies in her account that the "live-in" job is a job where "you get abused." It should also

be noted as well that "getting papers" is ascribed to the fact of "meeting wonderful people"; that is, exceptional kindness on the part of employers is necessary in order to obtain legal status.

In the studied context, professionalization through the regularization of one's stay and work seems to be, on the one hand, the only secure defense against oppressive employers. On the other hand, however, the regularization of one's status is due mostly to friendly employers, for whom legal regulation is not an unnecessary defensive mechanism. The present legal status of Polish women as citizens of the European Union, and after the opening of the Italian labor market in 2006, means they no longer have to depend on employers in obtaining the stay permit because they are entitled to stay and move freely as EU citizens, and that regularization of the work contract is no longer dependant exclusively on the employer's will, as the employer does not have to apply on their behalf for the work permit. However, as also later studies show, these changes do not translate into greater regularization share (Kaczmarczyk 2008; Näre 2012).

**Professionalization: A Summary**

The professionalizing strategy is generally characterized by an active attitude. This means that the household worker might resign from an oppressive job, decide to change the work mode by choosing one that provides more freedom and allows for integration. Domestic workers may also aspire to regularize their stay, and negotiate their work terms (see: Figure 1). Apart from this, it also manifests itself in a wide range of narrative practices that are supposed to confirm, in a symbolic way, that the

household worker and her interaction partner are in a situation that is defined as "work."

Within the bounds of the professionalization strategy one may observe that a professional definition is given priority over a personal one in a situation where women are threatened by degrading or by familiarization practices used by employers in oppressive work situations.

Professionalization is a strategy used when dealing with both degrading practices and fictive kinship-based practices. In the table below, the strategies are shown on a grid created by two dimensions: distance and hierarchy (arrows signify professionalization). Both oppressive work forms are based on a total asymmetry and a construction of distance ("overt degradation") or a construction of closeness ("fictive kinship").

Table 2. Migrants' strategies and the dimensions of the domestic work situation: professionalization.

		Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance	Work		Overt degradation
	Friendly professionalism		Fictive kinship

Source: self-elaboration.

In order to free oneself from an oppressive situation, the domestic worker has to push the definition of the situation towards a restricted, formal asymmetry which is characteristic of superior-subordinate relations, and—additionally—in the

case of “familiarization,” the household worker has to introduce a degree of distance between oneself and one’s employers.

### Domestic Workers’ Strategies: Personalization

The degradation of the household worker originally manifests itself in the exposure of their role and in the non-person tactics discussed above. Part of the truth about the degradation model is that it manifests itself in the interaction with the personalization strategy; that is, a strategy of introducing a personal dimension into the relations between employers and domestic workers, in the form of punishing household workers for exceeding their roles.

As argued by Parreñas (2001; cf. Vianello 2014), in many cases of migrant domestic workers we deal with occupational downward mobility. The women who are educated and experienced on the labor market in the host country undertake a job below their qualifications. Household workers engage in activities that belong to their role-identity of the domestic worker and which seem to belong, from their point of view, to a repertoire that is available in a work situation in an Italian house. Judging by the related reactions of Italian employers, one can conclude that, from the employers’ perspective, these kinds of behaviors mean “exceeding one’s role.” These are mainly symmetrical interaction initiatives, independent of the function that is fulfilled by being a household worker. Such behavior might include a willingness to learn Italian, speaking to the male host in a foreign language (English), a willingness to watch television together, answering questions

in quiz shows watched by the family, and reading books. These attempts are met with negative reactions on the part of the employers: a refusal to help in the study of the language and anger, turning off the television, a refusal to take part in the interaction, and astonishment.

And when they noticed that I dedicate a lot of time to reading books, it became a problem. It got on their nerves that I, even after long working hours, still have time to read books, so they began to introduce new chores, to invent new tasks. (Katarzyna)

Apparently, this sort of behavior is treated by the employers as incongruent with the role of the domestic worker. The “penalties” that are imposed on household workers may be severe. Krystyna, at the beginning of her stay in Italy, tried to learn basic Italian:

They didn’t want me to learn Italian, to understand, they were surprised to find I wanted to learn it. The woman, when I asked her how you conjugate “to do,” spilled coffee on the marble and told me: “Clean this up”...and absolutely not! Because I hadn’t come here to learn, I had come here to work, and you can naturally understand such things [connected with cleaning], even if you don’t speak the language.

Most employers’ reactions are, however, more subtle and range from surprise to suggestions of giving up such an activity (the motif of reading books often creates tensions between domestic workers and their employers).

Polish women working as household workers, having realized that certain behaviors are not welcome,

deploy two tactics: either they deliberately continue these activities, or they abandon them, but with a feeling of psychological discomfort; this was sometimes expressed during the interviews. The dimension of personalization can thus be examined on two planes: the plane of interaction and narration. I will discuss the cases of two persons whose strategy may be described as “personalization”: one of them makes attempts to introduce a personal dimension to her work; the other one abandons it, but brings it up in the narrative.

### Personalization in Interactions

Krystyna is an example of a person who made repeated attempts to bring in a non-professional plane in interactions. She claims that her employers reacted angrily to her attempts to learn Italian; then, in turn, she engaged in activities that seemed ordinary and casual to her, but were not welcome by her employers. They were surprised she read books, were astonished that she answered questions in a quiz show, and turned off the television when she tried to join in, despite their verbal declarations of friendly bonds: “They repeated: ‘We’re your friends’ [and when I came to watch TV with them] they switched off the television.”

The above quotation illustrates the apparent tension between a false and a genuine feeling of closeness. The employers’ declarations are presented as void because when it comes to an attempt to “draw conclusions” from their declarations on the level of interaction, Krystyna was met with rejection. For Krystyna, it meant living with a constant feeling of degradation and exclusion from symmetrical non-professional interactions.

She was interviewed during an untypical period: at that time she was in search of work, her previous replacement having come to an end. At the same time, for about a month, she had been taking advantage of an opportunity to live with some acquaintances, and she had visited the surrounding areas of Naples and was resting.

### Personalization in Narratives

Iwona, a 26-year-old live-in housekeeper, a person for whom the personalization strategy manifested itself on the narrative level, was also in a specific migration moment: the interview was conducted just before she returned to Poland for good. She intended to return to her home country with the goal of taking up Italian studies in Poland, after three years spent in Italy. She had worked with one family as the cook’s assistant, and—after the cook’s death—as the cook herself. She was obliged to wear an apron during work hours; two years after she began working for the family, she attempted to negotiate this requirement:

At one time after two years of work I dared to ask the grandma [who was a member of the older generation in the house she was working in] if I might take off the apron ‘cause...I felt uncomfortable in it. “*O, per piacere, non mi domandare queste cose, un'altra cosa è aprire la porta con una bella camicia e bel grembiolino*” [Oh, don’t ask such things, it looks quite different when you open the door in a beautiful shirt and a beautiful apron]...That’s the way it is with them, there’s no other way, and that’s the end of it. Just one small tunnel [she shows the perspective of a blinkered horse]; they look in a single direction,

and that's the end of it. There's no such thing as a leap sideways; no, no such thing that I might rebel, or come back later, or take off the apron, or anything like that.

Indeed, the above account relates to an attempt to negotiate a working condition, and not strictly the personal dimension of the relationship (although for both parties the apron has a symbolic meaning—for workers it means degradation, for employers, as we see in the above quotation, it underscores the visible status role of the worker), but it is important that Iwona concludes from this story that her situation cannot be changed. It is also significant that she “dared to ask” about the apron only after having worked in the household for two years. Iwona sees no opportunities to express a personal dimension in that Italian house, and that is why she feels permanently degraded. She feels like a servant, and she declares: “I don't want to be a servant all my life.” She is a person who represents those with an attitude that is “set on Poland.” She is coming back to Poland with the

intention of taking up Italian studies. Iwona lacks any positive auto-identification that is possible to realize within the Italian house, such as an employee's identity in the case of women with a professionalizing attitude.

**Personalization: A Summary**

The alternation of social roles is an ordinary part of everyday life in contemporary societies; it is necessary for the normal social functioning of an individual (Goffman 1961). The punishment for “exceeding one's role” makes it impossible for domestic workers to perform different social roles, and such a possibility might still be present in a somewhat attenuated form even within the live-in job. They are reduced to only one social role—the role of a household worker, and that is why it starts to resemble a total institution (Goffman 1961), and it is experienced by them in such a way (see: Kordasiewicz [2005] for more detail on the domestic work as a form of total institution; cf. also Motsei 1990).

Migrants applying a personalization strategy do not pay attention to the professional dimension of the work. They do not develop a positive auto-definition of a domestic worker as an employee or that of any other. This is visualized in table 3.

A personalization strategy denotes a withdrawal from a situation of total asymmetry into a sphere of equality and distance, such as in the case of two persons who do not know each other, but respect their equal status (“relationships between persons”).

The two respondents' lack of success when it came to using this strategy, and their persistence in sticking to it, might be linked with their atypical situation: at the time of the interviews they were either unemployed or were going to return to Poland in the near future. Further research would be needed in order to ascertain whether this connection is systematic.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In this paper, I have discussed several models and strategies pertaining to relationships between household workers and their employers. I have presented a conceptual grid consisting of the hierarchy/equality and intimacy/distance dimensions to order the relationships as analyzed in the existing scholarship and in this paper. The main findings were the strategies of opposing migrant domestic workers: professionalization, which aims at a business-like relationship, and personalization, which aims at a relationship that is equal and distant at the same time. Both of these target models are difficult to achieve in the investigated context. Not

all Polish migrants in Naples are lucky enough to be hired by employers who offer them good working conditions and who respect them as persons. Among the strategies used by Polish women in oppressive situations, one can discern both direct and symbolic actions. Direct actions include leaving their job, striving for regularization, opposing their employers' oppressive practices. Symbolic actions might consist of playing the definition game in such a way that would enable them to obtain a more advantageous situation.

One of the main limitations of the study was not including the employers of the domestic workers, so it offers only a one-sided picture. The cultural factors may play a crucial role. Polish women experience certain actions on the part of employers as degrading; for instance, the non-person treatment. But, that does not necessarily have to be the intention of Italian employers. The non-person treatment, moreover, is said to have both mortifying and functional aspects, when it enables certain people to perform their tasks smoothly (photographers, bodyguards, interpreters) (Goffman 1969:132). It may be that employers, who are better acquainted with the ways of coping with household workers, apply customary practices that allow strange people to coexist with each other under one roof, without necessarily producing close bonds; this behavior, in turn, is interpreted by domestic workers as social exclusion. Future research on domestic work in Italy should include domestic workers, as well as their employers in order to explicate also their perspective, and currently the literature on Italian employers is scarce (to the best of my knowledge some information is included only in Anderson

Table 3. Migrants' strategies and the dimensions of the domestic work situation: professionalization (solid arrows) and personalization (dashed arrows).

	Symmetry (equality)	Asymmetry (hierarchy)	
		Formal (partial)	Informal (total)
Distance	Relationships between persons	Professionalism	Overt degradation
Closeness	(Friendship)	Friendly professionalism	Fictive kinship

Source: self-elaboration.

2000; Miranda 2002).<sup>10</sup> There are also prospects to make the analysis of the relationships in the world of domestic work more systematic, and the conceptual grid proposed by this paper is one of the ways to achieve it, however, it requires further application to different contexts.

To summarize, I would like to refer to three basic analytical frameworks in Erving Goffman's work, as identified by Andrzej Piotrowski (1998): social reality may be seen in terms of "drama" (like in the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*), "game" (e.g., *Strategic interaction*), or "rituals" (*Interaction ritual*). The ritual aspect of the interaction consists of showing respect and of being shown respect, of "being a person among other persons" (Piotrowski 1998:99). The "drama" consists of creating and controlling impressions through which a process of creating and expressing identity takes place. The "game" is a strategic and goal-oriented action, and the aim is to fulfill one's objectives through all the available means.

The strategy of personalization—introducing extra-situational elements, attempts to take part in symmetrical interactions while maintaining some independence—may be interpreted in terms of ritual and dramatic dimensions of interaction. Polish women working as household workers want to be "persons among other persons" and to express the non-professional aspects of their identity. Professionalization, on the other hand, is a strategic action, a game that serves to obtain one's goals.

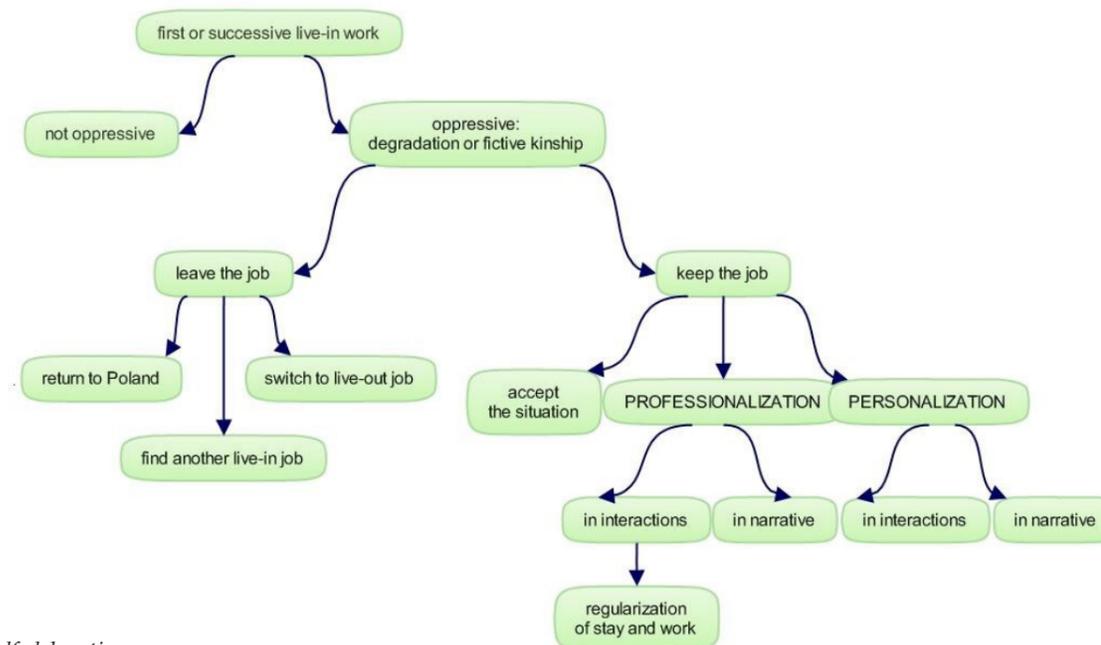
<sup>10</sup> In my next study on domestic work in Poland, I included both workers and employers, and put an emphasis on the employers as under-researched (cf. Kordasiewicz 2009; forthcoming).

A majority of domestic workers, in a situation where both the personal and professional aspects of identity are threatened by the oppressive work situation, focus on the "game": this is a battle for a professional dimension and introducing a definition of work (professionalization); the ritual and expressive aspects of work are renounced, or the struggle in the personal field as well. A minority of household workers in the study, however, did not develop a positive auto-definition of the "employee." They rather concentrated on the personal dimension by taking the initiative, with the aim of presenting themselves as persons (personalization). On the basis of the gathered materials, it is possible to conclude that defining the relationship with one's employer as a game where professional definition is at stake (while abandoning the personal definition of that relationship) more often than not leads to a successful end in the investigated site. On the other hand, concentrating on the relationship as a ritual and a drama, if auto-identification is lacking in the professional field, usually fails as it is not confirmed by the interacting partners, and so results in a feeling of degradation that is experienced in silence.

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Figure 1. A tree of possible actions of a household worker in Naples in an oppressive work situation.



Source: self-elaboration.

Comment: The starting point is placed in upper-left "first or successive live-in work," and the tree unfolds the possibilities top-down. The tree of possible actions includes actions actually recorded during the research in many individual cases.

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## The River That Crosses an Ocean: *Ifa/Orisha* in the Global Spiritual Marketplace

**Abstract** *Ifa/Orisha*, the traditional spiritual practice of the Yoruba nation, has entered the global spiritual marketplace. With thousands of worshipers on both sides of the Atlantic, practitioners and participants are engaging new arenas of discourse. In southwest Nigeria, storytellers are expressing the living religion through narratives that are relevant, adaptable, and meaningful in a plurality of contexts. From the often antagonistic relationship between *Ifa/Orisha* and the Abrahamic faiths, to the challenges posed by modernity and globalization, practitioners are renegotiating the identity of their religion in social and philosophical ways. Interpreting data gathered from interviews conducted in Nigeria and the United States, I present a qualitative analysis of how practitioners, participants, and non-practitioners interact with the fundamental premises underlying the matrix of symbols, rites, and narratives that represent traditional Yoruba religion.

**Keywords** Ifa; Orisha; Yoruba; Ogun; Osun; Nigeria; African Religion and Spirituality

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"This is Osun." The priest said, showing me a stylized brass figurine. "She can move across the Earth at 10,000 km per second. That is how she can be anywhere in the world, and respond to anyone who prays to her. You know, there are many, many people who pray to Osun."

"Does she hear any language?" I asked.

The priest nodded. "Yes. She is a spirit, you know. She hears what the heart says. It doesn't matter what language you speak."

[personal communication, May 2012]

I was not the first *oyinbo* (white man) interested in learning more about the spiritual practices of the Yoruba in southwest Nigeria. My first challenge was to penetrate a layered and complex matrix of social responses designed to protect and maintain the integrity of an indigenous esoteric tradition. It is not uncommon for practitioners of *Ifa* and *Orisha* to mislead foreigners, taking advantage of a new paradigm of spiritual tourism between the West and developing countries around the world.<sup>1</sup>

On account of its popularity in the Diaspora, particularly in Cuba and Brazil, as well as in the United States, the Yoruba spiritual tradition and pantheon attracts a good deal of attention. While spiritual tourism is not as prevalent in Nigeria as it is in Peru or Thailand, the annual Osun Festival in Oshogbo draws hundreds of visitors from around

<sup>1</sup> I was told, on several occasions by different individuals, "Be grateful that you know someone. Otherwise, they would have done something useless and taken your money. You would never have known the difference." I asked whether this happens often. "It happens. Foreigners come here with money."

the world.<sup>2</sup> While many visitors are familiar with *Ifa* and *Orisha*, there are many different practices, interpretations, and representations.

A comprehensive and comparative survey of the various traditions that incorporate and employ elements of West African *Ifa/Orisha* would be lengthy indeed. Suffice it to say that worshippers in Cuba are not identical in their practice to worshippers in New York, and neither are identical in their practices to worshippers in southwest Nigeria. Nonetheless, the Orishas are considered to be *the same spirits* regardless of whether they are invoked in Yoruba, Creole, Spanish, Portuguese, or English. It is possible to ascribe the transnational character of Yoruba religion to the historical circumstances surrounding its proliferation. Its currently international identity, however, suggests that *Ifa/Orisha* is meaningful and relevant to a broad spectrum of participants. This is remarkable for an indigenous religious tradition, in part because *Ifa/Orisha* is closely tied to the Orishas and the rites meant to elicit their protection and aid, or to prevent them from harming an individual or group. *Ifa/Orisha* is polytheistic, worldly, often uninhibited, unpredictable, and radically diverse. It emphasizes difference and plurality, maintaining integrity both esoterically and exoterically through carefully moderated relationships between practitioners and participants.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Probst writes (2004:34-35): "[w]hat has taken place is the transformation of a formerly 'local' festival into a 'global' event, with nowadays numerous entries on the Internet, and attended by visitors from all over the world...many of the tourists attending...are members of the African Diaspora in Europe, the U.S., the Caribbean, and South America, who come to Nigeria either to find or to revitalize their ethnic identity."

