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ETHNOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY: NEW PERSPECTIVES, TECHNOLOGIES AND NARRATIVES¹

Marina Berardi, *University of Basilicata*

Chiara Scardozzi, *University of Foggia*

ABSTRACT

Ethnography and photography are relational practices configured as two forms of writing with their own specificities that intersect. Considering the profound technological changes in the recent decades and the crisis of ethnographic authority and photographic representation, the attempt of this special issue is to generate an overview of the plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches relating to the use and production of images in social research.

KEYWORDS

Photography; ethnography; visual ethnography; social research; collaborative ethnography; visual research; images; visual methods.

BIO

Marina Berardi is an anthropologist and a photographer. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Cities and Landscapes: architecture, archaeology, cultural heritage, history and resources, at the University of Basilicata, with an anthropological research project on politics, rhetoric and abandonment processes in small towns of Basilicata, Italy. She graduated at the School of Specialisation in Beni Demoetnoantropologici, after graduating from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. She works as a visual anthropologist in intangible and material heritage, depopulation, material culture, and vernacular imagery. Some of her photographic works have received national and international mentions and awards, including Nikon Talents 2013, Sony World Award, and Metropolis 2017. In 2019, she was among the winners of the MAVI Photography Competition (Museo Antropologico Visivo Irpino). Since 2019 she has been the Photo Essay Editor of Visual Ethnography, a peer-reviewed journal, Classe A, Macrosettore 11/A5.

Chiara Scardozzi holds a Ph.D. in Ethno-Anthropological Disciplines at the University of Rome, "La Sapienza". Currently she is Adjunct Professor of Visual Anthropology at University of Foggia, Italy. Since 2009 she has been working between Italy and Latin America, where she develops her research activities, mainly concerning the ecoregion of Gran Chaco, the processes of inter-ethnic coexistence, and land rights of indigenous peoples and *campesino* families. In 2014 she received the "Francesca Cappelletto Award" from the University of Verona, (Centre for Ethnographic Research and Italian Society for Applied Anthropology), for the best MA thesis in the field of public anthropology. In 2015 she graduated from the Roman School of Photography and Cinema, where she read for her master's in "Reportage and creative personal research". Her works are published in *Visual Ethnography Journal*, *National Geographic Italia*, *La Repubblica*, *Witness Journal*, *Yogurt Magazine*, and *C41 Magazine*.

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¹Although the introduction to this Special Issue is the result of common reflections, the paragraph entitled "Introductory Notes" is to be attributed to Chiara Scardozzi, and the paragraph entitled "Steps to a hermeneutics of the gaze" is to be attributed to Marina Berardi.

The call for contributions

Ethnography and Photography are founded on relational practices which are based on encounter and storytelling. In such an observation, participation and representation space, these disciplines are configured as two forms of writing with their own methodological specificities, as well as zones of contact.

Considering the profound technological changes in the recent decades (such as greater accessibility to photographic devices, the increasing production and circulation of photographs, the diversification of virtual spaces, the new digital ethnography), what are the current links between ethnographic research and photography? What kind of contribution do the visual languages offer to the production of anthropological knowledge? Which kind of relations are established between texts and images? How creative and/or authorial artistic research combines with scientific knowledge?

The aim of this issue of Visual Ethnography, is to generate a critical reflection starting from intersectional points between the two disciplines and the plurality of visions and methods. It is conceived as a moment of thought and comparison on the role and the future of photography in ethnographic research, through a theoretical and visual approach, to start a reasoning about theoretical and practical tools of cultural and social anthropology, considering how photography and/or post-photography and its uses declined through the different devices, in addition to making the research contents visible, can also be considered as a real collaborative practice, methodology of intervention, restitution and/or autonomous authorial narration.

The call was open to papers and photo-essays focused on experiences of collaborative visual ethnographies that use photography to solicit specific narratives and/or include methods of participatory photography aimed at involving groups and communities in the research and co-production of visual contents; researches that explore the possibilities of creating subjectivity in the online life by sharing new forms of self-representation of the body, gender, identity; reflections that interweave ethics and aesthetics in the representation of *otherness*; studies concerning photographic collections that are interpreted through their political and public use and inserted (or censored) within the so-called *heritagization* processes; researches relating to the most innovative and creative trends in contemporary photography that redefine the boundary between reality and fiction starting from the idea of 'post-truth', using different media and methods.²

Introductory notes

The idea for this call was born from several years of collaboration, in which we carried out numerous workshops and training activities related to Visual Anthropology, both inside and outside the academic field.³ These activities were aimed at students and researchers from the social sciences, interested in developing greater awareness of Photography, but also to amateur and professional photographers interested in social issues, and willing to refine their gaze through the lense of Cultural Anthropology. These encounters have been valuable opportunities for mutual learning, and they have led us to consider how our 'double nature', as anthropologists and photographers, is sometimes reflected in specific individual paths, but very rarely contemplated in the training opportunities offered in academic courses, or outside them, at least with regard to the Italian context. We are convinced that these fields need to be integrated in order to mutually enrich each other, both theoretically and practically, and that the need for discussion on the 'visual' is a current and essential issue, even in the face of the so-called 'digital turn' and its effects in social, epistemological, and ethical terms, and its repercussions in the social sciences, in the study of media, communication and interaction.⁴

We are not only faced with changes in the ways of practising and understanding photography - its semiotic status - but we probably look at and perceive reality in a different way, starting from the physical mediation of screens, smartphones and cameras. We are at the same time both the users / viewers and the producers / creators of a quantity of images that are difficult to quantify in terms of speed and size.

² Extract from the call "Ethnography and Photography today: new perspectives, technologies and narratives" published in April 2021 by Marina Berardi and Chiara Scardozzi.

³ To name a few: "Phototelling. Rethinking ethnography through visual languages", National Conference of the Italian Society of Applied Anthropology - SIAA, Catania 2017; "Ethnography and visual research", Anthropology Festival, Bologna, 2018; "Visual anthropology and photographic research", Deaphoto Cultural Association - Florence, 2021.

⁴ At least since the early 2000s, research abounds, and just to name a few examples closely related to the visual: Horst and Miller (2012); Favero (2018); Larsen and Mette (2014); Pauwels (2015); Pink (2011); Pink et al (2016).

The technological innovations of the last decades have certainly made the production of photographic images more accessible, rapid and 'democratic'. With digital technologies, the internet, mobile telephony, and social networks, their diffusion has also been transformed, through communication channels and media different from the past.

Within the contemporary visual hyperproduction and overstimulation, the Catalan photographer Joan Fontcuberta (2016) imagined *Homo Photographicus*, the species towards which we humans have evolved as beings characterised by the compulsion to produce images. It is precisely in the *post-photographic era* (Mitchell 1992; Fontcuberta 2016), in which it is easy to surrender to the thought of having already seen and said everything, that we believe it is important to problematize, through the sensitivity of ethnographic observation, both the act of 'seeing', and the responsibility of 'giving to see', combining ethnographic rigour with the awareness of the photographic choice, and the creative ability to 'let the images speak'. This kind of reflection clearly requires an approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries, and shows the richness of the visual social sciences, not only as a study 'on' the visual, but also 'through' the visual (Pauwels 2015: 3).

It is no coincidence that the authors of the contributions hosted in this Special Issue belong to the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Psychiatry, Cultural/Media/Communication and Visual Studies, Architecture, Art and Graphic Design, and interact heterogeneously with Photography; observing Photography as an *object of analysis* (Grasso, Ohashi and Mizuno), and using Photography as a *method of investigation* (Chatagny, Prisco, Sousa), a *resource for social documentation* (Mestroni, Leon-Quijano), an *instrument of creative expression* (Arteca, Berardi, Ceccarini, Scardozzi), and as a *collaborative practice* in the public sphere (Benbrahim and Björn, Thieftaler and Lynch).

The call for contributions had an international resonance and a response that exceeded our expectations, forcing us to give up numerous significant contributions that we hope will be published and enhanced on other occasions.

On the basis of the abstracts received, we made a selection that could account for the plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches relating to the use and production of images in research, and which, without claiming to be exhaustive, was able to generate an overview of some of the communicative, expressive and cognitive possibilities of photography and its uses, and declined through multiple *perspectives* (what we look at, and from what point of view), *narratives* (how we tell it) and *technologies* (with what means).

For us it is important to underline how the different research experiences start from a common awareness of the crisis of ethnographic authority (Clifford 1983) and of photographic representation. Both in the papers and in the photo essays, these critical assumptions become constitutive of visibility, and it is understood as a dialogic practice, with the related ethical and aesthetic implications: the need to decolonize the gaze and bring the observation back to the contexts of proximity, and up to the auto-ethnographic exploration; the incorporation of participatory visual methodologies, such as *photo-voice* and *photo-elicitation*; the possibility of practising visual ethnography not only as an appendix of academic anthropology and documentary support to the field investigation, but as real research applied to topics of collective interest and in the public space (Pink 2007; 2013).

Visibility thus becomes a learning opportunity, a meeting ground and collaborative possibility; it gives us back a *polyphonic gaze* that is affirmed through heterogeneous tools, practices and languages.

If we think that digital technology has engulfed every possible alternative, definitively dematerializing the photographic image, the contributions collected in this volume testify, on the contrary, to the coexistence of multiple techniques and the adaptation of the means to the ends: in fact, the authors measure themselves with different devices, and show us, for example, how smartphones have entered the toolbox of researchers in the field - thanks to portability and ease of use - but without replacing film cameras; instant image films coexist with pixels; digital archiving practices do not necessarily replace paper prints but enhance and preserve them; virtual environments do not cancel the terrain, but amplify it. Thus the act of photographing is not an automatism necessarily dictated by software, but it is a subjective choice that requires awareness, as well as, and above all, an awareness of what is shown and what is not.

The smartphone, intended as a 'personal portable archive', becomes similar to a family photo album, and it is at the centre of the collaborative contribution of Kana Ohashi and Daijiro Mizuno, who use it to analyse a painful and existential transition in the life of one of the authors. Looked at retrospectively

in an auto-ethnographic key, the photos are 'traces' capable of materialising absence, visualising the change, and trying to reconcile the events.

Instead, the digitization of a public archive is the starting point of Erika Grasso's essay, which explores the dark Italian colonial experience in Somalia through a photographic collection, preserved in the archive of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography at the University Of Turin (MAET). In this case, the photographs are dense objects, in need of a new reading that can shed light on the positivist and objectifying paradigm, used to define *otherness*, essentializing it into racist categories. Half way between tangible and intangible heritage, these 'visual finds' condense history, memory and social significance, and are witnesses of the colonial gaze behind the photographic device.

The political ontology of photography (Azoulay 2012), the asymmetry of power in favour of the photographer versus the photographed, are at the centre of Manuel Francisco Sousa's contribution. Starting from research conducted in the Ukrainian context, the author critically reflects on the need to think of photographic documentation as a collaborative process: what is shown is therefore the result of a negotiation that necessarily presupposes the consent of the people portrayed.

The ethical questions underlying the photographic representation are also the background to the contribution of Guillaume Chatagny, who reasons on the authority and responsibility of the researcher to 'show' the reality of a mosque in Switzerland, choosing to return to the informative value of photography intended as field 'data'. Here the photos, analysed a posteriori, are documents that help to 'see better', to reconstruct the research space and its configurations.

The problematic representation of the Neapolitan peripheral urban areas is the fulcrum of Marilena Prisco's research, who, through the participatory method of photo-elicitation, investigates the perception of stigma among children living in public housing. Here the potential of the visual method unfolds, and they act to rethink and orient interventions in the field of architecture and urban planning.

We have chosen to give ample space to photo-essays, because we are convinced of the need for a critical reflection on the relationship between words and images, starting from the value of photographic research as an autonomous authorial product. This is a series that develops ideas through anthropologically oriented research that the authors return to us through stylistically coherent narratives, composed by means of a careful selection, and the studied juxtaposition of images. It is through this editing operation that the expressive and communicative richness of the photographic story is revealed, which can be 'read', like a text with its own characteristics and specific grammar.

The multiple expressive languages, often even distant from the aesthetic canons of 'ethnographic photography' to which we are accustomed, push us to overcome the realistic paradigm of photo-ethnographic representation, effectively recomposing the fracture between aesthetic expression and fieldwork documentation.

In the contribution of Camilo Leon-Quijano we find again the problematic representation of the suburbs of cities and their inhabitants. The author, while using the classic black and white style, moves away from stereotypes relating to the Parisian *banlieue*, a symbol of marginalisation, exclusion and violence, by showing us the creative and constructive experience of urban gardening.

Simone Mestroni's work on the conflict in Kashmir is also placed in the name of social reportage, this time in colour. With a closer look, and by means of what the author defines as 'visual tombstones', we are able to enter the complexity of the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan, and of the violently repressed guerrilla warfare of the Indian army.

The documentation becomes something more evocative and personal in the work of Damian Arteca, who portrays his hometown, Sudbury (Canada), working by subtraction, and starting from the remains left by the production of nickel, in which heterogeneous landscapes are united by the 'presence of absence'.

The extractive territories of Sicily, Italy, are instead investigated in the work of Chiara Scardozzi, who tells the complexity of late-industrial scenarios, by contrasting decadence and splendour, and combining the documentary photographs made by the author in 2019, with the tourist postcards produced in the 1960s.

Sabine Tiefenthaler and Gemma Lynch present a collaborative project carried out in the Extraordinary Reception Centers (CAS), in Sardinia, Italy. Based on the *Photo-Voice* method, this project is effective in restoring voice and visibility to young women seeking asylum, who become active protagonists of their narratives and photographic representations, subverting stereotypes related to gender and migratory paths.

Also in the vein of collaboration and self-ethnography is the work of Dina Brenbahim and Kári Björn, created with snapshots that portray the author nursing her daughter Naël in different situations. It is an impressive example of serial work, which draws on private life to subvert the stigma associated with breastfeeding in public places.

Gianluca Ceccarini travels back through the history of anthropology, evoking *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer, and draws on the photographic repertoire of an ethnological matrix mixed with digital post-production, inviting us to reflect on the paradoxical topicality of the evolutionist paradigm and its gaze on *otherness*.

Finally, far from the positivist utopia that thought of photography as a faithful and truthful proof of reality, Marina Berardi, by means of *in-game photography*, expands our perception of the terrain. She inserts herself into the split between online and offline life, suggesting (provocatively) for us to reconsider the relationship between reality and fiction, and the intrinsic ambiguity of images.

Steps to a hermeneutics of the gaze

This Special Issue of Visual Ethnography is therefore an attempt to initiate a fruitful dialogue between researchers who have chosen to contribute to a critical reading on the ways in which it is possible to narrate through images, as well as an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which images, as cultural and symbolic devices, become the object of critical readings and theoretical positioning, especially if observed in their reproduction, in everyday life and in the worlds we investigate. The questions from which we started try to intercept the great issues that have been reflected in an extraordinary participation, and this has translated into a discursive need, that we are happy to have intercepted. The heterogeneity of the contributions highlights how visual practices are anchored in ethnographic practice, which requires a continuous focus, made possible also through identity narratives.

The feeling of ethical responsibility that photography brings within the anthropological discipline, already attentive to the internal, local and emic point of view, is quite transversal in the various contributions (Chatagny; Prisco; Leon-Quijano; Sousa; Tiefenthaler and Lynch), and amplifies the complex process that passes between auto and hetero representation, which also requires us to consider the aspect linked to the imaginary, the imagination as a projection, not only aesthetic (Appadurai 1996).

The images are placed in the narrative by wavering the *textocentric hermeneutics*, or the centrality of writing, becoming no longer subordinate forms of knowledge, but forms of reflexivity and critical instances. On the one hand, the challenges of the contemporary bring out the need to understand the ways in which the circulation of photographs can be read; on the other hand, attention must be paid to the ways in which forces of various kinds contribute to the construction of a discourse that risks essentializing and naturalising otherness.

The attention to biographies, present in the contributions, is necessary to enter the texture of everyday life, into social life, and into the interstices in which the different forms of individual and collective self-representations come to life, and the ways in which they interact with the plane of imagination and the projection of oneself into the world, and of the world into itself.

Another moment of analysis concerns the ways in which aesthetics problematise the boundaries of 'authorship' through a critical representation of places and the production of localities - already understood to start from the boundaries of one's own body, and therefore immersed in the expression of emotions - within the visual production (Arteca; Björn and Benbrahim; Mestroni; Scardozzi; Tiefenthaler and Lynch), becoming a dense discourse and bearer of critical, reflective and processual demands, as well as bringing the criticism of the gaze within the discipline itself (Ceccarini).

This extends to the process of memory, private and public, which contributes to the critical construction and deconstruction of the gaze. The postcards and colonial photographs present in the essays (by Scardozzi and Grasso), albeit coming from completely different contexts, highlight how the aesthetics of the representation of places, through the diachronic lens, heals the fracture between memory and oblivion, and allows us to imagine building an archive of places and communities. Appadurai writes:

Thus, we should begin to see all documentation as intervention, and all archiving as part of some sort of collective project. Rather than being the tomb of the trace. The archive is more frequently the product of

the anticipation of collective memory. Thus the archive is itself an aspiration rather than a recollection (Appadurai 2003: 16).

This Special Issue stems from the awareness that being in an expanded world, through the multiplication of *global cultural flows* (Appadurai 1996), means being in a world whose coordinates place us at unimaginable distances in contrast to the past. In this expanded world, digital ecosystems (Favero 2018; Pink 2017) are an example of how technologies, on the one hand, are able to unhinge the paradigms of truthfulness, and on the other, they are dialogic, relational, poetic, mediated and experiential space.

In some essays the choice of the instrument is not secondary to the narration: in the essay on the Game-Industry (Berardi), through the digital choice, one enters a world that otherwise would not exist, and one enters a vision in which it is possible to rethink the body and boundaries of the self in a new reflective narrative. At the same time, the choice of preferring analog instruments, such as Polaroids (Benbrahim and Björn) or disposable Film cameras (Tiefenthaler and Lynch), is an explicit self-reflective and collaborative poetics as an aesthetic, and therefore political gesture (Bourgeois, Schonberg 2011).

In other contributions, the poetics of representation meet the practices of elicitation and give rise to new and dense ways to participate and observe (Prisco; Tiefenthaler and Lynch), "photo-elicitation solves 'memory problems' and evokes responses" affirm Collier and Collier (Collier and Collier 1986: 100-101), and photography becomes a tool to generate a narration induced by the two-dimensional space of the image, in which a back-knitting of events and elements (material and immaterial) takes place, which, for those involved in elicitation practices, they ideally also represent spaces in which to practice local identity and self identity.

The *deep* meaning of this Special Issue is to give back one of the relationships in which to start a dialogue on the different and multiple forms that the visual tools take in research, and in the worlds we traverse. The discursiveness that follows, leads us in the direction of *community art* (Crehan 2011), in which the community and researchers build a dialectical and processual space through multiple forms of cultural representation.

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IMAGES AND “INTERESTING SUBJECTS” FROM THE COLONIES. ARCHIVE, MEMORY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS AT THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TURIN

Erika Grasso, *Università degli Studi di Torino*

ABSTRACT

Recently, the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University Of Turin (MAET) started a process of reordering its archive and of digitising its photographic collections. Among the latter stand out three albums from the 'Carlo Vittorio Musso' collection, containing 111 photographs produced between 1920 and 1923 in Italian Somalia. After years of “oblivion”, the museum’s archive reveals images linked to a corpus of ethnographic objects from the Italian colonies, which connect the cultural heritage to the collective memory and to the imaginaries and narratives on otherness. The 'rediscovery' of these albums and the 'along the grain' investigation of archival documents and photographic collections question the MAET's past and present use of images from 'elsewhere' and its co-participation in specific narratives concerning the construction of the national identity. The biographical approach to both objects and images and the reconstruction of the story that led them to the MAET allow the start of a process of decolonisation and the recognition of those subjectivities that, for too long, have had no voice in public, political or scientific representation.

KEYWORDS

Heritage; Photographic collections; Visual Anthropology; Museum Anthropology; Italian colonies; Decolonisation; Archives

BIO

Erika Grasso has a PhD in cultural anthropology, and is currently a research fellow at the University of Turin, Italy. She conducted research in Northern Kenya focusing on Christianisation, ethnic belongings and urbanity. She oversaw the creation of the historical archive of the Catholic Mission of Marsabit, Kenya, of which she has enquired the history. She has worked as a museum curator and collaborated in the cataloging campaign of material culture and photographic heritage. Currently, her research focuses on the ethnological and photographic collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of Turin (MAET). She is (co-)editor of two books and over 15 scholarly articles and book chapters.

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Introduction



FIGURE 1: “Zanini non dà tregua ai soggetti interessanti”, (Zanini gives no breath to interesting subjects) 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

In Turin, an old photograph and its “interesting subjects” emerge from the darkness of the archives (Fig. 1). The blurred photograph portrays a young woman holding a basket and looking at the camera. We can just glimpse her drawn smile and serious gaze. On the right side, a man bent over his camera. He wears a light-coloured shirt, knee-length pants, leather shoes, and socks. Behind the two, there are two columns and a barren landscape. It is a black and white photograph, with shades tending towards sepia. The neutral tones and the out-of-focus details contribute creating an opaque and ill-defined atmosphere, increasing the fascination on the observer. The subjects are involved in a peculiar game of glances. The man looks at the twin-lens camera’s lens in his hand. The camera’s objective lens points at the woman as to capture her and, through the camera viewfinder, to ‘offer’ her image to the photographer. The woman is not looking at either the man or his camera. She looks at us. Her intense gaze not only suggests the presence of a third person on the scene - the unknown author of the photograph - but also questions the observer from the time and place of the shot, over a century ago and more than eight thousand kilometres away. Beside the photograph, on the dark cardboard page of the album that contains it, there is a brief caption written in elegant hand: “Zanini gives no breath to interesting subjects”.

The photograph is contained in an album that opens with a dedication: “To my dear friend

Lieutenant Vittorio Musso”. It is one of the three albums of the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection¹ of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the University Of Turin (MAET). The MAET’s cultural heritage includes ethnographic, anthropological and archaeological collections, and various photographic collections (among them are the Marro², Carlo Vittorio Musso, Giuseppe Carlo Sesti³ and Bicknell⁴ collections, all made up of gelatin dry plate negatives). This heritage has been collected since the foundation of the MAET (1926) and documents peculiar perspectives and understandings of alterity and otherness worthy of being fully analysed and evaluated. Since 2017, after years of closure to the public, MAET initiated a wider resumption of its activities including the reorganization and digitalization of the historical archive and the photographic collections. In this context, the “Giuseppe Carlo Sesti” and “Carlo Vittorio Musso” collections have been involved in a process of digitisation, restoration and cataloguing⁵, which makes them accessible to a wider public.

This contribution aims to critically analyse ‘Carlo Vittorio Musso’ albums that until recently were among MAET’s unpublished materials. They are part of the “heritage in the dark” (Rabino Massa 1998), as the MAET’s heritage has been referred to in the past, and for decades they have been ignored, as has much of the Museum’s ethnological and photographic corpora (Grasso 2020). The two most consistent albums contain 88 silver gelatin prints marked with the initials “F.Z.”. They are photographic reproductions of images (probably postcards) most probably part of a series of numbered images that circulated in Italy between 1920s and 1930s. We know just the author’s last name: Zanini. He is the photographer portrayed in the image described above (Fig. 1), part of the third album. This third album is composed of 23 print photographs with handwritten captions that document a journey across the inner Somali territories, then under the control of the Italian government in the early 1920s. Time seems to have been less kind to this album, which is the least substantial of the collection. It differs from the other two in that it contains photographs of different sizes and, most likely, by different authors. In some cases blurred and deteriorated, these photographs are less intelligible today than Zanini’s postcards. Zanini’s name connects the three albums that turn out to be a private collection that reached the MAET’s rooms with a corpus of ethnographic objects from Somalia and Libya through trajectories only partially understood. The three albums and the ethnographic corpus are connected with wider processes related to heritage, memory and identity. The 111 photographs resonate with the history of ethnographic heritage and photographs collecting processes in the first half of the 20th century. Moreover, the “interesting subjects” portrayed in the images bring to light the need to question ourselves – as scholars, curators and citizens – on the reasons and modalities with which Zanini and ‘his’ subjects met and travelled, albeit virtually, towards the Musso private collection and, then, to the MAET archive.

This paper aims to contribute to the MAET heritage’s process of decolonisation (Mangiapane and Grasso 2019a) through the reconstruction of the history of the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection and its critical analysis. It addresses the crucial question of how to actually proceed towards the decolonisation of cultural heritage by examining the case of a photographic collection that is part of the heritage of a museum, founded during a period of fascism and characterised by a complex and ambiguous history

¹ The collection consists of three cardboard albums bound with cord binding, two of which (24 pages, 19 cm x 13 cm) contain 88 silver gelatin prints marked “FZ” (14 cm x 9 cm). The third album (12 pages, 19 cm x 14 cm), also in cardboard with a drawstring binding, contains 23 silver gelatin prints of different sizes and accompanied by captions.

² The Marro photographic collection was donated to MAET by the museum’s founder Giovanni Marro and consists of approximately 2000 gelatine dry plates, which document the research activities of the museum’s founder. Of particular value are the 228 plates of the Egyptian photographic collection dating back to a period between 1911 and 1923 that document the excavation campaigns in Egypt of the Italian Archaeological Mission (Rabino Massa and Boano 2003; Boano, Campanella, Mangiapane and Rabino Massa 2016).

³ The Giuseppe Carlo Sesti photographic collection consists of 343 negatives gelatine dry plates. The photographic collection became part of the museum’s holdings with a large collection of objects from the Congo Basin, which constitute the largest part of the African corpus of ethnographic collections collected by Giovanni Marro. The Congolese ethnographic collection is owed to the engineers Pietro Gariazzo and Carlo Sesti, author of the photographs, who were engaged in the construction of the railway line between the cities of Matadi and Leopoldville (today Kinshasa) in the early years of the 20th century (Gualino 1938; Pennacini 2000).