I was curious to learn how Nigerian practitioners and participants acknowledge the global character of *Ifa/Orisha*. Do they engage the religion as a root system of local or regional origin; or as an inclusive system able to assimilate religious and magical elements from practices external to Nigeria? I would, of course, let the respondents speak for themselves. Many of them were, after all, the representatives and storytellers of a tradition that originated in their homeland.

I conducted interviews with over forty respondents.<sup>3</sup> Interviews were conducted in a number of locations throughout southwest Nigeria, including Ile-Ife, Oshogbo, and Ibadan; as well as in Yola-Jimeta, Adamawa State. I arranged interviews in Yorubaland through a sponsor,<sup>4</sup> and after several structured interviews, I was invited to observe and participate in a sequence of *Ifa/Orisha* ceremonies over the course of the next two years. I conducted interviews with practitioners, including *Ifa* priests, as well as priests in the service of Osun, Shango, and Ogun, and apprentices undergoing training to become professional *babalawo*. I also conducted interviews with Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa respondents of varying ages and professions, from university students to *okada* drivers; as well as non-African respondents from the United

<sup>3</sup> Most interviews were one-on-one, but on several occasions included other individuals. In some cases, an interview would begin with a single individual and expand as others arrived who became interested in contributing information. There were a number of structured interviews with several individuals, including a meeting with two priests and an apprentice tasked with assessing my petition to observe and participate in ceremony.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to my sponsor for facilitating a good deal of my primary research among practitioners and worshippers in Yorubaland. From translation to transportation, he made certain that this *oyinbo* was given access to genuine information and experience.

States, Haiti, and Columbia. Questions focused on familiarity with *Ifa/Orisha* in terms of practice and philosophy, as well as respondents' personal and family history related to Yoruba religion; belief and relationship to the symbols and concepts of *Ifa/Orisha*; knowledge of related variations of African spirituality. Many interviews were spontaneous and unstructured, serendipitous occasions of right time and place—including a meeting with a local king and his royal *Ifa* priest.<sup>5</sup>

Understandably, practitioner engagements were varied. A pattern did emerge, however: practitioners who lived in larger urban centers were more familiar with external interpretations, as well as foreign practitioners and initiates. Consequently, they were either prepared to, or proficient in, adapting their explanations to accommodate multiple perspectives and interpretations. In doing so, they perform a complex narrative function: they draw from disparate frames (i.e., local, tribal, and global), incorporating different interpretations (of the Orishas, ritual objects, and mythology), different mediums of representation (music, art, performance), and interrelate these frames, interpretations, and representations into a sacred space created *in the moment* to suit a specific, worldly purpose. At the same time, they draw from specific, lineage-based stocks of knowledge anchored in familiar, socially reinforced conventions that satisfy a real need for a meaningful and effectual exchange between practitioner and

<sup>5</sup> On this particular occasion, I was interested in learning more about local rural practice outside of Ile-Ife, specifically related to the Orisha Esu, an often volatile and unpredictable spirit. Fortuitously, my sponsor's father was from a complex of villages northwest of Oshogbo, and he was able to make formal arrangements for a meeting with the king.

participant(s). In contrast, practitioners outside of larger urban centers were more likely to rely solely on lineage-based, directly transmitted forms. Unfortunately, for local practitioners who do not have access to, proficiency in, or an interest in engaging foreign importations of *Ifa/Orisha*, they are faced with a diminishing matrix of local interest and investment. Young men and women from the villages are seeking their fortunes in the rapidly growing cities throughout Nigeria, encountering highly aggressive congregations of Christians and Muslims, as well as a marked emphasis in modernity, industrialization, and globalization. The religious systems of the largely uneducated elders do not hold so strongly, and are eroded steadily. Diminished forms may exist, even those that may have been distorted by the pressures of social change.

Practitioners of *Ifa/Orisha*, as well as participants (clients, witnesses, etc.) enact the roles of storyteller: clients petition the priests with the troubles of their daily lives, opening connections into multiple arenas of human engagement. The priest (*babalawo*) surrounds, or encases the exchange in sacred space, ensuring that a very specific meaning (or range of meanings) is assigned to the actions, words, and objective of the consultation. Stories are told that serve as invocations (rites of summoning), reference-points (applying the principle of sympathetic magic<sup>6</sup>),

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Mauss (2001:69) writes: "[a]mongst [mythical spells] we have a type of incantation which describes a situation similar to that which the magician is trying to produce. The description usually involves a fairy story or an epic tale, with heroic or divine characters...the reason behind it being something like this: if a certain person (a god, saint, or hero) was able to do such and such a thing (usually a very difficult task) in such and such a circumstance, perhaps he could perform the same feat in the present case." Mauss's definition is applicable here.

predictions/divinations, and positive and/or negative exhortations.<sup>7</sup> This contextual blending of multiple frames is then distilled into a meaningful correlation by the practitioner, who empowers the supplicant or client *to continue the narrative*. New stories are constantly told, building and reinforcing connections to pluripotent prisms of association, symbol, mythos, and ritual.

My analysis here will focus on data from respondents representing practitioners, participants, and non-practitioners.<sup>8</sup> Sandra T. Barnes<sup>9</sup> (1997:20) presents a useful methodology for engaging *Ifa/Orisha* that "focuses on cultural representations by hovering between two levels of analysis: one that stays close to the empirical ground, as does ethnohistory, and another that soars to the language of universal principles such as deep structures of the mind, as does structuralism." These universal principles, or "root metaphors," are abstractions "formulated by the minds that are being explored...because it is created by the actors, the generalization retains its cultural uniqueness. But because it is an abstraction, it lends itself to being translated from the terms of one culture to another" (Barnes 1997:20).

<sup>7</sup> In his analysis of ritual conduct, Emile Durkheim (1995) identifies two aspects to every cult: negative and positive. In short, the negative cult is associated with prohibition and taboo, and the positive cult with sacrifice: "[a]nd so when men feel there is something outside themselves that is reborn, forces that are reanimated, and a life that reawakens, they are not deluded" (Durkheim 1995:352-353).

<sup>8</sup> The data substantiating this article is based on interviews conducted between 2011 and 2013 with practitioners (a priest and priestess of Osun, an Obatala priest, and two priests of *Ifa*) and non-practitioners (Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo Nigerians, as well as Westerners).

<sup>9</sup> The analytical method described by Barnes (1997) is particularly useful for examining a number of concepts, including root metaphor, emphatic symbol, root paradigm, and archetype.

It may also be helpful to make reference here to the ethnographic model proposed by Robert Prus (1997:17): “the interactionist approach or paradigm attends centrally to *the study of human lived experience as the paramount reality*...the most feasible way of learning about human lived experience is through *interactive inquiry* into human life-worlds.” *Ifa/Orisha*, though active in countless different life-worlds on both sides of the Atlantic, is nevertheless strongly tied to its roots in West Africa. Its cohesion and adaptability is strengthened by the relevance and meaning ascribed to the social and private role of the religion by practitioners and non-practitioners alike.

I am not unaware that morphologies of religion have been imposed on accounts and studies of African traditions. James L. Cox (2001:351) rightly points out in a criticism of McKenzie’s *Hail Ori-sha!* that “phenomenological typologies, understood as essential characteristics of religion, fail to acknowledge the historical, social, and cultural contexts out of which they developed. Typologies only make sense as pragmatic, limited terms to help facilitate communication and promote understanding.”<sup>10</sup> Cox’s point is not dissimilar to Emile Durkheim’s position (1995:91): “social facts exist in relationship with the social system to which they belong; hence they cannot be understood apart from it. This is why two facts belonging to two different societies cannot be fruitfully compared simply because they resemble one

<sup>10</sup> Cox (2001:351) goes on to say that “it is important for scholars to adopt self-reflexive approaches whereby they position themselves historically and ideologically as they engage in their investigations.”

another.”<sup>11</sup> *Ifa/Orisha* is far removed from the totemic religions posited by Durkheim as the most basic and universal form of religious belief and practice.<sup>12</sup> However, different varieties of practice exist concurrently that appear to retain elements of varying stages in the development of the religion. Granted, many of these expressions are the result of factors that affect uprooted and transposed native traditions.

It should be noted that, at this time in history, the primarily oral traditions of Yoruba spirituality have been considerably influenced by tension, syncretism, and globalization, rendering any attempt to reconstruct an *original Ifa/Orisha* model all but impossible.<sup>13</sup> The same adaptability that allows the tradition and its components to survive in so many different forms also precludes a definitive version, while allowing a plurality of narratives to exist in the same arena. There are many

<sup>11</sup> Durkheim himself does posit a series of religious stages of development, classifying later stages as more developed than others, more primitive varieties. For Durkheim, the totemic conceptual scheme gives way to higher levels of differentiation, specialization, and anthropomorphizing tendencies. Among the higher stages of development is the inclusion of a supreme creator deity, which Durkheim suggests is a natural (as opposed to strictly inherited via colonization, etc.) advancement.

<sup>12</sup> Durkheim sourced his information in an admirable collection of ethnographic accounts, including, of course, Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*. Durkheim’s primary focus, however, was on the Aborigine tribes of Australia. He considered the practices described by Spencer and Gillen, Strehlow, and Howitt to be “the most favorable terrain for the study of totemism” (Durkheim 1995:88-90).

<sup>13</sup> For example, one respondent referred to guns in a retelling of Ogun’s origins and initial interactions with humankind. Obviously, guns were introduced to West Africa well after the Iron Age, considered by most scholars to coincide with the widespread generation of Ogun cults throughout the region. When I pointed this out to my respondent, he could only tell me that “most of the old, old stories have been forgotten or lost. Sometimes, they are the same, except we say ‘machetes’ instead of ‘guns’” (personal communication, May 2012).

practicing *babalawos* in the Yoruba nation presently, but there are fewer initiates today when compared to the precolonial heyday of the itinerant diviner. *Ifa/Orisha* is by no means an endangered tradition.<sup>14</sup> However, it is equally safe to say that, inasmuch as Yoruba spirituality is syncretic, there are relatively few examples of unadulterated practice, particularly with respect to the lesser-known deities. There is little doubt that for as many religious elements as have survived the long years between pre-contact and modern Africa, there are many more that have been utterly forgotten. There are deities who will never again receive the sacrifices of their worshippers.

Nonetheless, there is no indigenous move to create a definitive version. Rather, the preservation of efficacious rites is entrusted to direct transmission (personal communication, December 2011), while the flexibility of the system itself is expected to accommodate the integration of new ideas and interpretations. Moreover, multiple narratives exist explaining or addressing the same idea or complex of ideas (Orunmila’s relationship to Osun, for example). Some of these may have been generated among different narrative groups at the same time, while others are clearly revisions of earlier stories. The motives for these revisions are many, including the integration of new objects or ideas and the assignment of spiritual symbols and meaning to them. Nevertheless, both the earlier and later nar-

<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to suggest that *Ifa/Orisha* is a singular, homogenous tradition in Nigeria, elsewhere in West Africa, or in the Diaspora. There are remarkable similarities across the board, but the differences are notable, as well as culturally and historically meaningful. A difference in the number of cowries used in divination, for example, may indicate differences in the underlying mythology.

ratives continue to exist, suggesting that different variations of *Ifa/Orisha* can survive concurrently. Their continued survival is, of course, dependent on social investment,<sup>15</sup> and it has become apparent to many practitioners that, in order to preserve the rites themselves (including the consecration of ritual tools, invocation of the Orishas and Odu, etc.), a broader range of transmission should be adopted.

Practitioners of *Ifa/Orisha* in southwest Nigeria incorporate belief in the ubiquitous power Durkheim called the totemic principle,<sup>16</sup> known to the Yoruba as *ase*; an extensive pantheon of gods and goddesses; and a supreme creator deity (Oludumare). The art, poetry, and dance forms associated with the tradition are varied and expressive of highly adaptive and progressive styles. Practitioners also exhibit a willingness to explain the ritualistic and symbolic relationships that constitute religious observation in public and private. Durkheim (1995:134-135) identified mythology as an *a posteriori* creation designed to explain highly emotional correlations based on collective experience. I am in no position to determine whether or not *ase* preceded the corpus of myths and narratives that continue to be told, adapted, and translated. However, it seems that *ase* retains its impersonal, causal integrity as a collective, social energy that is nonetheless harnessed in varying degrees by the individual in pursuit of

<sup>15</sup> A point made by Marcel Mauss (2001:154): “[t]he universality and the *a priori* nature of magical judgments appear to us to be the sign of their collective origin.”

<sup>16</sup> Durkheim (1995:207) writes: “[t]he central notion of totemism is that of a quasi-divine principle that is immanent in certain categories of men and things and thought of in the form of an animal or plant.” Durkheim goes on to say that this principle is the clan itself, the power of the collective overpowering the sensibilities of the individual and instigating a process of ideation that expresses itself in totemic, ritualistic ways.

personal goals. Symbolic relations, natural phenomena, circumstantial events, and a range of both individual and human experiences are linked to the involvement of the Orishas and lesser spirits, ancestors, and unnamed natural entities that act and react through interconnected human worlds. Participants in these worlds carefully negotiate personal and collective interpretations to maintain the chain of meanings that correlate tangible experiences to spiritual or supernatural origins. In many respondents, this attribution was clearly automatic. Higher degrees of involvement correspondently featured a tendency to ascribe spiritual causes to daily events (encountering a particular individual or acquaintance, the arising of an opportunity or obstacle, etc.).<sup>17</sup> In many cases, these interpretations are quite clever. In one case, the purchase of a shoddy used car that broke down at a very inconvenient time (on the road from Okene to Ile-Ife) was ascribed to the trickery of Esu working alongside Ogun—one a spirit of mischief and misfortune, the other a spirit of iron and industry (personal communication, May 2012).

*Ifa/Orisha* occupies a range of positions in many lives around the world. For some, it represents a central focus; as priests or active practitioners, they may identify their social roles as representatives of certain lineages associated with specific temples, sites, and deities; or in terms of their social roles as the community's consultants, healers, and protectors. For others, it is marginal, liminal, shrouded in sensationalized superstition. There are many points of interaction,

<sup>17</sup> Prus (1997:59) writes: "[s]ubcultures may be most notably defined by activities, but the life-worlds that develop around these activities are also characterized by sets of perspectives, identities, relationships, commitments, emotional expressions, and linguistic influences."

and *Ifa/Orisha* is constantly rewoven into a radically changing landscape. Storytellers are challenged to preserve the essence of the system while maintaining their own roles as narrative agents. The substance of the belief system must be refreshed within competing life-worlds that are both culturally internal, and as far afield from their historical source as the metropolises of the New World. The balance between multiple expressions and a socially constructed, independent unity of interwoven narratives is a fine one, and difficult to maintain.

The major Orishas are well-known and can be found under a variety of names in sources ranging from scholarly articles to mass-market New Age catalogues of deities and spirits. In South America, they are most commonly syncretized with Catholic saints for a variety of reasons, but such conflation is misleading to outsiders and non-practitioners. This is often intentional, as Sheila S. Walker (1980:32) writes: "[w]hereas some people did indeed become Catholic, many managed to remain faithful to their ancestral religion, while avoiding persecution by superficially catholicizing their deities, a practice to which Catholicism lends itself well."

In Nigeria, this type of syncretism is less common than in the Diaspora. Evangelical Christianity does not emphasize the reverence of saints or intermediaries; nor does the Yoruba concept of distant Oludumare accord with the Protestant vision of a personal relationship with God.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many of the Yoru-

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, however, a type of African spirituality-Protestant syncretism *does* exist, according to Walker (1980). She cites Mitchell (1975) in saying that: "[b]eing filled with the Holy Spirit resembles possession by the Loa in the Vodou religion and a kind of Protestant-Vodou syncretism exists" (Walker 1980:34).

ba Orishas are earthbound spirits. Islam, of course, maintains a distinctly antagonistic stance towards idolatry. Still, there are many adherents of Yoruba spirituality who identify as Christian or Muslim, and it is not unknown for an individual belonging to another religion to consult a *babalawo*. In fact, many practitioners in Nigeria and in the Americas hold two faiths, freely blending symbolic and ritual elements in an endless variety of ways.

While most, if not all, ethnic groups practiced traditional/indigenous religion and medicine at one time, the spread of Christianity in the South along the coast and Islam in the North across the Sahel greatly diminished the number of active practitioners and limited the application of *juju*<sup>19</sup> to herbs, charms, and talismans, typically used to ward off danger or encourage success. Even these remnants of a more widespread array of practices are eroding, succumbing to a vigorous campaign of proselytizing by orthodox or fundamental expressions of the two major religions.<sup>20</sup>

The situation is not the same across the Atlantic. Yoruba spiritual traditions are quite healthy throughout South America, as well as in large ur-

<sup>19</sup> This term is commonly employed by Nigerians; however, it should be noted that *juju* refers predominantly to talismans, amulets, and charms, and is associated with witchcraft. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word itself is likely a borrowing from the French *joujou*, "toy." Yoruba divination and spirituality, although often grouped alongside witchcraft by outsiders, is another matter entirely.

<sup>20</sup> Probst (2004:37) writes: "[t]hrough the victory over Fulani did not stop the expansion of Islam, Osun was able to maintain its integrative function. With the advent of Christianity, however, the situation changed...the missionaries made it clear that there is no alternative to the gospel. Combined with the effects of an increasing dominance of British colonial rule, their efforts turned out to be successful, and in the early 1930s, roughly a hundred years after the Fulani war, the mission forced the king to give up his office as the chief priest of the Osun cult."

ban centers across the U.S., and they continue to gain followers from all walks of life. Many communities that practice these traditions are in contact with their counterparts in West Africa,<sup>21</sup> and the movement of ideas, styles, and symbols has adopted a new pattern of transatlantic exchange. Enjoying the patronage of scholars, affluent worshipers, and large sectors of urban populations throughout the Caribbean and Americas, as well as a vigorous dynamic of syncretism and diffusion, Yoruba traditions are now returning to their homelands invigorated by a variety of spiritual globalization.

The *Ifa* Corpus is an oral one, and it is only relatively recently that the verses associated with the 256 Odu (spirits of divination) have been transcribed (see: Bascom 1969; 1980; Abimbola 1976; 1977; Eleburuibon 1989; 1998; 2004; Fama 1994). Moreover, while the structure of an Odu sequence is uniform, individual practitioners are free to express and interpret the verses in their own ways, authorized to do so in accordance with the lineage of their instruction and practice. Amherd (2010:40) writes: "[b]ecause attention and privilege is given to the performance's function in a given context together with its intertextual liability, static repetition is neither sought nor valued. Instead, pleasure and relevance are found in ongoing emergent utterances that make use of orature materials appropriate to the function at hand." No two recitations are going to be exactly alike. During the consultation, the petitioner and practitioner become actors in a sacred

<sup>21</sup> Including the Oyo Tunji settlement in Shelton, South Carolina, a neo-Yoruba community dedicated to the traditional worship of the Orishas. Oyo Tunji, according to Walker (1980:36), can be translated as "Oyo Rises Again/is Reborn." Oyo was the once-capital of the West African empire of the same name.

space exceptional to that context and situation. While the methods of creating this space are conventional and reproducible, there are many factors that converge to facilitate an interaction that is consecrated, unique, and immediately relevant.

Robert Prus (1997:69) writes: “[w]hile the existence of a generally shared language enables the development of any particular subculture, it is important to acknowledge that *each set of activities in which people engage represents a realm around which extensions or variants of that linguistic base may be developed.*” In this case, the language is the matrix of symbols, ideas, and mythological narratives that comprise shared interpretations of *Ifa/Orisha*, unique to highly diverse cultural, social, and geographic settings. Each engagement works within and from this matrix, but participants are both licensed and encouraged to formulate additional meanings and contextualized interpretations *within sacred space*.

Naturally, beyond these realms of engagement, outside consecrated space, the system is immediately subject to the imaginative retooling of profane discourse. Different storytellers can choose to address issues or interpretations that may affect their practice or engagement with *Ifa/Orisha*. On the other hand, collective acceptance of new interpretations or representations depends on a complex process of mutual negotiations that are validated through symbolic reinforcement, appraisals of intention and authority, and consensus. My own interest in learning more about *Ifa/Orisha* was very carefully evaluated by sponsors and contacts in Yorubaland. Following several divination rites intended to elicit the consent of the Orishas, I awaited the

decision of several practitioners in the community as to whether or not I would be admitted into their confidence. I am fortunate that the Orishas looked favorably on my petition, and as well that my intentions were deemed sufficiently genuine by those who are regarded as the guardians of a precious cultural heritage.

### Perspectives and Engagements

It may be helpful to begin this part of the analysis from “outside” the practice. Prus (1997:73) writes: “[t]he objectification process also becomes intensified when *outsiders* (intentionally or otherwise) engage in ‘identity work’ pertaining to...interests (curiosities, fascinations, entertainment, knowledge, fear, condemnation, control, elimination) with respect to the subculture in question...they may be seen to contribute to the ‘realism’ of particular subcultural essences.” Rather than relying on the indigenous/foreigner dichotomy, I have opted for a practitioner/non-practitioner framework. Beginning with the non-practitioner, I suggest two primary viewpoints. The first is:

1. The non-practitioner *unfamiliar* with more than the superficial elements of *Ifa/Orisha*.

There are significant differences in how this viewpoint is expressed or articulated across cultural and/or national groups. Degrees of familiarity are directly related to exposure. In areas that include a significant number of active practitioners (engaged in visible and public expressions of worship), even those unfamiliar with African spirituality may recognize certain symbols, representations,

and other elements.<sup>22</sup> A citizen of New York or New Orleans, for example, may frequently come across shrines, *botanicas*, and popular representations of the Orishas. In Haiti, the *lwa* are well-known even by non-practitioners, as well as in Brazil where Umbanda is as familiar as Catholicism.<sup>23</sup> In these communities, there are relatively few individuals genuinely unfamiliar with traditions influenced by Yoruba spirituality. The citizen of a community that is strictly Christian may never have seen anything beyond a Voodoo horror film. To clarify, *unfamiliar* in this case refers to those who have had a relatively low level of exposure, and are non-participants, as well as non-practitioners. The difference is that an individual may be a participant without engaging in practice of any kind, including worship, sacrifice, or ritual.<sup>24</sup>

In areas of low exposure, communities that practice sustained engagement with *Ifa/Orisha* are rarely, if ever, encountered. Individuals and groups unfamiliar with African religions are more vulnerable to specific channels of representative ideation (churches, television, film, etc.) and more likely to express

<sup>22</sup> Prus would likely characterize *Ifa/Orisha* as transnational and transsocietal, as well as encompassing “virtually all areas of participants’ lives” (1997:45). Participants may engage in “cyclical” or “occasional subcultural phenomena,” depending on the extent of their involvement and role. Even priests or *babalawo* may engage in other life-worlds that only marginally involve the religion, fully engaging their function only during ceremonies, consultations, and similar activities.

<sup>23</sup> Sandra T. Barnes (1997:17) writes: “Umbanda is the main beneficiary of an outpouring of books, conferences, and theological writings that explain Umbanda’s theological premises and thereby systematize and legitimate this faith in ways that are characteristic of world religions. In the process, Umbanda has become a national religion that embraces racially mixed congregations.”

<sup>24</sup> Researchers are most certainly participants. Prus (1997:224) writes, “[e]thnographic research is not only an interpretive, cooperative, and interactive process, but it is also a mutual process.”

or recognize negative associations (occultism, black magic, superstition, the reanimated dead, etc.). Where *Ifa/Orisha* is scarce or absent—particularly outside of Nigeria—the representatives and storytellers of the religion cannot defend their own interpretations and expressions, reassign unfavorable meanings, or “deal with outsiders” (Prus 1997:138) in constructive ways.

2. The non-practitioner *familiar* with *Ifa/Orisha*.

This viewpoint is found among the Yoruba, as well as Africans and non-Africans familiar with *Ifa*, Candomblé, Santería, Umbanda, Vodun, Spiritismo, et cetera. Scholars who study the traditions or those who go to observe a ceremony are examples of participants who are not only recipients of traditional narratives but in some way contribute to their proliferation. In terms of exposure, participant non-practitioners do not rely on stereotypes or media representations, but are knowledgeable in at least several dimensions of Yoruba spirituality, including the Orishas and their representations, even the symbols and powers associated with them; the history of the religion; and the purpose of many rituals, including the much maligned “mounting,” or spirit possession.<sup>25</sup> This group may be characterized by acceptance or tolerance<sup>26</sup>; however, this is not always the case: “[u]ntil the latter part of the 1960s, the Catholic influence was so prevalent in the dominant culture

<sup>25</sup> For a good account of spirit possession and how it is perceived by non-practitioners, as well as the importance of this element to African spirituality and religion, see: Walker (1980).

<sup>26</sup> Michael A. Nicklas (1990:96) writes: “[m]ass culture in Brazil can be characterized by acceptance and embracing of this emerging culture. It is estimated that there are roughly 300,000 Afro-Brazilian groups in Brazil.”

that the Afro-Brazilian groups, including Umbanda, were thought not to represent a religion" (Nicklas 1990:91). Instead, they were considered ethnic cult groups, characterized by a certain insularity described by Walker (1980:32): "[t]he purpose for keeping slaves from the same group together was not humanitarian in inspiration. On the contrary, the rationale was that such a practice should insure that slaves from different groups remain conscious of their own specific ethnic identity." The insularity that preserved Yoruba identity and tradition also slowed the process of social integration that would eventually result in the creation of Umbanda. Still, as entrenched paradigms of dominance and subordination give way to new patterns of social exchange and globalization, the insularity that formerly characterized religions like Candomblé or Haitian Vodun are giving way to new models of practice that may boast larger spheres of cultural influence.

In exchange, however, there is the contention that a high degree of syncretism endangers the authenticity of a given system. Lindsay Hale (2001) writes:

Diana Brown (1994) and Renato Ortiz (1978) both present compelling histories of how the founders of Umbanda sought to systematically strip the Afro-Brazilian religious traditions found in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro of those elements—such as blood sacrifice, "lewd" dancing, consumption of alcohol, "black magic," and sexual exploitation—offensive to bourgeois sensibilities. (p. 218)

As Walker points out in her article, many of those very elements are *essential* to African traditional

practices. Not only is spirit possession considered central to many disciplines,<sup>27</sup> most notably Vodun, the *Ifa* Corpus makes it abundantly clear that sacrifice is the primary locus of exchange between the mortal and supernatural worlds.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most significant element that affects outsiders' appraisal of Yoruba practice is animal sacrifice—indeed, the emphasis on sacrifice in general. Human sacrifice is forbidden, of course, and there is an *Odu* verse that explains why,<sup>29</sup> but the practice is nonetheless often attributed to African traditional religions. One respondent, a practitioner of traditional Peruvian shamanism, specifically *Ayahuasca*, expressed this view of African practices: "Working with any spirits that require blood sacrifice is dangerous. The intentions of the practitioner may be good, but spilling blood in exchange for power is black magic; the intentions no longer matter. That kind of practice is corruptive" (personal communication, November 2012). These qualms are more often expressed by Westerners and spiritual tourists, however. While the blood and certain organs are offered as part of an *ebo*, the rest of the animal

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Thompson Drewal (1997:207) writes: "[s]pirit mediumship is the most significant role of a priest." Similarly, Walker (1980:28) writes: "[t]he world view of the African and Afro-American societies in question is such that the altered state of consciousness manifested in the act of spirit possession is highly desirable and ardently sought."

<sup>28</sup> See Durkheim's (1995:347) analysis of sacrifice: "[s]acrifice is certainly a process of communion in part. But it is also, and no less fundamentally, a gift, an act of renunciation."

<sup>29</sup> Specifically, a verse and *ese* from the *Ìretè Meji*, here translated by the *Awisho* of Oshogbo, Yemí Elébuìbon: "[Orunmila] said, as from today on, no *Ifa* priest should use human blood to appease his inner head any longer" (Eleburuibon 2004:79). The story, essentially, is that Orunmila, god of divination, was on the verge of unknowingly purchasing his own son for sacrifice; when he heard the boy recite verses that only his son could have known, he recalled a barren woman he had met in the bush.

is in most cases eaten. Still, a typical initiation ritual necessitates the sacrifice of different animals, including rats, turtles, goats, et cetera (personal communication, May 2012), and these animals are killed in a ritual context expected to elicit the participation of a deity or spirit that responds to the blood of those animals.<sup>30</sup> Particularly from a Christian perspective, blood sacrifice is not only unnecessary, but in many cases considered offensive. The emphasis in *Ifa/Orisha* on blood sacrifice is doubly alarming given the animistic premise of ascribing not only sentience but intelligence to animals and even plants. Many *Odu* verses feature narratives involving non-human and non-Orisha actors, including the *Òsé Òtúrú*, a charming story about an earthworm who enters heaven to confront his father and earn the inheritance that his brothers (various species of snake) denied him: power (*àse*). This power is what enables the earthworm to burrow (Fama 1994:87-103). There are many *Odu* verses that serve to explain features of the natural world, describe interrelations common to social life, and establish parameters of behavior in a world populated by spirits of all kinds.

The respondent identified as a practitioner of Peruvian shamanism also indicated that there is a tendency to associate African practitioners with the *brujo* of South America, who practice without a strict moral compass (personal communication, November 2012). Morally "right" or "wrong" are difficult terms to unravel in this context, but based on the answers of respondents familiar with indigenous shamanic traditions, the ethical framework of the system depends on the use of

<sup>30</sup> On the sacred nature of blood, see: Emile Durkheim (1995:136-137): "[t]here is no religious ceremony in which blood does not have some role to play."

power, itself dependent on the deity to which a practitioner directs his or her worship.<sup>31</sup> Some are morally gray, unpredictable deities; others are dangerous and demand highly questionable practices from their worshipers; others are benevolent, "white" deities. Similarly, one may use his or her access to the spiritual world for good or for ill, to heal or to harm; and he or she will reap the consequences accordingly. One respondent, a Yoruba worshiper, said: "This man went to consult the priests, and they told him that he should not send Esu to kill someone. He did not listen. He went and consulted Esu, and Esu turned against him. He died" (personal communication, March 2013). It is clear that the *Ifa* Corpus is not morally neutral; many of the stories in the tradition encourage moral behavior. Still, the principal emphasis is *not* on morality as such, but on performing the prescribed *ebo*.

Participants in *Ifa/Orisha* engage a larger community of practitioners and worshippers that accept as true the fundamental premises of the religion, in whole or in part. The efficacy of *babalawo* and certain rites is assumed (Mauss 2001:114-120) and reinforced through periodic or cyclical engagement.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Durkheim (1995:215) writes: "[t]hus, both the moral power conferred by opinion and the moral power with which sacred beings are invested are fundamentally of the same origin and composed of the same elements." For Durkheim, the totemic principle at the base of religious activity is a social and, to a certain extent, a *moral* one. It is this principle that imbues subsequent ideations of gods and goddesses. However, it seems that this fundamental principle is more than capable of more complex diversification, embodying experiences that are degrading as well as uplifting, terrifying as well as inspiring, grotesque as well as sublime. If so, the moral element is removed from prominence and associated more with the maintenance of good relations between the mortal and divine worlds.

<sup>32</sup> Prus (1997:46) writes, "[c]yclical subcultures refer to those realms of involvement that entail a seasonal or calendar dimension...At more of a local community level, any variety of festivals and events represent annual or seasonal instances in which certain (subcultural) practices may be invoked."

More importantly, however, involvement is maintained through narrative and storytelling, active on many levels in a variety of forms. Dynamic narratives that are *taken from sacred space and integrated into profane life* are essential for two reasons: first, they maintain both personal and collective connections to the sacred space of the rite or consultation (where/when the narrative was created), and secondly, they strengthen symbolic or mythic associations to the belief system. When the outcome of an *Ifa* consultation comes to pass, in one form or another, participants are quick to point out that it was because the rite was effective in eliciting the involvement of certain entities.

Unfamiliarity with *Ifa/Orisha* may create a belief based on fear, superstition, and stereotype. For example, upon stating my desire to visit Oshogbo, one Nigerian respondent expressed genuine concern and apprehension, vehemently indicating that—although she was from Lagos—she would not go anywhere near the Osun Shrine. When I asked why, she maintained that witches were known to kidnap people and forcibly convert them. The victims would either remain among them indefinitely, or would leave entirely transformed by the experience, virtually unrecognizable to their families (personal communication, October 2011).

Sustained engagement with *Ifa/Orisha* may be due to experience (i.e., a “genuine” religious and/or mystical experience validating the premises of the tradition [Prus 1997:137]) or traditional upbringing (a form of cultural or collective experience). Nearly all of the Yoruba respondents indicated one or both of these influences. In many cases, the second

exists as a cultural and ethnic gestalt; most Yoruba respondents claimed relatives who were practitioners and/or participants. Younger respondents of Yoruba origin (18-24) exhibited a greater diversity of responses with respect to participation and experience. Among those who claimed direct relatives who were worshipers, initiates, or practitioners, belief was a more pronounced element, often due to personal experience or exposure to a pervasive, social narrative of affirmation. Members of a congregation reinforce one another’s belief and continued investment, not only as a means of maintaining the solidarity of communal identity, but also to perpetually rejuvenate the mythology. If Osun, Ogun, Esu, and the other deities were not considered very much active and alive, the *Ifa/Orisha* tradition may have since become no more than an ethnographic curiosity.

Interestingly, one practitioner admitted that without collective belief many of the Orishas would fade away from the world. I asked him what happened to spirits when they faded away. He shrugged and answered: “They go into the earth to sleep” (personal communication, January 2012). Mauss (2001:154) writes: “[a] group’s beliefs and faith are the result of everyone’s needs and unanimous desires. Magical judgments are the subject of a social consensus, the translation of a social need under the pressure of which an entire series of collective psychological phenomena are let loose.” The Orishas are certainly believed to respond to needs, embodying forces that tangibly affect the objects and circumstances of personal and public life. Individual lives are bound up in a multitude of engagements that may feature the Orishas, Odu, *ase*, or other elements of the religion

as a common, binding narrative that may provide a sense of both personal and collective continuity. In the midst of radical change, it may be that Yoruba participants are reinforcing their collective identity through *Ifa/Orisha* in the same way that groups in South America and throughout the Diaspora use comparable spiritual traditions to construct and realize group identity.

Among both Christians and Muslims in Nigeria who strongly identified with their religion, skepticism or antagonism towards *Ifa/Orisha* often arose from doctrinal loyalty. They considered Yoruba spirituality a brand of idol worship. Importantly, unlike those who *did* attribute some sort of power to *Ifa* and the Orishas, respondents in this grouping indicated that the Orishas simply did not exist, and that those who worshipped them were performing meaningless gestures before empty objects. Respondents who expressed this position were either Western, or Christian Nigerians exposed to Western culture and education.<sup>33</sup> Northern Nigerians expressed both of these positions far more commonly than they did any kind of belief. However, non-Yoruba, Hausa Muslims who believed in *juju*, charms, talismans, bush-spells, and the like were likely to attribute actual power to the Orishas of Yorubaland while claiming that those spirits “didn’t belong to them” (personal communication, November 2011). Skepticism also appeared among certain younger

<sup>33</sup> Bear in mind that most education in southern and eastern Nigeria is “Western.” Traditional educational models, based on apprenticeship, direct observation, and social narrative, still exist; but, formal education as such is typically British or American in format. Western educational models are mission-based and aggressively Christian, or they are products of an intellectual tradition that is expected to encourage development and modernization—often at the expense of valuing a rapidly diminishing cultural heritage.

participants; one respondent indicated that he did not know enough to say whether the spirits did not exist, and did not want to offend them in the event that they did (personal communication, May 2012).

Many younger respondents who opposed traditional practices expressed a curiously high degree of nationalism. Rather than see traditional practices as a unique and irreplaceable cultural resource, they viewed them as hindrances to modernization and development. Respondents dismissed indigenous practices as primitive and obsolete, rooted in an ignorance of the natural world and the discoveries of science.

The Nigerian movie industry, known as Nollywood, produces many films that present indigenous African religions as malevolent, sinister, or as the antithesis of Christianity or Islam. Adelakun (2010) writes: “[I]overs of Nigerian films will be familiar with this trend: a man or woman who wants to harm his/her neighbor goes to Ifa priest to help. He/She is given a charm and the evil intention most likely succeeds...a Christian pastor or Islamic cleric is invited to pray for him/her...the power of light which Christianity/Islam represents is seen as having triumphed over darkness and evil which the African traditional religion is seen as representing.” Yoruba filmmakers are responding with productions of their own.<sup>34</sup> Unlike other, lesser-known indigenous African traditions, *Ifa/Orisha* is international. Many practitioners are taking advantage of this fact by

<sup>34</sup> Prus (1997:74-75) writes: “[w]here outsiders define certain subcultures as undesirable, they may sponsor certain kinds of media messages in attempts to discredit the practices and participants associated with specific subcultures... Subcultural insiders wishing to promote their own pursuits may also sponsor media messages as tools.”

promoting Yoruba religion as a cultural resource. My own interest and involvement was interpreted in this light, and I was encouraged by several practitioners to represent their belief system accurately and honorably to the outside world.<sup>35</sup>

One thing that becomes clear when inquiring into the philosophy of indigenous practice is that faith is not defined in the same terms; that is, in the sense of holding something as true that cannot be proven. Rather, sufficient evidence is considered abundant. This is true for many shamanic and traditional practices; they are based on tangible results in the physical, phenomenal world. Practitioners are generally paid by their clients, and as such are part of the economic system of a given culture, offering a service in exchange for money or goods. Simply put, if they do not deliver, any trust in the efficacy of their work will be erased, and they will not be called upon to perform any of the services attributed to the traditional practitioner. In *Ifa*, for example, a diviner's predictions are *expected* to come true; moreover, if a threat is averted, it is also expected that the client should know and recognize that the "treatment" prescribed by the diviner successfully protected him/her. Chief Fama (1994:39) writes in her explanation of the *Ìtàn* attending the *Ìrosùn Ogbè*: "[i]n Yoruba culture, only versatile and proficient Babalawos are qualified to divine for kings. In the past, a Babalawo that divined for an Oba was required to live in the palace until his *Ifa* messages came to pass."

<sup>35</sup> My methodology in gaining practitioners' trust is advocated by Prus (1997:232): "[r]ather than becoming a convert...it may be more accurate to envision an effective researcher as one who takes on the situated role of an apprentice in the world of the other...insiders who adopt roles of teachers, guides, or research partners of sorts are particularly effective in communicating their experiences with the researcher."

Mauss (2001:115) writes: "there has always been a pressing urge to support magical beliefs by providing precise, dated, and localized proof," and: "along with this 'will to believe,' there is plenty of proof of actual belief" (2001:118). The practitioner is willing to believe in the efficacy of his own rites because, as Mauss (2001:118) argues, "[h]e is not a free agent. He is forced to play either a role demanded by tradition or one which lives up to his client's expectations." Obviously, among non-practitioners who discredit *Ifa/Orisha*, the rites belonging to the tradition are at best devoid of meaning, and at worst a perpetuation of an entrenched, ignorant form of primitive cult worship. Among practitioners, however, the efficacy of ritual practices is determined by a relatively liberal process of interpretation and association. While the Orishas themselves do not act outside of their jurisdictions or contrary to the entire (and often contradictory) range of their temperaments and habits, the symbolic and literal chain of events that links the ritual to its objective can assume a variety of forms. Similarly, when an objective is not attained, there are any number of explanations for the failure<sup>36</sup>; not the least of which is the absence of sufficient *ase*, typically attained and strengthened through sacrifice. If this happens, there is a bargaining, a give-and-take between the practitioner and his client (personal communication, January 2013) that may include adding to the originally prescribed sacrifice. If the second attempt proves fruitless, only then is the cred-

<sup>36</sup> Mauss (2001:114) points out that "even the most unfavorable facts can be turned to magic's advantage, since they can always be held to be the work of counter-magic or to result from an error in the performance of a ritual...the failure of a magical rite, far from undermining the people's confidence in the sorcerer, merely endowed him with greater authority, since his offices were indispensable to counteract the terrible effect of the powers, which might return to harm the clumsy individual who had unleashed them without taking the proper precautions."

ibility of the practitioner called into question—and quickly diffused by a willingness to believe that the spirits proved uncooperative on this occasion.