⁴ The Bicknell photographic collection consists of about 140 gelatine dry plates, which reproduce rock engravings from the pre- and proto-historic era made by Clarence Bicknell and Luigi Pollini in the region of Mount Bego between 1905 and 1913.

⁵ The digitalisation and restoration project “‘Fondi fotografici del Sistema Museale di Ateneo dell’Università di Torino: immagini del brigantaggio e rappresentazioni coloniali, un patrimonio inedito da scoprire e salvaguardare” have been promoted by the Italian Ministry of Culture through the campaign “Strategia Fotografia 2020” (<https://www.museoantropologia.unito.it/strategia-fotografia-2020/>).

(Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b). It moves from the awareness that “Anthropology museums represent crucial public spaces in which to undertake this social and political process, which is a necessary first step towards any prospect of the 'decolonisation' of knowledge in these collections” (Hichs 2020: xiii). In this sense, this contribution also aims to bring out an anthropological approach and ethnographic method that is impactful and important (Bargna 2019), improving the capacity of the Museum to be “relevant” in its social context (Simon 2016) and recognising the Museum and the archive as spaces and devices (Grechi 2021) and “turning the focus back upon the anthropologist, curator, or museum as both object and subject of enquiry, performing dialogue with certain 'source communities'” (Hichs 2020: xiii). In particular, cultural anthropology critical approach and the focus on the biographies of both the objects and the protagonists of the museum's history play an essential role in the process of deconstructing the cultural context in which the museum was born and through which its heritage was created. For this reason, it seems essential to retrace the traces of those who appear mentioned in the archival documents in an attempt to bring to the surface memories that question the present (Benjamin, 1997) and the Italian and Western sight on otherness. For these reasons, this contribution aims to reconstruct the history of the Carlo Vittorio Musso photographic collection and to recognise the meanings condensed on the opaque surface of its albums' pages. The article will proceed along the trajectory that has characterised archival research and critical analysis. The first part of the contribution will be dedicated to the challenges of the museum and archive context in which the collection has been preserved. As it will be seen, it is characterised by a substantial lack of attention to the heritage - ethnographic and photographic - of non-European origin. The condition of silence and oblivion that characterises part of the MAET's heritage seems to be surmountable thanks to the deepening of knowledge about the collections. It is in this sense that, in the second part of the contribution, the history of Carlo Vittorio Musso collection and of the subjects portrayed in the photographs or cited in the captions will be reconstructed and the images critically analysed.

As suggested by Jean-Loup Amselle, museums and heritage are related to essential political issues and to the processes of re-appropriation of values by different subjects (Amselle 2016). The MAET's archives and its photographic and ethnographic collections, constitute a crucial chance to investigate the meanings that images and material culture have assumed, which have defined otherness in the past, to question the one-way relationship between museums and cultures and to acknowledge how museums can be a “contact zone” (Clifford 1996). In this sense, this contribution is part of a wider process of deconstruction of the narratives and practices that saw the MAET's extra-European material culture and images as a mere corollary of those collections (anthropological and archaeological) exhibited and used as an objective document of evolutionist and racist theories (Grasso 2020). The historical and biographical reconstruction seems essential for the constitution of a knowledge that makes the heritage accessible to a wider public. Following traces within the archives and retracing the paths that led Carlo Vittorio Musso's albums from Somalia to Turin, it is possible to shed light on the nuanced meaning that heritage takes on over time. It appears as a long journey over time and space that apparently ends in the museum's depository and which brings out the possible “contact-zone”, but also the asymmetries in which it is grounded (Boast 2011). Moreover, it led to new paths, bringing the museum to better acknowledge its role and to open up to those subjectivities which have been claimed to represent it for so long.

In the following paragraphs, therefore, analysis and historical reconstruction will collide with the opacity that characterises the heritage at the encounter between the public and private dimensions. A complex panorama of relationships and memories emerges questioning the relationship of Italian and Western society with otherness. In this sense, the conclusions will refer to the need to proceed with virtuous processes of decolonisation and valorisation of 'sensitive heritages' (Schorch 2020: 1).

Images and absences in the archive

The MAET's historical archive preserves documents mostly related to the research and teaching work of its founder, Giovanni Marro⁶, and his assistant, Savina Fumagalli. After years in oblivion and

⁶ Giovanni Marro (1875-1952), a psychiatrist and anthropologist, founded the Institute and Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography at the University of Turin in 1926, a few years after being appointed professor of Anthropology for the Natural Sciences (1923).

copious losses (Grasso 2020; Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b), the MAET's archives emerge today as a space in which absences are more substantial than the presences of collections to critically engage with. Although sometimes 'interesting subjects' emerge from the obscurity which, for a long time, the photographic collection, archival documentation and ethnological collections gravitated (Grasso 2020), offering the chance to reconstruct histories and trajectories that led to the creation of the MAET's cultural heritage.

Musso's albums were jumbled up with notebooks, papers and images dating back to the first thirty years of the museum's activities. The old archival inventory marked them as "African photographs?" and it did not mention their origin, who donated them to the Museum or the subjects they portray. It is a first and interesting evidence of the scarce attention given in the past to the cultural heritage coming from extra-European contexts. The MAET was created in accordance with the positivist and racist scientific paradigms of the time. The scientific framework that shaped the institution at its inception affected the way it considered material culture and images coming from 'elsewhere'. For a long time other cultures' objects and images were understood as a mere corollary of other findings considered more crucial to document the history of human evolution (Grasso 2020). This way of considering - or not considering - the non-European patrimony characterised not only the first period of the museum's activity, marked by clear racist and positivist lines, but also the years following the Second World War and the change of direction when the hateful racial theses were abandoned but the focus was maintained on the evolution of the human beings. Little attention was given, therefore, to the photographic collections and to the ethnological heritage, which was considered of little interest. The recent resumption of the reorganisation and cataloguing of the patrimony required the start of processes of investigation and research that allowed us to 'discover' and 're-discover' several unexplored areas, both in the archives and in the deposits. Among them were the 'Carlo Vittorio Musso' collection's albums. Undeniably, the albums emerged as an element of great fascination. They appeared to be an 'interesting' and original document among the MAET's heritage, but they also constituted a possible link between the archive and ethnographic collections. Among the objects of African provenance, in fact, there are some objects whose provenance and biography had not yet been possible to determine, but which could be traced back to Italian colonial contexts (Libya and the Horn of Africa) and which were waiting to find a more pertinent place in the MAET's inventory. Despite a small «Ethiopian collection» appearing in the inventory, attributed to Savina Fumagalli (dated between the late 1950s and early 1960s) it did not take into account all the artefacts of clear colonial provenance conserved by the Museum. Just like the objects, the three photographic albums were simply more elements of the MAET's heritage which were waiting to find a place, not only in the Museum heritage, but also in the wider context of collecting and the contact with otherness with which the museum was born and developed with. In this sense, the anthropological and critical approach to the museum collections and to the archival documents made it possible to recognise the MAET's historical grey areas that for so long have been silent (Mangiapane and Grasso 2019b). Within the broader framework of the reconstruction of the biographies and trajectories that allowed for the creation of the museum's heritage, the albums of "African photographs" emerge as an exemplary case of how the analysis and study of documents enable us to 'restore' voices and agency to documents and artefacts, and potentially also to the subjectivities that may be represented through them. Moreover, the albums are intrinsically linked to national history and, therefore, to the society of which the museum institution is an expression.

The "Carlo Vittorio Musso" collection: images between history and fascination

The three albums are therefore to be considered part and document of a collective memory. Paradoxically, the reconstruction of the historical context in which they were first produced was possible thanks to the captions on the private album. It is a trace of the intimate and private nature of the album, a travel souvenir and gift made to Carlo Vittorio Musso. The album opens with a dedication: "To my dear friend Lieutenant Vittorio Musso" (Fig. 2). It links the entire collection to Carlo Vittorio Musso. At first glance, Musso's name did not find any echo in the MAET's archive documents and it has not yet been possible to identify F. Zanini, the author of other two albums' images, with certainty. The name of Carlo Vittorio Musso, to whom the private album is dedicated, seemed to be one of many names confused in the labyrinth of those individual and collective events that make up the colonial context, of which the photographs are both document and practice (Modest 2014:25).



FIGURE 2: “Ischia Baidò - Abbeverata”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

The images of the “Carlo Vittorio Musso” collection are part of the broader panorama of colonial photography. They should be seen as tools useful to reproduce and contextualise the colonial reality. The images from the Italian colonies represent the first glimpse through which Italian society came into contact with and built its knowledge of the colonial experience. They generate *topoi* that mark the history of colonialism by supporting the construction of an imaginary and collective identity in which the idea of “diversity” and mildness of Italian colonialism stands out. The images from the Musso collection confirm that the colonial universe recorded by photography was proposed in reassuring and self-celebratory terms (Palma 1999: 16).

Significantly, the captions in the private album make visible the interconnection between collective experience and subjective trajectories. They also bring up clues for a probable dating and contextualisation of the collection. One side, the images signed by the photographer Zanini unequivocally express the colonial and Italian gaze on otherness. On the other, we see the private images go further. They give to the otherness of the places and faces a subjective and real connotation. This peculiar dimension allows us to better understand the whole collection and to place it in the broader panorama of the colonial conquest of Somali territories by the Italian government and the collective narratives about it. For this reason, in order to understand and contextualise the entire Musso collection, it was necessary to start by carefully observing the private album, which is paradoxically the most complex and potentially the most critical as it contains ‘just’ 23 images which have suffered due to the passage of time. In some cases, the subjects portrayed are not recognisable, the photographs appear to

be different in shape and cut, and the album is most likely a collection of shots by different authors.

The private album opens with a view of a herd of camels at watering holes (Fig. 2). The photograph is blurred and degraded by time and it is possible only to recognise the figures of the animals, the water glare and the typical shrubs of the Somali bush. It could be an oasis, a classic trope of colonial photography and an emblem of the world seen by Europeans as inexorably different and exotic. The oasis is the first in a series of images that reproduce all the classic themes of colonial photography. Like in the albums signed by Zanini, it is possible to recognise the themes and the aesthetics that are typical of the cumulative repertoire on which the Italian collective imagination regarding otherness is grounded. They are similar to the images that have been circulating in Italy since the beginning of the colonial conquests of Libya; they document the workplace, the local population, with whom the colonists sometimes stand side by side, perhaps to testify to some form of contact. They show scenes of daily life in the villages and the attention of photographers is focused on exotic imagery and manifests the fascination for exploration of the colony (Frascaroli 2013: 41). Both private and collective, this repertoire testify to the exotic gaze on which the Western perception of otherness, and of Africa in particular, is grounded (Mudimbe, 1988). In particular, images from the Italian colonial context document the fascination with a racial and cultural otherness that was 'finally' available to the masses and an object of appreciation, desire and pleasure (Hooks 1992: 21-29).

The private album differs from the other two by the presence of captions which accompany the images. Although the captions do not provide detailed information on the date and occasion of the shots, they proved essential for the historical and critical analysis that led to a plausible dating of the albums and the recognition of the specific context from which they came. One caption in particular made it possible to recognise one of the portrayed subjects. It identifies the three men standing in a barren landscape portrayed in one of the last images of the album (Fig. 3): «Ugo Ferrandi. Capt. d. Bianchi. Com. Bertazzi (Afgoi)».



FIGURE 3: “Ugo Ferrandi. Capt. d. Bianchi. Com. Bertazzi (Afgoi)”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

Ugo Ferrandi⁷ is the man in the centre of the group. He was a renowned Italian explorer present in Somalia as early as the end of the 19th century. Ferrandi conducted the exploration of the Uebi Scebeli and Juba valleys with Vittorio Bottego and he was active in Somalia participating in the explorations that often turned, when not into military expeditions, into surveys that were functional to and anticipated the actual Italian occupation. In the album appears the village Lugh, the takeover of which, motivated the expedition with Bottego in 1895⁸. Ferrandi returned to Italy definitively in 1923. The photographs can be traced back before that year and to a period prior to the installation of Cesare Maria De Vecchi⁹ as governor of Italian Somalia in 1923. Thus, they are a document of the transition period between the Italian liberal colonialism and the fascist imperial enterprise.

Among other colonial officials, the captions identify “H.E. the Governor” not naming him. Italian forces were active in Somalia since 1889, but just in 1908, the Italian Parliament enacted a law that brought all the territories between Bender Cassim and Kisimajo under the administration of Italian Somalia and the governor was appointed for Italian Somalia (in the first two years as many as seven names alternated at the head of the colonial administration). Therefore, the journey documented in the album took place after 1908. Since that year, the colonial administration focused its efforts in the occupation of the Lower Uebi Scebeli region. A garrison was set up in Afgoi, where Ferrandi is portrayed. The album's captions mention Baidoa, a centre occupied on 25 June 1913. Thus, the photographs that immortalise the colonial officials at the Baidoa outpost are to be dated in the following years. The information regarding the (Italian) subjects portrayed in the album are so far not yet exhaustive to fully retrace the trajectories that led them from Mogadishu to Afgoi, Baidoa and Lugh. The trace left by whoever created the album and chose the photographs, their order and their captions, made it possible to date it and to proceed to a deeper, critical analysis. They were the first step in the identification of Carlo Vittorino Musso and in the retracing of his experience in the Italian colonies.

Born in Ceva (CN) in 1896, Carlo Vittorino Musso fought in the First World War as an officer in the Alpine Corps. During the Second World War, he was in the Balkans with the 4th Alpine Regiment, and in 1943 he took part in the Resistance war in the Garibaldi Partisan Division in Montenegro. Back in Italy, he joined the Partisan war in Turin. After the Second World War, he continued his military career in the Alpine corps, reaching the rank of colonel (ANVRG 2008:47). This is the brief biography provided by the introduction to the volume *Per la libertà dei popoli. Memorie garibaldine. Penne nere allo sbaraglio. Diario di guerra di Carlo Vittorino Musso* that collects the handwritten notes that Carlo Vittorino Musso kept during his experience in Montenegro after 8 September 1943, when twenty thousand soldiers belonging to the Italian army's 'Venezia' and 'Taurinense' divisions voluntarily decided to join the resistance against German occupation. This account of Carlo Vittorino Musso's life focuses on his exceptional experience in Montenegro and then in Italy at the height of the civil resistance war and totally overlooks the first years of Musso's military career, the years which the images preserve in the albums of the photographic collection named after him.

At his home, Carlo Tua, Carlo Vittorino Musso's great-grandnephew and member of a family with a long military tradition, spoke at length about his great-uncle clutching in his hands a leather folder. Similar in material, features and decoration to three photo frames and a cushion of Somali origin, part of the MAET's ethnographic collections, the folder was just one of the few artefacts that Carlo Tua inherited from his granduncle, a passionate collector of weapons. It contained documents, a picture of a Libyan woman, some Carlo Vittorino Musso portraits, and his service record. Although even for his family Carlo Vittorino Musso's overseas experience is not fully known, his service record has proved to be an essential document in tracing his movements between Eastern Europe, Somalia and Libya between 1917 and 1924. That year he ceased to belong to the Royal Colonial Troops Corps (RCTC)

⁷ Ugo Ferrandi was an Italian explorer (Novara 1852 - 1928). In Somalia, he explored the lower Juba valley and went as far as Bardera (1892). He joined the Bottego expedition (1895) and was in charge of the Lugh station, later called (1932) Lugh Ferrandi, where he stayed for two years. He then held various colonial posts and was the regional commissioner of Upper Juba.

⁸ The mission had the aim to find practicable accesses to Ethiopia. In the small centre of Lugh, not far from the border, Ferrandi had the task of opening an Italian station of which he remained in charge until 1897 (Ferrandi, 1903). In 1910 he moved back in Lugh and in 1913 he was appointed Commissioner of Upper Juba and, later, of Northern Somalia.

⁹ Cesare Maria De Vecchi (Casale Monferrato, 14 November 1884 - Rome, 23 June 1959) served as Italian Somalia governor from 8 December 1923 to 1 June 1928.

and was transferred to the IV Alpine Regiment. Between 1917 and 1919 he was stationed first in Macedonia (162nd Infantry Regiment, 35th Division) and then in Bulgaria and Romania (102nd Infantry Regiment). On 4 December 1919, he embarked at the port of Naples with his destination Mogadishu where he arrived on 10 January 1920. Carlo Vittorio Musso served in Italian Somalia between 1920 and 1923, both as an outcast of the RCTC and as a civilian 'resident'. Between 1926 and 1930 he was stationed in Libya (21st Eritrean Btg. of Cyrenaica), while between 1940 and 1942 he was active in Algeria with the Italian Armistice Commission with France. His grandnephew confirmed that he collected local artefacts and weapons during his experience in the Italian colonial territories, which he kept in the Turin home he shared with his second wife, Bianca Gastaldi, curators at the Galleria Sabauda¹⁰. Some of them were donated to the MAET between 1952 and 1961 with the three albums that were most likely a gift that Musso received from a friend with whom he shared his experience in Italian Somalia.

The ethnographic objects that can be traced back to Carlo Vittorio Musso are characterised by being typical travel souvenirs brought back to Italy after the experiences in the colony. In the absence of precise lists, it is only possible to assume that the objects identified as coming from Somalia and Libya are indeed the result of Musso's donation. Among them is a large camel leather trunk, with a lid engraved with 'A. Italiana', confirming that it came from Italian Africa. The aforementioned portrait holders and a leather cushion cover decorated with geometric motifs and themes clearly related to the Somali context. There is also a scarf, a leather Quran holder, some milk containers typical of the pastoral populations of the Horn of Africa, a bag and two Tuareg saddle covers probably collected by Musso during his activities in Libya and Algeria. Like the photographic representations, the objects refer to the 'other world' of the colony and constitute one of the many ways of bearing witness to and remembering one's experience elsewhere. They carry stratified on their surface the meanings with which they are loaded. They cease to be objects of the everyday life of the subjectivities that produced them and take on the role of a document of otherness and testimony of the participation of those who collected them in the collective experience of colonial conquest. For this reason, the objects that can be traced back to Carlo Vittorio Musso today seem to have value as a document of the communities they come from, but even more so as a trace of those contacts between Italian and African societies which, violent and unfair, are at the basis of both the constitution of Italian national identity and the relationship with otherness (Sorgoni 2009). Moreover, like the captions of the photographs, the objects that once belonged to Musso as well as those that are now kept by his heirs provide access to his subjective experience. If the captions refer to a shared memory, it is easy to imagine the pillowcase or the milk containers in Musso's Turin home. Objects that fill the space of everyday life and give form to the inhabited space, creating a true aesthetic that leads back to individual and collective memory and the relationships on which it is based (Miller 2004).

Private and collective memories from “elsewhere”

It cannot be denied that the main peculiarity of Musso's collection is that it is made up by albums that contain photographs that have been selected and organised according to specific thematic and hierarchical choices. As a device to preserve images and memories, the album cannot be considered a neutral and culturally irrelevant material container. Conversely, it appears as an expression of the taste of the time¹¹ and of a subjective will. It belongs to the domain of the transition and passage. What emerges from the Carlo Vittorio Musso collection, is the changing social space between public and private (Tommasini 2013: 60). Moreover,

An album collects within a case and thus unites and connects a series of photographic images: with this simple operation, the album actually contributes to overcoming the fragmentary nature of photography, it introduces a sequence, a succession, a link between the images; if photography is the negation of the passing of time and therefore of history, the album allows for the construction of stories, narratives (Tommasini 2013: 62).

¹⁰ Art Gallery founded in 1832 in Turin by Carlo Alberto.

¹¹ The golden age of the dissemination of photo albums seems to be the late 19th and early 20th century (Tommasini 2013: 62), a period to which the albums in the Musso collection actually date.

In this sense, the case of the Musso fund is illustrative. Although different from each other, they can only be understood as a single document. Similarly, the images they contain acquire meaning and significance only if they are observed sequentially, following the reading trail indicated by the person who composed the collection.

Musso's albums reproduce themes and subjects widespread in the Italian early colonialism's visual discourse and fruit of a political and cultural climate in which colonialist and racial myths proliferated and later found full expression in fascist propaganda and imperial aspirations (Labanca, 1988). They date back to the period of transition between the liberal and fascist phases of Italian colonialism and do not present the fascist iconography of classical elements. Rather they seem to contain “the whole Italians' iconographic colonial universe” (Labanca, 1988:43) taking the observer back to that particular moment in the history of Italian Somalia when the takeover of the coast and of some areas of the interior turned into the actual constitution of the colonial state¹². They were produced shortly before the arrival in Mogadishu of the fascist governor Cesare Maria De Vecchi in 1923 and preserve in their black and white shadows the private memory of an official visit that engaged the governor Carlo Riveri¹³ and some officials in the occupied territories between Mogadishu and the Ethiopian border. From the images, emerge the tones of a pleasure trip. They depict profiles of ancient mosques (such as the ancient Jama Mosque in Mogadishu), nomadic caravans, river banks, camel herds at watering holes and the barren Somali countryside, women posing or surprised, children and herders looking directly at the camera, often characterised by indecipherable gazes that reveal mistrust and wonderment at the same time.

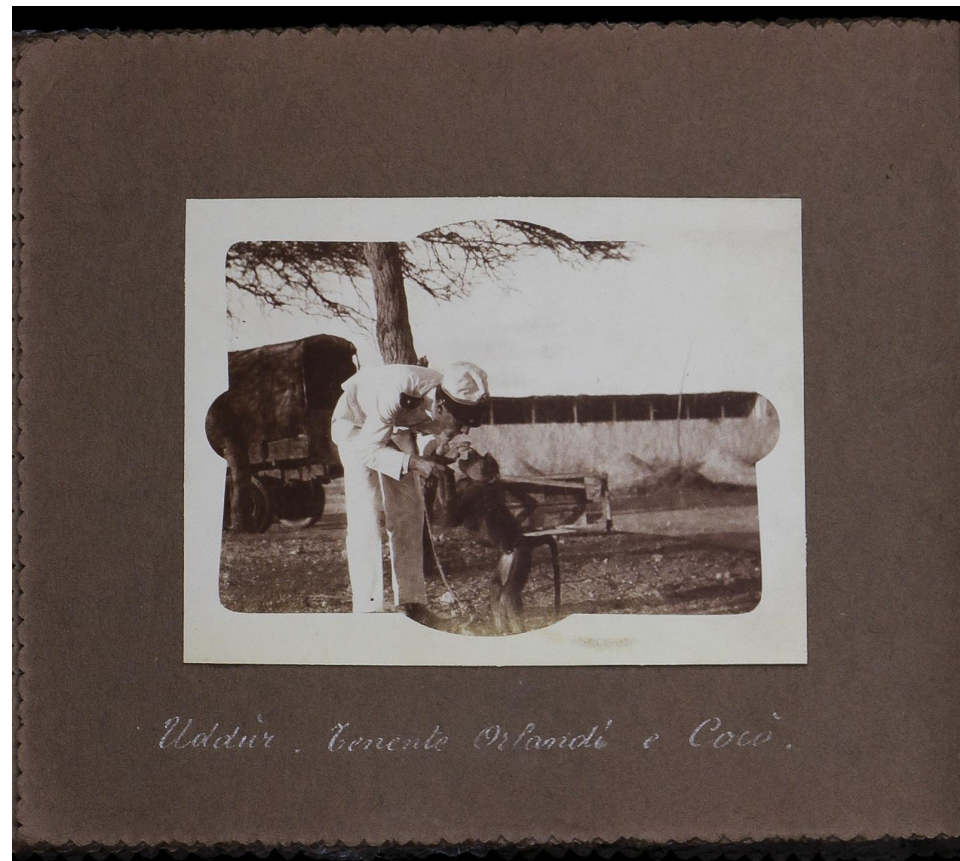


FIGURE 4: “Uddur. Tenente Orlandi e Cocò”, 1920-1923. Courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

In the collection, the contact between different subjectivities – the western 'visitors' (or conquerors) and the local population – take place through the camera's lens, the true medium between two worlds

¹² For a reconstruction of the events that interested Somalia and the Horn of Africa during the Italian colonial campaigns, see Del Boca, 1976; 1979 and Labanca, 2002.

¹³ Carlo Riveri served as Italian Somalia governor from 21 June 1920 to 8 December 1923.

which, in the shots, only come into contact in a couple of cases. The European officers are never captured with the “interesting subjects” that Zanini portrayed in his series. One photograph shows Lieutenant Orlandi playing with a baboon: “Cocò” (Fig. 4), bringing out a sort of everydayness and familiarity with the exotic, but also arousing curiosity. So too do the large number of images of men and women posing, which linger on the physical appearance and clothing of the portrayed subjects. Above all, Carlo Vittorio Musso's albums consist of images that show the “land of blessing” (Del Boca, 1976: 432) over which Italy had taken control through a highly aestheticized and stereotypical representation, and at the same time, glances that reveal confidence and habit and from which emerge an interesting interweaving of gazes. The private and subjective memory is given and preserved by the images like the portraits of Somali women. In particular Betulla, the protagonist of three blurred shots: first «serious!» and then, in the last one, «smiling!». In between, a close-up of the girl posing with other women behind her. Her gaze is confident, her left fist is resting on her side, while her right hand is closed and resting on her stomach. With her hair covered by a fancy scarf, Betulla looks at us from what seems to be the other end of the long road that led her from Somalia to Turin.

The choice of images and their succession in the albums' pages help the observer to grasp glimpses of a real or presumed everyday life that looks ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. This is especially true of the album with captions. The neat cardboard pages, the frames provided for the photographs and the captions written in nice handwriting betray the intention to give the memory of a pleasant, exotic and unforgettable journey. Moreover, it does appear clear that it is a shared experience between Carlo Vittorio Musso and whoever donated and dedicated the albums.