When asked to explain why he believed without doubt, a Yoruba non-practitioner familiar with *Ifa* maintained that anyone who doubted should

ask around. Everyone will tell you that it works. There was this man who stole a lot of money from a worshiper. The worshiper goes to consult *Ifa*, and they now tell him that he should make a sacrifice. If he makes this sacrifice, the man will die. Within seven days, he died. (personal communication, November 2012)

I asked the respondent whether this was considered "black magic," and he indicated that it was dangerous to send a spirit after someone, but that the men and women who did such things were dangerous people.

I should point out that there is no "secular *Orisha-ism*" in Nigeria,<sup>37</sup> no move towards separating the cosmological and supernatural elements from its moral, social, or ethical dimensions. In fact, this would likely be impossible. Many outsiders, particularly respondents from the United States, perceive African spiritual traditions as composed primarily of supernatural and ritualistic elements, and containing very little, if any, intellectual or moral components. This is not an uncommon perspective among those with a low degree of exposure to Yoruba concepts. The picture changes considerably

<sup>37</sup> In the way, for example, that there is a "secular Buddhism," nowadays associated with the writings of Stephen Batchelor, who wrote the popular *Buddhism Without Beliefs*.

among those with higher degrees of exposure, and is entirely different among those who are familiar with the traditions.

Witchcraft—prominent examples of which are constantly circulated across a variety of mediums<sup>38</sup>—is aligned with what a Westerner would call "black magic." Many Nigerians believe witches to belong to "secret societies," or cabals of practitioners who are responsible for any number of crimes and catastrophes across the country. Active in both rural and urban areas, secret societies are believed to abduct and initiate children, commanding them to steal from or murder their families.<sup>39</sup> Adult members are believed to possess a range of terrible powers, most of them malignant in nature. Opposed to secret societies and their nefarious members are priests, pastors, preachers, traditional healers and medicine-men. More than a few Nigerians, even in the north, carry various charms that ostensibly protect them from the machinations of witches. These charms and amulets are

<sup>38</sup> Including church newsletters. In one example, on the "testament" page of a particular newsletter, a "witness" claimed to have been abducted and forcibly initiated into a snake cult (a popular theme in Nigeria) where she was made to kill hundreds of innocent people in savage rituals. She was allegedly responsible for conducting the souls of her victims to the leader of this "secret society." This went on for years before she was found and redeemed by missionaries from this particular congregation (from Lord's Chosen newsletter, April 2012).

<sup>39</sup> I became privy to an alleged instance of child-related witchcraft in 2013. The story began when I was informed that the young daughter of a friend's brother had been accused of trying to murder her grandmother, with whom she was living at the time. Christian pastors were brought in, and they declared that the girl was possessed. They were unable, however, to exorcise the influence. About four months later, after another thwarted attempt to kill her grandmother, the child informed her family that members of a secret society had contacted her to tell her that they would claim her blood as punishment for her failure to deliver her grandmother into their hands. Shortly afterward, the young girl died in the hospital. Everyone with whom I spoke concerning this affair expressed no doubt whatsoever that a secret society was to blame for the girl's illness and death (personal communication, April 2013).

provided for a fee, and are composed of various local herbs bound in leather. The more powerful (and more expensive) charms are bound in pieces of burial shroud taken from an exhumed corpse (personal communication, March 2013).

Interestingly, *Ifa* practitioners themselves acknowledge the existence of secret societies that work with evil, “black,” or “red” deities. A *babalawo* indicated that “The red is always looking for blood. Whenever something terrible happens and many people die—that is the red. Those who serve the red are always looking to kill, and take the blood” (personal communication, December 2011). The priest went so far as to name a number of recent accidents and insist that they were the work of practitioners who were using those accidents as a means of mass ritual sacrifice. However, practitioners of “bad magic” are punished if caught, and typically executed (personal communication, December 2011). Individuals unfamiliar with *Ifa* may be unaware that practitioners worship opposing deities and vie with one another for influence and spiritual territory. A Yoruba worshiper informed me that a group of practitioners from a neighboring town frequently assaulted Ile-Ife using bad magic, and that the *babalawo* and other practitioners of *Ifa/Orisha* had to defend against them (personal communication, May 2012). Foreigners who are unfamiliar with the traditional religious culture of Yorubaland (and Africa in general) may not realize that it is an often *violent* spiritual landscape. However, Nigerian respondents indicated that this is common knowledge; good and evil practitioners have always warred with one another, and both Christians and Muslims freely superimpose angelic and demonic connotations on extant

narratives of earlier, precolonial traditions. Still, inasmuch as both Christianity and Islam are exclusive faiths, there is a diminishing space in Nigeria (particularly urban Nigeria outside of the Yoruba nation) for traditional religious specialists.<sup>40</sup>

Since the revivalist predilections of contemporary spirituality, the traditions of the developing world have attracted the attention of those interested in reclaiming, appropriating, and translating the wisdom of cultures that have not entirely succumbed to the homogenizing influence of modernization and globalization. *Ifa* is no longer another backward religion indistinguishable from similar religions throughout South America, Oceania, and Africa. It has become an untapped treasure-trove of active forces that address very earthly and material needs in ways the monolithic religions do not. For practitioners, the ability to integrate diverse expressions across varied mediums of exchange allows for an interface unavailable to many indigenous systems throughout the Continent. However, interactions between the storytellers of *Ifa/Orisha* and the extended worlds of both practitioners and non-practitioners are opening spaces of unpredictability, conflict, and negotiation.<sup>41</sup>

Whether the commoditization of spirituality is positive or negative is not a question addressed by this article (see: Carrette and King [2005] for a detailed analysis of this phenomenon). Suffice it to say that

<sup>40</sup> Again, this is not true in the Diaspora where the number of initiates and practitioners is growing.

<sup>41</sup> Prus (1997:44) writes: “[i]n all instances, however, it is the connectedness of interactants that provides the essential foundation of the larger (translocal, regional, transnational) subculture in question.”

the Yoruba traditions have not escaped the attention of a peculiar sort of consumer: the spiritual tourist. Just like any other resource on the market, value is proportionate to demand. Identifying the nature of the demand is necessary to understanding exactly how *Ifa/Orisha* is valued or objectified as a commodity. The demand itself tells us about the consumer, and a distinguishing characteristic of the spiritual tourist is a willingness to believe in at least one aspect of the premises that support a given tradition. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to be reductionist here, and many spiritual tourists myopically impose Western dichotomies on indigenous systems, that is, traditional versus globalized, genuine versus mediated, original versus derivative. Seen from behind this tinted lens, Yoruba spirituality becomes another romanticized religion, closer to an idealized source.<sup>42</sup>

As part of the Diaspora, Yoruba spirituality is easily as global as any of the major religions. As a highly syncretic religion, particularly in the Americas, one finds the Orishas commonly mediated through analogous Catholic saints. The Yoruba pantheon is also a composite of deities brought together from a variety of tribal groups in the precolonial history of West Africa. J.D.Y. Peel (1997:275) writes on Ogun: “[t]he prominence of any one of Ogun’s potential meanings or functions in a particular place depends partly on local circumstances...it is also af-

<sup>42</sup> Carrette and King (2005:78) are highly critical of spiritual tourism, and with good reason: “[w]hile ‘New Age’ followers dance the gospel of self-expression, they service the financial agents and chain themselves to a spirituality of consumerism. While they selectively ravage the feel-good fabric of ancient cultural and religious traditions, their disciplines and practices can easily isolate them from the resources of social justice and community to be found within those same traditions.”

ected by what other deities are present in any local complex of cults...These complexes are the practical, concrete reality of Yoruba religion.” However, Ile-Ife is known as the “Source,” and it is more than likely that there are elements of the Corpus that have remained relatively unchanged since the Bantu Expansion. The perception of practitioners is that *Ifa/Orisha* has *survived*, and the further one moves from urban centers built on the history of colonialism, the greater the likelihood that threads of older practices continue to find expression “in the bush.”

Africa, and Nigeria in particular, is developing quickly. Perceptions of traditional religions are changing; their continued survival is not due solely to their ability to adapt and change, but also to their ability to *resist* change. Yoruba spirituality has been able to walk this tightrope in Nigeria, but—as is historically the case—traditions need defenders and advocates who are capable of representing and resolving this tension between resistance and adaptation. These representatives participate in the construction of multi-vocal narratives that allow the voice of the religion to be heard in different contexts (e.g., local, national, global) and translate that voice into mediums foreign to it. For example, traditional practitioners likely did not need to explain the mythology or reasoning<sup>43</sup> underlying their work anymore than a citizen of classical Greece needed to be told who the Olympians were. Now, invited into a marketplace that extends across cultures, the Orishas are obligated to explain themselves in ways

<sup>43</sup> According to Mauss (2001:119), “[m]agic is believed and not perceived. It is a condition of the collective soul, a condition which is confirmed and verified by its results. Yet it remains mysterious even for the magician.”

formerly unnecessary. Karen McCarthy Brown (1997) describes a worshiper “mounted” by Ogun who channeled the deity in a way uncommon to normal manifestations of the Orisha:

[t]he tearful despair of these New York Ogou is a facet of the spirit’s character that is difficult to imagine being acted out in Haiti. Perhaps a new dimension of the Haitian Ogou is emerging in the North American setting...However, the Haitian Ogou has not taken up the challenge of interpreting modern technology, as he has in Nigeria. (p. 83-84)

Modern practitioners must contend with an “unwillingness to believe” that results from an opening or fragmentation of unified, collective investment and participation in sustained practice or storytelling. This has most certainly taken place in Nigeria. How practitioners respond to this challenge varies, but it is enough for the moment that multiple trajectories of engagement exist: from the representation of Orishas and their devotees in popular media and entertainment, to scholarship conducted by outsiders and insiders, to translations of the Corpus, to the maintenance of direct lines of transmission and carefully moderated instruction and apprenticeship.

In effect, the point of interaction between practitioner and non-practitioner is not only ideological and social but direct. The Yoruba spiritual tradition is primarily concerned with the world, and is therefore active *in the world*, rather than eschewing worldly pleasures and acquisitions. Belief is reinforced by two key elements: a causal and direct relationship between ritual actions and their intended

effects,<sup>44</sup> and the fact that the symbolic narrative of the tradition is continuously adapted and rewritten to suit changing social contexts. Given these elements, it is no surprise that Yoruba spirituality survives and continues to proliferate across many of the same channels that once facilitated the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In fact, West African spirituality—not limited to the *Ifa/Orisha* traditions of Nigeria—has not only survived but has adapted itself to a world dominated by the neoliberal marketplace.

### Philosophy

*Ifa/Orisha* is a polytheistic system. The bickering, anthropomorphized deities of classical mythology in the Western world are not dissimilar to the Yoruba gods, who likewise quarrel, engage in common human behavior, and experience difficulty. The Orishas are also assigned powers and jurisdictions; they possess defining characteristics and are easily syncretized with comparable deities across ethnic and cultural groups. Also similar to the gods of old, the Orishas have very specific preferences and taboos that must be observed by worshipers and initiates. The deities are actors in an extensive corpus of narratives that serve a number of functions: they answer questions about the appearance and machinery of the natural world; they establish the boundaries of ethical behavior; they stabilize and validate the social and political community.

<sup>44</sup> This involves the law of sympathy or contiguity, described at length by Mauss in *A General Theory of Magic*, originally published in 1902. In essence, the direct correlations necessary to magical or ritual efficacy are the result of collective belief in a “curiously limited” range of symbolic associations (Mauss 2001:86). While this range is similarly limited in *Ifa/Orisha*, the narrative possibilities available with which an individual or group may mythologize, interpret, or assign a causal link between ritual and effect are far more extensive.

At this juncture, it may be helpful to point out that *Ifa/Orisha* is *both* a magical and religious system. The rites and rituals of sacrifice, initiation, divination, et cetera have a magical character dependent on the actions of an authorized practitioner. The system itself operates according to the laws associated with magical operations, including contiguity, contagion, and sympathy. However, according to Mauss (2001:30), “[a] magical rite is *any rite which does not play a part in organized cults*—it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite.” Elements of public/social and personal/private worship and ritual exist in *Ifa/Orisha*. The *babalawo* is the priest, and the wilderness may well serve as a temple of collective worship. There is both mystery and openness in the tradition that bridges the untamed forest and the village, the seemingly changeless rural settlements with urban centers that race towards modern development. In many ways, it is the magical character of Yoruba religion that works as the primary locus of unity, coherence, and narrative compatibility. This is uncommon, inasmuch as knowledge transmission and instruction are generally highly localized and depend on the unbroken continuity of a specific stock of rites, rituals, formulae, et cetera. The open dissemination of magical knowledge is counterproductive. However, what is remarkable here is that the religious elements of *Ifa/Orisha* do not exist independently of the mythological and magical elements, but work to bolster them by empowering local practitioners. By accessing the religious elements—social, moral, philosophical, and mythological (inasmuch as mythologies cross religious-magical boundaries [Mauss 2001:105])—practitioners are able to reinforce the ongoing mythos of collective participation and strengthen the relevance of symbolic correlations between disparate fields of engagement.

The mythology changes and adapts depending on the practitioner and the lineage. Bascom (1980:32) writes: “[t]he verses confirm, supplement, and at times contradict what is known about Yoruba religion, revealing how beliefs vary, with cult members often assigning greater importance to their own deity than is generally recognized.” Practitioners may be any of the following:

3. Priests, priestesses, *babalawo*, et cetera, who conduct ceremony and perform sacrifices, initiations, divinations, and consultations, and administer traditional medicines. Included in this set are those who engage in rituals of “mounting” or spirit possession.<sup>45</sup>
4. Initiates who are not qualified to perform advanced ceremonies, and who are undergoing apprenticeships. This set is complicated by a number of initiates who do not receive instruction in the traditional way, that is, living with the priest and learning through direct observation. Some may travel periodically to receive instruction or participate in ceremony, supplementing their instruction by accessing modern sources of information, including transcriptions of the Corpus.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Outsiders generally identify this ritual with Haitian Vodun, but it is an integral part of West African spirituality. Margaret Thompson Drewal (1997:207) writes: “[t]he god is said to mount (*gùn*) the devotee (*elégún*, literally, ‘one who is mounted’) and, for a time, that devotee becomes the god. Temporarily, then, the animating spirit of the deity (*èmi òrìsà*) displaces that of the individual being mounted.”

<sup>46</sup> Some “practitioners” are taking advantage of unorthodox methods of instruction to swindle those interested in becoming initiates. One respondent informed me that this practice is common, particularly towards foreigners: “If you don’t know someone who knows a priest and can vouch for you, if you try and find someone yourself, they will lie to you and take your money. It is very important that you know someone who can speak for you to the priests. But, this is not always a bad thing. Plenty of foreigners come to learn *Ifa* who don’t know what they are doing, and that can be dangerous” (personal communication, April 2013).

5. Worshipers. Many worshipers keep shrines to the Orishas in their homes, participate in public ceremonies, and engage in a variety of other activities that express belief in the deities—drumming, reenactments, swordplay, et cetera. Thousands of worshipers attend ceremonies dedicated to Osun, Shango, Ogun, and Obatala.

All of these are considered to be *familiar* with the tradition; based on interviews with practitioners from each of these sets, I will briefly discuss a few major premises that address the philosophy of the religion.

The first regards the relationship between human-kind and the divine. Unlike the three primary monotheistic religions of the world, human beings cannot address the Creator directly. Oludumare can be accessed only through intermediaries, each with its own jurisdiction, power, and relationship to the others. These intermediaries are the *Irunmolé*, the *Odu*, the Orishas, ancestors, and innumerable lesser spirits. While many of these deities are considered “good,” most of them nevertheless occupy a range of moral positions. They can be aligned in accordance with three primary forces: white, black, and red. An *Ifa* priest described the deities associated with these forces in the following way: “...white is cool-headed, good, helpful, creative, and life-giving. Red is hot-headed, violent, powerful, virile, and difficult to appease. Black is unpredictable, dangerous, and destructive” (personal communication, May 2012). There are troublesome spirits as well, akin to the demons of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions, but they are not linked to a single orchestrating source of evil.

It is often problematic to outsiders from the West that *Ifa/Orisha* spirituality does not abstract and personify Good and Evil in the same way that the monotheistic religions do. In fact, West African spirituality is arguably more complex in its polytheism than the duality that frames many expressions of monotheistic theology. The neo-Platonism and Manichean philosophy that influences Christianity is absent here. This does not mean that the practice is amoral, but rather that the individual is responsible for his or her own harmony and balance.

In *Ifa*, balance is negotiated between the human being and his or her *ori* (inner head or ancestral spirit). Similar to Western concepts of the Spirit, the *ori* is virtually autonomous in its own right, appointed to an individual as a guide.<sup>47</sup> An individual can have a “good head” or a “bad head” (Bascom 1980:34), implying good or bad fortune. Respondent practitioners indicated that the *ori* is often called one’s “destiny.” Durkheim (1995:283) addresses this concept in his analysis of the individual totem or ancestor spirit: “[w]e cannot become fully merged with it because we ascribe to it a stature and a respect that lift it above us and our empirical individuality.” This holds true for the *ori*. An individual that neglects to satisfy his or her “inner head” will be chastised and made to endure all manner of misfortune; not only on account of his or her *ori*, but because the withdrawal of the *ori*’s protection attracts the influence of

<sup>47</sup> Bascom (1980:34) writes: “[i]nformants stress the importance of the ancestral guardian soul, some even calling it a deity.” In his translation of an *Eji Ogbe* verse, Orunmila is told to accord proper respect to the source of his good fortune: “[t]hey said, ‘Orunmila, you should shout about the one who made you so.’... Shout, ‘Head, oh! Head is what makes a boy a man. Yes’” (Bascom 1980:129).

negative forces (personal communication, January 2012). For Durkheim, the ancestor spirit was a personification of a doubled self (1995:283), a means of resolving the duality that characterized the social, communal involvement of an individual as distinct from the day-to-day responsibilities more properly belonging to the profane realm (1995:390). This suggests that the displeasure of this ancestor spirit is a projection of the communal self’s<sup>48</sup> shame, based on the awareness that he or she may have strayed beyond the accepted norms or conventions of his or her social obligations. This may not be entirely untrue as the *ori*’s sanctions are responses to moral or social transgressions (i.e., not paying for a sacrifice, failing to respect a mutual contract, etc.). However, practitioners also indicated that taboos may be entirely personal in nature, having nothing to do with social conventions or regulations, and that these taboos are imposed by an individual *ori* in accordance with a highly intimate relationship. These taboos are given to initiates—or rather, revealed to initiates—by a *babalawo* in ceremony. They remain thereafter a secret matter, to be steadfastly observed by the individual. Indeed, a practitioner indicated that to openly speak of one’s personal taboos is dangerous, insofar as it more easily leads to his or her breaking them (personal communication, May 2012).

The spirit of an individual, associated with his or her energy or power (*ase*), is strengthened in two ways: when one is in alignment with his or her inner head/destiny, and through worship and sacrifice. *Ase* is both personal and impersonal; it can be

<sup>48</sup> What Freud termed the “superego.”

stolen, exchanged, gifted, and drained. It can also confer an ability or power on an individual, and it is considered the source of talents and/or unique characteristics. John Pemberton (1997:124) writes<sup>49</sup>: “[a]se does not entail any particular signification, and yet it invests all things, exists everywhere, and, as the warrant for all creative activity, opposes chaos and the loss of meaning in human experience. Nevertheless, *ase* may be used for destructive ends.”