The two albums 'signed' by F.Z. are the result of a composition that was intended and conceived in the same way, but which presents different characteristics and apparently has no addressee. The images present the classic tropes of this genre of photography. The landscapes, the herds of dromedaries as they walk and drink, the local population portrayed in front of traditional dwellings or gathered at the market, all contribute to the image of 'another world'. A mysterious and uncivilised Africa in which to find exotic animals and uncontaminated landscapes - a visual depiction that places the inhabitants on the same level as the landscapes. They seem to make real those landscapes imagined and narrated in adventure novels, exploration reports and personal diaries and that, reproduced in photographs and postcards, facilitate the visual penetration of the African continent (Geary and Krzysztof: 2018). Evidence of this sort of 'wildness' of Africa and Africans are also to be found in the photographs that immortalise indigenous “fantasies”: men dancing in groups with their sticks raised, their bodies in motion, their arms raised from which emerge the sense of disorder and disorientation that the dances dedicated to and in honour of Italian officials must have created in those who attended them.

Michel Foucault stated that “Curiosity evokes 'concern'; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervour to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to the traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential» (Foucault 1996: 305). In this sense, the Musso photographs express not only the ambivalence of the colonial relationship but also a kind of Western voyeurism. The posed women, like the warriors and shepherds, appear as subjects representing a diversity that is not the object of cultural appropriation but rather of appreciation and desire (hooks 1992: 21-29). Moreover, between the folds of the sepia tones of the images, emerge the complex relationship between race and sexuality, fetishism and domesticity that shaped European imperialism (McClintock, 1995).

Moreover, in the images depicting the life scenes of local populations and Western officials emerge from the ordinariness of daily life and practices. The dimension of curiosity leads to widen the gaze and recognise in the “colonial iconographic universe” (Labanca 1988: 48) a record of the encounters between subjects who are curious about each other and between individuals and unknown environments (Pennacini 2015). The multiple, subjective meanings that photographs document, practise held and their ambivalence become clear if we take into account the mutual curiosity of which they are the fruit and that is constituted by fascination, suspicion and, perhaps, fear (Edwards 2013:50).

This is evident in the profile and three-quarter profile close-ups that occupy a large part of Zanini's albums that are unmistakably reminiscent of the anthropometric photographs used by anthropologists and social scientists of the time, who classified humanity into 'types' with recognisable somatic features. Zanini's subjects gaze fixedly at the lens and, today, make evident the asymmetries and paradoxes stored in the archive. Men and women in the foreground, in front or three-quarter view, pose for the camera

lens. The backdrop is neutral and sight is focused on the expressiveness of their faces and the 'strangeness' of their clothes. These portraits are not accompanied by captions and respond to the aspiration to document an idealised and stereotyped otherness. Zanini's shots, however, seem mostly to express curiosity and interest, as mentioned above. The gazes betray intimacy and closeness between subject and photographer. An 'other' reality and, at the same time, knowable and visible, the 'interesting subjects' portrayed by Zanini are the fruit of a productive power and part of the colonial discourse as described by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). The 'posed' men and women seem to have consented and had a voice in the composition of the shot and, at the same time, they seem to be imaginary figures of whom we can assume everything and know nothing (Fig. 5).

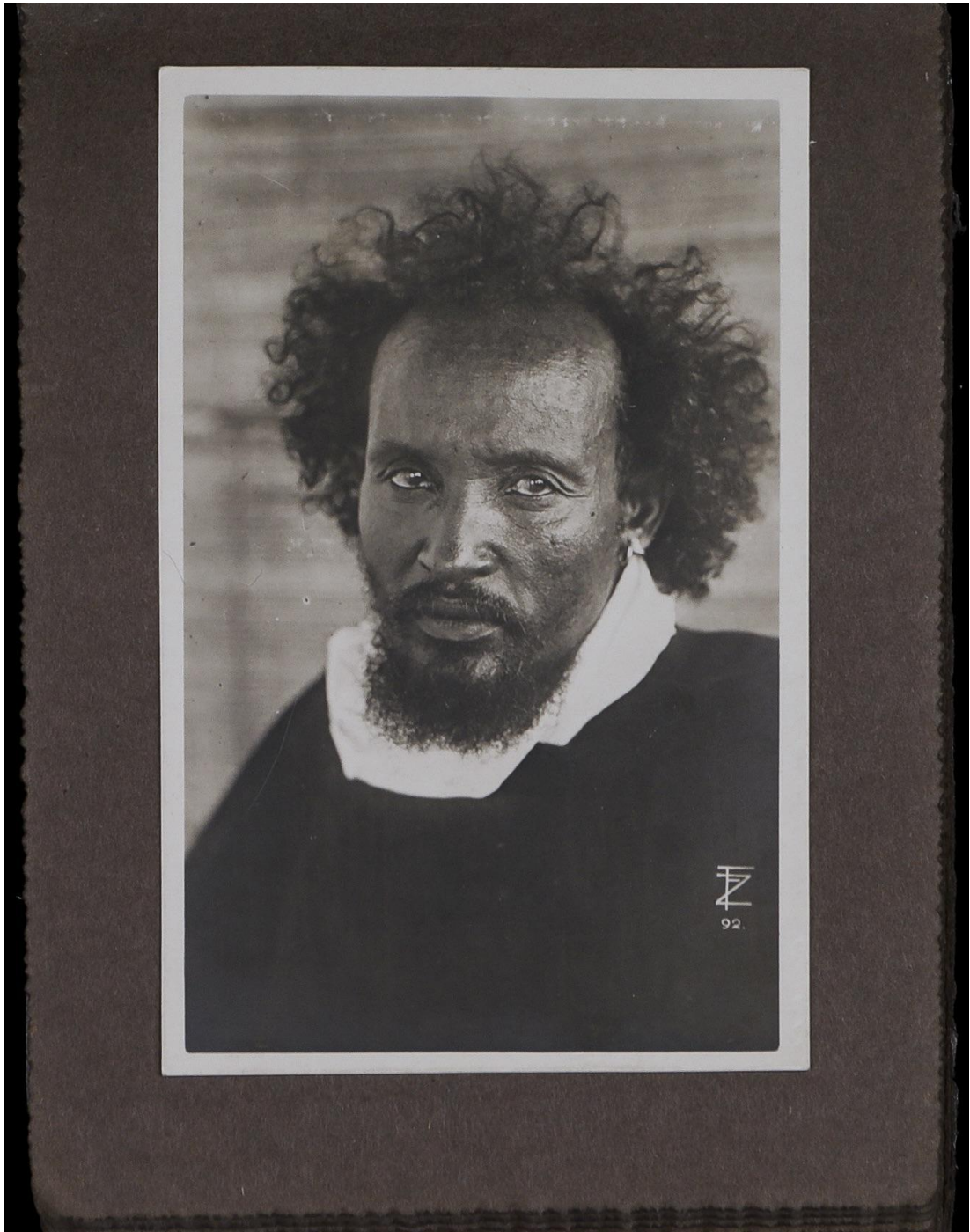


FIGURE 5: F. Zanini, N°92, 1920-1923. courtesy of Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography; University of Turin.

Moreover, Zanini seems to make visible a particular sense of the past - 'pastness' - through the act of taking photographs (Vokes and Newbury 2018: 1). In the same vein are images of men and women in 'traditional' dress, Somali warriors posing or in groups during dances most likely staged for the photographer or in honour of the Italian delegation. This ideal past is cleverly constructed in the stereotypical photographs and is contrasted with an ideal future of Africa. Aerial images of colonial settlements or portraits of groups of officers, explorers or Ascari don't exclusively preserve an event for posterity but have as their object the planning of a different future (Vokes and Newbury 2018: 2).

Moreover, the photographs they preserve evoke a visual anthology that gives the sensation of containing the whole world in the mind (Sontag, 1977). They stand in a liminal position between the public and private domain soliciting the contemporary observer to seek interpretations that acknowledge the cumulative nature of visual archives in which the ideas of "affection" and "effect" return to the photographs their nature of document and practice of the colonial sphere (Modest, 2014:25). Generally, private pictures taken by soldiers or civilians active in the colonial contexts documenting everyday life are placed side-by-side with photographs or postcard series that were commissioned and purchased by a wider public in the national context. They share themes and subjects that characterise private and public collections and often are preserved in series or in albums. Actually, they constitute a visual diary through which, thanks to the language of the "now distant memory", heal the contradictions of the colonial (violent) experience and legitimise having been part of that page of national history (Mignemi 1998: 45-47).

Conclusions

Carlo Vittorio Musso's albums present typical characteristics of collections of historical photographs relating to Africa and, in particular, of the photographic corpus concerning the Italian colonial experience. Part of public and private collections, often inaccessible or little considered, this sort of diffuse archive of images (and imaginaries) consists of scattered documents that have contributed in an essential way to the definition of both otherness and national community (Triulzi 1995: 146). In the absence of information regarding the subjects, locations and dating of the shots, the seemingly muted nature of the images in the Musso albums emerges. As with many other photographic collections of this kind, they are distant and barely recognisable landscapes, inhabited by men, women and children who often look into the camera, but of whom little is known and whose stories little can be imagined. Although the captions help to identify some of the places and subjects portrayed, they do not say enough. The bodies portrayed, the gazes, the crowded streets and the cities are part of an archive of memories that have travelled paths often characterised by silence and oblivion, that have seen the involvement and succession of different experiences and subjectivities and that need to be properly investigated. Lacking essential identification data, images require reconstruction of the context and the cultural discourse through which they were produced.

In this sense, the 'emotional' and 'subjective' relationship of those who took the pictures, but also of those who ordered and preserved them over the years, with the places and people portrayed, must be put into dialogue with the political and scientific context within which the shots were produced. As Alessandro Triulzi points out, the reconstruction of the context and identification data would allow each image to be restored to its documentary value (Triulzi, 1995: 147). As far as the photographic collections of the MAET are concerned, the need for a historical and thematic framing of the images they preserve is dictated firstly by the lack of certain information regarding the history of many of the museum's collections and, secondly, by the history and nature of an institution whose foundation dates back to the fascist era and whose past is marked by ambiguous junctures and many silences. In this sense, the analysis of the MAET's unpublished photographic collections and ethnographic collections that began in 2017 is part of a broader action of study. It is increasing public accessibility and valorisation of the heritage and aims to investigate both the contexts of production and collection of the stories of subjects represented in its collections, long ignored. At the same time they enable an interrogation of different types of documents starting from the history of the archives and collections and the ways in which they were created and maintained over time, through a critical analysis and reconstruction, "along the archival grain", as proposed by Ann Laura Stoler for colonial archives (Stoler 2009).

Recently, therefore, MAET has been involved in and has promoted heritage study and enhancement activities, such as reorganisation and cataloguing campaigns of its ethnographic and photographic

heritage. In addition, heritage communication and public engagement activities were promoted through social media following what is defined as a digital turn of the museum world (Pennacini 2020). In addition, exhibitions were inaugurated that included collaborative heritage re-signification projects in collaboration with African diaspora communities in Turin and other museums and cultural institutions (Grasso and Mangiapane 2021) such as the exhibitions 'GELEDE. Our Yoruba Mothers (Nigeria/Benin)' (2018), “The gaze of the anthropologist: connections between Egyptology and anthropology' (2020) and 'The world in a room. Precious testimonies of extra-european cultures from the collections of the University of Turin’ (2021). These initiatives, as well as the projects of digitisation of the photographic fonds already mentioned, move from the need to deepen a knowledge of heritage that allows the rooms of museums and archives to be opened to a wider public. The study of the Carlo Vittorio Musso photographic collection illustrative of how heritage is an essential element in reconnecting individual histories and collective memories that are crystallised on the surfaces of the objects and images collected, conserved and 'exhibited' by different subjects and according to changing strategies and trajectories. It shows how to reconstruct subjective and collective trajectories of those involved in the heritage construction or ideally represented by it allows to recognize the discrepancies and power relations underlying heritage and to move forward giving voice to those subjectivities that for too long have been silent.

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EXPERIENCING A MOSQUE THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY: ISLAM AS AN ORDINARY RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the author reflects on using photography for an ethno-sociological study which interrogates the spatial configuration of a mosque in Switzerland. After defining the concept of spatial configuration and presenting his field, the author considers several difficulties pertaining to the photography of concrete situations. It is shown that photography enables the researcher to take a critical distance from their own ethnographic activity and the way it can influence the behaviour of actors in the field. Through analyzing spatial configurations as enabled by photography, the author advances two social logics pertaining to the constitution of social space: discretion and conviviality. These logics, as well as the photographic method used in their elaboration, are shown to be pertinent for the study of Islam as an ordinary religion.

KEYWORDS

Islam in Switzerland – Photography in a Muslim associational context – built environment – spatial configuration – ordinary religion.

BIO

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Introduction

In this article I wish to present my experience of using photography in an ongoing doctoral project in ethno-sociology¹. The particular object of this study is the spatial configuration of a mosque² run by a Muslim association in Swiss Romandy. The article will also provide some general reflections concerning the use of photography in such a context.

In an age such as ours in which the visual dimension largely predominates public life (Mirzoeff 2000; Spencer 2011), information on producing and processing photography is widely accessible, whether in schools and universities or on the internet. While the use of photography, as well as of visual data more generally, is a part of the curriculum in many social science programs, I must confess that it did not form part of my own studies. Photography was instead somewhat imposed on me because, once I had decided to focus my research on material culture, the literature I consulted remarked on the pertinence of visual methods for this line of questioning (Daniels 2011; Delsaut 2020³; Pauwels 2020).

The basic assumption of this article is that any and all analyses of photography must begin by reflecting on the social and technical dispositives allowing for the capture of images (Maresca 1996: 16). For such a reflection, it is more than important to consider the researcher's position with regards to the spatial configuration he is investigating. In doing so, I argue that the use of photography in ethno-sociological research invites the scholar to reflect critically upon their experience of the field and its conceptual elaboration. I further affirm that photography is an occasion to "take a step back" (Olivier de Sardan 2008) during the different phases of the research. This allows the researcher to avoid, on the one hand, a poorly established construction of their object of study and, on the other hand, the kind of cumbersome over-interpretation that can occur during analysis. In order to account for these difficulties, this article, using my current research as an example, will be structured in three sections.

The first section will discuss the theoretical framework and the field of my research. I will first define the main notion of my research project, which, as it is centred around 'spatial configuration', is strongly linked to the visual dimension. Next, I will present the association and some methodological issues related to my fieldwork – such as the way in which the researcher is part of the situation he analyses and his influence on the conducts he observes.

The difficulties inherent to taking photographs in a Muslim associational context will be thematized in the second section. The photographs taken during my first encounters with the association attest to two aspects: firstly, to my unease in producing images and secondly, to my particular mode of situating myself in the environment. Consequently, I will advance two logics of the spatial configuration of the association – those of discretion and conviviality – and give an example of critical feedback on the fieldwork from my photographs.

In the third section, I will come back to the relevance of photography for approaching Islam as an 'ordinary religion', using the expression coined by Piette (2003). Photography, to the extent that it allows one to notice details, encourages a microsociological approach to religion, beginning with the analysis of the environment in which the activities of the group take place. While Islam and Muslims are all too often thematized in connection with 'extraordinary' phenomena such as radicalization and terrorism, the use of photography in the study of a local association serves as a reminder that the day to day life of such an association includes social forms which are very ordinary indeed.

¹ I would like to thank James Fisher for his valuable assistance in developing the English version of this article and for our rich exchanges on sociology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

² Brekke et al. (2019) give a minimal definition of 'mosque' as both a place of collective religious expression, especially prayer, as well as, depending on the context, a place of Islamic education, services and other religious and non-religious socializing. I will talk about a place rented by a Muslim association that is used for religious (prayer, Islamic education) and non-religious purposes. By using this definition, I refrain from entering into debates that seek to give a normative definition of what a mosque ought to be. This usage is justified by the fact that a number of practitioners themselves designate their centre as a mosque. To give two examples, upon entering the place, one can read a notice on the door stating that "[...] after many meetings of the mosque's board, [...]" they had come to the decision to close the place after the prayer of 'Isha'. The word 'mosque' appears twice on this notice. I also read this word in conversations on a WhatsApp group created by a young man in order to organize activities that could bring Muslims together. To provide another perspective on the issue, a young man stated during an interview that he would not refer to the place rented by the association as a mosque, because it is too small for this designation.

³ See in particular the first chapter about the economy of popular language.

1. Taking photographs in a mosque of 100 m² in Switzerland

The conceptual framework: a study in spatial configuration

My PhD project in ethnology and sociology began with the idea of exploring the material culture of a Muslim association. The expression ‘material culture’ is subject to debate (Bonnot 2014; Latour 2012), but my original understanding of the term was that it studied the artefacts produced and used by the actors of a given social group⁴. As a result of my experiences in the field, the theme of my research crystallized around the configuration of associational space. The term ‘configuration’ echoes Simmel’s (1992: 687) assertion that sociology is concerned, not with space itself, but with the way things are configured within it. At the same time, it also refers to post-modern conceptions such as space as relational category (Löv 2016). The scholar of spatial configuration observes, describes and analyses the forms which characterise associational space in close proximity. In so doing, their first objective is to distinguish the forms of the built environment from those emerging in the course of human action – thereby respecting the distinction between “place” and “space” (see Knott 2005 on this topic). In my opinion, it is the merit of spatial configuration that it reflects on the passage from place to space and back again as human activity develops reciprocal relations between the two. In so doing, my aim was to analyse the forms engendered by the relations between built environment (a setting of physical objects) and human behaviour; a theme which evidently remains closely linked to that of material culture in general (Schlereth 1985: 3).

The behaviours of the actors participating in the emergence of the associational space cannot be studied if they are not brought into relation with their environment and their concrete situations (Douglas 1980: 3). Goffman (1964: 134) also advises that “you cannot describe a gesture fully without reference to the extra-bodily environment in which it occurs.” When using a microsociological perspective, the researcher studies social situations in their details. Following Goffman’s (1964: 135) definition, a social situation is

An environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all others who are ‘present’, and similarly find them accessible to him. According to this definition, a social situation arises whenever two or more individuals find themselves in one another’s immediate presence, and it lasts until the next-to-last person leaves.

The notion of spatial configuration invites the researcher to direct their attention not so much to the ‘interaction order’ (Goffman 1982) as to its formal expression.

The practices occurring in a Muslim association, just like the practices occurring in any other social context, are ‘situated activities’ (Barwise 1989; de Fornel and Quéré 1999). Because they make use of certain material resources, humans depend on their environment and its regularities, delineate the specific regions of this environment and exhibit particular orientations towards it in the course of their actions. As is implied in Goffman’s definition of the situation, built environment and situation are mutually constitutive of one another: the environment does not acquire its full meaning except through the perception the actors have of it in the course of their actions; each social situation is founded upon an environment whose forms are transformed on the whims of the actors. In conclusion, one can affirm that a formal approach of this type encourages one to apprehend the built environment as a partner in human behaviour (Quéré 2006) and to approach space as the result of a social construction of complex registers (Lefebvre 1992; Remy 2015).

Up until now, I have not considered the researcher’s presence in the space whose forms they wish to study. Nonetheless, one cannot begin to analyse a spatial configuration without taking into account the fact that, by taking photographs, the researcher transforms the situation he observes (Sontag 1977: 10–11). Furthermore, the researcher’s positioning in the environment, the movements and orientations qualifying his behaviour all participate, just as much as those of the other actors in co-presence, to the emergence of a spatial configuration. These considerations are complemented by the fact that I was able to reconstruct the spatial configurations of the association in certain concrete situations only by using and describing photographs. The notion of spatial configuration is thus indissociable from the photographic act and the analysis of the data thereby produced. My next task will be to return to the

⁴ For a more extensive definition of ‘material culture’ which includes time and space, see Carp (2014).

relation between the presence of the researcher in the field, his photographic practice and the analysis of visual data.

For simplicity's sake, one may begin analysing the built environment using photographs. Photography materializes the visible forms of a situation under observation. Barthes (1980) considers the photographic image as a trace of the spatio-temporal presence of a real thing that was in one way or another observable by a human being⁵. In glancing at a photograph, one understands that the objects therein depicted maintain relations between them. More than objects or entities, the visual dispositive of photography shows us configurations or assemblages⁶ (Emmison and Smith 2000: 150).

If the photograph shows configurations, it is also characterized by an out-of-frame, which recalls the existence of its producer, that is the researcher who produces the image. If the photographer places himself at a distance to better observe, to better see, like a voyeur (Sontag 1977: 10)⁷, he is nonetheless part of the situation (Arborio 2007: 26). Thus the environmental and situational forms, such as they have been crystalized in the photograph, depend on the presence of the researcher and the way his orientation therein constitutes the shot. As a result, when analysing visual data, the researcher cannot close his eyes to the reasons which contributed to his situation in this or that portion of the environment at the moment the photograph was taken, or even of those which lead them to direct his view in a certain direction rather than another. Such questions can be examined using field notes which document the conditions of direct observation, but also by strategically using a specific point of view while 'reading' a photograph.

In describing and analysing photography, one approach is to direct one's attention not so much towards the activities unfolding before them, the situation *in actu*, but toward other possible activities which could just as well be supported by the same environment. Examining the spatial configuration in this sense requires one to adopt the point of view of an actor who could be considered as the "implied reader" (Hausendorf and Schmitt 2013:12), capable of identifying and 'reading' the characteristics of the environment, understood as "usability cues" (Hausendorf 2013: 295)⁸. This act of abstraction which considers actions other than those actually underway then forms a framework to return to the situation under observation and the forms of actual experience. Now, can this point of view be the same as that adopted by the actors engaged in the course of an action, which the photographic support has captured in a certain form? On the contrary, I insist that it is impossible to describe the mosque without extrapolating on the specific perspective of the researcher. The questions: "Who sees what from which vantage point in the environment and by means of which datum? What point of view is used in describing the situation?" become primordial and cannot be ignored.

A visual ethnography of an Albanian Islamic cultural centre

In the Sixties, economic reasons led to the growth of the Balkan population in Switzerland. In the case of the Albanians, many young men left their homes to work in Switzerland as seasonal workers (von Aarburg 2002), aiming to make enough money to return to their country of origin. This first wave of immigration was followed by two others: a second wave that emerged for family reunification in the 1990s and which diversified the Albanian population in Switzerland, and then a third wave initiated by the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia (on the subject of Albanian presence in Switzerland, see Iseni 2009). The women and men who have come to Switzerland can be qualified as 'transmigrants' (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995)⁹ as they have established themselves in the country and plan to spend their futures there, while at the same time remained closely attached to their countries of origin. Over time, it became necessary to establish places of prayer for the population of faithful and practicing Muslims.

⁵ See Peccatte (2012) for some critical remarks on Barthes' perspective.

⁶ The concept of 'assemblage' was forged by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. For the pertinence of this concept for the material turn in the study of religions, see Bräunlein (2016).

⁷ Sontag goes so far as to say, commenting ironically on an advertising image, that the photographer masters the situation.

⁸ Describing the photograph in this way allows for a break from the fixity of the photographic image, a necessary step given that the production of space is about movement, actor orientations, and object displacements among other things. Another advantage is that this process encourages the researcher to consider the presence or absence of even the most ordinary objects (Hausendorf and Schmitt 2013: 28), which facilitates a detailed account of the spatial configuration. For more on this subject, see the third section of this article.

⁹ For a discussion on the concept of 'transmigration' with reference to Albanians, see Dahinten (2005).

Founded in the early 2000s, the Muslim association in which I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork¹⁰ is an example of an Albanian cultural centre¹¹, that is to say an associational place destined for other community activities just as much as it is for prayer. On this subject, one should underline that, as creating places of prayer is one of the principle objectives in establishing such centres, their cultural character concerned objectives such as

speaking the same language, experiencing Islam as it was appropriated and experienced in one's country of origin, transmitting this part of one's identity to children born in Switzerland, forging and maintaining social bonds which are imbued with memories, destinies and horizons which are more or less shared (Bennani-Chraïbi 2010: 4).¹²

The Albanian cultural centre here in question rents a building which was in no way constructed to serve as a place of prayer. In fact, at the moment of writing, the association I study rents a room in a building one could qualify as 'administrative and commercial'¹³ situated at the periphery of the city, but not far from the downtown. The organisations sharing the building are diverse: in the same building one can find for example a toy store, a school for pole-dancing and a physiotherapist. The room rented by the association, of approximately 100 m², is divided into various sections, of which the most important are the entrance with infrastructure for ablutions, the coffee-break or convivial zone with a table, chairs and coffee machine, the bookshelves and the prayer zone¹⁴.

I now come to some aspects pertaining to my use of photography in the centre. In contrast to other visual researches – such as Richter's (2015) study of the arrangement of vestries and activities that occur there or Mustafa's (2014) research about religious identity and identification in Islam – I did not ask the Muslim actors of the association to take photographs of their environment with the idea of photo elicitation (on using photographs in interviews, see Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 2002; Pink 2013). Instead, I myself took the essential photographs of the interior of the association, both while it was unoccupied as well as in the course of activities such as Friday prayers, working sessions, communal meals, individual prayers, etc.

Collier and Collier (1986: 133) and, more recently, Richter (2015: 105) have pointed out some difficulties and problems associated with the researcher-photographer's presence in their field: firstly, when starting to photograph the inner workings of social structure, one leaves the public domain and enters the confines of more private beliefs and behaviours and, secondly, taking photographs in small places like a vestry or a 100 m² prayer room could be seen as intrusive or distracting by the informants themselves. In order to reduce the above-mentioned risks, I followed a single Muslim association and did so for an extended duration (about three years)¹⁵. During this time, I only visited the mosque randomly or, sometimes, for specific occasions and I only participated in 'open' activities of the association, that is to say those in which any Muslim person, whether or not he was a member of the association, could also participate. With the exception of Friday prayers, daily prayers and special occasions, the place mostly remains empty.

The history of anthropology has shown the stakes that were at play in the emergence of ethnographic fieldwork (Stocking 1983), notably in terms of the influence they had on the sayings and doings of informants (see also Adler 1987; Arborio 2007; Olivier de Sardan 2008). In my case, my presence as

¹⁰ During my fieldwork, I interacted almost exclusively with men. I conducted a single interview with representatives from a group of women attached to the Albanian Islamic cultural centre that I had approached in the context of my research. On the criteria of gender in studies pertaining to Muslim contexts or individuals, see in particular Ahmed (2016: 71) and Quraishi (2008).

¹¹ There are approximately 500,000 Muslims in Switzerland (5.5% of the total population), of which the largest denomination is Sunni (85%) and the largest ethnic subgroup is Balkan (34.8%), see Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti (2020: 656).

¹² Translated by the author.

¹³ Here, we refer to the qualifiers used in a local press article on the opening of the Albanian Islamic cultural centre in the 2000s.

¹⁴ Such a division of the environment shows the extent to which the centre is designed as much for 'religious' as for 'non-religious' practices. Furthermore, the fact that these zones can, in certain situations, be used in tandem shows the subtle border between these two kinds of practice and the way they can be put in relation to one another. On several occasions, I had discussions at the table while, some metres away, several men prayed in the zone reserved for this activity. It can also happen that the practitioners use the Albanian Islamic cultural centre as a meeting point before departing on other excursions, such as sporting activities.

¹⁵ On the duration of time that is spent on the field and its advantages, see Bernard (2011: 277ff) and Schwartz (2012: 357ff).

well as the fact of my taking photographs both participate in the object of my study: the emergence of specific spatial configurations. I would now like to give some examples of the influence I had on the behaviour of the group who hosted me during my research

I observed the Friday prayers on several occasions. There is usually a moment when the men suddenly change position and come forward in the direction of the *mihrab* – some walking and some even crawling on the floor – and, oriented by the motifs decorating the carpet, seek to align themselves correctly for the prayer. When they saw that I was staying behind, some would save a place for me and look towards me with questioning eyes to determine whether I would join them. I then needed to make them understand that I would not be praying, whether by a gesture or by saying “I’m just an observer.” While committee members of the association and some other visitors to whom I had explained the reason for my presence knew in advance that I was not there to pray, there were others who did not know me and thought, on the contrary, that it was I was there for that reason. While my influence in such an instance is clear, observing it did allow me to ascertain the process by which the men, before praying, consider their surroundings. They check to see if other individuals are looking for a place to pray. I observed this behaviour on many occasions: the lack of space is readily manifest during Friday’s collective prayer as it attracts a great number of practitioners¹⁶.

The very possibility of observing certain activities is explained by the fact that several members of the association knew precisely what interested me. I was thus invited, by telephone and in an impromptu fashion, to participate in the renovation of the place. While the workers took a break, I was invited to partake in a meal and, together, we ate pizzas in the midst of a room in a state of upheaval. After this episode, the informant who invited me sent me a great number of photographs of the different stages of the renovations. The practitioner’s photographic practice and above all the fact that he sent them to the researcher can certainly be seen as proof of the latter’s influence. These emic photographs, along with other clarifications that I subsequently obtained while exchanging with and observing group members, nonetheless show the extent to which the renovations represented a genuine event in the life of the group.

The final example of my influence on the behaviour of actors in the group concerns the utility of the researcher for the group. While in most cases, the ethnographer produces images for the purposes of his research, it has also come to pass that I was placed in the position of photographer in order to produce images serving the group itself. I was thus invited by a member of the association to take photographs during the farewell of an imam who was officiating among the group for the last time. Thanks to this example, and to countless others that I cannot mention here¹⁷, one may conclude that the use of photography can be qualified, under certain circumstances, as a legitimate practice within the group itself.

2. Reflections on producing photographic data



PHOTO 1: View of the building in which the association rents a room of 100m².



PHOTO 2: Lectern with inscriptions and a Quran.

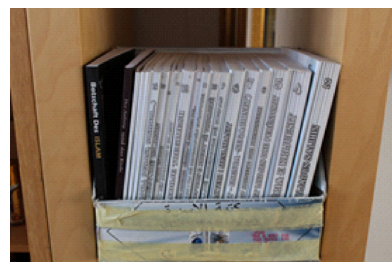


PHOTO 3: Showcase of booklets placed at the disposition of the users of the mosque.

¹⁶ The surface area of the centre is not always sufficient to contain all the practitioners and, on these occasions, the entrance way can come to serve as a waiting area.

¹⁷ I should mention at this point that the association’s previous president kept an archive containing a great number of photographs taken on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Albanian cultural centre.

Photography as a threat to the logic of discretion in the association?

Practicing photography in the midst of a Muslim association poses questions when one remembers that Muslim groups inscribe themselves in a continuum of visibility and invisibility in the public space (Salzbrunn 2019). My research involves writing about the Albanian Islamic cultural centre where I conducted my research, and even reproducing photos of their activities – as I do in this article – thus exposing the inner workings of the group to an outside eye. My task is thus at odds with one of the principle logics of the association, that of “discretion”¹⁸ (Bennani-Chraïbi 2010: 1).

This concern for discretion, guarantee of a certain intimacy, is already apparent from the association’s built environment¹⁹. While intimacy between religious brothers is not exclusive to Islam²⁰, the Islamic cultural centre nonetheless guides and controls impressions (see Goffman 1959: xi) of potential exterior observers. The very existence of the centre, while not hidden, remains discrete. As is shown in photograph 1, few indicators attract the attention of passers-by on the go in public space towards the centre. It is only in advancing in close proximity to the building that one can decode, among other inscriptions, the panels indicating the presence of the centre. Furthermore, the motifs depicting minarets and affixed to the windows of the centre are so discreet that one needs previous knowledge of their existence and to make a deliberate effort if one is to perceive them from the exterior. To paraphrase Ravelli and McMurtrie (2017: 57), the centre has no point of contact with the outside world, such as an easily legible sign designating the centre and indicating “You can make contact with us here.”

This discretion may be a strategy adopted in a tense social climate. In Switzerland, Islam and the presence of Muslims are construed as a “social problem” (Gianni, Giugni and Michel 2015: 9; Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2020). In addition, the portrayal of Muslims tends to reproduce a homogenized image emerging from mainstream society, thus exhibiting the reductive and stereotyped terminology of a “total discourse” (Behloul 2009). To this one may add that Swiss media tends to transmit a negative image of Islam²¹ (Gianni, Guigni and Michel 2015: 15; Ettinger 2018). Given these circumstances, the group in question has every interest in making a good impression and in taking care not to upset the other occupants of the building, for instance by avoiding noise disturbances and respecting the designated places in the parking lot. In a sense, it is simply about presenting themselves as good neighbours and citizens by not disturbing the peace of the neighbourhood, let alone that of the region. This discretion can again be explained by the association’s ties to a specific region and culture. It thus has little interest in seeking to attract new members: the centre already has its regulars, it is concerned above all with the part of the region’s Albanian population which is faithful and practicing. What’s more, any advertising for events organized by the centre is undertaken principally using posters within the locale, or else simply by word of mouth.

The association is thus greatly concerned with discretion. This implicit concern already informed the way that I conducted my field work, and particularly my use of photography, even before discretion as such became a specific theme of my research. After having approached the association with the idea of conducting a study of its material culture, I began taking photographs during my first visits to the centre. In this early phase, I brought a semi-professional camera, but quickly exchanged this for a smartphone, partly for practical reasons, but also to facilitate blending in with the occupants of the place. To gradually familiarize my hosts to my presence in their association, I at first visited the centre during times when it was empty or scarcely inhabited. When I encountered other men, I introduced myself and my research. It was only much later that I photographed communal activities in the centre.

In accordance with this photographic evolution, the photographs taken during the first months of the study were primarily concerned with the association’s interior design. Yet I perceived this design in a mode that one could describe as an ‘objectification’ of the material agents “in a way that mimics the

¹⁸ *Entre-soi* in French.

¹⁹ Hence the importance in a visual ethnography of giving time to the analysis of the material environment which, as in my case, makes it possible to bring to light the important logics which generate the conduct of the actors, see Pink (2013: 80ff) et Maresca (1996: 31).

²⁰ In his PhD, Best (2010) studied the bonding intimacy of Quaker adolescents and notes that the issue of faith alone remains marginal.

²¹ This dimension was mentioned many times during my visits to the association. Some contacts told me they appreciated my undertaking because I did not stop at what the media said about Islam but came to visit a mosque to see for myself what this religion was.

objectification of human ‘others’ in conventional ethnographic monographs” (Pink 2006: 66). Rather than wide shots of the different elements in the room, I primarily took close-ups of certain objects (see photos 2 and 3). Such photographs seek to document the artefacts distributed and used in the room rather than account for the interior design in the sense of an environment that is organised and structured by social logics. They are also, even if they are related to legends or explanatory texts, too weak a form of data to study the spatial configuration of the association such as defined in the previous chapter, and thus ultimately to account for the life of the association²².

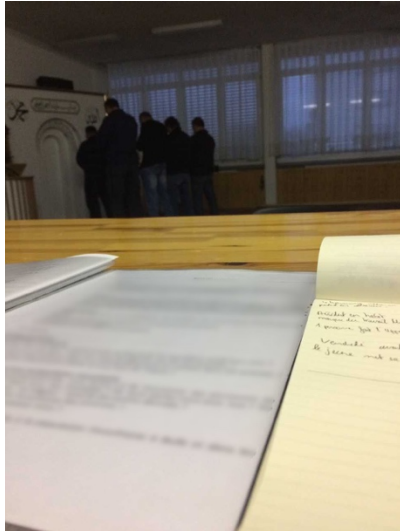


PHOTO 4: A photograph ‘stolen’ during prayers?



PHOTO 5: The practitioners wait for the Jumu'ah to begin: The imam gives an introductory speech and the men listen more or less attentively.

Though I was comfortable taking photographs of the interior design of the centre when it was empty or little occupied, it was more difficult to photograph activities in which a large number of people participated – especially the Friday prayers. The photographs I produced during such activities are often similar to one another (compare photos 4 and 5): In most cases, I took the photos at the greatest possible distance from the main action, the framing of the images is maladroit and seeks to avoid showing the faces of the actors (photo 4) and it is worth noting that I often found myself installed in the same portion of the environment (photos 4 and 5 are taken from the same side of the room). The analysis of the image, on returning from the field, participates in a critical exercise concerning the status of observer within the group. It reveals my initial difficulty to face the group, to assume my role in the situation; difficulty redoubled because of the restricted surface of the place.

The researcher’s reticence to take photographs and the production and circulation of emic images

The formal characteristics of photography from the early stages of my fieldwork recall the ‘savage’ and ‘profane’ use of the photographic image, as termed by Bajard (2016). If one did not know that the researcher’s presence had been authorized by the committee of the Islamic centre, one could easily imagine that these photographs were ‘stolen’ images. One can identify an operator who is ill at ease with the photographic act and inept in documenting a moment in the life of the association he frequents.

As mentioned above, Richter (2015) notices that the risk of upsetting and intruding on activities is elevated when the space in question is limited. One may extend this observation by attaching it to Goffman’s definition of the situation (mentioned in the first section of this article). In particular,

²² One solution I’ve adopted is to create photo spreads. They have the advantage of re-assembling photographs of objects to account for certain logics.

Goffman's situation involves each of the actors who co-exist in the same environmental region mutually monitoring the other. This monitoring makes particular use of visual perception.

The space rented by the association is characterized less by 'regions', in Goffman's sense of the term, than by 'portions'. For Goffman (1959: 106), a region of the environment is defined by the fact that a material dispositive obstructs the perception of the actor. In the case of the room rented by the association, it is true that one may speak of regions when one finds oneself in the narrow entryway because one is unable to see and observe what is happening in the rest of the room (and vice versa). Yet once they arrive in the room, each actor's behaviour is evaluated by the other actors co-present in the space, and does so on the basis of the visual register. While I was taking photographs in the main room of the association, I knew that my actions could, at any moment, be observed and evaluated by those who were co-present with me. To be completely frank, I was anxious about being found at fault – but what kind of fault could I be guilty of?

The work of reflection allows the researcher to refrain from projecting his own malaise concerning the photographic act: it is I myself who am ill at ease with capturing images, and not the Muslim actors. All the same, during the first visits, I developed a bias, namely that the actors I was dealing with, precisely because they were Muslim, would necessarily be reluctant to being captured in photographs.²³ I reactivated this belief when orally explaining my use of images. I specified to the group that if any of their faces appeared in one of my shots, it would be blurred. While I was indeed concerned with guaranteeing the anonymity of the actors – according to the ethics of ethnographic fieldwork – I was also troubled by the unconscious belief evoked above. I wanted to reassure the Muslims who were doubtless mistrustful of the reproduction of their faces, particularly when they were engaged in ritual practices.

In observing and analysing my photographs, I noted that their framing attested to my unease. By virtue of its formal characteristics, photography thus served me by drawing my attention to the bias mentioned above. Over time, I observed that the Muslim actors themselves used photography and circulated images using social media platforms whose boundaries more or less corresponded to those of the association. In fact, I realised not only that several men took photographs of themselves (selfies) shortly before the Friday prayers, but also that such images circulated on the platforms, to which I had access for a number of months.²⁴ Furthermore, I was never questioned while taking photographs in the centre, let alone asked to stop. These observations imply that there is a legitimate practice of capturing and circulating images among Muslim groups.

The inscription of the researcher/photographer

After three years of intermittent visits to the Albanian Islamic cultural centre, the photographic data proves that I was typically situated in a very specific way in the centre, as I will now describe.

As one can see in photos four and five, the environmental portion in which I situated myself while taking photographs is on the side-lines of the collective activities, whether during the prayers (photo 4) or during the period of waiting before the Friday prayers (photo 5). Such photographs display the relation between the principal activity undertaken by the actors of the association and a simultaneous but secondary activity, namely that of the production of images as undertaken by the researcher.

One of the primary objects present in this portion on the side is a table ('the famous table', to cite the expression of a man who frequented the Albanian Islamic centre when I asked him to sketch the locale

²³ It is worth noting that, on several occasions when I introduced the subject of my study to third parties, they were surprised that the board of the association had accepted my using photography to produce my data. Does this surprise refer to the fact that the reproduction of images would be likely to harm the collective? Is it rather that the use of photography in an Islamic context is surprising because it would tend to undermine the intimacy of the group during prayers? Or should we identify the belief that Islam forbids the representation of faces?

²⁴ The circulation of such images, whether depicting the activities of the group or the centre's interior design, testifies to the way social media can facilitate relations between actors who, at times, do not know each other personally, and can be dispersed throughout Switzerland and abroad, on the topic of the impact of social networks on migration process see Dekker and Engbersen (2014); Hiller and Franz (2004) and King and Wood (2001). A certain 'deterritorialisation' of the associational space using these new platforms for communication can be identified (Appadurai 1991). For instance, a WhatsApp group (to which I did not have access) unites several members of the association and it is by means of this channel that information circulates. Mutually feeding off of each other, the circulation of images on these platforms demonstrates the dynamism of certain associations as well as the establishment of new places of prayer.

on a piece of white paper). There are generally chairs positioned around the table. Nearby, some shelving has been installed in order to display a series of trophies. These testify to the group's victory in football tournaments organised by an association for Muslim youth. On the other side, a coffee machine and a beverage cooler have been placed in a sort of cubby hole. To put it simply, the arrangement of this portion of the environment clearly materialises another logic than that of discretion as mentioned above. Instead, this arrangement testifies to a logic that I refer to as conviviality. This term is justified because the forms it generates testify to those relations and interactions amongst actors who consider themselves as partners in their common activities and as 'brothers in religion'. The arrangement of this portion on the side-lines allows the users of the space to settle in around the table to chat, drink a coffee or read.

It is from this portion on the sidelines that I spontaneously positioned myself, time after time, to observe the activities of the group. During one of my first visits to the centre, a person in charge asked me to be seated in this portion, and it was here that I conducted interviews with group members. This 'spontaneous' and 'sudden' positioning was at times influenced by the number of people visiting the room. As the Friday prayers attracted a great number of people, I identified three portions which were available to me: the usual portion on the side where I tried to take up as little space as possible, a space between the cooler and the coffee machine indicated above, or else the entrance way where the ablutions are performed and where the visitors arrange their shoes on shelves before entering the room.

Taking photos of a Muslim associational space, beyond all individual or collective activity, allows the researcher to document the organisation of the room, whether on the level of its environmental forms (interior design) or of the situations there produced (placement and regrouping of the actors in the room, as well as production, recognition and maintenance of the forms which establish existing regions or portions – a front side, a back side, a side-line etc. – in relation to a principal course of action). Photography also allows for a materialisation of the distinctions between actors in copresence: the Muslim actors who interact together to make religion and interact with a divine entity and, at a distance, the researcher who observes them and photographs the situation.

I will now return to the two logics that have been highlighted until now: discretion and conviviality. While the logic of discretion enables the group to manage the impression they might make on outside observers, and thus to select what can or cannot be seen of the centre by such observers, the logic of conviviality concerns moments when men can share an instant around the table, drinking a coffee of chatting or while they stand by waiting for the prayers to start.²⁵ To be clear, the logic of conviviality does not only concern Muslim actors. It also concerns visitors from the outside, as is the case of the photographer-observer. As I have described, it was precisely in the environmental portion attached to the 'famous table' that I placed myself – even though it is folded up and put away before the prayers in order to optimize the space dedicated to the ritual.

While a principle action like prayer is underway, the observer sees themselves relegated to a rear portion representing, in some sense, the 'wings' of the space. From this position – and according to Goffman's definition – he undergoes less risk of putting the definition of the situation in question. The border between the portion dedicated to prayer and that governed by the logic of conviviality symbolically separates the practitioners from the observer. It also duplicates the general distinction between inside/outside, coupled with that of insider/outsider and materialized through diverse arrangements: the windows, the threshold of the association, the corridor for the ablutions²⁶. Taking photos from the wings, if it is to breach this symbolic frontier, necessitates complex procedures as the gaze of the researcher rests on an environmental portion and its activities which are not addressed to them. The portion dedicated to conviviality must thus not be understood as designated uniquely to Muslim actors, but rather as an environmental portion where an exterior observer can be situated without upsetting the main course of action.

Here, one begins to perceive the interest in studying not only material culture, but also the question of the social production of space. Following the formal perspective that photography invites one to adopt, it becomes simpler to elucidate the complexity of a room (even if its dimensions are limited to 100m²!)

²⁵ In spatial organization, the challenge for the group is therefore first to delimit a portion of space (the logic of discretion) and then, through specific practices, to establish relationships that promote affective ties with this portion of space and the other individuals who occupy it (the logic of conviviality), on this topic see Segaud (2010: 72).

²⁶ Rather than opposing them, these two distinctions are to be understood as a process of negotiation between two spatial portions and states. This is the very idea of the 'threshold' as thematized by Segaud (2010: 133) when she speaks of a zone that hosts interactions between individuals.

in the way it is used by actors, and notably by those who are invested in establishing and experiencing a relation with the divine. The following section of this article returns to the pertinence of using photography for understanding Islam as an ‘ordinary religion’.

3. Analysing the ordinary forms of Islam through the use of photography *A matter of details...*

Beyond using photography in order to study artefacts and techniques, social scientists have long linked the photographic procedure to their study of the sequences and gestures, organizing practices, and particularly rituals. A classical example of this tendency can be seen in the work *Balinese Character* by Bateson and Mead (1942) which concludes with photographic work on rites of passage. The use of photography was then timidly taken up by the study of religion. Following a study conducted in Great Britain, Pye (1977) published an account containing several remarks on the ways that photography could serve as an instrument in this field: according to him, photography assists in defining the questions of the study (photographic work as a focus for the definition of research questions) and serves as preparation and orientation for the fieldwork subsequently undertaken. Photography can be further employed as “an aid for recalling observations” and is particularly pertinent for taking inventory, studying sequences of activities (as in the study of ritual practices) and, finally, as an “aid to interviewing technique”. While one could further refine and discuss the different elements of this list, for our purposes, it is enough to show how the use of photography can be beneficial during all research stages, as is noted, incidentally, by Williams (2015: 192).

Photography, as with any other kind of data, is a construct of the researcher serving to illustrate the social world and thus needs to be inserted in an analytic framework (Emmison and Smith 2000). Evident as this may seem, one should emphasize that using photographic data to study religion commits the researcher to apprehending certain aspects of their object to the detriment of others. In particular, a microsociological approach to religion is appropriate to photography because it commits the researcher to extracting as many details as possible from the situation which has been photographed.

The anthropologist Albert Piette has indicated on many occasions (Piette 1992; 1993; 2007; 2020) that photography is a “specific kind of knowledge”. One argument for the pertinence of photography in capturing and analysing social situations rests on its indexical character: a photo quite simply shows what has been (Piette 2007: 25)²⁷. The anthropologist references Roland Barthes’ reflections on photography, notably citing the phrase “there, that’s it, that’s how it is!” (Barthes 1980: 15-16)²⁸. Furthermore, Piette takes up Barthes’ distinction between the *studium* (the theme of a photograph, its general interest) and the *punctum*, a detail or a supplement which deranges the *studium*. This encourages one to read social life while considering “the effect of the particular in the general or of the potential in the actual” (Piette 2020: 192)²⁹. Consequently, photography renders visible those elements of a situation which were already there but which one failed to observe – this brings details to the foreground in a particular way, as the scholar of the social world should strive to do. According to him, the study of the social should above all be an affair of identifying and analysing remainders, thus focusing the study not on the homogeneity of the social – as do many researchers – but on ruptures, things that do not seem pertinent to the unity of the situation under analysis (Piette 1996: 52).

Allow me to reflect a little further on Piette’s critique of a tendency he identifies in the social sciences, namely the particular attention that is brought to bear on the homogeneity of the social world (Piette 2020). To illustrate this critique³⁰, I will take up two specific claims made by Piette, one of which deals with cultural anthropology, and the second with microsociology. He points to the way cultural anthropologists sometimes use description to illustrate the specific tonality of a given culture: “The aim is to present the tone of a culture. What mediates between the singularity of a ritual or some other activity and the tone of the culture is the idea of ‘homogeneity’ or ‘shared identity’ within one community of

²⁷ Let us note here that Piette emphasizes the produced character of the photographic image, thus refusing to think the image apart from its relation to the observer-photographer (Piette 2020: 193).

²⁸ Translation by the author.

²⁹ Translation by the author.

³⁰ My aim here is not to comment on these criticisms. Some, such as Olivier de Sardan (2008: 150) have rejected this vision as a widely caricatured ethnological model. I mention them in order to come to the notion that will occupy us later, that of ‘ordinary religion’, as theorized by Piette.

people who respect each other, anchored to a circumscribed location” (Piette 2015: 24). The second critique concerns Goffman’s microsociology. While recognizing its potential to account for the details of a situation, Piette nonetheless claims that these details are nonetheless reintegrated in the play of pertinence, impertinence and strategy (Piette 2020: 141). He writes: “The interaction is first regarded as a set of relevant, meaningful signs, acceptable to other participants, providing a starting point for the next message. Second, the interaction is based on mutual acceptance. Against the backdrop of existing information that enables the participants to predict other people’s behaviour and behave in such a way as to prompt a desired behaviour, and also learn what is expected of them, the action’s guiding lines determine the important points of ‘working consensus’.” (Piette 2015: 28)

Piette’s work on ordinary religion has dealt with Catholicism in France, but also on the practices of so-called ‘secular’ religions. One example of a photographic analysis of religion in his work can be found in Piette (1996). Concentrating on the ordination of a catholic deacon, and subsequently on the consecration of a protestant pastor, Piette explains that he wishes to defend an approach based on close-up observation of reality. He does so through the use of photography by referring to details that do not seem relevant to the unity of the situation being analysed and thus nearly irretrievable as the actors themselves will rapidly forget them. Using these images and the context in which they were captured, Piette presents the persons therein depicted, provides some excerpts of dialogue, and inserts the images in the chronology of their situation.

Although the built environment is not a privileged point of entry for Piette’s photography and situational analysis – this is one of the points which distinguishes his research from my own – he notices the agency of objects that inform (such as a brochure) or directly incite action. In order to stay as close as possible to the situation and to avoid the risk of over-interpretation, Piette does not evoke the objects with regard to a symbolic register. Instead, it is a matter of noting “their function of coordination for the action” (Piette 1996: 60). On the one hand, the anthropologist thus analyses the situation’s context and the way in which the appearance of the frame where the action occurs is constructed. On the other hand, he analyses the precise way a work space is constructed using a set of material resources that aid in orienting actions and by realigning behaviours on the basis of spatial constraints. Through this example, one sees, when using photography to analyse a situation, one cannot spare oneself the effort of minutely describing and observing the built environment and the role it plays in the course of human actions. This is because photography shows one the spatial configurations in which human entities and their material resources are inscribed through the course of action.

Islam as an ordinary religion

In the case of religious rituals, viewing objects as ‘coordinators of action’ is a concrete example of apprehending religion in its ordinary dimensions. For Piette, it is always a question of showing how the most banal aspects participate in the fabrication of the religious. He thus proposes a “secularised reading” of ritual (Piette 1996: 78). This approach seeks to ‘bring ritual down to Earth’ in order to avoid the over-interpretative effect that appears, according to him, in the

description of sequences of events according to a textual ideality that is programmed and organised, functional valorisation of ritual as if it needed something of the order of intention and specific direction, association of gestures and objects to a symbolic dimension referring beyond the ritual itself (Piette 1997: 34)³¹.

He proceeds by deconstructing the three fundamental concepts of ethno-sociology of religion: i. ritual is taken as a set of codified gestures within a given framework, ii. belief, for its part, is studied in its concrete manifestations, i.e. in situations (Piette speaks of “belief in act”) and, iii.

the ‘symbol’ I see as one object among others with the regulative role in coordinating interactions and capable of launching – in a way that is punctual, non-necessary, and not generalised by the individuals participating in the situation – a cognitive and/or affective process of focalisation-evocation (Piette 1997: 35).