*Ase* is comparable to the *mana* treated by Durkheim (1995:214): “the environment in which we live seems populated with forces at once demanding and helpful, majestic and kind, and with which we are in touch. Because we feel the weight of them, we have no choice but to locate them outside ourselves,” and, “[r]eligious forces are in fact only transfigured collective forces, that is, moral forces; they are made of ideas and feelings that the spectacle of society awakens in us...they are superadded” (1995:327). Mauss categorizes *mana* as a quality, thing, and force (2001:135), describing it “like something superimposed on another. This extraneous substance is invisible, marvelous, spiritual—in fact, it is the spirit which contains all efficacy and life” (2001:137). This idea is central to both magic and religion, particularly in their earliest forms; although, even in Protestant Christianity, the Holy Spirit is considered to work similarly (personal communication, September 2012). *Ase* is neutral, pervasive, and requisite for virtually any endeavor; it can be channeled into manual labor, artistry, and other human enterprises; in its unadulterated form, it is the fuel of ritual activity. An insufficient reserve of *ase* diminishes

<sup>49</sup> Taken from Pemberton’s analysis of a traditional Ogun Festival.

the efficacy of a rite. *Ase* is both individual and social, although it clearly exists at the intersection of individual and collective life. It can be cultivated individually and used to effect change in the social world. It is both necessary for, and strengthens sacrifice; and the most powerful sacrifices are performed collectively. *Ase* is weakened through disharmony with the *ori*, a tension that is incurred through—as Prus (1997:140) might suggest—a mismanagement of one life-world or another.<sup>50</sup> However, participant respondents emphasized the highly personal quality of the *ase* alongside its ubiquity; this personal quality was not unconditional, however, and one could lose his or her power, as well as gain, regain, and exercise it. It was in this way tied to personal actions, albeit relative to the community for the most part, though also dependent on the maintenance of entirely personal taboos and obligations.

Ritual taboos are determined by the specific Orisha or lineage and typically involve restrictions that deal with diet, offerings, dress, and habits of worship. Consider this verse from the *Owonrin*:

[t]o be told and to like it,/ To be given advice and to accept it/ Cast for Disobedience/ When he was going to take land for a farm on the road to Igbale./ The hoe that cleared the land,/ It chopped the head of Egungun./ Egungun opened his mouth and was singing,/ “You knew the taboo;/ Why did you do it?” (Bascom 1980:709)

<sup>50</sup> In other words, inasmuch as *ase* is also destiny, nearly every individual decision can be measured in terms of whether or not it accords with, deviates from, or directly opposes the fortunes allotted to one's course in life. This may sound rather like predestination, and that comparison would not be entirely unfair: many worshipers experience a good deal of trepidation when consulting a *babalawo* regarding the orientation of their *ori*, for fear they will be told their fortunes are ill-favored or insignificant (personal communication, May 2012).

The emphasis in these few lines is mirrored in many of the *Odu* verses and is centered on two elements: taboos and sacrifices. Taboos maintain an intricate network of relationships between the mortal and immortal communities and stress the importance of both discipline and obedience. Sacrifices serve in a similar capacity, and additionally facilitate exchanges between the two worlds. The blood of a particular animal sacred to an Orisha (e.g., as dogs for Ogun or white hens for Osun) serves as a conduit for the conveyance of a prayer or message. A response is expected from the Orisha in question. If there is no response, the ritual may be repeated or additional methods used to elicit a tangible reaction. If silence persists, the endeavor is abandoned and another means of address sought (personal communication, May 2012).

If one looks at religious concepts evolutionarily, according to the typology developed by Weber (1946; 1963) and Marriott (1955), the Orishas are “limited by their specificity. They fail to link diverse peoples together, because they are concrete, because they are parochial and therefore tied to concrete places and groups, and because they represent only part of the cosmos” (Barnes 1997:22). Barnes (1997:19) goes on to point out that evolutionary typologies of religion are entirely insufficient for an appropriate analysis of *Ifa/Orisha* deities: “[t]he ability to appeal to a universal...culturally plural audience rests on what a deity means: what, in fact, a deity signifies, symbolizes, suggests, and intends and the ways these elements are expressed.” Barnes' (1997:19) analysis is focused on Ogun, who “is a profoundly satisfying symbolic expression of a human dilemma: how to balance the need for constraint against the need for freedom.”

Ogun is transcultural, Barnes (1997:20) suggests, in part because he is a “root metaphor,” in this case for an experience that is universal to humankind: the creator/destroyer dichotomy, the smith who makes the tools that cultivate and the tools that kill. Obatala, Orunmila, Osun, Esu, Shango—these are also root metaphors for a vast range of individual and collective experiences.

Durkheim (1995) takes another approach, which merits consideration:

[t]he tribal high god is actually none other than an ancestral spirit that eventually won a prominent place. The ancestral spirits are none other than entities forged in the image of the individual souls, the origin of which they are meant to account for. The souls, in turn, are none other than the form taken by the impersonal forces that we found at the basis of totemism. (p. 299)

These anthropomorphized impersonal forces are similar to Barnes's root metaphors, but, in the life-worlds of practitioners and participants alike, the Orishas are living entities that are at times dangerous, unpredictable, independent, and contradictory. Prus (1997:137) writes: “the primary concern is not over whether something is ‘truly religious’ or not, but rather with the ways in which people develop life-worlds around ‘phenomena’ that they deem worthy of devotion in some more enduring respect.” Practitioners and participants both create multiple life-worlds around their relationships to various Orishas; respondents would likely insist that Osun, Esu, and the rest have multiple life-worlds of their own.

Questions of origin—of where the spirits “come from”—are relevant in terms of the mythology, but the spirits themselves are believed to maintain their own narrative continuums both in the present and backwards in time. So, it is equally likely that a practitioner would argue that people simply were not able to recognize the Orishas until by necessity or innovation their efforts brought them within the jurisdiction of one spirit or another. Sandra T. Barnes and Paula Girshick Ben-Amos (1997:39) write: “[b]asically, the Ogun concept encapsulated the progression from hunting to agriculture and the mastery of metallurgy, to urbanization and, ultimately, in these peoples' own view, to the development of empire. In one symbolic complex there existed a recapitulation of each kingdom's stages of growth.” One respondent indicated that “...the Orishas are always teaching us. They do not teach us until we are ready to learn.” I asked him, “What happens when you've learned all there is to learn?” The man laughed and said: “That is something only an *oyinbo* would say. There is always something to learn” (personal communication, January 2012). In other words, *ase* did not so much develop into the Orishas; rather, when human communities or singularly heroic individuals had attained a mastery of *ase* that enabled them to invoke the deities, the Orishas themselves instructed them in the rites that would thereafter order the relationship between the two worlds. The Orishas did not replace the concept of *ase*; it became the dominant currency in the dialogue between the mortal and spiritual worlds, no less important in today's practices than the sacrificial offerings themselves.

*Ifa/Orisha* narratives are neither linear nor circular in time, but layered and beaded together by

a consistent web of associations, symbols, and collective representations. The Orishas may be archetypal in a sense, but they are neither irreducible nor amorphously universal. Nor are they merely social forces wrapped in layers of mythology—not to the practitioner. They are actors in a larger drama that fuses societies (even across countries and oceans), acknowledges both individual and social roles, and preserves continuity through adaptation.

Respondents who identified themselves as strongly Christian or Muslim commonly viewed *Ifa* as a form of idolatry, which is only *technically* correct inasmuch as practitioners do make offerings “to” graven images. I use the quotation marks because I clarified this point with a priest of Osun:

You do not make a sacrifice to the stones. The stones are not Ogun, they are not Esu. You do not worship the stones. It is this way: when you call the spirit, the spirit comes to the stones; there is a quality in the stones that can hold the spirit. You make a place for the spirit. You welcome the spirit, and when it is there, you can communicate with it. (personal communication, January 2013)

This is a crucial distinction, but it is sadly the case that Christians and Muslims opposed to traditional religious practices do not appreciate the difference.

Apologists of Yoruba spirituality have attempted to stress the importance of Oludumare to the Orisha pantheon. This, as Cox (2001) notes, is likely a direct result of the interaction between *Ifa/Orisha* and Islam and Christianity. Cox (2001) cites Andrew Walls (1996):

[f]or Walls, the fact that African religions almost everywhere have expanded their concept of God to include the Christian and Islamic emphases on an all-powerful Supreme Being makes the question of whether indigenous religions in precolonial times actually conceived of such a God largely irrelevant for discussions of contemporary African beliefs. (p. 337)

Peter McKenzie—whom Cox criticized earlier for imposing an inherently Christian typology on Yoruba beliefs—writes on Ulli Bier’s analysis of Susanne Wenger’s<sup>51</sup> influence and attempt to create a “universalist *òrìsà* doctrine”: “[h]er cosmology appears to be a kind of pantheism or panentheism, with Olòdùmarè as the total of the All including the *òrìsà*, and with each *òrìsà* a personalization of the universe, a...condensation of the forces of the universe at a certain place, seen from a certain angle” (1976:196). There is a good reason to be highly critical of imposing a theist interpretation on Yoruba spirituality. Patrick J. Ryan (1980:162) writes that “[n]ot only outside observers but also certain African Christian insiders have perpetuated a tendency, perhaps unconscious, to describe African conceptions of the transcendent in Semitic or Indo-Eu-

<sup>51</sup> Susanne Wenger, as McKenzie (1976:195) writes, was a “convert to the *òrìsà* [who provided] homes (shrines and images) for the *òrìsà* to settle in, after a long period of uprootedness. Susanne, an Ogbóni elder and a priestess of Obàtálá, has also done much for the official cult of Osogbo, Osun. She has given support to the *òrìsà* not only by encouraging astonishing works of art but also by formulating a kind of universalist *òrìsà* doctrine.” While many respondents evinced a respect of Wenger and her work, there were several who considered her influence detrimental to the indigenous preservation, expression, and interpretation of Yoruba religion. An answer to this concern, however, was voiced by a Yoruba respondent who said: “We can criticize her if we were doing something to preserve our own cultural heritage. She, a foreign woman, did more to preserve our traditions than we do—and now we are letting it go to waste again” (personal communication, May 2012).

ropean theological categories that are still basically foreign.”

Ryan (1980:166) goes on to point out that “[o]ver all these *orisa*, *Oludumare (Olorun)* reigns supreme, the ancestor of no patrilineage, adopted as the direct recipient of no individual’s sacrificial worship.” The question of a Supreme Deity may be of concern to non-practitioners seeking to create open lines of communication between the monotheistic religions and Yoruba spirituality. It certainly was for missionaries who may have hoped to stage a recurrent drama: the ascendance of a single, omnipotent, and all-encompassing God at the expense of a lesser pantheon of spirits<sup>52</sup> that would either be destroyed (played out through a loss of followers) or otherwise subordinated (as evidenced by one respondent’s comparison of the orisha to archangels). However, while Christianity and Islam in Yorubaland are weathering away at traditional practices, the ability of worshipers and practitioners to adopt an inclusive position should not be underestimated.

A respondent addressed this issue in the following way: “Nowadays, people will pray to God or Jesus or Allah when it comes to things they cannot control. They still pray to the Orishas when it comes to things they believe they can—their problems, their hopes, their work; these things are still entrusted to

<sup>52</sup> Durkheim (1995:288) expresses a similar concept: “[s]everal [Australian] tribes have achieved the conception of a god who, if not the only one, is at least the supreme one, and one to whom a preeminent position among all other religious entities is ascribed.” What does it say about *Ifa/Orisha* that such an entity exists but cannot be invoked or otherwise addressed by humankind? It may indeed suggest that Oludumare is an importation, voiceless beyond the missionaries who insisted on his inclusion. Or, it may suggest a more Gnostic interpretation: that humankind had, at some point, lost the ability to communicate with him.

the Orishas” (personal communication, May 2012). Worshipers who adopt two religions see no conflict of interest in following both.<sup>53</sup> The Orishas are not competing with God in any way; on the contrary, it is understood that they are *closer* to humankind and as such can act on behalf of God in matters that fall under their jurisdiction. The Orishas are not generally reduced to “manifestations” of God save by outsiders to the practice who are actively seeking to resolve a conflict that does not exist for many practitioners. Still, one initiate referred to this interpretation, saying:

If that is how they want to see the Orisha, if that helps them understand the Orisha, then it is good. Only let them not be confused; each of the Orishas is different. Some of them are enemies and some of them are husband and wife. They are all worshipped differently. (personal communication, January 2013)

The primary concern of the spiritual tourist—as with many tourists in general—is with *authenticity*. This is set against a contrary position of in-authenticity, a concept often expressed in terms of a reaction against the prevalence of aggressive missionary or conversion-based religions in developing countries. This perspective is directly related to the perceived philosophy of traditional religions as holistic,

<sup>53</sup> Prus (1997:46) writes: “*interfused subcultures* [refer] to circumstances in which people find themselves more or less simultaneously involved in or actively engaged in managing two or more situationally coexistent subcultures...What is most consequential about interfused subcultures are the multiplicity of ‘central’ activities and the problematic and shifting nature of people’s opportunities, involvements, and emphases within more or less concurrent timeframes.” One may apply this concept to individuals who engage two disparate religious matrices without necessarily partitioning loyalty. This is a complex symbolic and theological juxtaposition with a range of possible individual expressions.

less doctrinal, more flexible, and more open to accepting significant differences in personal experiences of the supernatural or divine. In other words, an individual who undergoes a spiritual experience under the purview of a traditional ceremony may express that experience through multiple, even contradictory, narratives. For example, Barnes (1997: 17) writes of how devotees narrate their interactions with Ogun as both creator and destroyer: “[r]ather than resolution, an unending tension is maintained between the two sides of either equation...In African cosmologies where Ogun is a central figure, destruction and creation are two aspects of a unity that cannot be broken into opposing parts.” This is also true for Osun who is commonly compared to Venus—even visually and symbolically—but whose aspects range from terrifying to seductive, matronly to virginal.

Raising this point with a Nigerian Catholic who identified as a worshiper, the respondent indicated that

Catholics are polytheistic in their own way, dividing God into three parts that can be considered separately but never separated. The Orishas are the same. They are all aspects of Oludumare, and they cannot be separated from him. It’s just that, unlike the Trinity, the Orishas fight with one another, contradict one another, and interact with one another in very human ways. (personal communication, November 2011)

Granted, to many Catholics outside of Latin America and West Africa, this would be more than a minor point and an unjust and potentially blasphemous comparison. However, from the point of view of a practitioner, there is often a sense that mono-

theism and polytheism are not mutually exclusive typologies. Barnes (1997: 12) writes: “[t]here are even triple blendings of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous systems. To classify them would be to misrepresent the nature of the phenomena or the abilities of adherents to layer ideas on one another, make analogies, or otherwise subtract and add in a variety of ways.”

Priests of *Ifa/Orisha*, in contrast, seem unconcerned with typology altogether, although they will sometimes attempt to draw comparisons to Christianity in an effort to explain certain elements of the system. For example, a *babalawo* respondent indicated that Esu is syncretized with the Devil (personal communication, January 2013), a comparison that is highly problematic and misleading. Esu does inflict suffering, and he does often play tricks on human beings that may or may not be intended to impart a moral lesson; but this Orisha is rather similar to the archetypal Trickster figure. Some expressions of this archetype are primarily benevolent, if challenging, while others are as capable of outright malevolence as they are of kindness. Esu is like this. When queried as to the reasoning behind the syncretism with the Devil, this respondent added that

Esu is difficult to work with. Another priest kept Esu in his house, when you are supposed to keep him outside. He started having all kinds of trouble in his life; Esu was disturbing him seriously. He now had to buy another house, and keep Esu outside. Since then, he has no more trouble. That is why we say, Esu is like the Devil; he doesn’t care. If you make a mistake with him, there is nothing you can do. (personal communication, January 2013)

There is another premise that merits attention in terms of how *Ifa/Orisha* is practiced and understood: the emphasis on worldly gains. Barnes (1997) puts it this way:

[a]frican religions tend to dwell on predicting, explaining, and controlling day-to-day circumstances such as illness, poverty, infertility, or bad luck...Stress on pragmatism is a part of non-Western traditions to a greater degree than in Western religious traditions, which put strong emphasis on transcendental functions, such as preparing for the hereafter or helping devotees gain faith or inner “grace.” (p. 22)

This is a complex point to unravel. *Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie*; in theory, worldly concerns may be second to otherworldly ones, but they are certainly not absent from the prayers of those who adhere to Western religious traditions. Secondly, the emphasis of *Ifa/Orisha* ritual on the attainment of worldly successes is based on a premise of the utmost importance regarding the relationship between the earthly and spiritual; namely, that the earthly world is a reflection of, and directly connected to, the spiritual world.<sup>54</sup>

Typically, practitioners and participants in magical and religious traditions consider the world of the spirits and the world of men *two separate worlds*.

<sup>54</sup> Durkheim (1995:82) relies rather heavily on the sacred-profane dichotomy, essentially using it to support his primary hypothesis regarding the collective and social origin of elementary religious ideation. However, one cannot effectively analyze the sacred designation applied to persons, objects, and rites without understanding how participants construct both worlds. Mythology is a primary tool in this respect, and is as invaluable in examining the “belief-worlds” of a community as dreams are to examining the interior, psychological world of an individual.

Obviously, the idea of Heaven, paradise, et cetera is related to this. However, *Ifa/Orisha* is somewhat different: this world, our world, is as much an arena of spiritual activity as is any other (personal communication, June 2012). Consequently, the boundaries between sacred and profane are perhaps more blurred and permeable in southwest Nigeria than elsewhere. Every place is potentially an intersection point between the world of humanity and the world of the Orishas; one may meet a spirit on the road without realizing what it is. Every object, whether by virtue of its composition, appearance, or purpose, can be drawn into a sacred context and imbued with additional meaning. These meanings are not fixed, but take an active role in the narratives constructed by worshippers and practitioners. One might think that taboos and prohibitions would abound, affixed to the simplest gestures and activities, and this would not be entirely inaccurate.

Many of the Orisha are earthbound spirits. One respondent indicated that they had “...gone into the ground,” and no longer journey to heaven (personal communication, May 2012). However, the Orishas can, and do, travel—even across oceans. This same respondent said of Osun: “Osun is a child of the sea. She tore free of her mother’s womb and became the source of all the rivers that run with cool water. You can go to any river and find Osun” (personal communication, January 2013). This story is likely a modern interpretation. Osun was at one point a relatively localized deity, bound to the river that bears her name. Osun is worshipped globally now, from New York to Rio, and devotees make offerings in ceremony on the banks of rivers

with many names. What does this mean? It is common for new powers to be ascribed to spirits, in accordance with the circumstances of their manifestation in different contexts; consider the various appearances of the Virgin Mother.

Worshippers, initiates, and priests all indicate that specific human problems (e.g., related to finances, lovers, family, work, etc.) are best resolved by spirits that are associated with those domains via a complex network of associations and narratives (personal communication, 2011-2012). Ogun, for example, is considered by Yoruba Nigerians to safeguard road travel on account of his association with all things iron—including, apparently, cars.<sup>55</sup> As the world expands, so too do the roles of the Orishas; they navigate the turbulent rivers of changing meaning more adeptly than many human communities. In many ways, we find them waiting at the crossroads of past and present, already dressed in the finery of the day. Now, Ogun can be found wearing army fatigue and carrying an assault rifle, marching alongside the soldier; Osun can be found dressed for a night on the town, both seductive and fierce. Change is important to practitioners of *Ifa/Orisha*. While there are many elements of worship that are timeless and universal, it is important that the traditions *reflect* the world rather than stand apart from it. Joseph M. Murphy (2001) writes:

Ochún is not what she seems to be. Behind the fan, beneath the surface of the waters, there is always another Ochún...The meaning of symbols rests, of course, on social conditions that make them intersubjectively understandable. As these social conditions change so too do the meanings associated with the symbols and thus their ability to represent social and experiential categories. (p. 96-97)

An important element of religious belief is *time*. In monotheistic traditions, time can be divided into a number of periods: the mythic pre-historical (e.g., Genesis), the historical, the present, and a mythic future (e.g., Revelations). The progression from one period to another is typically perceived as linear, despite the recurrence of certain themes. Younger religions, if derived from older parent traditions, generally appropriate this narrative and reinterpret it, assigning new values and meanings to the most relevant symbols and altogether discarding or transforming others. Both Hinduism and Buddhism are patterned cyclically, while the monotheistic religions are considered to posit a terminus. Time works quite differently in the *Ifa/Orisha* tradition.

To outsiders conditioned to think linearly about the greater narrative of a religious system, it may seem that African traditions are left behind. While many belief systems also feature a prophetic or mythic future,<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> As, for example, the blended Christian-indigenous North American Ghost Dance religion founded by Wodziwob and later represented by its prophet, Jack Wilson. Alice Beck Kehoe (2006:7-9) writes: “[t]his was a complete religion. It had a transcendental origin in the prophet’s visit to God, and a continuing power rooted in the eternal Father... ‘Ghost Dance’ is the name usually applied to Jack Wilson’s religion, because the prophet foresaw the resurrection of the recently dead with the hoped for renewal of the earth.”

the apocalyptic narrative is not emphasized by non-Western indigenous traditions. In contrast, the emphasis is on the present and immediate future, on frames of time. These frames do not bridge the past and present in the same way that a recitation of the Gospels or Qur’an does during a sermon; in that case the past is recalled to reinforce the significance of the present as a moment *within* a narrative unfolding towards a promised terminus. This is more pronounced in millenarian movements based in monotheism, including certain Protestant denominations that focus on an apocalyptic event. The present derives meaning and significance from a projected future, when the fundamental premises of the religion will be proven true.

K. Noel Amherd (2010:124) approaches this subject through language: “time is not water spiraling down a drain unattainably lost only to be represented through historiographic chronology... In this multitext, a person ascends, descends, traverses, reverses, and changes course, constantly relocating within realms nested inside each other, but remaining parts of a total whole.” Amherd (2010:125) goes on to say that while English “foregrounds an object’s boundedness as a thing that remains through time and space,” Yoruba verbs are “poly-temporal” and “modify both time and manifesting” so that while one might say in English *it is dark*, in Yoruba one might say “S/he/it darks/ed.” In a sense, *darkness* becomes a condition of manifesting, a state experienced by the subject as opposed to a static adjective or descriptor. Amherd (2010) explains the significance of this temporality here:

[u]nlike a Western, Abrahamic-infused conception of “heaven,” which implies both a separation through time and space from this world, as if one could travel far enough and long enough into space to eventually arrive at heaven’s gates, the *Ìsèsè* idea keeps these realms as a nested whole allowing for movement amidst the entanglement. (p. 130)

This “entanglement” is a matrix of “nested” and interrelated narratives that react to conditions in the present—as, for example, when a *babalawo* is asked by a client to consult the *Odu* on his or her behalf. In the monotheistic traditions, the past—even if it is mytho-historical—is *still* historical, a point that can no longer be recovered and that exists only in narrative form. In contrast, the mythic past of the Orishas is constantly reenacted in the present. Familiar narratives constellate around compatible associations and bind the timeless to the changeful. When the change is drastic, the symbolic framework of the system adapts, retelling its stories to accommodate new meanings and new experiences.<sup>57</sup> This may seem like a chicken-and-egg problem: if the Orishas change in response to circumstance and experience, then it stands to reason that they *must* be products of a collective, cultural imagination, given enough flexibility to

<sup>57</sup> Osun, among the popular of Orishas on both sides of the Atlantic, is particularly adaptable (perhaps unsurprising for a spirit associated with water). Ysamur Flores-Peña (2001:123) writes on the altars worshippers and practitioners keep to Ochún; she writes: “[t]he goddess was no longer confined to a river in Africa but extended her influence to all the rivers in the world...No longer confined to a town or geographic area, which directed and controlled her cult, she moved to new domain areas...But what happens when the same areas are expanded to companies, contracts, and mergers? American society fell head over heels for the goddess. Her actions empowered new *Lucumí* worshippers in America, providing a paradigm of assertiveness at home and in the workplace.”

survive even the most drastic changes imposed on the group that is united by those beliefs.<sup>58</sup>

Practitioners obviously do not interpret the Orishas in that way. An answer to the question of how they address the changefulness of their own belief system came in a roundabout way from their answer to my concerns about being an *oyinbo* trying to learn *Ifa*:

This will always be the Orishas' home. But the world is far larger than our ancestors believed. The Orishas have always known. It is not that we brought them to other places, the way it is said. We found them waiting for us. You did not find Ifá here; it was Ifá that brought you here (personal communication, May 2012)

Practitioners do not see themselves as *originating* narratives—the world's stories are encoded in the world itself, in the living experience of every human being. Rather, practitioners see themselves as generating, or regenerating, a matrix of narratives that they participate in.<sup>59</sup> They are actors on the same stage as the spirits and deities they worship, and time becomes just another element in the story, measured in intervals between the prediction and its manifestation, between the sacrifice and its return. Intermingled with these exchanges are the conflicts, dilemmas, and experiences that con-

stitute human life around the world. Embedded in these experiences are associative clues that connect to an active pantheon of root metaphors that will, and do, respond to the ritualized actions of their devotees. They make their influence known in countless ways, speaking through the people, objects, and circumstances that fall under their purview. New layers of experience represent new means of expression; the mythic does not need to be reinterpreted or recreated. Instead, new modalities are created to represent experiences that are both precedent for new iterations and echoes of an ongoing dialogue between the world of humankind and the world of the spirits.

### Conclusion

There is a good deal of tension between the Abrahamic faiths and *Ifa/Orisha* traditions in Nigeria. While they are not persecuted, one need only look at the overwhelming number of Protestant initiatives and “Crusades” to realize that Christianity (much of it based in, and originating from, Nigerians) is aggressively pursuing an agenda of conversion. Islam, initially tolerant of other ethno-indigenous practices during the Sokoto Caliphate, is now shifting towards intolerance. These are the extremes of tension, active when an exclusionist religious system interacts with indigenous traditions. There are many other historical and cultural factors involved; for example, Christianity is associated with the West, and the West, in turn, with modernization, industrialization, and globalization. These are socio-historical matrices that dramatically affect local cultures and impact the creation and interpretation of reli-

gious narratives. Religions (Yoruba traditions are no exception) have their own ways of narrating history that may not accord with other versions of the story.

The Yoruba mythology is playful, remarkably human, and at times bitterly harsh. The transcendent, embedded in the movement of a history towards an inevitable and divinely ordained end, is found elsewhere in the immense corpus of orature related to *Ifa/Orisha*. Non-practitioners may find it difficult to locate the transcendent; not only because it is hidden from view but because it is seen through a lens that is specific to those who experience it firsthand. This experience is shaped by how the tradition is disseminated throughout the community. The narratives generated by those who became devotees through conversion are very different from those generated by individuals raised into a belief system by their families; and both are different from those generated by individuals who receive a calling—as many do, who choose to become advanced practitioners of Yoruba traditions.

In the spiritual marketplace, many religions are evaluated on the basis of accessibility. One Christian Nigerian respondent said: “Why are these spirits even necessary? I know what they say: God is distant, and the only way you can reach Him is through these spirits. But, they are not all good. I don't need them. When I pray, I can feel God in my heart” (personal communication, April 2013). Christianity is an accessible religion; while it has many esoteric elements of its own, the promise of salvation and heavenly reward fundamental to the

system is available to all who accept as true the major premises of the faith. *Ifa/Orisha* is somewhat different. While belief in the Orishas is open to all, the Orishas are not obligated to respond to those who do not actively participate in their worship (personal communication, October 2011). They are approached in very specific ways and through particular offerings. If an individual requires their assistance or blessing outside of a ritual context, there are other means—through talismans, herbs, and charms that essentially serve as mobile beacons capable of attracting the spirit in question. Still, to many—especially in the modern world—such fetishes represent ignorance and superstition. Is it not simply more effective to believe that a sincere prayer will accomplish the same result? Similarly, the knowledge required to properly petition the Orishas represents another barrier to accessibility that is difficult to surmount for outsiders and foreigners to the tradition.

Another source of tension is *translation*, in both the literal sense (much of the music of Yoruba is lost in English renditions, including puns, wordplay, and the artistry of the composition) and in the symbolic sense. Reducing deities to common denominators is a generally feeble attempt to strip an aggregate of conceptual associations (i.e., a deity) and reduce it to its original *archetypal* qualities—in the process stripping it of its history, distinction, and cultural relevance. This is not always the case in syncretic religions, nor with African traditions in the Caribbean and Americas. On the contrary, many Orishas have *expanded* their roles, adopting new personas to address a multiethnic congregation of devotees.

<sup>58</sup> Durkheim, naturally, would entirely agree with this point, as would Marcel Mauss.

<sup>59</sup> To bring in Robert Prus, these narratives are essentially life-worlds. Participants use *Ifa/Orisha* to actively construct and perpetually reshape these worlds accordingly as social meaning, changing circumstances, and necessity make necessary. That they are able to do so without compromising the integrity of their engagement is testament to how accessible, adaptable, and relevant the Orishas are to those who honor them, whether by tradition, choice, or both.

In the global spiritual marketplace, foreigners to the traditions also evaluate them on the basis of whether or not they are compatible with established narratives and systems of belief. Unfortunately, this subjects a given tradition to the “pick-and-choose” approach, a decidedly privileged and consumerist attitude towards religion. Traditional practitioners do not have the luxury of deciding whether or not to believe in a particular premise of their faith; to do so would invalidate the faith entirely. The Western spiritual consumer, however, is not restricted in the same way, particularly in the United States. He or she does not feel obligated to preserve the whole at the expense of accepting an unpleasant or possibly offensive aspect of the tradition. Instead, the latter can be abandoned and the remaining fragment juxtaposed to more palatable paradigms of practice. New religions are created out of this individualized habit of practice, disseminated through charismatic representatives, prophets, intellectuals, and through a universe of narratives composed by participants and practitioners. The question remains, however: what becomes of older forms of the tradition? Will they appear only in the records of former observers and participants, otherwise lost in their active form? Or, will they be recycled piecemeal, incorporated into new models better suited to modern life? Carrette and King (2005:85) offer a grim prediction on this note: “[a]s long as spirituality operates according to the dictations of global capitalism it will continue to contribute to the breaking up of traditional communities and the undermining of older, indigenous forms of life around the world.” In the next sentence, however, they offer a possible

solution: “[c]apitalist spirituality, however, can be overcome by consideration of the forgotten social dimensions...by rescuing and developing alternative models of social justice, and by contesting the corporatization and privatization exemplified in such contemporary forms of spirituality” (Carrette and King 2005:85).

Carrette and King, in emphasizing the social obligations intrinsic to many indigenous spiritual traditions, recall both Durkheim and Mauss. If religion and the sacred are products of sustained engagement with a certain collective or community—united by common belief, mythology, experience, language, et cetera—it stands to reason that the fragmentation of the community would necessarily lead to the fragmentation of the religion.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, if a formerly local, tribal, or inter-tribal religious system becomes transnational, affecting the life-worlds of communities around the world, what becomes of it then?<sup>61</sup> How does a religion meet the needs of people so radically disparate from one another? How do different cultural communities use the language of shared practice to negotiate an exchange that will strengthen rather than weaken their individual and shared beliefs? Both Christianity and Islam

<sup>60</sup> Remnants may exist, of the sort recorded by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*; superstitions and legends that once belonged to a living matrix of belief and ideation. These vestigial echoes are not properly called religions in the active, social sense. They are fragments. Even if juxtaposed, it is unlikely that the composite reconstruction will command any of the power or authority enjoyed by the earlier system. Such is often the fate of “New Age” movements that draw from a range of sources, from the Gaelic to the Egyptian, in an attempt to recreate an allegedly universal system.

<sup>61</sup> Durkheim (1995:345) writes: “[h]ence it is man who makes his gods, one can say, or at least, it is man who makes them endure; but at the same time, it is through them that he himself endures.”

are seen to use homogeneity to accomplish this purpose:

Preachers and *imams* both want us to be the same. Everything the same. Same god, same church, same prayer. The Orishas, they are different as we are different. It is better for the world that we are different. Why now would this god have created everyone differently if we were meant to be the same? (personal communication, September 2012)

*Ifa/Orisha*, in contrast, embraces diversity as a source of narrative, ideological, and spiritual strength. Local spirits may be overshadowed by the major Orishas in the mixed pantheons of belief systems on both sides of the Atlantic, but they stand a greater chance of survival if some role can be found for them in both new and ongoing narratives of collective practice.

*Ifa/Orisha* in the Diaspora is not necessarily in need of rescuing; there are many who actively promote the preservation of older and more traditional styles of worship, from Oyo Tunji in South Carolina to basement *peristyles* in Haitian communities in New York City. Unfortunately, the case in Nigeria is different. Nigeria is crippled by corruption, dysfunctional infrastructure, ethnic violence, and—since 2008—plagued by militant Islamist groups in the north and excessively brutal retaliations by the country’s own military. Nonetheless, Nigeria is racing towards modernity, funding scientific projects ranging from nanotechnology to innovations in sustainable agriculture. In an effort to compete, there is an implicit prioritization of intellectual resources that does not include the promotion of the

country’s spiritual heritage. Indeed, that heritage is often perceived as backwards, steeped in ignorance, and obstructive to the pace of development. The dominant narrative of progress is at times dismissive or explicitly hostile towards indigenous religious traditions, but there are many advocates of *Ifa/Orisha*, in Nigeria and abroad, that recognize the value of a philosophical religion based on inclusivity, worldly spirituality, and an adaptable, diverse, and expansive mythology. Their stories, affirmations, and perspectives will continue to support communities that honor and invoke the Orishas; in return, the Orishas will lend themselves to as many stories as there are individuals to tell them.

One respondent said:

In the West, people no longer worship Zeus, Odin, or any of the old gods that people believed in. The same will happen here in Africa. No one will worship Ogun or Shango anymore. Just like no one believes that it is Zeus who hurls lightning bolts, no one will believe that Shoponna causes smallpox or HIV. (personal communication, February 2013)

An initiate replied:

It is true that we are now informed as to the causes of things. But, the spirits hide themselves behind the causes of things. It is Ogun in the heart of a man who defends his people. It is Esu hidden behind the circumstances that cause a bridge to collapse when a cursed man walks over it. The world comes alive when you believe. It is only a dead thing, filled with suffering, when you interpret it mechanically. (personal communication, February 2013)

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## Public Sociology and Participatory Approaches. Towards a Democratization of Social Research?

**Abstract** The subject of participation has been gathering increasing interest from the various social disciplines: from politology to psychology, from urban sociology to evaluation, this concept carries a particular fascination and discussing participatory research has now become an absolute must. However, an adequate reflection on methodologies for analyzing research practices and evaluating hypotheses and effects when setting up actual research relationships has not followed on the tail of this new tendency. This paper arises from that need and aims, through discussion of the main debates that have interested science and sociology, to reevaluate a critical approach towards the analysis of the social relationships that are created during a research investigation.

This study starts out as a reflection aimed at analyzing the impact that participation, in all its various forms, can have on the way research is carried out. The originality of this article lies in the proposal of a form of participation, and from this, the expression of a hope for the future of social sciences: that we can aspire towards a dialogical model and towards a new cooperative and emancipatory relationship with the public.

**Keywords** Participation Models and Practices; Democratization of Social Research; Dialogical Approach; Critical Sociology; Reflexivity; Relationship Between Researcher and Social Actor

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### Introduction: An Overview of the Problem

The term participation, while hiding some ambiguities and having become a wide umbrella that covers various types of intentions and practices (Bobbio 2007), has recently had the merit of being part of some key-transformations which have characterized democratic processes, especially in politology and public administration<sup>1</sup>: the tran-

<sup>1</sup> After the Seventies, when the paradigm of participation had a central role in the politological field, today, participation democracy has a new relevance, especially starting with the experience of Porto Alegre.

sition from bureaucratic paradigm to post-bureaucratic, from government to governance, from unilateral acts to voluntary pacts and contracts, from the control of learning to the affirmation of deliberation as a particular and more clearly defined form of participation.

Participatory experiences has also had significant repercussions on the field of evaluative research where several authors have underlined the importance of reflecting on the participatory character of democracy, adopting shared research practices in which stakeholders take part as reference subjects for the policies that are the object of evaluation (Brisolara 1998; King 2005).

Starting from this framework, the issue of participation is gaining more and more relevance also in the field of sociology, and specifically in methodology where there is a new debate on the role of the sociological public (Burawoy 2005) and the possible democratization of social research practices.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, the consideration of the relationship between researcher and social actor<sup>3</sup> can be seen as a fundamental part of the affirmation of sociology as a discipline with its own scientific independence: since its origins, the question of the relationship between the subject and object of study has had to deal with the main debates that have interested sociology: for example, the epistemo-

<sup>2</sup> For example, to this issue is dedicated one session of the 2013 European Sociological Association Congress.

<sup>3</sup> In order to respect the dignity, the specific competences, and the reputation of those (single person or group) who represent the subject/object of this social research, I have chosen to use the term social actor throughout this study.

logical debate between methodological monism and methodological dualism; the debate between microsociology and macrosociology and between methodological individualism and methodological holism; the dispute between qualitative research and quantitative research.

In fact, if, traditionally, the relationship between researcher and social actor has been seen as a source of distortion by approaches that are more allied to the idea of methodological monism,<sup>4</sup> on the other hand, it has been more valued by those approaches closer to methodological dualism. From German historicism onwards, these last approaches have had the merit of recognizing that, unlike natural sciences, social sciences are, as far as their field of study is concerned, in a subject to subject relationship rather than a subject to object (Giddens 1976:76). At the same time we have to consider that, while the sociology that has concentrated on micro objects of study has often held in high consideration the fact that the symbolic construction of social science is based on relational facts and, in turn, produces relational facts, the sociology that has concentrated on structures or institutions has substantially neglected the researcher-social actor relationship. Lastly, if the qualitative positions are in opposition to a vitalistic concept of the cognitive process in which the sociologist is first and foremost a social actor able

<sup>4</sup> This polarization should take into account the new concept of science that has been steadily growing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>: from the scientific revolutions it is important to acknowledge that also in the so-called *hard sciences* the observer records a segment of reality that is not given, but that is built into the composite system of relationships that are created between subject and object (eg., Bateson 1972).

to establish a privileged relationship with the subject/object of the study, the quantitative positions, on the other hand, show the necessity for a more detached relationship between researcher and social actor.<sup>5</sup>

Although extremely typified, these debates reveal a limitation in the type of reflection that has taken place within sociological thought on the relationship between researcher and social actor: the inability to explain the relationship between the two subjects in concrete terms, or, in other words, to evaluate the nature of the human interaction which takes place between the subjects over the course of the research.

Rarely, in fact, these debates were capable of recognizing that social research is a historically relevant activity that can, above all, lay claim to its social character, as an exercise based on codified norms and shared reciprocal expectations. On the other hand, social sciences rarely consider that their outcomes affect social reality—in that they may affect the actors' awareness to action, the definition of problematic situations, and the attribution of labels, et cetera.