³¹ Translation by the author.

Ordinary religion is the result of a certain approach to observing, describing and analysing 'the fabrication of the religious' which does not stop at the commonalities of practitioners – their shared beliefs and practices – or at the supposed consensus established in the definition of the situation. Piette defines ordinary religion using three focal points: i. anodyne and contingent activities which construct and stabilize the fact of religion; ii. moments of particular emptiness, absences, pauses when the wings are highlighted in opposition to the strong moments in whose succession they are inserted and iii. gestures, actors and objects which are of secondary importance although they nonetheless performed simultaneously and in the copresence of the focalized sequence of action (Piette 2003: 2).

Studying the spatial configuration of a Muslim association through the use of photography commits me to observing and describing the ordinary forms of Islam such as they are experienced in a local Muslim association. Which material arrangements constitute the built environment? How do the resources available in this environment participate in organizing the behaviours that occur there and what new behaviours emerge, spatially, from this usage of the place? To answer these questions, one must observe concrete situations in those aspects which are as banal as they are strategic for the environmental organisation: thresholds which may or may not be materialized by doors facilitating the passage between an exterior and an interior or to determine, within the interior, the place of an entity coming from the exterior; a zone of conviviality materialized by a table and chairs. Finally, the forms that emerge here testify to the borders, interweavings and even confrontations that exist between different social logics that generate the associational space at hand.

The configuration of the associational space is the product of a certain reading undertaken by the researcher through the use of photography and referring back to their experiences in the field. This research object and the reading it informs allow the researcher to account for its contours and what they testify about Islam as it happens, as it is being expressed by actors whose behaviour can correspond more or less to those logics which organize the built environment of the Muslim association, more or less aligned to communitarian logics. Thus, photograph five presents us with a main scene: the Imam, dressed in white, preaches while his congregation listens. The person of the Imam is situated in a portion of the environment containing the *mihrab* which, in being illuminated, indicates the direction where the practitioners should orient themselves. Nonetheless, the photograph also exhibits forms of distracted listening: a man, leaning on his left arm, scratches his ear with his right hand; another is busy with the cell phone that he holds in front of him (is he still listening to the Imam? Does he even understand Albanian, the language in which the imam is speaking?); yet a further directs his attention to the regions for entry and ablutions, etc. It is easy to see that the first phase of the Friday prayers, notably the arrival of the congregation while the Imam preaches, involves as ordinary as complex configurations.

Conclusion

At the end of this article, the reader may ask: where is God - the divine entity - in this Muslim space? And what about the beliefs of individuals? I have intentionally addressed only two of the most ordinary social logics in the spatial configuration of the Albanian Islamic cultural centre in which I conducted my fieldwork, namely the logics of discretion and conviviality. Indeed, I consider it important to take some distance from the concept of belief in view of a (re)materialized study of religion (see in this regard Bräunlein 2016; Houtman and Meyer 2012). Unless it is studied in terms of 'belief in action' as does Piette, the concept of belief seems tricky to examine closely from a microsociological perspective. Moreover, it seems fundamental to question the places in which actors dealing with religion believe, in the manner of Kerestetzi (2018). Thus, I have not returned in this article to a third logic - studied in my doctoral research - concerning the "relationship to God." What I can say, however, is that this third logic is indissociable from the other two, since before experiencing a relationship with God, at the moment of the ritual of prayer for example, the actors – particularly in the case of an association – still have to set up a place that makes it possible, and do so by outfitting this place with specific material resources.

Specifically devoted to the use of photography in my research, this article has listed some issues related to this subject. Photography is an appropriate tool for studying the spatial configuration of a collective since it allows not only a close examination of the built environment of the social group but also, from a reading of the photographic images informed by the experiences of the field, the new forms that emerge as a result of the practitioners' activities.

In my case, photography was also a tool that allowed me to take a critical distance. If the researcher does not appear on the image, they are nonetheless part of the situation at the time of the shot. Their situation in an environmental portion - negotiated with the actors in co-presence - in other words their use and experience of the space, are parameters contributing to the very constitution of their research object. And it is thanks to photography that the researcher gains an insight into the mode of apprehension of the group, the place from which he observed the group and its practices. It is of course a matter of questioning the reasons for this inscription and the type of images taken. While one is quick to think of the risks of undermining, through the use of photography, a particular intimacy that characterizes activities in a religious context, examining the photographs and subsequently reflecting on their production revealed to me that the problem or reluctance to take images was hardly based on the Muslim actors but more on my own perspectives and fears with regard to the situations observed.

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VISUALISING RAPID LIFE TRANSITIONS: ETHNOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING THROUGH SMARTPHONE- BASED COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Many Japanese individuals fall victim to the disease of cancer, making it the most common cause of death in Japan. The second author Mizuno's wife, Mie was diagnosed with stomach cancer in May 2017, just before the delivery of their first child. She passed away three months after their son's first birthday. Mie's loss made Mizuno a widower and a single father. Up until then, the life transitions of family caregivers who became young widowers during the infant-care period were scarcely documented in academic studies in Japan. Mizuno had started to record himself and his family's life using his smartphone camera almost every day ever since he was informed of Mie's cancer. From June 2018, he started a collaborative research with the first author Ohashi to understand and express the rapid and unpredictable changes of his family's lifeworld. The authors began to share diaries and visual images generated with his smartphone and arranged to have weekly online interview sessions to collaboratively reflect on the files. Eventually, the authors made an ethnographic documentary film to express the rapid life transitions experienced by Mizuno. In this paper, the process of how the authors applied multiple methodologies to develop the research project will be reflected and described. Secondly, the characteristics of the visual images recorded on Mizuno's smartphone during the project will be analysed. Thirdly, the findings and implications of visualising the experience of life transitions as a family caregiver will be elaborated. Lastly, the authors will discuss how we can understand and visualise the life transitions experienced by family caregivers, given that smartphones are a part of everyday life for many people nowadays.

KEYWORDS

Life transitions, family caregiver, design research, visual ethnography, mobile methods, smartphone, documentary filmmaking.

Bio

Kana Ohashi (Ph.D. in Media and Governance) is a visual ethnographer and currently working as a full-time lecturer at the Department of Communication Studies, Tokyo Keizai University, Japan. Her research interests include everyday mobilities practices, transnational communication, and visual ethnographic methodologies.

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Research background

1) Family caregivers of cancer patients and their life transitions

Note by Mizuno (8 August 2018)

Mie was older than me. I didn't consider having children because she had already passed the ideal childbearing age when we met. At that time, I often travelled overseas for business and to local towns of the country and worked until midnight. I would have to change my lifestyle if I had a child, but I didn't dare to think about having one considering her age. But eventually, Mie told me that she wanted a child, just like ordinary families. She was 42 then. She had experienced a miscarriage before. Moreover, there are a lot of schedule restrictions on infertility treatment, and it is expensive. We needed to decide when to stop trying. The communication between Mie and myself regarding the treatment was particularly challenging for me when no results were gained.

Despite the situation, her urge to bear and to raise a child was very strong. At any cost, Mie longed for the happiness gained from having a family (she did not enjoy working). Child-raising alone—and not through accomplishments from work—could confirm her identity. I guess she arrived at the conclusion that having a family—a child—was her aim in life after she was successful in living at her own pace.

Finally, in Autumn 2016, an artificial insemination was successful, and our baby grew remarkably inside her as she went on to overcome her high-risk pregnancy. In April 2017, she was ready for delivery. At that time, she was busy attending child-rearing preparation classes, doing exercises and yoga, going to obstetrics and gynaecology hospital appointments. Her due date was expected to be at the end of June or beginning of July.

However, Mie gradually developed what seemed like late morning sickness. She lost all her appetite. Though she had various prescriptions from her obstetrician, she could barely eat. Something was wrong. On 19th May, she had a periodic medical check-up.

Immediately, the obstetrician gave us an introductory letter to consult a doctor at a general hospital. We rushed there anxiously. The doctor admitted her into the hospital at once. A week later, a detailed examination revealed that a stomach cancer had caused the condition. The cancer had narrowed the exit of her stomach and had blocked any food consumed from reaching the bowels. As she was nine months pregnant, we decided to opt for a caesarean, forgoing natural birth so that she could begin and concentrate on cancer treatment immediately. We cancelled all our plans to give birth at a maternity clinic and to have luxurious festival foods in celebration of the arrival of our child. Everything was going against our own decisions.

A pregnancy-associated stomach cancer. A rare case, which is also associated with poor prognosis. It was scirrhus stomach cancer, a type that worsens the prognosis. Even though I am not an expert in this field, I discovered this information from reading medical articles, as I am a researcher. Disappointed. Wiped out. With the imminent delivery, Mie wished from the bottom of her heart, that I would not be unhappy.

In Japan, approximately 62% of men and 47% of women get diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime (National Cancer Center Japan 2019), and one in 3.6 people succumb to death as a result (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan 2018). This means that many Japanese people not only experience their own battles against cancer, but many have to care for their family members who are diagnosed with cancer. In recent years, an increasing number of young workers and those in their prime years suffer from cancer during the period of child-raising. Accordingly, many young people become family caregivers. The family caregivers are expected to take responsibilities for decision-making, providing substantial caregiving, meeting the financial and social costs, maintaining stability, and adapting to change (Onishi 2009). Onishi (2009) points out that family caregivers should be considered as 'second-order patients', because they are under intense mental, physical, and social stress from the moment their family member is suspected of having cancer. However, studies also show that very few family caregivers receive necessary social support as 'second-order patients' (Matsushita et al. 2010).

As described in the note above, the second author, Mizuno's wife Mie was diagnosed with stomach cancer in May 2017, just before the delivery of their child that the couple had been eagerly awaiting. Mie began to live with medical treatment immediately after giving birth. Nevertheless, she passed away three months after her son's first birthday. During that period, Mizuno had to manage to balance work, childcare, and care for Mie. Mie's loss made Mizuno a widower and a single father. Mizuno's role in his family transitioned, and environmental transition also occurred rapidly. This kind of life transitions experienced by young widowers during the child's infant-care period are scarcely documented and investigated as academic studies in Japan (Kondo and Sato 2007; Shirakawa 2015).

According to the 2016 Nationwide Survey on Single Parent Households, there are 1.23 million

mother-child(ren) families and 187,000 father-child(ren) families in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan 2017). The loss of the partner was the main cause of motherlessness for 19% of father-child(ren) families. In Japan, previous studies have largely focused on issues regarding mother-child(ren) families, as most single parent families were predominantly mother-child(ren) families, and many were confronted with serious economic difficulties due to the delay in women's participation in society (Lee 2019). The concepts of 'division of labour by gender' and 'maternity myth' are still deeply rooted in Japanese society, and this is considered to be another reason for the focus on supporting mother-child(ren) families. Shirakawa (2015) found that young male parents or those in their prime of life caring alone for underage child(ren) are more likely to lack a confidant to consult with and be isolated from childcare information and role models. Given this background, it is crucial to understand the experiences of single male parents who cared for the partner through their last days and consequently, were forced to raise their child(ren) single-handedly.

2) Visualising the life transitions experienced by a family caregiver of a cancer patient

According to Pardo and Morcate (2016), the visual representation of illness, death and grief has been changing through the years and it relies heavily on the cultural context. There have been many indications that death and death-related topics have been tabooed, covered up, isolated, excluded, denied, and/or suppressed in modern Japanese society (Sawai 2002). As mentioned previously, there has been a problem of family caregivers of cancer patients not receiving the necessary social support they need in Japan. One of the reasons for this problem is the hesitance of family caregivers to express their needs and feelings (Muta 2018). There are cultural norms that may underlie this hesitancy and resistance to expressing emotions related to illness, death, and grief.

However, in the age of smartphones and social media, expressing and sharing the experiences by patients and family caregivers themselves is becoming less unusual. For example, Ameba Blog, one of the largest blogging services in Japan, has more than 150 official tabs or genres for users to specify what their blogs are about, and categories like 'caregiving diary' and 'hospitalisation and disease fighting' are on the list. Over 40,000 users have chosen these two categories for their blogs as of August 2021 (CyberAgent, Inc. 2021). This is not a big number when you consider that Ameba Blog has 67 million users in total. Nevertheless, the publicist of Ameba Blog points out that the popular blogs tend to be the ones that write about their experiences related to love, care of the family, illness, etc., which they do not often talk about with others in person (CyberAgent, Inc. 2019). People's practices of expressing and sharing their experiences as family caregivers are being driven by smartphones and social media. Pardo and Morcate (2016) indicate that people are willing to share their stories of illness, grief and death using social media, in the hope of meeting others, increasing social understanding, and making a difference.

The authors of this paper made an ethnographic documentary film titled 'Transition' together in 2019. The film aims to understand and visualise the life transitions experienced by Mizuno, who cared for his wife until her death, while having to work and raise their new-born son in parallel. Mizuno recorded himself and his family's life using his smartphone camera almost every day ever since he was informed of his wife's disease in May 2017. In June 2018, Mizuno decided to start a research project with the first author Ohashi to understand and express the rapid and unpredictable changes occurring in his family's life. The authors began to share diaries and visual images generated with Mizuno's smartphone on Google Drive and arranged to have weekly online interview sessions to collaboratively reflect on these files. A total number of 1,921 photos and videos were taken during this period. Eventually, the authors decided to make an ethnographic documentary film to express the rapid life transitions experienced by Mizuno as a family caregiver.

Research Aims

In this paper, firstly, the process of how the authors applied multiple methodologies to develop the research project will be reflected and described. This project was not clearly designed or planned in advance. In the process of confronting the events that had happened to Mizuno and his family, Mizuno and Ohashi sought a way to make the experience the focus of study and to visualise it. As the study was based on the event experienced by one of the authors, their emotions were also incorporated in the

choice, development, and implementation of the methods. These will be described to reflect on how the authors and the participants of the project were situated within the research context as a reflexive approach (Pink 2013).

Secondly, the characteristics of the visual images that Mizuno recorded on his smartphone during the course of the project will be analysed and interpreted with reference to diary and interview data from each period. It will reveal how the smartphone camera was used in different modes.

Thirdly, from the viewpoint of Mizuno, who was both the researcher and the subject of the project, the findings and implications of visualising the experience of life transition as a family caregiver will be elaborated.

Lastly, the authors will discuss how we can understand and visualise the life transitions experienced by family caregivers, given that smartphones and social media are a part of everyday life for many people nowadays.

Methodological foundations and their applications in the project

1) Design research using smartphones

Mizuno decided to record himself and his family's life using his smartphone camera when he was informed of his wife's cancer in May 2017. His underlying habits and identity as a design researcher may have motivated him to record his daily life when he had to face his wife's unexpected disease and the associated changes in his family.

Design research is considered as a systematic enquiry into the design process. Its primary objective is to generate a new body of knowledge that contributes to better design, whether it is an object, service or system. In making prototypes, employing ethnographic research on users to understand their needs since user-centred design (as discussed by Norman and Draper 1986) became one of the main focus in the design research field. Accordingly, ethnographic methods are adopted in some cases, but speed is required in the industry-driven design context. In this sense, the stimulation and development of distinctive research methods called design ethnography (such as IDEO's design method cards) is required to capture the essence of user experience in a short period of time.

On top of understanding users, design research is also used to help designers generate imaginative artefacts. Such distinctive approaches on exploring users include 'Cultural Probe' (Gaver, Dunne, and Pacenti 1999), and more recently 'Design Documentaries' (Raijmakers, Gaver, and Bishay 2006), which attempt to illustrate the lives of users through the methods developed in documentary filmmaking. However, with the improved functionality and communication speed of smartphones, it has become no longer necessary for the researcher him/herself to physically go to the site or to provide a camera to the subject, which would be used as the 'Cultural Probe'. For example, user research that adapts a 'mobile ethnography' method (Segelström and Holmlid 2012) has emerged, such as sending out text messages to research participants on their smartphones, asking them to capture a video or photo, and then immediately sending these back to the researcher.

For years, in his role as a design researcher, Mizuno has been researching and practicing methods to understand users' lives via smartphones and cameras. He decided to record his and his family's life as a subject of research using his smartphone camera when his wife was diagnosed with stomach cancer during her last month of pregnancy. Smartphones are small in scale compared to general cameras and are commonly owned by many, which makes it easier to use them to shoot without making others uncomfortable. Shooting with a smartphone was easier and less stressful than a single-lens reflex camera or a video camera, so he could keep recording daily.

In the beginning, Mizuno did not have a clear objective, goal, or idea about the kind of research project he wanted to realise through the daily recordings of his family's life via his smartphone. Nor did he make an exact schedule of the research project. The manner in which his wife's disease was diagnosed and how circumstances related to his family changed was unpredictable. The project began in an autoethnographic way with Mizuno single-handedly recording the unpredictable situation.

In the first year he started recording, circumstances involving his family dramatically changed. Mie gave birth to a 2,900-gm baby boy on 1 June 2017. He was named Terasu. When it was decided that Mie would undergo a total stomach removal operation, her role changed from 'an expectant woman' to 'a cancer patient'. However, the operating surgeon told Mizuno that it was impossible to remove the entire stomach—she was on stage 4 cancer, not on stage 2 as the doctor had first anticipated, and instead

a bypass surgery was performed to help her provisionally regain bowel functions so that she could eat. The operation that was carried out for livelihood rehabilitation ended without any problem. Mie began to eat, starting with rice water and gradually moving on to rice porridge.

It was decided that Mie would return to the hospital to receive oncological treatment after leaving the hospital early in July 2017. As side effects exert mental and physical loads on patients, they had to leave Terasu in an infant home. The Child Welfare Act Article 37 states that infant homes should be facilities intended for admitting and fostering infants (including toddlers in cases where it is particularly necessary to ensure a steady living environment or due to other reasons of healthcare), as well as to provide consultations and additional assistance to those who have left (Ministry of Justice, Japan, 2009). Infant homes have been supporting babies and infants who cannot live with their families due to various family circumstances for more than 70 years in Japan (National Council of Homes for Infants Japan, 2019).

Mizuno and Mie could not get parenting support from either of their parents. Their parents live far from them and are at an advanced age. This forced them to rely on the infant home, which turned out to be a saving grace for Mizuno, who was bewildered about how he could raise new-born Terasu while balancing the need to support Mie's fight against the disease, work, and do household chores. However, Mie was not about to give up on child-rearing even though they had left Terasu at the infant home. She wished to raise Terasu herself as much as possible, bringing Terasu home on a regular basis. Terasu had been her long-cherished desire. Mizuno limited his work to raise Terasu with Mie as much as he could, especially when the side effects of her anticancer drug were mild. The period at the end of 2017 leading up to the New Year was particularly hectic, with Mie entering and exiting the emergency room due to her weakening physical condition as a result of a compromised immune system. Mie often caught colds and spent more days sleeping due to the side effects of anticancer drugs. Meanwhile, Terasu grew up quickly and healthily, weighing over 10 kg, progressing from a new-born baby to an infant. In March 2018, the family travelled to Kyoto to spend some blessed time with friends.

On 3 June 2018, Mizuno's family celebrated Terasu's first birthday at Mie's parents' home. Mie baked a special cake for Terasu. Terasu devoured it, however, Mie could not eat festive meals anymore. On 8 June, Mie was admitted to the hospital due to impaired liver function. Terasu was to spend more time at the infant home and go out only for a limited time when Mizuno went to see Mie at the hospital. On 27 June 2018, the attending doctor described Mie's disease as 'advanced stomach cancer with peritoneal dissemination' in her report during a meeting. He said he could do nothing further. A nurse who had specialised in palliative care joined the meeting. Around this time, Mizuno's work-life balance was disrupted, and he began to hear a ringing sound in his ears and had stomach aches caused by excessive stress.

2) Doing mobile visual ethnography and its variation process

On 28 June 2018, the very next day that Mizuno was told by the doctor that treatment for Mie was futile, Mizuno shared his situation to his sub-supervising PhD student at that time, Ohashi (the first author) and suggested to start a research project on his case. Ohashi was conducting her PhD project based on her interests in people's everyday experiences and practices of mobilities (Urry 2007; Büscher et al. 2011). The objective of her project was to understand and visualise how cross-border migrants in Japan communicate and maintain relationships with their family members abroad and how they live in the transnational lifeworld based on the methodology of visual ethnography (Pink 2013). Before commencing her PhD research project, she had completed a programme in Documentary Filmmaking at a film school. Thus, for her project, she combined her knowledge and skills of documentary filmmaking with visual ethnography methodologies. Ohashi had created a documentary by doing ethnographic fieldwork for over a year with each of her five research participants. In the process, she focused on the use of reflexive, collaborative, and participatory methods (Pink 2013).

As soon as Ohashi heard about Mizuno's situation, she responded with eagerness to start a research project with him. A month after Ohashi was informed of Mizuno's situation, when she had almost finished her doctoral dissertation, she embarked on this new project with Mizuno. The authors called this project 'X'. Neither of them knew how it would evolve; they would just keep working on it even though there was no budget.

Mizuno explained the project to Mie and obtained her permission to take photos and videos, and to use them to produce research-creation. Mie had long been aware of Mizuno's approach to design

research. She had also heard from Mizuno that Ohashi had been making documentary films in her research. On this basis, she agreed to be the subject of their research and did not ask them any questions or make any suggestions about the way in which she would be filmed or the treatment of the photographs and videos.

On 7 August 2018, Ohashi adopted a ‘mobile method’ discussed by Jirón (2011) to understand Mizuno’s everyday life. It is an ethnographic shadowing approach and Jirón (2011) elaborates on how this mobile method is valuable to get closer to people’s everyday experiences and practices of mobilities. Around that time, Mizuno frequently travelled back and forth by car between his home, the university he was working at, the infant home Terasu was living in, and Mie’s hospital. As Jirón (2011) had done with her research participants, Ohashi accompanied Mizuno, observing the way he experienced his journey between his home, university, the infant home, and the hospital and collaboratively reflecting on his experiences. This journey was filmed and photographed during the shadowing process and was reflected collaboratively using the visual images afterwards. In light of this, this method could be called ‘mobile visual ethnography’.

On this day, Mizuno worked at the university campus until noon, and then went to the infant home to pick up Terasu to bring him to the hospital. Mizuno introduced Ohashi to the staff at the infant home as a friend, however, the staff warned that Ohashi should have registered beforehand. As aforementioned, infant homes care for children who cannot live with their families due to various reasons. Thus, visitors are strictly controlled, and only those who are permitted may enter. After leaving the infant home, the authors and Terasu went to the hospital. Ohashi met Mie for the first time. Ohashi became nervous because she did not know how to behave in this peculiar situation, specifically in the patient’s bedroom, with Mie struggling against cancer. Mie greeted Ohashi with a smile and offered her some sweets. She looked skinny and could hardly talk, walk, or move. Ohashi could never bring herself to talk about the research project to Mie. Ohashi also felt uncomfortable pointing her camera at Mie, even though Mie had given permission to film her. The only picture she managed to take in the hospital was of Mizuno, Mie, and Terasu spending time together in a children’s area. Ohashi took this photo because she thought it was valuable as a record for the family, not as a part of the research. Mie appeared to be in pain and experiencing breathing difficulties, while Terasu was lively and playing with toys. After some time, Mizuno let Mie rest and left the hospital to bring Terasu back to the infant home.

Together, Mizuno and Ohashi reflected on the day and discussed how to move forward with the project. Ohashi said it would be difficult for her to directly photograph/film Mizuno’s family—including Mie. After meeting Mie, she thought that Mie had very limited time and physical strength, and that Mie would probably want to focus on spending time with her family too. Ohashi wanted to avoid exhausting Mie’s limited time and strength by staying in the lifeworld of Mizuno’s family for research purposes. Thus, Ohashi asked Mizuno to keep an open-styled ‘time-space diary’ in addition to photos and videos of his daily life. A ‘time-space diary’ is a mobile method that uncovers people’s modes of movement (Haldrup 2011). In the diaries, he was asked to describe time, locations, his activities, and thoughts. Mizuno and Ohashi began to share time-space diaries and visual images taken by Mizuno’s smartphone camera on Google Drive and to have weekly interview sessions to collaboratively reflect on the files.

3) Making an ethnographic documentary film ‘Transition’

In just one year, Mie transformed from an expectant mother, a mother, a cancer patient, to one who needed care. Terasu transformed from a new-born baby, an infant, to a toddler. Mizuno became a father to his son and a caregiver of his wife with cancer. The apartment the family lived in together became a place where Mizuno slept during intervals of coming and going to and from the hospital, infant home, and his workplace after Terasu was born. The apartment also became a place for the whole family to live together for a short period when Mie’s condition was better and was discharged from the hospital. In September 2018, it became a place to care for Mie till the end.

Mie passed away on 19 September 2018, a week after she began her final recuperation at home. Mie’s loss made Mizuno a widower and a single father. Subsequently Mizuno’s role transitioned, and environmental transition also occurred rapidly. Mizuno decided to move to Kyoto City. Kyoto is where Mizuno and Mie had lived for many years, with close friends who could support his future life. He needed a social network, not only for work, but also to raise Terasu by himself while working. After securing a new job, he found a place to live and a nursery for Terasu with the help of friends. Mizuno

and Terasu moved to Kyoto in March 2019. In total, Ohashi and Mizuno had 28 interview sessions from the beginning of the project until Mizuno settled in Kyoto in May 2019.

According to McNiff (2018), artistic expression offers modes of communication that are inaccessible to linear and logical reason and language. The authors felt that by making a documentary film, they could engage and express the rapid life transition experienced by Mizuno. Several documentaries were used as references in the making of the film. One of the most thought-provoking films was 'Tarnation' (Caouette 2003). Caouette composed his film as a collage-like combination of home videos, snapshots that he had taken since he was 11 years old. The film was made using only iMovie, a free video editing software that comes with the purchase of an Apple computer. The authors considered that Caouette's work is important because it shows that filmmaking can be seen as a way of reflecting on one's own lifeworld, and that there are tools that make it possible to visualise one's experiences without specialised skills.