For this reason, in this article, I will try to analyze the democratic and participatory issues in social research, assuming a reflexive approach. Reflexivity, in fact, means assuming a critical approach to

<sup>5</sup> At this point, I have to stress that, according to several authors, this position is not simply the result of a legacy from positivist scientism, but more an affirmation of value capable of guiding the investigation so that the results are a way of seeing past the facts and can be useful and fruitful both to scientific know-how and human knowledge.

the study of sociological practice in order not only to analyze the internal dynamics of the relationships that are created during the research in a more realistic way, but also to challenge them in view of possible renewal. As Gouldner says (1970:489), in fact, the historical mission of reflexive sociology “would be to *transform* the sociologist, to penetrate deeply into his daily life and work, enriching him with new sensitivities, and to raise the sociologist's self-awareness to a new historical level.”

In particular, in the first part of this article, there is a brief review of examples of reflexive approaches that originated during the 1960s and 1970s, during the period that has been called the *crisis of traditional methods* and which was the result of the convergence of studies from a variety of disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology, up to psychology: the common thread linking these was the idea of challenging the positivist and scientist origins of the *mainstream*, as well as affirming the primarily relational character of research activity.

These reflections are the basis for a general consideration: the necessity of admitting that social science forms a part of the social world, as well as being a concept of it. This means acknowledging not only that a relationship of a social type exists between the researcher and the reality in which he lives, but that the interaction that takes place over the course of the scientific investigation between the researcher and the social actor represents a central moment of co-construction and shared representation of the reality being investigated. This also means that sociologists stop behaving as if a subject and an object exist, as if

sociologists study and lay people are studied, as if they belonged to two different breeds of humans. “There is only one breed of man—Gouldner firmly reminds us—but as long as we are without a Reflexive sociology, we will act upon the tacit dualistic premise that there are two, regardless of how monistic our professions of methodological faith are” (1970:490-491).

The reflections that make up the second part of this article are dedicated to filling in this gap. Beginning with several considerations on the relationship between researcher and social actor,<sup>6</sup> these aim to increase reflexivity over the course of the research investigation and raise a question which has galvanized new interest in the human sciences today: the theme of democratization and participation within the field of social research.

### Input From Critical Sociology

In the field of sociology, in conjunction with the period known as the *crisis of traditional methods*, reflections on research practices have led to the re-evaluation of the relationship between researcher and social actor, since this is the central moment of interaction and construction of the representation of reality being investigated. To this line of thought belong some of the studies that under-

<sup>6</sup> To resume some of the considerations already made in previous studies (Cataldi 2012), the theme of the relationship between researcher and social actor will first of all be seen in the context of critical approaches which originated in the 1960s in human sciences, focusing specifically on anthropology (Scholte 1972; Tedlock 1979; Clifford and Marcus 1986), and then, successively, developed within the wider field of reflections on the participation models which underlie research practices.

line how social investigation is characterized by a typical division of labor between the client, the researcher, and the social actor (Gilli 1971): here, there is a clear division of tasks between the different actors, based on the different needs, ability, and *know-how* that imply pre-established relationship structures. But, when the nature of these social relationships is inspected more closely, we see how some of the more significant aspects are represented through the structuring of the interactions, which are often not placed on the same level, in an exchange of horizontal reciprocity, but are instead highly hierarchical and based on latent authoritarian models. For this reason, various parties have talked about social research as an exercise of power (Galtung 1967; Gilli 1971), thus highlighting the asymmetry typical of research relationships.

Gilli (1971) makes his ideas clear about this concept when analyzing the roles of the different actors involved in the investigation, and he believes that the whole research experience is an application of power on several levels. However, the core of the social investigation is represented by the relationship between researcher and the subject/object of study. It constitutes the central nucleus not only during the construction phase of the information base, but also during the whole investigation, from the identification of the problem to be analyzed. On the same theme, Galtung (1967) also observes the existence of underlying assumptions during the interaction practices that are typical of social investigation and which have authoritarian implications, and where we can recognize at least three different types: normative, remunerative,

and coercive.<sup>7</sup> These three different types of power are, in reality, nothing more than the application of a more general social power, which therefore use the most common instruments of control, namely, incentives, sanctions, and shared norms and values. In research relationships, however, it is important to consider the existence of a *surplus* element, of an additional characteristic which permits the hierarchical structure and legitimizes the authoritarian nature of the relationships. This element is that form of power that Gilli (1971:105) calls *technical*: in synthesis, it can be defined as that “set of abilities that help to direct the individuals or group...which finds its contents and its legitimacy in the researcher’s (the scientist or the professional) possession of a *body of scientific knowledge*.” In the practice of social research, in particular, we can identify different ways of expressing technical power: the first regards the asymmetry between the researcher and the social actor’s knowledge of the research objectives, the

study tools, and the models for carrying out the investigation (Gilli 1971); closely linked to this aspect are other ways, such as the *scotomization of reality*<sup>8</sup> (Gilli 1971:105), the *lockdown of the situation*<sup>9</sup> (Gilli 1971:107), and lastly the tendency to favor some specific categories within the group of subjects being analyzed, preferably those belonging to social positions such as the middle class (Galtung 1967).

Technical power, then, is the reply to the paradox typical of the human science scholar: to be both within the reality being studied, in that he/she is part of it, but also external to the reality under analysis, as observer and scholar.<sup>10</sup> If the psychologist addresses a problem by adopting various techniques for distancing and detaching himself from the patient who lies on the couch with the promise of hard-fought psychological stabilization, and if the historian, in his turn, manages to get over this difficulty by specializing in the study of previous

<sup>7</sup> Normative power derives from a cultural background and makes reference to an obligation based on shared norms and values: in the field of research, it can be used by the researcher when seeking the collaboration of the subject, by appealing to social values such as the common good or the improvement of the *status quo*, or by using little tricks that put the subject in the condition of being unable to refuse the interview (for example, by saying that all the other people have accepted). Remunerative power is a particular form which is fully expressed in an economic system of exchange: in fact, it envisages the payment of the subject in both monetary and moral terms. But, there is another form of the exercise of power, and that is of a sanctionary nature, which is typical of a coercive power and which, according to political tradition, is expressed through the exercise of force. Excluding its purest manifestations that should not belong to social research, we can attribute to this type those forms of the exercise of power that tend, in different ways, to force the subject to participate in the research according to the researcher’s pre-planned procedures; in this category, for example, are all the *captive audience techniques* (Galtung 1967:147), and especially all those devices that appeal to indirect sanctions, as often happens in research carried out in professional environments where the choice to participate or not in the research is not completely free and is conditioned by work relationships (Gilli 1971).

<sup>8</sup> To explain the concept of the *scotomization of reality*, Gilli (1971:105) states that among the researcher’s possibilities there is the faculty to arbitrarily make a cut in the relevance in the analysis of the reality being investigated, adopting a relative point of view that by definition is delimited and simplistic. In fact, what normally happens is that the choices of relevance are made in relation to the specific interests of the researcher and even more so those of the client, without worrying at all about the real cognitive needs of the subject being analyzed; and also, in most cases, this means not taking into account the psychophysical and emotional entirety of the subjects, but only evaluating certain characteristics in relation to the expectations for the research results.

<sup>9</sup> By *lockdown of the situation* Gilli (1971:107) means a specific authoritarian manifestation that obliges the object to have themselves portrayed in a static position. Galtung (1967:153) attributes this, in particular, to the *survey*. The assumption at the basis of this manifestation derives from the physical-natural sciences and imposes the non-modification of the object being studied in order to guarantee maximum scientific objectivity.

<sup>10</sup> This is the paradox that Gadamer (1960) expressed so well in the hermeneutic tension that has always existed between familiarity and unfamiliarity.

generations from the past, how can the sociologist neutralize his relationship with the study object when it represents, above all, the very environment in which he is completely absorbed, in that he is both member and dynamic actor, and directly involved? From this paradox, then, in hindsight, comes the need for traditional sociological methodology of a neo-positivist and behaviorist type which, according to Galtung (1967), tends to overshadow, as far as possible, the social and relational nature of the relationship between the analyst and the analyzed.

### What Sort of Participation for Social Research?

Even though they came about in a climate of controversy and breakaway from official science, the instances of criticism from the 1960s and 1970s cannot be hastily labeled and set aside: we would run the risk of not considering the outcomes of a reflexivity that has analyzed research relationships in concrete terms, from a meta-sociological point of view. Indeed, such considerations express the profound need for a reformulation of the relationships that are established over the course of a socio-historical investigation, taking into particular consideration the cognitive objectives and core values. In this sense, the theme of the relationship between researcher and social actor cannot neglect the aspect of values in sociology. First and foremost, it has to take into account an ethical perspective. Gouldner (1970:791), for example, reminds us that reflexive practices cannot be “value-free,” but must analyze the idea that “motives and terminating consequences would embody and advance certain specific values.”

In the same vein there are also other, more recent proposals, such as those related to the so-called *critical turn to public sociology*, proposed by Burawoy (2005),<sup>11</sup> which has as a reference point the relationship, defined as both spontaneous and reflexive, between the two subjects of the research, or rather, between social scientists and civil society. From this comes an invitation addressed to the scientific community—to be more ethical or more conscious of the relationships that are created with people who are the object of study, and of the effects that this produces: “[we] should be more self-conscious about our relationship to the people we study, and the effects we produce in the act of research” (Burawoy 2005:323).

In order to rise to the challenge, some authors have recommended participation in social research (Ferrarotti 1961; Schwartz and Jacobs 1979; Martino Simoni 1991). However, I believe that it cannot be considered the cure for all ills. We must therefore ask: What does participation in social research mean? I will try to answer the question starting from an analysis of the different phases of investigation, and it will be enough, then, to contextualize the question and identify some participation models.

Borrowing a well-known type used in the field of sociology of work (Delamotte 1959; Blumberg 1968), it is possible to identify different pure types of

<sup>11</sup> Public sociology brings into question that vision of the community of sociologists influenced by paternalism, authoritarianism, elitism, and deference; in contrast to a sociology community that is decentralized, democratic, and egalitarian, which seeks to make knowledge more accessible not only to students (who represent the main audience for academic sociologists) but also to the public on a second level, or in other words, civil society (Burawoy 2005).

participation of social actors in research. The first type takes inspiration from *idyllic participation* (Delamotte 1959; Blumberg 1968): this can be seen as the division of roles that is characterized by the negation of conflict and which is based on a mechanistic and unproblematic concept of research relationships. In other words, research practices of this type are defined by the uni-directionality of the decisions about the ways in which the social actors participate in the research and the outcomes of that research: so the relevance that the social actors attribute to the problems of research is not important; the actors are substantially called on not only to participate in procedures that have already been defined by the research team, but also to give a contribution limited only to the need for information.

The second type arises from *institutional participation* (Delamotte 1959; Blumberg 1968). It regards those forms that include the institutionalized involvement of social actors during the most crucial moments of the research. This type recognizes a psychological and cognitive depth in the subjects involved in the investigation and includes practices that envisage shared management of some of the specific phases of the investigation, such as taking on key actors during the initial phase, adopting empathetic interaction models in the data collection phase, or the involvement of the subjects studied during the analysis and the interpretation of data phases.

Finally, the third type is based on the *conflictual* model (Delamotte 1959; Blumberg 1968): following on from the metaphor of the sphere of industrial relations, it is based on the acceptance of the existence of a permanent dualism between sociologists and social actors'

points of view. For this reason, it is not possible to talk about effective participation in this model, but rather about research practices that are characterized by the awareness that two different *Weltanschauungen* exist and the denial that an effective relationship between the research actors is indeed possible.

On closer inspection, however, all these types of participation reveal an evident limitation: they are based on one-way relationship models, where either only one active subject exists or the two active subjects never meet but travel along parallel planes or planes of pure conflict; but, above all, these models do not adequately take into account the implications of the actor's real participation in the research process.

For this reason, I believe it is important to propose a fourth pure type of participation which we might call *dialogical* (Gadamer 1960; Dwyer 1977): rather than making reference to consolidated investigations, it refers to new hermeneutic, constructivist, and relational concepts that are becoming established in the field of methodological thought on the tools that are available to the researcher during the various phases of the investigation. One of the fundamental characteristics of this participation model is therefore the non-exploitation of the relationship between the researchers and social actors, and recognizing the specific contributions of each person towards the co-construction of the research (Ferrarotti 1961).

Another characteristic of this model can be seen in the inter-penetration into the systems of the two key-subjects of the research: including all those instances which enhance a sort of co-penetration between the worlds of the researcher and the social

actor, and that take into account the transformations that take place during the research until the two subjects react to each other, and therefore until one becomes part of the action objective of the other (Colasanto 2011; Iorio 2011).

Finally, this type of model is characterized by a dialogical structure, so that the scientifically accepted criteria mostly coincide with a form of communication that is as genuine as possible between the subjects. This does not mean denying any conflict that might arise in the research, or the tensions that can arise between opposing views during the actual investigation (Eco 1960). Even though it may be difficult and troublesome (Burawoy 2007), the development of dialogue is the main aim of this participation model which, conscious of its own limits, is offered to the public as a place for discussion and joint action.

What does using either one or other of these research models actually involve? I will now follow up the effects of these choices on the progress of the research, rediscovering in the process all those practices that include the particular involvement of the social actor, and will try to distinguish them according to the specific contribution each ideal type of participation makes.

### Participation Models and Practices in the Choice of Research Subjects and in Research Design

The first step is to understand that the researcher and the social actor share the same idea about the *facticity* of the phenomenon they are analyzing, of its external importance, of the fact it *has always been there*. This does not invalidate the specific vocation of the researcher for

the suspension of disbelief, on the other hand, it indicates that social science, more particularly research, is profoundly ingrained in the living world, precisely in function of the tacit agreement that exists between the sociologist and the member of society: he makes sure that there is a common conviction of the fundamental and ordered existence of the phenomenon, whether or not there is an analysis method for it (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970). Rather, it is from this shared idea that the choice of research problems derives: daily life, in fact, not only provides the problematic context from which sociology studies arise, but also provides the scientific analysis of the social world with a concept of factual order and cognitive perspective (Ranci 1998).

In other words, from the perspective of participatory research, the objectives of the research can never be unilaterally taken for granted, either by the researchers or the clients, regardless of the attitudes of the groups of people that are the subject/object of the research; they must come from the common awareness of a real problem which is important precisely because of the fact that it has a shared everyday dimension. But, if an institutional perspective of the participation model puts more emphasis on the pragmatic dimension of the origins of the scientific problem,<sup>12</sup> both genetic and functional, which link it to the living world,<sup>13</sup> one aspect of dialogical

<sup>12</sup> The pragmatist vision of research, as strictly characterized in its cultural background, sees common sense as the basis of every scientific problem, or in any environment in which people are directly involved and the logic of which is defined by a practical sense (Dewey 1938).

<sup>13</sup> As Dewey (1938) recognizes, a very close relationship exists between scientific research and the living world, a relationship that can be understood in a double sense—a genetic relationship, since the research field derives from this sphere, and a functional relationship, since it is the task of science to classify and manipulate existential material.

participation of a constructivist type places greater emphasis on the idea that sharing problematics with the object of analysis is an essential prerequisite for creating participatory sociology. Thus, for several authors (Ferrarotti 1961; Gilli 1971; Martino Simeoni 1991), the theme of the research must constitute a real element of difficulty and uncertainty for the social actor, it must arise from his practical and cognitive needs.

Based on this, Kahn and Cannell (1957) identify three specific sources for the motivation behind the social actor's participation in an investigation: an extrinsic motivation, an intrinsic motivation, and a social one. In the first case, the theme of the ongoing research is fundamental: in fact, the subject will feel particularly encouraged to collaborate if he finds there is a real coherence with his own personal interests and the objectives or contents of the research project; the second motivation comes about as a result of the personal relationship that is created right from the outset between the researcher/interviewer and the social actor, in that, as many studies have highlighted, the motivation to cooperate with another subject strictly depends on the satisfaction that is gained from the human relationship that is established; lastly, the third type of motivation can be generally defined as having a social basis, in that, it depends on conformity to shared social norms: for example, the most elementary rules of courtesy, respect for authority and for others in general, the common good, which in any case have an important role to play in motivating the subject to *feel a personal interest* in the field of study and the objectives of the research.

Literature contains many examples of specific techniques for engaging the actor in the initial stages of the research: employing a cultural mediator, the use of key-witnesses, interviews with expert witnesses. These are particular subjects who are considered as being competent and trustworthy, and who are therefore chosen because they distinguish themselves from other members of society. One of the fundamental characteristics of these tools is that they give an active role to the social actor, so that there is less of a difference in status between the researcher and the object of study (Zimmerman and Pollner 1970).

However, there is not much literature on the definition of the specific tasks to be carried out by these figures during the different stages of the investigation, and so a brief outline follows. First of all, in some cases, only the key-witness and expert witness can influence and direct the structuring of the research project: seeing that they are figures who belong to the community being analyzed, their advice and indications give them the opportunity to push the researcher towards changing direction and altering the target, depending on the way things transpire during the investigation. The research project is not always planned on the basis of the researcher's direct experience in the field; in this way, the sociologist can get an idea of the different stages of the research, not just based on prior experience—personal or otherwise—or on the results of similar research, but can make use of the help of key-witnesses and expert witnesses in deciding which areas of observation are more important, which research tools will be more or less acceptable to the social actors, and in what order

to carry out the various stages of the research. Another important area of intervention is the moment of contact between the object of analysis and entry into the community under study, which involves the specific role of the cultural mediator. This figure gives the researcher the opportunity to establish a good relationship with the members of the group being analyzed, helping him to overcome any difficulties with integration or linguistic or cultural comprehension, and to overcome any explicit or implicit *rites of entry* into the community. Access to information flow is the specific job of the *gatekeeper*, a figure who is also often the key-witness, and who, because of their social position, is responsible for information control and for maintaining social control within the group. Finally, all the figures mentioned above, through their mediation and their direct knowledge of the other community members, are able to support the sampling stage, and can offer interesting information about the most suitable subjects for the aims of the research and about the characteristics that should be considered during the selection stage. Also, during the research activity, the key-witnesses and expert witnesses may be asked to help in defining the concepts and the boundaries of the reference classes, or for extra information with personal opinions on the characteristics of the study object, or perhaps for some immediate feedback on the researcher's ideas and the proposal of a subjective interpretation. Finally, all of the figures mentioned thus far might be called on to take the role of interlocutor and dialectical representative if any problems come up along the way, especially if these concern relationships and the whole group being studied, or just some particular subjects.

## Participation Models and Practices for Data Collection

As we know, data collection for social research is principally done in four different ways: analysis of documents, collection of secondary data, participant observation, and direct collection through interviews. In this section, attention is focused on participant observation and on the interview, in an attempt to show the participation models that underlie the different ways these two techniques are used and interpreted.

Starting with participant observation, the main objective of this technique is to overcome the cognitive and cultural gap that exists between analyst and analyzed by moving one of the actors towards the other (Gobo 2008); it is up to the researcher to approach the subject/object of study, relinquishing the detachment typical of the observer and trying, by participating in the social actor's world, to acquire their language, to understand their symbols, and recognize how they express themselves. This does not just mean gaining the social actor's compliance, but also mastering interpretation keys and specific competences that are not familiar to the researcher. The outcome of this access means being able to reconstruct the set of rules and codes that make the behavior and communication dynamics of the social actor understandable and meaningful. This only seems possible if the researcher enters the social actor's group of origin, taking on the role of a participating member (Adler and Adler 1987): the distance between the academic and the subject/object of study becomes closer, so that the researcher's immersion in the social actor's world takes the

typical form of a *temporary enrollment* (Ranci 1998).<sup>14</sup> Precisely because of this temporary nature, participant observation also reproduces the ethnographic complexity that belongs to the relationship between natives and foreign observers. It arises, in fact, from the idea that it is possible to observe at the same time as living: but this, Ranci notes (1998), requires a balance that is not only a paradox on a theoretical level, but is just as difficult to do on a practical level.