The authors edited the film by using daily photographs and videos taken by Mizuno's smartphone between May 2017 and May 2019. Photographs and videos by Ohashi and Mizuno's friends were also included in certain scenes. Ohashi edited all the materials, referring to the 28 interview sessions they had together, with interpretations of each photograph and video by Mizuno in mind. As Banks (2007: 96) suggested, Ohashi sought to 'work with images and let them speak for themselves as it were, rather than trying to force them to conform to a predetermined intellectual agenda'. To express Mizuno's feelings and texture in his daily life as faithfully and accurately as possible, decisions such as which photographs and videos were used, how long they were used, in which order, if background music was used instead of narration, etc. were made based on the interview sessions. In addition, from the point of view of 'dignity-in-outcome' (Langmann and Pick 2014), careful attention was paid to protect the dignity of the subjects in the film, especially of deceased Mie.

In the editing process, Ohashi shared a rough cut of the documentary with Mizuno and Kato (the adviser of this project) via online communication tools including video calls and messages, and finalised the film based on discussions they had. The film was titled 'Transition'.¹ The film was selected for the IDFA Competition for Short Documentary of the 32nd edition of International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and also for The Japanese Film Festival Nippon Connection 2020 'NIPPON DOCS'.

Analysis of images

The authors analysed the 1,921 photo and video files taken by Mizuno with his smartphone and shared them with Ohashi on Google Drive. Firstly, the subjects of all the files were written down. After that, the background and intention of the shoot were interpreted. By analysing and interpreting the visual images, with reference to diary entries and interview data from each period, it was found that the smartphone camera was used in different modes at five different periods. The results of the analysis are given in the table, and the details are described below.

¹ It is available at a private URL on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/369453515/db2680dff>.

Period	Events during this period	Number of photo files	Number of video files	Modes of the use of smartphone camera
1. From May 2017 to May 2018	-Diagnosis of Mie's stomach cancer -Birth of Mizuno and Mie's son, Terasu	351	68	-Used as a tool for creating family photo albums
2. From June 2018 to 19 September 2018	-Progression of Mie's stomach cancer -Start of continuous use of the infant home -Mie's hospitalisation and discharge -Mie's passing at home	184	61	-Used as a tool for creating family photo albums -Used as a tool for recording the changes in the family's living conditions for ethical reason
3. From 20 September 2018 to early November 2018	-Mie's funeral -Cleaning up the apartment -Administrative procedures after Mie's death -Mizuno's preparation for his new job in Kyoto -Searching for a nursery school for Terasu in Kyoto -Mizuno's participation in an international conference in London	304	52	-Used as a tool for recording administrative procedures of Mizuno's life transitions
4. From mid-November 2018 to December 2018	-Start of Mizuno's treatment at a mental health clinic due to sleep disturbances and malnutrition -Scattering of Mie's ashes in the sea of Okinawa -Preparation for Mie's memorial gathering with friends	129	133	-Used as a tool for Mizuno to understand his own condition
5. From January 2019 to May 2019	-Mie's memorial gathering with friends -Mizuno's job change and move to Kyoto with Terasu	365	274	-Used as a tool for recording the changes in the family's living conditions on the move

TABLE 1: Analysis of visual images recorded by Mizuno's smartphone camera

1) The first period: from May 2017 to May 2018

This period was very difficult for the family when they first discovered Mie's stomach cancer but at the same time the birth of Terasu brought great joy. The smartphone camera was a tool for creating family photo albums. Most of the photos and videos during this period are close-ups and up shots of Terasu. Sometimes Mie, their relatives and friends are also the subjects.

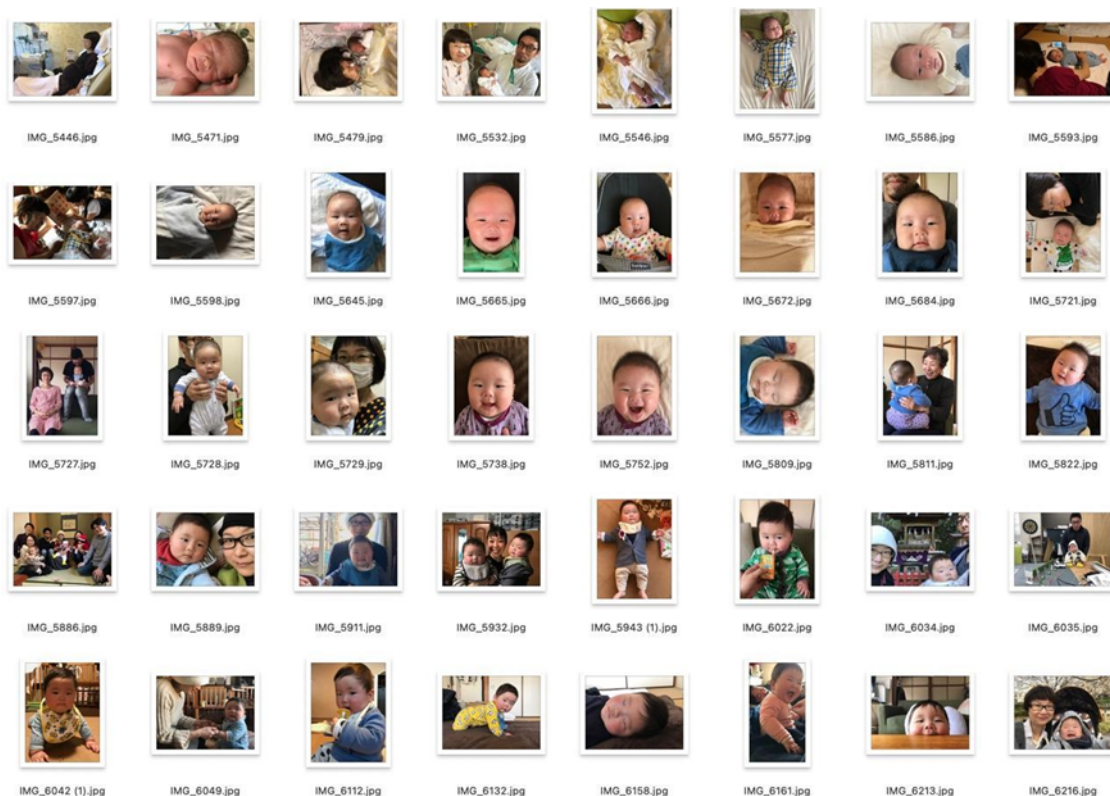


FIGURE 1: Screenshot of the thumbnails of a selection of the photo and video files taken during the first period

2) The second period: from June 2018 to 19 September 2018

By this time Mie's stomach cancer had progressed to a terminal stage and she was repeatedly in and out of hospital. Mizuno left Terasu at the infant home on an ongoing basis and took Terasu with him as

much as possible when he went to visit Mie at the hospital. During this period, Mie spent much of her time in hospital and Terasu in the infant home, while Mizuno was busy working and caring for both Mie and Terasu, shuttling back and forth between the hospital and the infant home.

From this time onwards, together with Ohashi, Mizuno began to consciously observe his own and his family's life as a research subject. The smartphone camera has become not only a tool for creating family photo albums, but also a tool for research. In the previous period, Terasu was the main subject, but in this period there are more photos and videos that show how the family's life has changed as a result of the progression of Mie's stomach cancer. The visual images clearly show that the family has been spending more time in the hospital room. Large cameras are not allowed in the hospital, and the areas where they can use cameras are mainly limited to Mie's private space. The smartphone camera was useful as a compact and mobile tool for research in situations where ethical considerations are required. In addition, Mizuno and Ohashi share the research interest in people's everyday experiences and practices of mobilities (Urry 2007; Büscher et al. 2011), which is also reflected in the photos and videos taken. For example, during this period, Mizuno delivered a variety of food to the hospital room in order to fulfil the wishes of Mie, who was gradually becoming immobile. These foods were photographed.

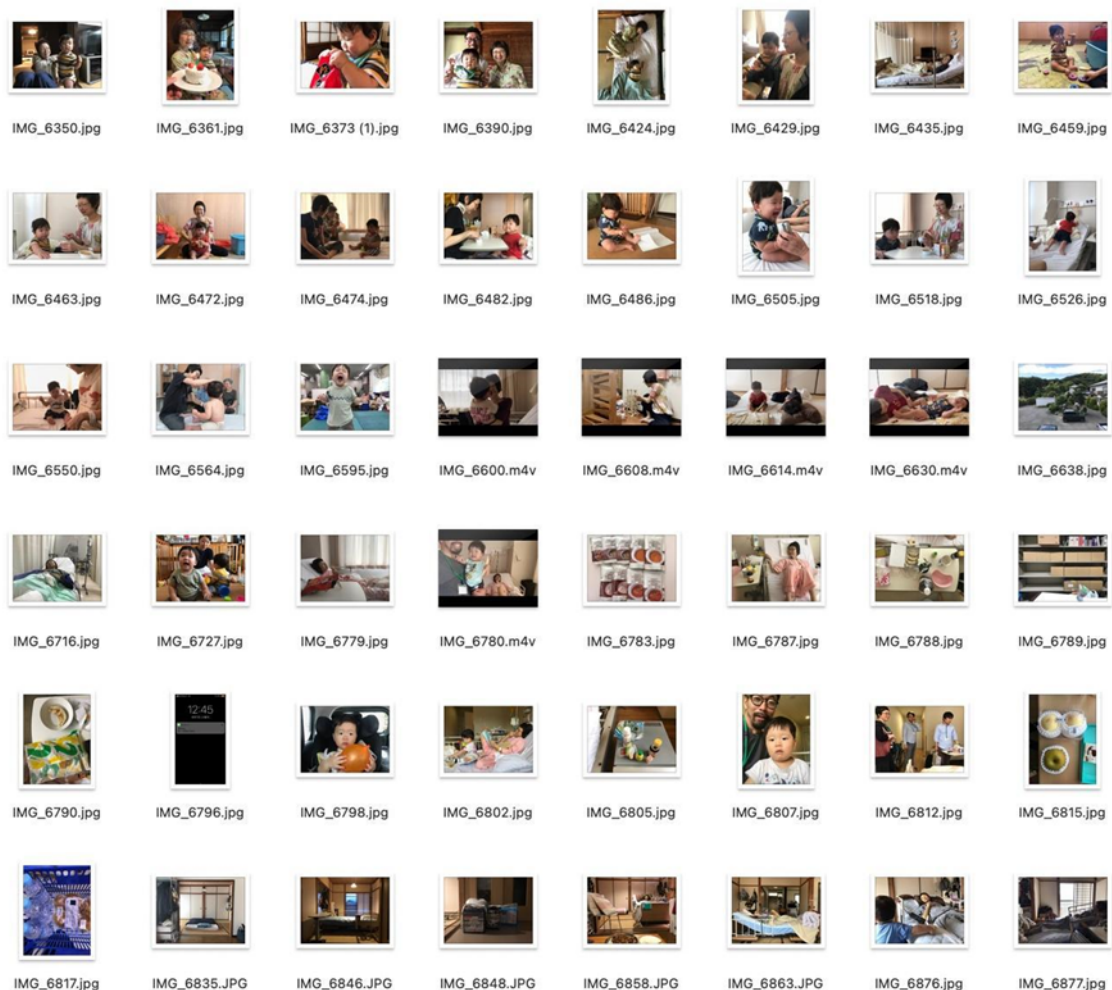


FIGURE 2: Screenshot of the thumbnails of a selection of the photo and video files taken during the second period

3) The third period: from 20 September 2018 to early November 2018

Mizuno's life changed drastically after Mie passed away. During this period, there was no time to grieve. He had to organise the funeral, tidy up the room where Mie had been taken care of, and work hard to complete insurance and municipal formalities. In order to raise Terasu on his own as a single father, Mizuno decided that he needed to move to Kyoto, where many of Mie and Mizuno's mutual

friends live. Mizuno began making preparations to change his job and to move to Kyoto. At the end of this period, he participated in an international conference in London, which was important for Mizuno as a researcher.

During this period, the smartphone camera was not a tool for creating family photo albums. It became a tool for recording administrative procedures of Mizuno's life transitions.

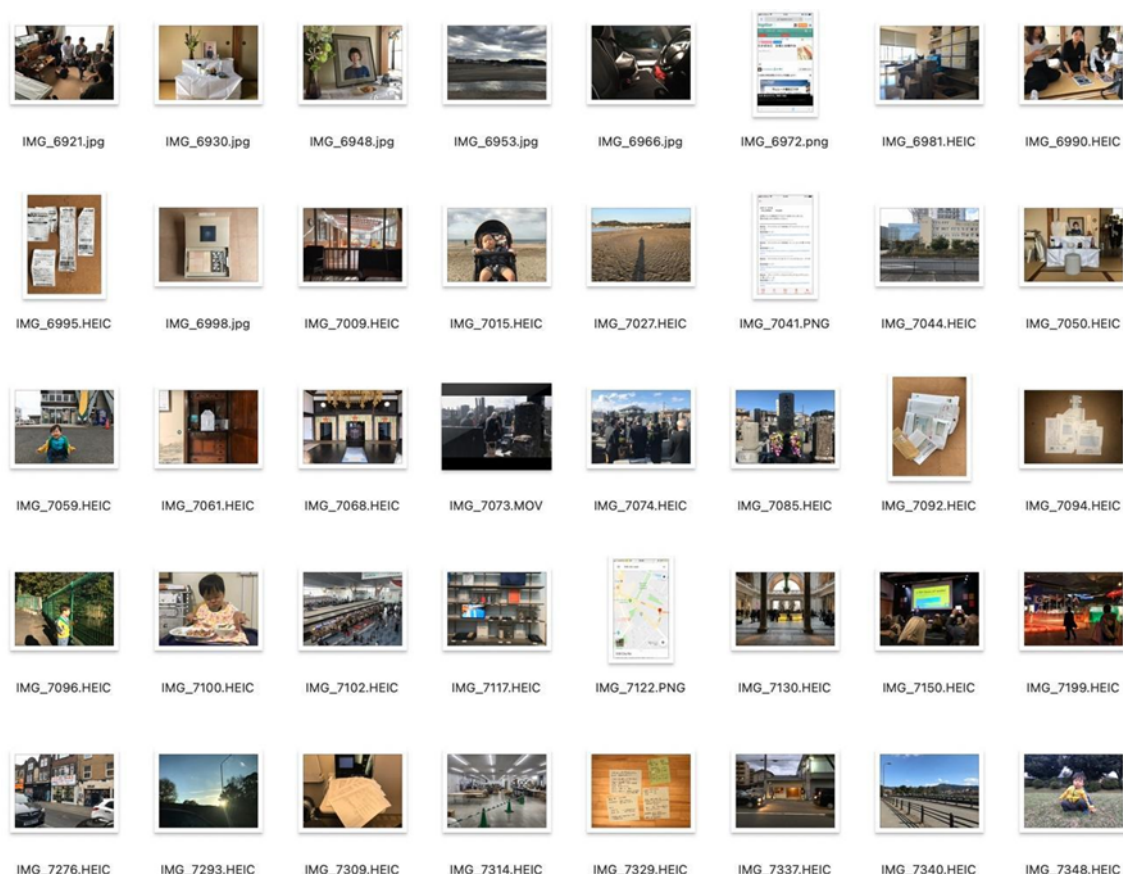


FIGURE 3: Screenshot of the thumbnails of a selection of the photo and video files taken during the third period

4) The fourth period: from mid-November 2018 to December 2018

In the two months immediately following Mie's death, Mizuno was very busy, without stopping, with paperwork, cleaning up the apartment and rebuilding his life. After a short break from his busy schedule, he went to the sea in Okinawa and scattered Mie's ashes there. This was where she had wished to go before her death. It gave him time to face Mie's death. On the day he scattered Mie's ashes, Mizuno took a photograph of himself in his suit reflected in the mirror. It was to record how he had dealt with Mie's death.

The memorial gathering of Mie was to be held at the beginning of the next year. Mizuno and his friends were preparing for it. For the memorial gathering, Mizuno reflected on his memories of Mie, meeting and marrying her, her pregnancy and childbirth, her illness and death. He put these memories into words. The process of looking back and writing about his memories of Mie was a greater emotional burden for him than he imagined. At this time, he was suffering from sleep disorders and malnutrition. This is reflected in the photos and videos taken during this period. The photographs of empty parks and streets at night were taken when he couldn't sleep and went for a walk in the middle of the night. These photographs do not represent the observable events of the time, but rather the condition of his body and mind. The smartphone camera has become a tool for the authors to understand his condition. At an interview session, Ohashi found out about Mizuno's condition and suggested that he go to a mental health clinic. Mizuno followed the suggestion and started to go to a mental health clinic during this period.

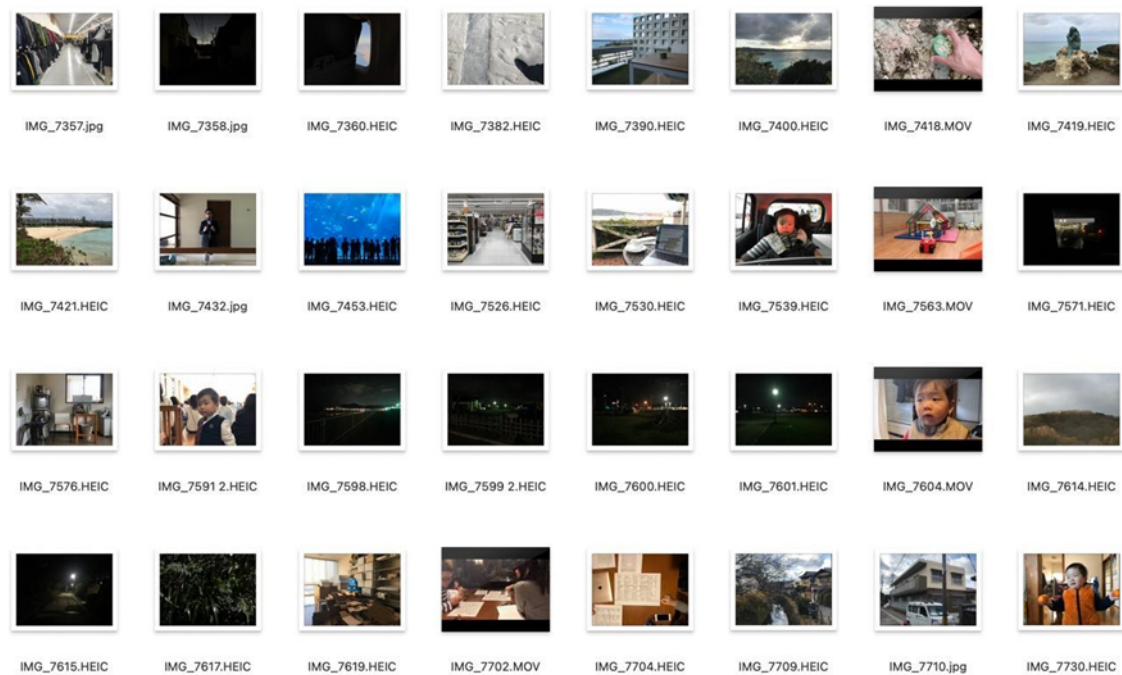


FIGURE 4: Screenshot of the thumbnails of a selection of the photo and video files taken during the fourth period

5) The fifth period: from January 2019 to May 2019

Mie's memorial gathering was held at the beginning of January. Around 200 of Mizuno and Mie's relatives, friends and colleagues attended the gathering. The participants ate a feast together and talked about their memories of Mie. It was also an opportunity to see the supporters of Mizuno and Terasu in their future life. In January, Mizuno confirmed his offer to work at a university in Kyoto from April. Accordingly, preparations were made for Terasu's admission to nursery school and for their move to Kyoto. The photos and videos from this period show Mizuno's preparations to start a new life in a new place, together with Terasu as a single father. The smartphone camera was used as a tool for recording the changes in their living conditions on the move. In Kyoto, Mizuno's workplace, Terasu's nursery school, and their apartment are in close proximity to each other. After moving, Mizuno sold his car and started to travel by bicycle and on foot. Old friends who live in Kyoto have come to support Mizuno in raising Terasu. These are reflected in the photos and videos.

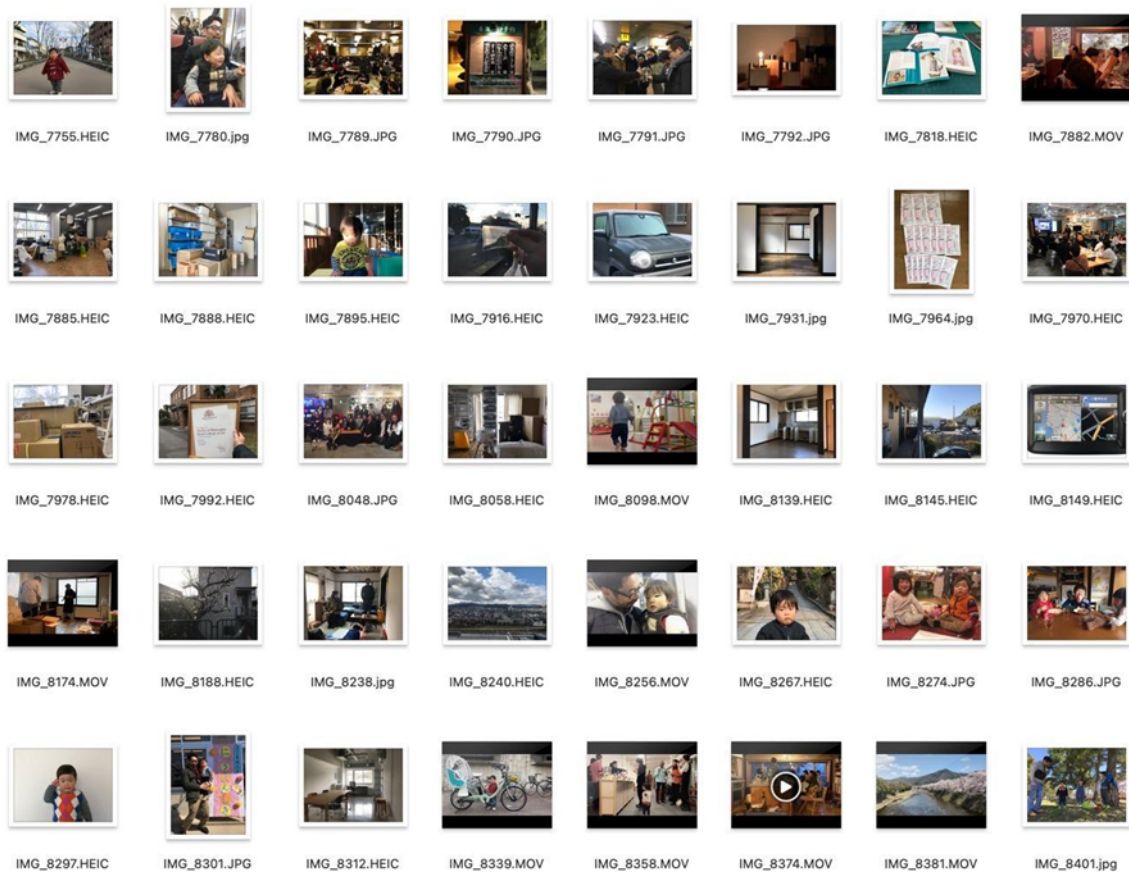


FIGURE 5: Screenshot of the thumbnails of a selection of the photo and video files taken during the fifth period

Findings and implications from the project

In this section, the findings and implications of visualising the experience of life transitions as a family caregiver will be elaborated from the viewpoint of Mizuno, who was both the researcher and subject of the project. There are three main points: the impact on Mizuno as a family caregiver, the impact on his family and lastly, expected impact on society. This paper has been written in the third person so far, but this section will be written by Mizuno in the first person.

1) The impact on Mizuno as a family caregiver

In this project, I was able to understand my own grieving process by objectifying myself in difficult situations. In other words, it became an autoethnography as a process of self-care and recovery. As a collaborative research project, the dialogue with Ohashi helped me to objectify my situation and to gain an analytical perspective. As the focus of the research was not a past event, but an ongoing event that was happening to me, the dialogue also led to new ways of thinking that brought about changes in my situation. This is exemplified by the case described in the fourth period, where Ohashi's advice led me to go to a mental health clinic. My psychological recovery process was accelerated by regular interview sessions, where I shared my lifeworld with another person/researcher and as a result, empathic communication occurred.

In addition, I was able to get feedback from others by showing my own lifeworld as a documentary film. Some of the people who attended the screening shared their own family experiences and bereavement. In this way, empathic communication with others (including strangers) occurred and I was able to reaffirm that bereavement in the family is something that can happen to anyone and is an inevitable event in life.

2) The impact on Mizuno's family

As already mentioned, Mie had given us permission to take photographs and videos and to use them to produce research-creation before she passed away. Mie's permission was based on her understanding of my research; but it was certainly not the only reason. Mie was a writer, illustrator, and editor before she became ill. After she gave birth and found out she had terminal cancer, she started to make a picture book for our son, Terasu. Having worked in the field of visual expression, she wanted to create a medium that would allow her to convey her thoughts to our son even after her death. It was with this in mind that she never once refused or questioned being photographed or filmed in this project. In fact, our son has already watched this film several times. It serves as a medium for him to know how his mother lived after he was born and how she treated and interacted with him in her final years.

3) Expected impact on society

As discussed in the beginning of this paper, the life transitions of family caregivers who became young widowers during the infant-care period of their child(ren) are scarcely documented in the academic realm in Japan. As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the lifeworld of those who became single fathers after the death of their partners, and the necessary social support is not in place. As a single father myself, I found it difficult to receive the social support I required after the death of my partner, and experienced the complicated procedures of private and governmental services related to care and medical insurance. By opening the research-creation of this project to the public, I hope to increase the understanding of this problem and to improve the situation for people who may experience the same.

Concluding discussion

In this paper, the process of how the authors applied multiple methodologies to develop the research project to understand and visualise the life transitions experienced by Mizuno as a family caregiver of a cancer patient, was elaborated. Then, the characteristics of the visual images that Mizuno recorded on his smartphone during the course of the project were analysed. In this project, Mizuno was both the researcher and the subject of the project. He reflected his knowledge and experiences as a researcher in his own behaviour as a research subject. This particular condition has certainly made this project possible in a significant way. However, the authors believe that the findings can be applied to other projects that seek to understand and visualise the details of life transitions experienced by family caregivers. In this final section, the research findings will be used to discuss points that can be applied to other projects.

As already described in detail, in the first period of the project, Mizuno worked alone, using a smartphone camera to record the changes in his family's life. From the second period, the role of the smartphone camera gradually changed as he began to do collaborative research with Ohashi. Beginning from this period, the authors also implemented specific research activities, which were carried out almost every week until the end of the project. By repeating this set of weekly research activities, the understanding of Mizuno's experience of life transitions as a family caregiver was deepened through dialogue. The smartphone camera became an important research tool for recording and sharing both the objective facts about Mizuno's life transitions and his physical and emotional condition while experiencing them. The specific actions entailed in the set of weekly research activities are shown in the diagram so that they can be applied to other projects. To simplify the model, Mizuno's position in the project is referred to as 'participant (research participant)' and Ohashi's position is referred to as 'researcher' in the diagram.

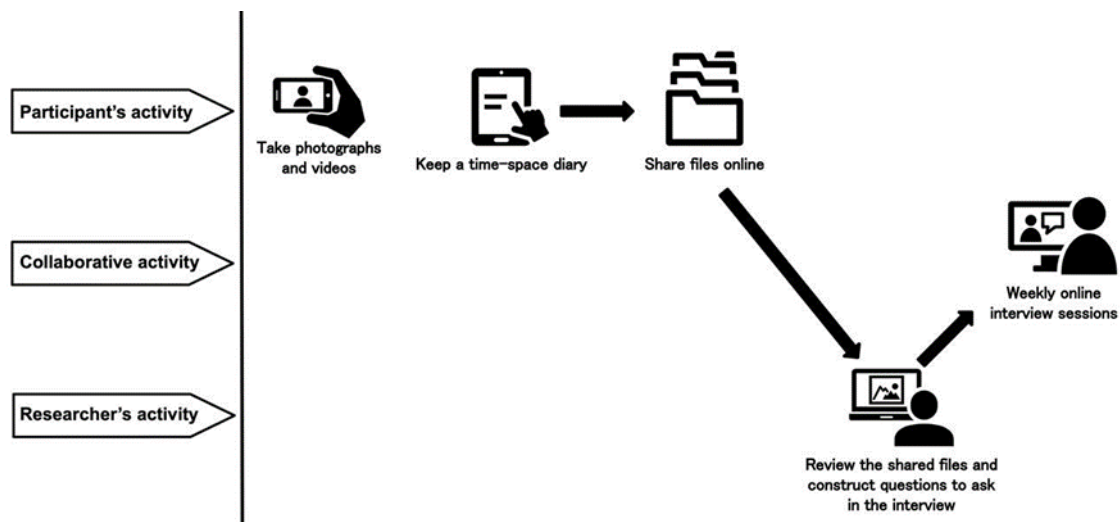


FIGURE 6: Set of weekly research activities to understand the life transitions experienced by family caregivers

Taking photos and videos with a smartphone camera has become an everyday activity for many people. In this sense, the activities shown in the diagram will not be too much of a burden for those who participate in a project. If the researcher prepares in advance a simple diary format and an online folder for sharing photos and videos, this will facilitate the participants' activities and increase the feasibility of the project. As this project has shown, it is difficult for researchers to understand family caregivers' lifeworld by observing and interviewing them in the field because of ethical concerns. This method will help to clarify the family caregivers' lifeworld remotely and in detail.

This project produced 'Transition', a film that was made using visual images shared during the weekly research activities. The process of making the film is shown in the diagram below.

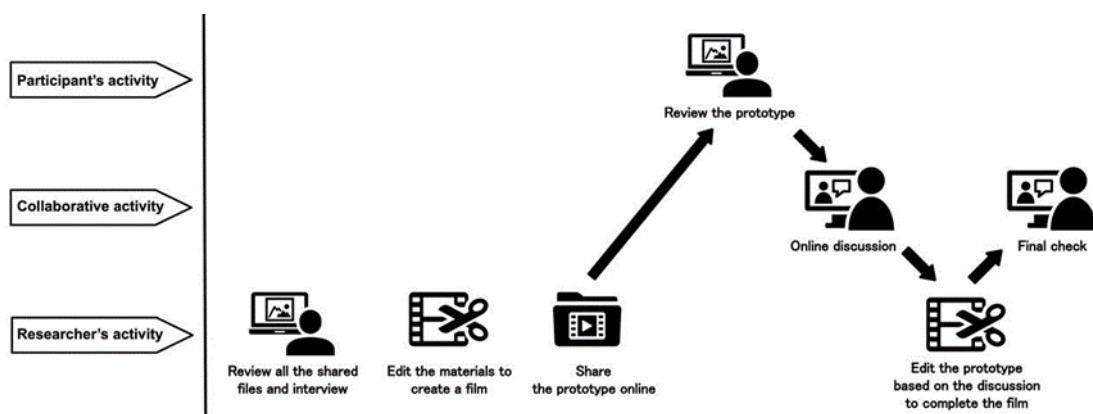


FIGURE 7: Process of making the film 'Transition' using visual images shared through the weekly research activities

In recent years, there have been applications that automatically generate a video of personal memories using photos and videos taken with a smartphone camera. However, these videos generated by such applications are not edited based on a deep understanding of the meaning of each photograph or video. Therefore, they would be incomprehensible to anyone other than those who are close to the owner of the smartphone. As mentioned earlier, the film 'Transition' was selected for the international film festivals. Referring to the two diagrams above (Figure 6, 7), this appears to be due to the fact that the film was made in an interactive and collaborative process as a work to be opened up to others. In addition to screenings at the international film festivals, the authors also organised screenings and workshops in Tokyo. Discussions with the audience covered not only the life transitions experienced by Mizuno as a family caregiver, but also topics such as the design of public services for family caregivers, ethical issues in researching family caregivers, and issues of privacy in photography and film.

In Japan, there are still very few opportunities for family caregivers of cancer patients who have

experienced rapid and harsh life transitions to share and talk about their experiences. People are not only likely to become cancer patients themselves, but even more so to be in a position where they are required to care for a family member who has become a cancer patient. The authors hope that recording and visualising the experiences will stimulate discussion to create a better social system that supports the recovery of family caregivers from such difficult experiences.

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ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS TOWARDS AN ETHICS OF DOCUMENTARY 'PHOTOGRAPHY-MAKING'

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ABSTRACT

An account of some of my experiences with Nadezhda, Henri, and A., is the ground from which I address the encounter with participants within the practice of documentary photography. Approaches to the theory of photography mostly deal with the photograph as an object in relation to its viewing. We look at photographs, we are interpellated by them, we establish relationships with them and their seductions of reality. But how does or should a theory of the ethics of the documentary encounter between practitioner and participant look like? Azoulay calls “the photograph’s illegitimate sovereignty” to its value as a precondition to discuss or understand the event. What happens when a photograph is not made available for us to see? And what about the photographs which are not taken at all? I shift the focus from the photograph as an image to photography as an event. And here, I also make a reversal of terms, from an ethics of visibility to a visibility of ethics. The reversed term addresses the voices which collide in the spaces and in the process of the production of photographs, in conflict or finding ways to collaborate. How can the conditions in which the photographs of others are created be made manifest at the centre of a documentary practice? This question leads me to a definition of the events of ‘photography-making’, and to the application of Levinas’ concepts of ethics to the relationship between practitioner and participants.

KEYWORDS

autoethnography, ethics, documentary, photography-making, storytelling

BIO

I work with documentary photography, portraiture, and printmaking. I am also a researcher. In my practice, I am interested in foregrounding the conditions in which photographs of the other are created, and the participants’ agency in the voicing of their representations. I am also particularly interested in mutually shared narratives, collaborative processes, and the application of anthropological and ethnographic methods to an understanding of documentary practice. I have developed projects across Portugal, Brazil, and Ukraine, where I have worked regularly since 2010. In the aftermath of the Maidan revolution, I engaged with testimonies and stories of people and places for the Beyond the Square project. These were exhibited the following year as part of the visual programme of the CANactions “Urban Studies” festival in Kyiv. I am currently a PhD candidate at the London College of Communication, University of the Arts London. My object of research is the ethics of the encounter with the other within the practice of documentary photography. I have an MA in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography from the London College of Communication, UAL, and a Master’s degree in Design and Visual Culture with specialisation in Photography Studies from the Escola Superior de Design, IADE Lisbon.

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1) Nadezhda

Nadezhda was the first person I met in Kryvyi Rih – a very industrial city in Ukraine, six hours by train east of Kyiv. The time I and my interpreter spent with her did not always involve the presence of a camera. Neither did it carry the expectation of a photograph at all times. On one occasion we met Henri, another participant whom I photographed, at her home. She is the central figure of a local group of mothers. When we met her, she was extremely welcoming and seemed glad to see us in her home. She laid a small table with tea, biscuits, and chocolates, and brought out photos of her sons and several of their certificates and diplomas to show us. She talked about them as she went through the photographs on her lap. I photographed and filmed her.

She talked to us for quite some time about her sons. I was not quite expecting the account she gave and the very visible grief it entailed. She had lost them both to homophobic violence. One was gay, the other was not. I remember becoming very self-aware of the camera in my hand. Of its weight as I held it between our faces. Of my posture. But especially of what my role there should be. What, and how, I should photograph. Or if I should simply put down the camera. I pictured her holding the photographs of her sons and their friends (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1

She appears in the pictures, her gestures are seen, and her voice is heard in the videos, but at the same time her face in front of me is hidden from the shutter.

Later I took her portrait outside, in the empty playground in front of her home (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**

I think this has been the encounter that questioned me the most in my position. Several times, I could not hold the camera up to her.

As I have started to type the words and organise the paragraphs that will come together to constitute this text – I am picturing a parallel here between this space of writing and the gesture of editing photographs, that is, deciding which ones will be shown, in what order, or left out to never be seen – I am again vividly remembering that encounter. It was almost two years ago, but I have thought about it, and the responsibility I had towards Nadezhda, on several occasions since. I will return to this word – responsibility – and its phenomenological and ethical context towards the other, later in this account. For now, I want to address some other initial aspects of my experience facing her with a camera.

Reflecting on that gesture's possibility, to point the camera at Nadezhda in that moment, it carried with it – and carries even today, already far removed from that event – a sense of violence¹ and of the exercise of sovereignty. Perhaps that is why I decided in that initial moment not to include her face in the frame. In a way, it was as if the camera enhanced and solidified, through the noise of the shutter, the violence in her account within her image.

The expression 'sovereignty' is used by Azoulay to denote configurations of control over the political space of photography. She argues that the encounter between the photographer, the photographed person, and the camera, displaces the possibility of any completely sovereign representation any one part might wish to impose. Absolute, or stable control over the reconstructed points of view of photographs is not possible². In this context, introducing dimensions of time and movement to the act

¹ Speaking about the photograph as the result of an encounter where an image of a person is inscribed, Azoulay observes this encounter always involves a measure of violence, even when the participants have fully and explicitly consented to it – “the violence is inherent in the instrumentalization of the photographed person in order to produce an image of him, within which context the photographed person can have as much of a vested interest as the photographer.” (Azoulay 2008:99) This relates to issues of ownership, both the photographed person's material conditions and those that surround the production of the image, and the participant's own intentions, which are left obscured – lacking – in, and by, the photograph.

An additional question can be made of the right to photograph. Azoulay traces the operation of the shutter to a mobilisation of a regime of imperial rights, which presumes the world to be made available to be exhibited to certain audiences. “The violence of forcing everything to be shown and exhibited to the gaze is denied when the right in question is only the right to see. If the right not to exhibit everything is respected, the right to see that endows “everybody” with unlimited access to what is in the world cannot be founded.” (Azoulay 2019:5).

² For Azoulay, photography's unique status lies in that it is the product of an encounter in the course of which, neither the photographer, the photographed person, or the camera, can become an absolute sovereign, “such that even when one of them

of “watching” a photograph, becomes the foundation for her conception of an “ethics of the spectator” – who has the possibility to posit themselves as the addressee of those photographs. This is an ethics which sketches “the contours of the spectator’s responsibility toward what is visible” (Azoulay 2008: 122). The photograph always inscribes something beyond – in excess to – the intentions of each one of its participants. And it is also always lacking. But its excess and lack are not “evenly distributed among the participants in the photographic encounter and cannot be subordinated to the point of view of any single participant” (Azoulay 2012:184). This gap opens the act of watching an image to the possibilities of meaning and intervention. Azoulay is working in the context of a political ontology, where subjects appear as referents of speech, of the gaze, and of the actions, of others, “in which the camera or the photograph are implicated” (Ibidem :28). She defines it as an ontology of “being-together, of an encounter, whose traces the photograph bears and renders present (Ibidem: 121).

With Nadezhda, our presence had been invited, and we shared a common understanding of purpose. Nonetheless, I was acting upon my own set of expectations and objectives for that encounter. At the same time, I was going to take pictures of someone who I did not know before – I was learning from my interlocutor what those objectives I had brought with me should perhaps instead be. They were confronted by the encounter with her perspective, by what she wanted to show, or better, what she wanted or would be willing to make visible. As the photographer, I took control of the framing of the picture, of what would or would not appear inside the frame, and of the moments and the frequency of the shutter’s action³. But these were never complete. From her part, Nadezhda would tell us of certain objects she wanted included, and to be photographed with.

Being in front of Nadezhda with my camera placed a strong questioning to my own self. This was twofold: at the same time to myself as a person who was facing another in their account of their own life – one that entailed deeply painful memories – and as a documentary practitioner who wished to know and represent her story, a story of an other. I wanted to photograph her. I wanted to produce something that I would use in my research, and that would be faithful to the account she wanted – or better, that I asked, and she agreed – to tell us. Or, better still, that would reflect something of our encounter and time together, this would be a more accurate way to put it. Maybe it was precisely that questioning that could open the possibility to know something of her, beyond myself, and to tell something of my experience of that encounter.

The verb ‘placed’, in the previous paragraph, denotes that sense of questioning’s material aspect that I experienced as part of our shared sensory environment. I would like to diverge momentarily and refer to an anthropological understanding of place.⁴ The idea of place as something that is lived⁵ opens the question of how the participants – as a practitioner, I am also a participant – are part of the production of, and present in, the places of photography that they share. In that sense, to talk about the documentary photography encounter is to consider the ways, the mutual understandings, and the environments in which a photographer enters in a relationship with someone with the intention of producing their

seems for a moment to possess the means of production, he or she or it is in fact no less operated than capable of operating.” (Azoulay 2008:27).

³ To use Azoulay’s terminology, I took sovereignty over these aspects. As she observes: “When one of the participants in the event of photography takes sole control over a variable, he effectively designates himself sovereign by virtue of this very control, given that his actions not only affect the photographic object – as property – but affect all of the people involved in its production” (Azoulay 2012:36).

⁴ Reading from Pink, this allows me to conceptualise how participants “are emplaced in social, sensory and material contexts, characterised by and productive of particular power configurations, that they experience through their whole bodies and that are constantly changing (even if in very minor ways)” (Pink 2015:60).

⁵ Casey offers a phenomenological description of place as event – “Rather than being one definite sort of thing – for example, physical, spiritual, cultural, social – a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*.” (Casey 1996:27). Additionally, Ingold conceptualises places as being delineated by movement. “Lives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere. I use the term wayfaring to describe the embodied experience of this perambulatory movement. (...) Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. Places, then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring (...) in short, [they] are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement.” (Ingold 2011:245-246) As such, they “do not so much exist as *occur* – they are topics rather than objects, stations along ways of life. Instead of saying that living beings exist in places, I would thus prefer to say that places occur along the life paths of beings” (Ingold 2008:1808).

representation through photographs. This implies a process, the experience of multiple ongoing aspects of being subject to power, and diverse conflicting or cooperating expectations over their results.

To begin delineating an approach to an ethics of documentary ‘photography-making’, I first would like to move the spectators⁶ – and, for now, also the photographs⁷ – to a position of hypotheticals that are imagined by those taking part. There are participants, whether they willingly came forward into this stage, or whether they unwittingly had it thrust upon them. There is a camera. There is a place, an arena where variable conditions of speaking are given or allowed to these participants. In this perspective, I will consider the practitioner who stands face to face in a relationship with a photographed person.

Levinas calls ethics that which challenges me before the other – “We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics” (Levinas 1991:41). My encounter with the other questions and makes demands on my own self. Their face offers a refusal to be contained – “it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed” (Ibidem: 184). Their transcendence – their independent existence beyond my own self and my own context of understanding of the world – calls my experience into question. Their address questions my spontaneity.⁸ In this sense, my recognition and response to the other is the ground from which all other questions can be spoken to. Levinas adds that “The welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge” (Ibidem :41). Levinas distinguishes between a type of process that reduces the other to my own sphere of comprehension, and another which is “a relation with being such that the knowing being lets the known being manifest itself while respecting its alterity” (Ibidem :40). My encounter with the other, as an ethics, is a movement which goes against the set of totalizing concepts within myself, within my thought.

In this sense, ethics is not a prescriptive approach. It does not become a set of *a priori* rules, or something to be judged and evaluated in a context of spectatorship. It exists in conversation with others. Levinas places the act of knowing as something that is already in dialogue. To understand the other is already to have him as an interlocutor – “the two relations are merged. In other words, addressing the other is inseparable from understanding the other. To understand a person is already to speak to him” (Levinas 1998:6). Ethics is thus instead both a foundational relation, through its expression in language and the address of the other, and it precedes ontology – “preexisting the disclosure of being in general taken as basis of knowledge and as meaning of being is the relation with the existent that expresses himself; preexisting the plane of ontology is the ethical plane (Levinas 1991: 191).

It is relevant to note that while I have been intentionally talking about the practitioner as a participant – and this is useful for conceptualising their movements and mutual engagement within the environment of the encounter – I will from now on differentiate between them. When I describe being before Nadezhda and being questioned in my own self, this relation is asymmetrical⁹. She also experienced me as an other but, phenomenologically, I am speaking of how she constituted ‘my’ experience as a challenge upon myself. More importantly, it starts to make a dimension of the practitioner’s responsibility for the participant clearly visible within this text.

⁶ To clarify any possible ambiguity of meaning, throughout the text I use the term ‘spectator’ in the usual sense of those who view and enter in relationships with photographs, not as other eventual parties that might be physically present when the act of photography is taking place.

⁷ As Azoulay observes, it is the presence of the camera, and the idea of the possibility of the image, not the actual production of a photograph, that effects the event. “The camera has the capacity through its sheer presence to set all of these effects in motion without even taking a single shot. Nor are such influences contingent on the actual pictures produced.” (Azoulay 2012:30).

⁸ To approach the other is to put in question my “spontaneity as a living being,” that is to say, my domination over things, “to which everything is permitted.” (Levinas 1991:283).

⁹ Crowell asserts that “the asymmetry in question is irrevocable, since it is a phenomenologically necessary feature of how the Other is constituted in my experience as command and obligation.” (Crowell, 2015:579). He further notes that it is not necessary to understand the other has having their own sense of ethical responsibility. Because this is a phenomenological argument, it “starts with, and remains within the scope of, first-person experience. From that perspective, I do not need to ‘know’ anything about the objective features of the one who issues the command. To say that the face is not perceived is to deny that *any* objective properties underlie my response to the command.” (Crowell 2015:586).

2) A.

A.¹⁰ works at a steel production factory. He is gay but not openly as he would certainly face heavy discrimination in his workplace. He enjoys a good relationship with his parents though. He is a participant but does not want his image associated with the mention of LGBT issues, which I do talk about when I discuss the context of these encounters. So, I am not showing it at all. Some time after we took his portrait, we had a drawing done from one of his pictures. It is rich in details, but his face is not visually identifiable there, so I use it instead of the actual photograph. The technique used was a line drawing, which uses only contours without any shading or *chiaroscuro*. In a way, it is a trace of a trace.

As for the photograph itself, I did a large print of it, and I offered it to him. He also has a digital file, but he is not sharing it anywhere. So, it has only been seen by me and my interpreter, by him and his mother – and I would assume also by his father, whom I did not meet – and an illustrator I had also done a portrait of, and who did the drawing from the photograph. The ownership over the availability and visibility of this photograph belongs to him.

Although I have shown this drawing on some occasions when talking about these encounters, I am not doing it here now. I could also describe some of the details of the living room where we took his portrait, describe the environment that surrounded us, but I will leave that empty. I want to visually emphasise the question of what happens when a photograph is not made available to be seen. This interrogation can also conceptually be extended to the photographs who are not taken at all, when the camera's shutter is not pressed. Azoulay calls the photograph's 'illegitimate sovereignty' to its value as a precondition to discuss or understand the event. There is a parallel between these two actions and decisions not to render something visible, although the second is anchored in the photograph's indexical authority, and the first in its ownership.¹¹

The question of ethics in documentary photography is situated in the field of the visible. We look at photographs, we are interpellated by them, we establish relationships with them and their seductions of reality – Cowie relates documentary with the desire for a reality which is accessible and made available for review, that is, "of reality beyond oneself but graspable and available to be held in an image" (Cowie 2011:8). Photography satisfies the desire for an ordering of the images of the world, produced as a signification through which the observed can be integrated into a field of knowledge and power. The spectator is interpellated by documentary and placed as a subject of knowledge. "At the same time, as spectators, we address the documentary with our desire, demanding knowledge: we want it to know the world for me and, therefore, know me. It is a demand for identity" (*Ibidem*:103)

But how does or should a theory of the ethics of the photographic encounter look like? I am shifting the focus from spectatorship to making, from the photograph as an image to photography as an event. And here, I also want to make a reversal of terms, from an ethics of visibility to a visibility of ethics. The reversed term addresses the voices which collide in the space and process of 'photography-making', in conflict or finding ways to collaborate.

In that sense, my definition of the events of 'photography-making' are the encounters which are constituted by the participants' movement towards their perceived and desired potential of a picture, within the environments of their ongoing address and response. This allows for encounters where photographs are not produced by a camera, or where the actual camera might not be present at all.¹² The interpretation of the event as a movement starts before and continues after the actual perceived capture of any individual picture.

¹⁰ 'A.' is not the initial of his real name. I'm using it merely because it is the first letter of the alphabet, both Latin and Cyrillic. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to identify him through his first name only – which he has told me to go ahead and use. Nonetheless, I decided to also hide his name in this text.

¹¹ Azoulay describes two principles that sustain this privilege that is added to the photograph: its interpretation as a testimony connected solely to what was in front of the lens when the shutter was pressed, "so as to say, "This is X," as if it were possible to cut the event generating the photograph into two", and the "identification of ownership of the means of production of photography with ownership of the photograph as such," so that the owner possesses the sole authority to determine the availability of the image for the event of photography to continue to unfold (Azoulay 2012:33).

¹² This draws from Azoulay's view of the photographic event as having two different modalities, the first "in relation to the camera or in relation to its hypothetical presence," and the second "in relation to the photograph or in relation to the latter's hypothetical existence" (Azoulay 2012:35). I am considering only a considerably narrow subset of what this description encompasses, though.

3) Henri

Thinking on how I should give an account of my encounters with Henri, the most vivid image that comes to my mind is of his often very strong and intense gaze, and the controlled and self-directed posture that he assumed in front of the camera. As I navigate through my notes and memories, I have this mental picture of someone who was very aware of how he wanted to show himself. I had interpreted this as something that comes from his public work as an activist and human rights educator. I still think so. During our photographic encounters, I remember noticing how he was always paying attention to small details, both symbolic and scenic.

I wanted to represent him. To take his pictures, to record him. My actions, gestures, my operation of the camera, were my movements towards my desire that in that encounter some pictures would bring together a statement that would tell something of his story – to know something of him through representing him. But I also felt he was very deliberately presenting and representing himself. Very shortly after we started photographing, I already had a sense that he was aware of his own posture in relation to the style and characteristics of the image that would be produced at any moment, to the background. As we were photographing, he would comment on this as he posed. “This will be a good sitting portrait”, he said at one point, facing the camera with his body at an angle, one hand on the cup of tea, the other resting on the table. He gestured me to wait while he placed and adjusted a wristband with the pride flag colours. This was very interesting for me. I wanted participants to take as much control over these events to themselves as they were willing or able to.

I met Henri and his mother, Tanya, through Nadezhda. Our first encounter was at Nadezhda’s home. She had told my interpreter that she had invited them over. It was better we met them there because they had been having some renovations at their house and they would not be very happy to have someone taking pictures there at that time. I felt disappointed to hear about this though. I did not want to photograph them at Nadezhda’s place.

Our second encounter was later the same day. He had gone to put up a small tent booth at the park in front of one of Kryvyi Rih’s shopping areas. He was doing some public surveys for his organisation and had asked if I would be interested to photograph there. I imagined doing some reportage style photography, picturing his work. He was already working when I arrived. It was a very cold end of the afternoon, with a harsh freezing wind. But our discomfort was not just due to the weather. I felt quite uneasy. There were a few people standing at a small distance, observing. A woman he was talking to when I approached became very angry when she spotted the camera. She spoke no English, and my Russian was inadequate, so my interpreter had to assure her I was not photographing her. There is great hostility to LGBT issues and activism in Ukraine. Henri asked me to take a photo just of himself and his mother, and afterwards invited us to his home, which was in an apartment block five minutes away. Walking along the backyards behind the buildings heading to his place, he told us that he has a keychain he ordered online with a panic button that emits a very loud alarm if he ever finds himself in some trouble. He had already had to use it before.