And it is to respond to this problematic aspect that ethnomethodological research has come up with—the idea of *empathic orientation*: this approach derives from the open criticism of the traditional concept of the technique, in that it is able only to propose a reconstruction of social reality according to the researcher's narrow point of view, that is, from the point of view of the person who will always be described as an outsider in the actors' accounts. The empathic perspective means a full immersion into the social context being studied, which must be accompanied by the researcher's ability to identify with the social actor on an emotional level, so that the relationship established between the two is based not so much on the intellectual effort needed to gain access, but on the emotional contribution, in other words, the researcher's ability to intuitively understand the other's sentiments and interpret them, and to empathize with the subjective experiences. Here, empathy is the element of discontinuity from the classic approach: it allows the researcher to temporarily abandon their

own tacit knowledge to “go native” and become familiar with the subjects' behaviors, so that they can directly experience and empathize with the mental states and intentions of the people they are analyzing. If the classical view of participant observation rose from the necessity to reconcile the two points of view (conflicting but both valid) of the observer and the observed, in Ranci's (1998) opinion, this new concept of empathy helps to achieve this.

However, until we are able to identify the characteristics of dialogical participation in this approach, we need to abandon a naive romantic and idealistic vision which sees empathy as the only way to fully understand the other's point of view, and take on an additional new element<sup>15</sup>: that is, understand that the main objective of the research is not so much to reflect social reality as to build it socially; “it is not about producing absolute knowledge but interpretations [and constructions of reality].<sup>16</sup> Behaviors tell us something about how actors interpret their own actions. Research produces interpretations that try to give a sense to the ways in which actors try to give a sense to their own actions” (Melucci 1998:23).

The first example of a dialogical approach in participant observation is suggested by Whyte (1955). In his study on the Italian slums of Boston, he employed a special assistant who was a member of the studied street corner society. Thanks to this strategy, there

<sup>15</sup> An element recognized by Ranci (1998).

<sup>16</sup> To affirm this, Melucci (1998) adds the notion of plausibility. This, the author sustains, represents an important point in the methodological challenge that has been raised by qualitative research, a challenge that interests social research in its entirety. In fact, plausibility opens two relevant questions: the relationship, though mediated by narration, between observation and reality and the theme of interpretation criteria (Melucci 1998).

was an overturning of roles: Whyte, the observer, was temporarily enrolled as a member of the studied community, becoming one of the best friends of his main key-witness, while Orlandella, a native, was temporarily enrolled as an observer, assistant of the sociologist. The empathic involvement of Whyte's participation is also clear when he guided Cornerville members to organize public demonstrations to get City Hall to pump more money into the neighborhood. However, an idyllic view of the access to the information field is unrealistic. In the methodological annex, Whyte (1955) specifies that he always was recognized as a stranger and as a gringo.<sup>17</sup> The dialogical approach, in fact, does not eliminate tensions or difficulties; its peculiarity is the circularity and awareness with the possibility to open processes of common hermeneutic construction and overturning.

A preference for direct collection techniques, through interviews with the social actor, derives from a completely different source. Even though it is on the way to rediscovering interactional perspectives for the valorization of the social construction of the information base, this approach has its origins in behavioral concepts that still affect it today. Within this approach we can find three positions that we will call *mechanistic*, *critical*, and *interactional* (Sormano 1996), and which represent three different relational models between the actors during the direct collection stage: the researcher, the social actor, and the interviewer. This latter figure, in particular, is often equated to that of the researcher, and in many cases is seen as

<sup>17</sup> Initially, he was observing, asking too many questions, and the relationship with natives was tense. When Whyte sat back and simply observed, he found his situation changed for the better: “[a]s I sat and listened, I learnt the answers to the questions that I would not have had the sense to ask” (1955:235).

a neutral mediation channel between the researcher and the social actor. When considering the roles of the single subjects who carry out the social interview, it is important not to neglect the specific role of the interviewer who has a fundamental position in the construction of the information base. In fact, this position should be given careful attention since if, on the one hand, in most social research, there is a long line of intermediaries between the researcher and the subject/object of the research, and on the other, the interviewer is often the only individual able to directly ascertain the actual impact of the data collection tools created by the researcher, and to obtain immediate feedback about the overall trend of the survey (Bocuzzi 1985).

In reality, in the first position I analyze, there is no great interest in the specific role of the interviewer: he is simply seen as the person who carries out the tasks assigned by the researcher, so that his primary interests are seen as being the passive administration of stimuli and the registration of the information gathered from the interviewee, avoiding at all costs any possible filter, influence, elaboration, or distortion. This is part of a basic theoretical framework which involves creating the stimulus-response design through the rigorous division of the work involved in the survey. It is the researcher's job to design and develop the stimuli that will most efficiently garner the greatest amount of relevant information, with the aim of accessing the deepest layers of the interviewee's personality; it is the interviewer's job to carry out instructions verbatim, without taking any personal initiatives; and it is the social actor's role to answer the questions immediately and mechanically, allowing the information that he already possesses

to come out, depending on its adherence to the requests. In the behaviorist ideal, in fact, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee must be completely neutralized in order to depersonalize the event and make it mechanical, so a mechanical situation is produced in which every uniform question receives an immediate reaction; if, however, the main concern of the interviewer is what Hyman (1954) calls *stimulus invariance*, the interviewee's concern must be to react to the stimuli he is given.

Implicit in this model is another basic concept which Sormano (1996) effectively calls the *simple extractive approach*: this derives from a meeting between behaviorist applications and information communication theories. Information is therefore considered as being at the center of the methodological construction of the research technique, and its conservation is the objective of many commonly accepted prescriptions: this leads to the study of the sources of data distortion, of the importance of an adequate transcription and registration of information, on the fidelity of the data collected. Information is hypostatized as if it were a treasure to be preserved within the interviewee and that already exists there in its entirety, and that, above all, corresponds to the actual state of the subject and what is being analyzed.

For these reasons, this approach to data collection through interview can be appropriately assigned to a research model based on an idyllic concept, or on a non-problematic relationship between the different actors involved in the research. The goal of the interviewer will be simply to explore the conscience of the interviewee and extract information with the help of certain tools: rhetorical devices that help him access

the innermost thoughts of the subject; there are also vertical data collection techniques that make use of a funnel-shaped data collection tool that includes increasingly specific questions that penetrate more deeply into the research problem; finally, there are horizontal techniques for asking the questions in order of proximity, which permits an in-depth discussion of the main dimensions of the research. On the other hand, this model assumes that the social actor will be absolutely rational and that his answers will be mechanical, complete, and transparent: here, it is exclusively clarity of meaning that is valuable as it corresponds precisely to the actual state of the subject (Sormano 1996). Moreover, in this context, the social actor is exposed to the cultural, practical, and cognitive world of the researcher; and he is called on to temporarily detach his role from its daily context, so as to lessen any distances from the researcher. The way the data collection tool is structured helps the social actor to carry out this task: for the interviewee, this means the imposition of the researcher's specific way of thinking, reply categories, and behavior practices.

The second approach pertinent to the direct data collection technique derives from the mechanistic concept and represents its critical development. Specifically, it originates from the considerations made by Atteslander and Kneubühler (1975) who begin with an accurate analysis of the behaviorist position, and introduce several important innovations which open the doors to some future developments: in particular, their focus concentrates on the passage from a research choice that is based on the researcher's extractive capacity to another which underlines the social context of the interview (Sormano 1996). In this view, the actor takes on a psychological importance

and becomes the creator of his own interpretations of the research, which has full repercussions on the progress of the interview and on the data collection process. The theoretical point of departure is, in fact, represented by cognitivism, according to which rather than finding that the interviewee represents an unformed terrain of mechanical reactions, or a *tabula rasa*, he is instead a fertile ground full of meaning where it is possible to flourish, acquire meaning, and consolidate past experiences. Thus, each reply does not correspond to an actual state that is ready to be extracted and made use of, but to a process of elaboration and construction which depends on many factors concerning the relational context and the statements of the interviewee. According to this approach, behind the traditional *distortions*, there is a truth and a cause that depend primarily on the psychological and social conditions of the interviewee. Indeed, it can be defined as a limitation characterized by three systems of normative reference, which together make up the interpretive framework for attributing sense to the communications results: the general social normative system, that of the reference group, and that specific to the interview. This means giving an active role to meaning for all the subjects involved. As expected from the institutional participation model, each person has a specific task: the social actor, the researcher, and even the interviewer, who, as a conscious subject, is able to evaluate the progress of the interview and to contextualize the contents. It is easy to understand why many authors recognize the importance of the interviewer's training, as it is the outcome of a thought process that shifts attention from information to the whole concept-variable-procedure process of data collection (Converse 1970).

The last reference model in the interview category is the *interactional* one (Sormano 1996; Ranci 1998). It could be included in the practices that are connected to a pure type of dialogical participation deriving from a constructivist basis. This approach, more than being considered a school of thought or a consolidated research practice, should be considered an approach that is still being formed and defined and whose characteristics can be seen in some forms of interview and interview analysis that are slowly emerging in the social sciences. If, in fact, the main limitation of the other positions can be seen as their inability to recognize the distances that exist between the research subjects as representatives of different realities, in this new concept, which is still being formed, the idea of including social relations in the interview situation means taking into account that the different points of view—of the researcher, the interviewer, and the interviewee—all contribute in their own way to the design of the research project. In this sense, the data collection phase is a crucial moment of the research in which a system of relationships is created where all the subjects play a game of agreement/differentiation with the others, strategically using their identity references (Emerson and Pollner 1988). In fact, the input from each person is considered indispensable for the social construction of information, which, far from being data, is the result of these interactional relationships.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, in this perspective, which is in the process of being acknowledged, we are very far from the first mechanistic model where the tool most

<sup>18</sup> In this respect, Sormano (1996) proposes the use of contributions offered by new linguistic theories about enunciation and by studies on polyphony with the use of discourse markers.

suitable for reproducing collected data was the tape recorder; but, we are also far from the second model still based on a more elaborate scheme of the stimulus-response process. This latter direction can, to all intents and purposes, be traced back to a dialogical participation model in that all three figures typical of the data collection phase can be considered active in the processing and development of the data, thus producing a circularity of interpretive levels which intersect, blend, and redefine each other.

### Participation Models and Practices in Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the classic imagery of social research, the analysis phase of the collected data and the interpretation of the results is the absolute responsibility of the researcher who, at a distance from the reality of the study or the location where the data is collected, is shut up in his study, seeking to record and process the available data. In literature, there are several ideas about the specific intervention of the social actor during this phase of the research. On the whole, these are tools that have been borrowed from anthropology and which show the need to obtain direct feedback from the *natives* through a generic *confirmation of the actors* (Gobo 2008). One aspect that appears in all the variations in this group of techniques<sup>19</sup> are meetings organized with the participating members

<sup>19</sup> Traditionally, this consists of a particular form of validation of ethnographic reports and provides for the involvement of the actors in order to obtain from them either confirmations or denials about specific data collection or data interpretation. In literature, this is spoken of as a *member test of validity* (Douglas 1976), of *host verification* (Schatzman and Strauss 1973), of *member verification* (Gould et al. 1974), of *respondent/member validation* (Bloor 1978; Emerson and Pollner 1988), which mean the convalidating function that this technique, in its many forms, carries out on the output from the intellectual and creative activity of the ethnographer.

of the community being analyzed, where they are asked to give their own opinions about the interpretations made by the anthropologist during the various stages of the research. These opportunities for discussion make it possible to judge the mood of the research trend through direct contact with the protagonists involved in the research, so that extra information can be obtained and an immediate comparison made of the mood and the reactions elicited from the ethnographical interpretations (Spradley 1979). In many cases, however, it is considered as being an evaluation technique with the main task of validating ethnographical reports (Gould et al. 1974).

In hindsight, however, this application implies an idyllic approach in that, in addition to not taking into account the psychological and social importance of the existing relationships between researcher and social actor, it does not fully value the cognitive, cultural, and life differences between the different actors. The principal criticisms to this technique concentrates on this point: it emphasizes the existing difference in first level interpretations and second level ones (Moerman 1974), and the responsibility that the scientific community has to validate the assertions. Starting from this basis, Douglas (1976) and Schatzman and Strauss (1973) have put forward new variations in the technique that can help to steer ethnographical interpretations in new directions not yet considered by researchers.

In sociology, this tool is used in order to supply further sources of information and precious additional materials which can enrich the researcher's wealth of knowledge when his work is done, and possibly re-focus his analysis (Gobo 2008; Cardano 2011). In particular, on this subject, sociology literature mentions

an interesting operation that involves the social actor during the data interpretation stage; this is a reflexive practice carried out by Lanzara (1993; also mentioned by Cardano 2011), which, when the monitoring of the project was at an end, involved all the participants in a presentation of the dialogical and constructive results. This was called *backtalk* to underline the conversational nature and the linguistic content that was typical of this form of interaction that is established between observer and social actor.<sup>20</sup>

In the field of research practice, creativity has given rise to other applications of this type which are also mostly unknown to methodologists. For example, the use of discussion groups or actual *focus groups* in order to bring out new interpretations by making the most of the synergic effect (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990), or to widen the field of research and new themes connected to the research object (Bertrand, Ward, and Pauc 1992; Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub 1996), or again, to identify the perceptions and the attitudes of the participants in data collection (Brown and Heller 1981).<sup>21</sup>

The interesting aspect of all these applications, more or less familiar in the field of sociology, is that in the attempt to clarify the results obtained, they can spark ideas that can involve:

1. the technical-operative dimension, aimed at analyzing the tools used in the research, especially

<sup>20</sup> The idea of *backtalk* derives, above all, from the hermeneutic sphere, where interaction regards the relationship between the observer and his research materials that are not necessarily alive, but that are in a certain sense able to *talk* to whoever is appropriately questioning them, such as happens with a text.

<sup>21</sup> Brown and Heller (1981) have used a variation of this technique called *Group Feedback Analysis* (GFA).

in relation to how they were perceived and how they were used by the subjects being analyzed;

2. the information-assessment dimension, aimed at clarifying values, attitudes, tacit knowledge, experiential assumptions, and mental connections of those contributing to the creation of the research information base;
3. the theoretical-interpretative dimension, aimed at stimulating, redefining, and eventually refocusing the considerations during the analysis and interpretation.

If the institutional participation point of view sees the involvement of the actors through reflexive techniques as mainly concentrating on the adequacy of the tools chosen and on the quality of the data (with specific attention to distortions), the constructivist point of view sees the possibility of refocusing the research and of recreating, through open dialogue with the actors, new possibilities for the discussion of motivations, relational mechanisms, and the reasons why all those involved gave a different reading to the same event problem and were more interested in certain aspects rather than others.

### Final Considerations

To conclude, we can ask if and how a dialogical participation model can be a prelude or a contribution to a democratization process of the social research.

At this point, I would like to highlight that a real equal relationship between the social actor and the researcher is not only a utopia but also a great

misunderstanding. The hermeneutic circle requires two different levels of analysis and two different points of view on the social reality. In this sense, not considering the different status and roles of the two main actors of the social research can be a misconception<sup>22</sup>: every democracy requires organic solidarity and a strict division of work. On the other hand, a unilateral way of doing social research is not simply the result of a legacy from positivist scientism, but more a negation of the social character of sciences, especially human ones.

In order to create a way to democratize the research, it is important to consider three questions.

First of all, the non-exploitation of the relationship between researcher and social actor, which in practice means recognizing the specific contribution of each person towards the co-construction of the research.

Secondly, it is important to try out new forms of participation for the social actor by valuing his competent contribution during the research activities. Three key words, borrowed from the field of industrial relations, should be taken into consideration:

- information,
- consultation,
- participation in decision-making processes.

<sup>22</sup> An example is the dialogic ethnographic reporting introduced into anthropology after the Santa Fe Congress in 1984. Although fundamental for a critical turn of cultural studies, this experience resulted in substituting the observer's monological account, written in the first or the third person, for ethnographical accounts, recounted by many voices and difficult to read and understand, where the transcription of the natives' discourses had an equal role that irreverently questioned the interpretations and the notes of anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

There is no perfect formula that can be adapted to all cases, and some of the reasons why it is not possible to impose a standardized direction are: sensitive issues, peculiarities of the research group and/or the clients, and the characteristics of the social actors, et cetera. At each stage of the research, it is necessary to bear in mind that the social actor is the real investigation partner and co-constructor. Therefore, in principle, he should not be kept in the dark about the research objectives, or about the goals and the procedures, or even about the results. In general, he should be kept well-informed in an open way. As far as consultation is concerned, the support (therefore, not simply the recruitment) of key-figures for consultancy is also valuable, and as regards participation in decision-making processes, experiments are in progress to also include representatives from the social world in the research groups.

Thirdly, democratization means being brave enough to open the black box of the research process. This means that, on the one hand, the researcher cannot disregard the economic and structural restrictions of the research, or its social collocation, and the cultural and professional role of researchers (Melucci 1998); on the other, it means that reflexivity must not fall back only on analysis and self-analysis, but must be able to seek out new practices which—as Gouldner would say (1970:489)—transform sociology and make the sociologist more self-aware, both as an expert and as an agent of change.

In my opinion, this is precisely the challenge that all social sciences are called on to face: it means both recognizing the social and historical characteristics

typical of every research practice, and also planning forms of participation that represent, most importantly, a common space of trust and integrity.<sup>23</sup>

Democratizing social research, in fact, responds to two particular needs. Primarily, there is a functional reason which sees the optimization of the information base as central to the question. Starting with the premise that states that researchers have great difficulty understanding and representing the social actor's point of view,<sup>24</sup> this motivation sees participation as a tool that allows the researcher to obtain the social actor's consensus, and this is an effective contribution capable of improving, in a functional sense, the successful outcome of the research. And this is the reason why, in traditional manuals on social research methodology, it is not difficult to find proposals for conscious interaction (Corbetta 1999:176), engagement (Marsh and Keating 1996:126), and the adoption of a participatory style (Arcuri and Arcuri 2010:108).

But, there is another, more significant reason that advances the idea of democratization in our discipline at the moment: the historical-social reason. This sees participation as the result of the eman-

<sup>23</sup> At this point, the statement contained in art. 14 of the Code of Ethics of the British Sociological Association (2002) seems significant: after specifying in art. 10 that during their research sociologists enter into a personal and moral relationship with the subjects they are studying, that is, people, families, social groups, or bodies, art. 14 explicitly states, that "[b]ecause sociologists study the relatively powerless, as well as those more powerful than themselves, research relationships are frequently characterised by disparities of power and status. Despite this, research relationships should be characterized, whenever possible, by trust and integrity" (see: <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/about/equality/statement-of-ethical-practice.aspx>).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the so-called legitimization crisis in scientific representation (Palumbo 2009).

ipation of civil society, which originates from the crisis in human values in our industrialized society and which has brought about the dawn of a new pluralistic era. Far from being made up of passive and indifferent subjects, this new era is characterized by subjects who are increasingly active, competent, and conscious, able to interpret and assume a critical vision not only of reality but also of social research itself.

To this end, in particular, I hope that the thoughts presented in this study will: offer some suggestions as to how we might bring about the application of a dialogical participation model, and also change the way research is done.

It is an ethical necessity, as Burawoy (2005) points out. Social sciences need to return to their origins, but also need to undergo some reconstruction so that they can pose new questions about their mission. It is possible to state that the dialogical proposal also embodies the characteristics of a bet: this means backing a sociology that is both a service to humanity, with emancipatory aims, and the ability to listen, but is also a means for highlighting human dignity.

It is also a historical necessity. As Heron (1996) maintains, the time has come for a proposal that expresses the importance of today's man and woman, and the time has also come for an elite vision of science to give way to a popular, democratic, and—above all—dialogical concept. In this way, proposing participation makes Touraine's (1984) invitation more credible, to return to the social actor, not just as a historical subject, but also as a new reference point for the renewal of social sciences and research practices.

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