Because of renovations at their apartment, the kitchen was the only place where we could photograph. It was very small, so I hardly had any place to move. I just huddled in one of the corners. He prepared some very fragrant herbal tea, telling us that he had been learning to cook and was becoming pretty good at it. He joked that since he was not going to marry a girl that would cook nice food for them, he might as well learn to do it himself. He went to pick up a pride flag to hang behind him and sat with his mother while we talked (Figure 3).

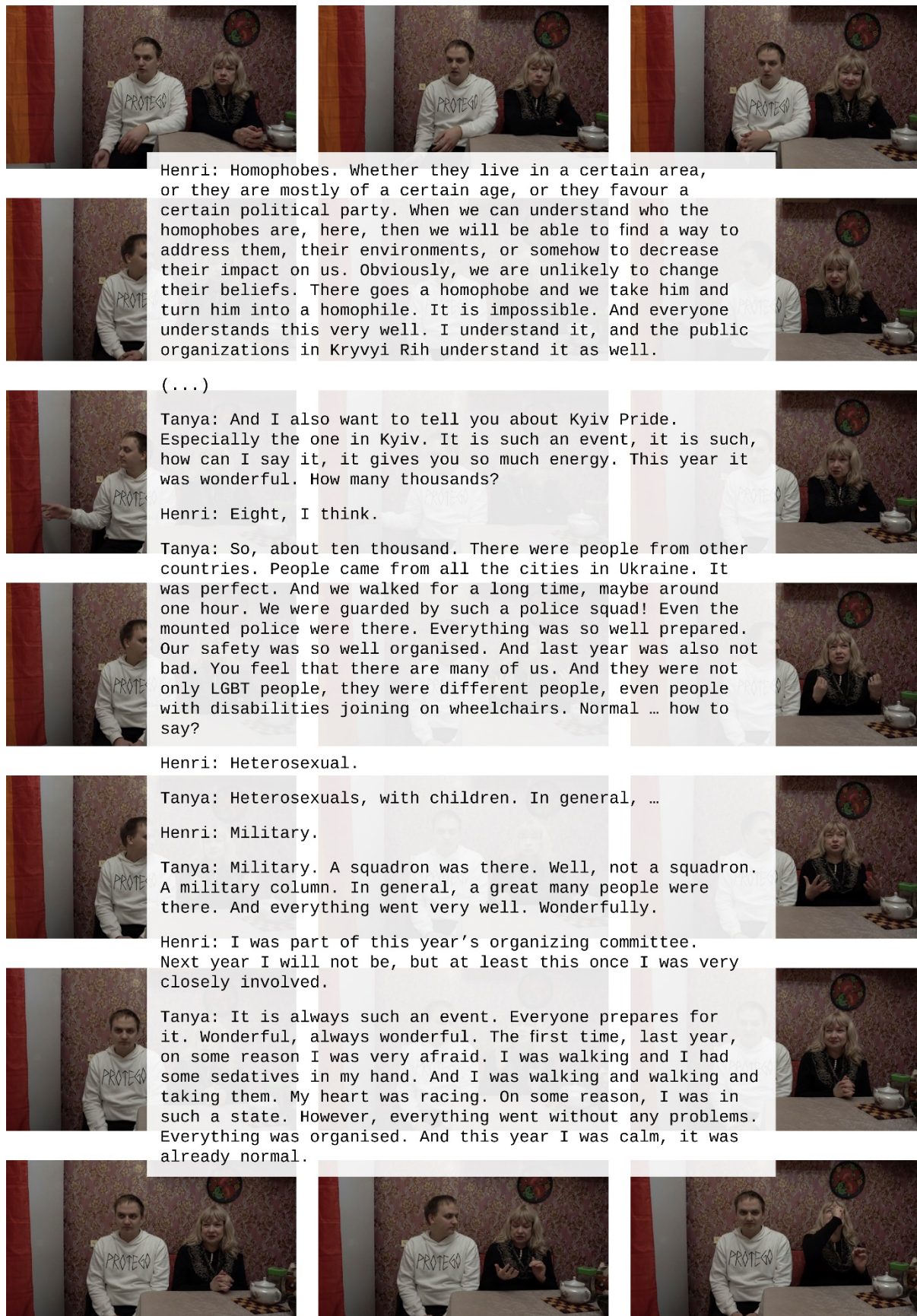


FIGURE 3

His identity as a LGBT activist is very important to him, and one that he wanted to state, to reaffirm, and to project as a fundamental part of how he was represented. But also, his relationship with his mother which, at first, I overlooked. He told me that my selection was “quite good, I would say even excellent” (Figure 4).



FIGURE 4

But the picture he called my attention to was one I had not included in my first selection, his portrait with his mother holding his arm (Figure 5).



FIGURE 5

Methodologically, this interests me particularly. It is not simply about a selection of images, which in itself is never simple, or neutral, at all. It shows what Henri thought and said about the way I pictured him,

about the story I told about him. It is about how his voice impacts what I tell about him in my own voice. Feld, talking about his field experiences while doing his ethnographic work, discusses his concern with the notion of authoritative representation – “the power to control which voices talk, when, how much, in what order, in what language” – and describes ‘dialogic editing’ as a form of discourse to speak to it.¹³ I have applied it, as a method, to the context of documentary photography, in my own relationship with the participants with whom I have been working with in the past two years. Here, Henri’s address within the subsequent encounter – his view on the way I was showing him in those pictures – again challenged and refocused my own account.

His mother is looking at him, and you can see in the way she is holding him, and in her expression, that she is proud of him. And I realised that I was not telling that. In the photographs I had selected, I was not speaking to that important element of his story that he wanted to be told. He wanted to show his mother as his family.¹⁴

These movements can be understood narratively, highlighting the issue of self-representation against the set of agencies that produce the environment of the encounter. Henri addressed me in his ongoing self-narration towards his perceived idea of how he appears – and wanted to appear – to others.¹⁵ This manifests itself in the way sovereignty and control over the various aspects of the encounters can be differently shared at any given moment. One of the initial questions that I then continuously asked myself, throughout these encounters with Henri and other participants, was about my own relation to those various aspects of sovereignty. That is to say, about the extent of my exercise of an authoritative voice, which I wanted to reflect upon. It was not so much only a question of what control the person I was photographing had over the ongoing conditions of their representation, but also what they perceived themselves to have, and even what they actually wanted to take. The movements that constituted the different places of our encounters are examples of effecting those conditions. Henri called me to photograph him while he was doing public surveys, and thus set a scene for those photographs. Later, when he invited me – and my camera – to his home, he was again constituting the place for our photographic encounter.

4) A., part 2

I met with A. and his mother the next time I returned to their city, to review the photos we had done with them before. They had already seen them. I had sent them a small selection by email not long after our first meeting. But I had taken a binder with several printed images with me, so that we could just go over them as we talked. On that day, they were going out for a walk so they invited me to meet them outside. This time, I did not take my camera. To me, this was as much a photographic encounter as our previous one, but I had no intention to produce any new actual photographs. My plan was to talk about my edit and, more importantly, I wanted to hear more in detail about their thoughts on our previous encounter and the resulting work. I had some delays, the address they gave me was almost on the other side of the city from where I was, and it was a long taxi ride, so I arrived rather late, which I was stressed about. They had told me to catch up with them at a park by the river. My interpreter was also there with us. It was a busy day at the park – many young couples, families with children, and wedding parties taking photographs. We walked a few minutes to find a quieter place under some shade, to sit and talk.

Towards the end of our conversation, I asked A. and his mother how they viewed the conditions of his participation. Some of the issues I wanted to touch upon included why they agreed to participate, what control they felt they had in the way we worked, and over the photographs, and the notion of consent. For me, this was especially relevant, taking in account the limited ways the photographs could ever be used,

¹³ Feld relates the dialogic dimension in his work to “what Kaluli and I say to, about, with, and through each other; with developing a juxtaposition of Kaluli voices and my own”. And he gives a definition of dialogic editing as “the impact of Kaluli voices on what I tell you about them in my voice; how their take on my take on them requires reframing and refocusing my account” (Feld 1987:191).

¹⁴ Henri’s mother had told me and my interpreter, on a different occasion, that his father had not accepted the fact that he was gay, and they separated. After that, Henri had his own name legally changed.

¹⁵ Cavarero foregrounds the question ‘who are you?’ to a “*narratable self*, immersed in the spontaneous auto-narration of memory” and in their relation to their appearance to others in the world. It is not necessary that a “personal memory be explicitly solicited in its autobiographical exercise, that is, memory need not make of itself an active remembering. The narratable self finds its home, not simply in a conscious exercise of remembering, but in the spontaneous narrating structure of memory itself.” (Cavarero 2000:67) This is further emphasized in her assertion that “at once exposable and narratable, the existent always constitutes herself in relation to an other.” (Cavarero 2000:74).

and the very real and significant potential of risk for him, because of the topics we were engaging in. He told us about a previous bad experience he had had with the use of some pictures where he appeared. I think it is highly relevant, so I will tell it also here.

A. had previously volunteered with a local nongovernmental organisation which, one year, decided to organise a flash mob to mark the international day against homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. They organised the release of rainbow-coloured balloons to the sky. There was a photographer from that organisation taking pictures that day, and he asked the volunteers if they minded that he was there, to which everyone casually replied it was ok. They had thought the pictures were just meant for an internal record of the event. But that organisation later printed a magazine about LGBT issues to be distributed to other Ukrainian organisations within the same area of intervention. Without their knowledge, A. was part of a group of people who were visible in a photograph that was featured in the cover. They only found out about it when they were asked for help to distribute the magazine and saw themselves on the cover. For him, it was a moment of shock.

He had said to them that he didn't mind that they were taking photographs, but they did not discuss with him if, and where, they could be used in the future. It went completely out of control. He told us that period was very stressful for him. The photo had been taken from afar, and the faces could hardly be made out, but nevertheless he was afraid that someone who knew him personally might recognise him. The other volunteers that also appeared in that photograph shared his shock and concern, but they could do nothing about it. A few thousand copies had already been printed and sent out. Luckily, that he knows about, no one did recognise them.

So, I returned to the question of why they had agreed to let me photograph them. My own position was very clear to me. The experience of working with them had provided me with very interesting insights, not only about them, but about my own photographic practice. It gave me material for research. My objectives did not relate to his photographs in themselves. They would not be, and are not, available to be shown. But I knew I benefited from it, from what they gave me. Both him and his mother then offered me an explanation that left me momentarily at a loss. They simply said, "we trust you". Nothing more.

I felt the weight of that word – "trust" – on me. It hit me with a sense of guilt. But, in this case, it was not a guilt in the meaning of an assignment of culpability, or a reprimand I directed at myself. On the contrary, in an ethical sense, it meant a demand. But this is not a violent demand, it does not offend my freedom, "it calls it to responsibility and founds it" (Levinas 1991: 193).

It is relevant here to note some interpretations of Levinas' description of the relation between myself and other, as a responsibility. Several authors have commented on the heaviness of his conception of ethics' demand on the knowing subject. Cooper, in her analysis of French documentary filmmaking, remarks that Levinas' "ethical position itself is set up as extremely uncomfortable, even though this is registered as discomfort with positive, uplifting benefits" (Cooper 2005: 23).

It is a permanent questioning that never allows the subject to settle. She views this as "the fundamental starting point for the rupture of totalizing thinking that takes us beyond ourselves, by opening to the infinite and, therefore, to others" (Cooper 2010: 58). Critchley, on the other hand, centres his analysis on the notion of trauma. It is a traumatic demand – "something that comes from outside the self, the irruption of a heteronomous fact that can strike without warning". It comes from outside, but "leaves its imprint within the subject". The relation to the other is thus the "experience of a responsibility that persecutes me with its sheer weight" (Critchley 2012: 54-56).

Piotrowska, in her investigation of the ethics of documentary film, reaches a – in my view rather pessimistic – conclusion that Levinas' paradigm puts "extraordinary pressures on the encounter", and the filmmaker's pursuit "will almost automatically, inevitably and perhaps unconsciously put the Other in danger. It might even indeed be that it is close to impossible to make documentary films and be ethical towards the Other" (Piotrowska 2014: 214). Finally, Crowell, confronting and objecting to Sartre's idea of shame as the original experience of the Other as another subject, asserts Levinas' phenomenological motivation

It is not because the Other is another consciousness like myself that I encounter the Other-as-subject in the form of a judgment that objectifies me affectively as shame. Rather, it is because I experience myself as judged – that is, in shame acknowledge the arbitrariness, the 'unjustified' character, of my freedom – that there is an Other for me, a 'face'. The reversal lies in the fact that, for Levinas, I can only attain to the phenomenon of the Other, radical alterity, if I acknowledge a *command* (Crowell 2015: 578).

This command, one that is inherent in the possibility of risk for A., highlights my ongoing and infinite responsibility towards him. My responsibility towards the participants does not only pertain to the moment of the release of the shutter, when the photograph is produced. Nor only to any of the possible subsequent ‘photography-making’ events that might occur between us. It stays – will stay – with me throughout all those photographs’ lives.¹⁶

Before we finished our conversation that day, A.’s mother also had one last question for me. She asked me why I liked that particular portrait I had chosen. It was an interesting question. I hadn’t thought before to verbalise why I had selected that image. I was not expecting that she would, in a way, reverse back to me the question that I had been putting to them. I mentioned some of the formal aspects that I thought worked well in the picture, but for me the point was that it was an image where I saw no tension, both in himself and between him and his environment. There was a sense of calmness and belonging in his expression and posture, in the way he was standing in that place. It was calm and confident. She replied that she saw the same thing, that she looked at her son, in that photograph, and saw a self-sufficient and confident person. She added: “My opinion is the same, our opinions agree, we understand each other”.

I was relieved.

5) Epilogue

“In this world where violence and justice are unequally distributed, struggles over narrative agency are struggles over the possible” (Meretoja 2018: 346). Reaching for a conclusion, I return now once more to reflect on my act of writing. The thoughts and choices that it embodies and represents also carry with them an idea of purpose. When I use the word ‘photography-making’, for instance, my intention is to highlight the relationship between practitioner and participant in their act of doing. It is a gesture to position ethics as the centre and the ground of that relation. Ethics then becomes something concrete, tangible, and emplaced, that is constituted by the encounter with the other, and is participated in. It questions what it is to know the other, to tell the other, to tell a story of the other, which is integral to the definition of documentary I am alluding to.

I am considering documentary as the representation of others. It is a kind of ‘story-telling’ of an other, and here I separate the ‘story’ and the ‘telling’ components of this word purposefully. This is to highlight both the self of the story and the voices which speak. In this sense I also particularly like Minh-ha’s notion of ‘speaking nearby’ (Minh-ha 1999: 218).¹⁷ I find it quite poetic in its formulation, but it relates to a very practical stance. It is an invitation to position one’s voice close to the voice of the other, as opposed to capturing it and speaking “about” or in-stead.

I am also employing concepts and methods from anthropology and ethnography to engage with, and write about, documentary practice. I have already referred to them in the previous sections. It is not the object of this writing, nonetheless, it is probably appropriate here to make a very brief reference to some of the more recent discussions on the ethics of visual research within these fields. In his survey of contemporary debates, Clark highlights the questions of consent, privacy or confidentiality, and ownership, as being fundamentally linked.¹⁸ He discusses ethics in a relation between an institutional and

¹⁶ For Levinas, this responsibility is not an act of choice that I make, it does not originate in my decision, “the unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a “prior to every memory,” an “ulterior to every accomplishment” (...) prior to or beyond essence.” (Levinas 1991b:48). He reasserts this idea as a proximity – “The face of a neighbour signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility, preceeding every free consent, every pact, every contract. It escapes representation” (Ibid., p. 128).

¹⁷ Speaking from the field of documentary film, Minh-ha raises the concept of ‘speaking nearby,’ to be applied not only to filmmaking but also to writing. She speaks about it as something that “is not just a technique or a statement to be made verbally. It is an attitude in life, a way of positioning oneself in relation to the world.” She understands this as a voice that reflects upon itself and positions itself close to the other. It does not appropriate them to speak “about” them, and it is continuously opening itself in moments of transition, layers, and forms of indirectness. She defines it as “a speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it.” (Minh-ha 1999:218).

¹⁸ Clark points out that the question of ownership is “not simply about determining who has legal ownership, but also about who can consent to the inclusion of images in research, and about who has a say in how images are used” (Clark 2012:23).

a ‘situated’ approach.¹⁹ This is also addressed by Wiles and Prosser (Wiles, Clark, and Prosser 2011). They discuss consent, anonymity, and the dissemination of images, and understand these issues as something that is situated within a series of contexts and dialogues. Pink calls visual ethnography an ethical practice.²⁰ She considers a ‘future-focused’ idea of responsibility which is entailed when a research practice is part of processes of change (Pink 2021: 51). Eglinton²¹ looks at a set of ethical challenges, and analyses reciprocity and reflexivity in the context of her work with marginalised young people, on their use of visual representations. Thinking of reflexivity and in the context of working with others, I find Ingold’s assertion that we always need to consider “the challenges they present to our assumptions about the ways things are, the kind of world we inhabit, and how we relate to it” (Ingold 2018: 17) to be especially relevant.

In this text, I have applied a Levinasian ethics to documentary ‘photography-making’, which I have approached through these four small accounts from the field. This has allowed me to describe three principal movements. First, the challenge that the encounter with the other, and their alterity, places upon the practitioner – a questioning of myself. Second, the placing of the desire and possibility of knowing the other within the scene of address, as first an ethical gesture. Third, the founding of the practitioner’s – “infinite” – responsibility for the participant.

Regarding the latter, it is important to note that it also relates to the issue of consent. I have not discussed consent within documentary practice – a complex subject in itself – in this text. But the idea of an infinite responsibility, which precedes any decision, pact, or contract, positions the practitioner in a role of an obligation towards the participants, beyond any institutional context. This reflects itself on the ongoing conversations between practitioner and participants around consent. Even when the risks – present and potential – are well understood between me and the participants, and there is a willingness to share them, to accept a risk for the sake of a common goal, in the end, I am the practitioner. I have an ongoing responsibility for them which I cannot escape.

I have also decided, in this text, not to confront a Levinasian approach to ethics with psychoanalytic thought. This has been previously explored both in a philosophical context and in the context of documentary film theory.²²

There is a parallel between the theory and canons of a given discipline or practice, and my role as a documentary photographer in the field. We both become apparatuses and embodiments of positions of power with all their historically attributed imperial rights. In photography, there are conditions that command

what sort of things have to be distanced, bracketed, removed, forgotten, suppressed, ignored, overcome, and made irrelevant for the shutter of the camera to function, as well as for a photograph to be taken and its meaning accepted (Azoulay 2019: 2).

I do not know the extent to which a complete refusal or sharing of this power is materially possible. But that is not the question I am asking when I look to an ethics of photography-making. It is instead a question about my relationship with the other, and the conditions of our encounter that we experience in different ways and from different perspectives.

In that sense, my own autoethnographic voice positions me within the process of photography-making and is an attempt to make visible, unsettle and subvert an authoritative voice attributed to the photographer. It calls a reflexive challenge upon myself as a practitioner, and on the visibility of the exercises of sovereignty over the places of speaking and telling within photography.

¹⁹ Decisions about the issues previously mentioned, as well as others, run throughout research practice, and in particular social, political, and cultural contexts. Clark argues that a situated approach enables researchers to make informed decisions in collaboration with participants and in consideration of those contexts. (Clark 2012:28-29).

²⁰ For Pink, visual ethnography is an ethical practice “in its approach to research and in our engagements with participants in projects, and beyond that in its ethical commitment to the world in the present and future. (...) It demands that we interrogate our encounters with participants in research. It also requires us to examine the politics, power relations and inequalities of the worlds we live in, and the stakeholders and emerging technologies through which they are articulated and sustained” (Pink 2021:42).

²¹ Eglinton, *Between the personal and the professional: ethical challenges when using visual ethnography to understand young people’s use of popular visual material culture*, 2013.

²² See, for example, Cooper, 2005, Critchley, 2012, and Piotrowska, 2014.

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**USING PHOTOGRAPHY IN INTERNATIONAL CASE-STUDY RESEARCH IN
STIGMATIZED CONTEXTS.
AN EXPERIMENT USING PHOTO-ELICITATION AND ‘TRAVELING PICTURES’ WITH
CHILDREN IN A PUBLIC HOUSING COMPLEX OF EASTERN NAPLES.**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of photography in an international research project on publicness and public space in European housing complexes. It proposes an investigation of how photography was applied in a pilot project entailing photo-elicitation in Eastern Naples (Italy), from my perspective as a postdoctoral researcher in architecture and planning collaborating to the project. The pictures of five European housing complexes (called ‘traveling pictures’) were used in the experiment. For the purpose of the study, I herein propose the analysis of an activity conducted with sixteen students at a middle school and their teachers through the lens of participatory research guided by the principles of feminist scholars and critical pedagogy. The aim of the paper is twofold: firstly, it means to provide an account of how the image-based experiment was developed with young residents of a public housing complex marked by stigma; and secondly, it discusses how the photo-elicitation experiment affected power dynamics and participants’ roles both during the activities and within the international research project.

KEYWORDS

Photo-elicitation, Public Housing, Photographs, Participatory Research, Critical Pedagogy, Children

Bio

Marilena Prisco holds a Ph.D. in Architecture and Urban Planning. She is currently working as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples “Federico II”. Combining her previous experience in education and activism, she is developing a study on processes of residents’ inclusion and exclusion in public housing neighbourhoods. She is currently working on how the mediation conducted by people, organizations and material objects may help to increase the inclusion and participation of children, youth and women in public space, using Participatory Action Research as an analytical framework.

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The discussed activities are part of the HERA Joint Research Programme “Public Spaces” (PS) Collaborative Research Project HERA.1.102 entitled Public Space in European Social Housing (PuSH) that I joined as a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples “Federico II”.

Photography as a research tool in public housing research projects

We are witnessing an increase in the production and use of photographs portraying objects, humans and places by a whole different range of people, crossing genders and ages. At the same time, the pervasiveness of pictures and the heterogeneity of their producers in the context of housing and the people's private sphere has also had an impact on the production of academic studies involving residents in photographs. As participatory visual methods are gaining more and more popularity, a number of studies can now offer insights into some emerging methodological and ethical challenges (Switzer 2018; Warr et al 2016; Liebenberg 2009). As a matter of fact, the widespread interest of scholars in photography and visual methods in social and anthropological research (Pretto 2015; Pink 2013; Mitchell 2011; Rose 2016; Pink, Kürti and Alfonso 2004; Warr et al 2016) and the use of specific research methods such as photo-elicitation (Soaita and McKee 2021; Burningham 2020; Rose 2016; Harper 2002; Pretto 2015) have recently pointed out to the fact that photographs have become tools for new experimental research. In the past, photo-elicitation was marginally present in research areas such as anthropology, psychology, education and organizational studies (Harper 2002). More recently, academic journals in visual methods research have published accounts of experiments with photographs conducted by Early Career Researchers at the scale of the neighbourhood (see for instance Schoepfer 2014), to deepen critical understanding of the potentialities and limits of photographs in experimental visual research with residents.

Given this premise, the present article aims at exploring the relationship between ethnography and photography in public space, by discussing how photo-elicitation may support the involvement of young residents of public housing in international academic projects. The study was conducted from the perspective of the author who is an early career researcher in planning and architecture. This is a particularly relevant field of inquiry for at least two reasons. First, it uncovers the potential of images for reaching and interacting with groups that usually are hard to involve in participatory studies (Darbyshire, Macdougall and Schiller 2005; Rose 2016); this is even more true, for example, when it comes to international research projects where the language employed is usually different from that of the residents involved in the experiments. Second, it offers a useful methodology to explore sensitive environments such as housing complexes where stigmatization occurs. At the same time, it is also worth addressing a number of potentially problematic circumstances where researchers may be initially perceived as intruders by residents and marginalized youth, or where young and less young age residents may have concerns about the risks of their involvement and doubt the positive impact of such academic studies.

This article critically interrogates the use of photo-elicitation and photography in an interdisciplinary research project on children living in public housing in Eastern Naples. The study is part of a wider postdoctoral project conducted by the author, aiming at involving residents of different ages to study their role in the production of public space. It discusses how photo-elicitation can be used as a methodology in similar research, taking as an example two participatory sessions in a public housing complex. The sessions are part of a pilot project conducted by the author¹ and initiated in 2019, when sixteen students, between 10 and 12 years old (6 female and 10 male), along with their teachers (3 female) were selected for participating in activities meant to observe the role of residents, schoolteachers, NGOs members and volunteers in public space. The pilot project was not an isolated initiative. On the contrary, it pertained to a wider research project on 4.000 long-time Italian residents located in a public housing complex in Easter Naples. In the summer of 2019, I joined a three-year European project designed as a multi-case study on public space, to be conducted with the use of visual representation by a team of planners, anthropologists, architects, and landscape architects. The Italian case was selected as it would contribute to non-comparative research that encompassed five European public or social housing estates as case studies. Through the different cases, the researchers have had a chance to investigate the dynamics emerging in public space and how they affect residents. In this context, publicness is defined as a phenomenon occurring through and within specific socio-spatial sites (Tornaghi and Knierbein 2014). In this paper, I would like to discuss how visual representation may increase the involvement of children in one of the selected sites for the exploration of the Italian case, i.e. a school.

In the twentieth century, much Italian research on architecture and planning concentrated on housing neighbourhoods and housing complexes, with photography being a central element. More

¹ I herein acknowledge my privileged position as a white, educated researcher.

specifically, public housing has been extensively photographed and represented in these disciplines. Photography is still very used in housing and neighbourhood investigation, where architects and planners may get in touch with residents (from photographing them to co-researching with non-academics). Social sciences developed a critical and reflective approach towards photography in the last few decades, especially regarding centring and decentering the authority of the researcher as the author of visual representations (Harper 2002). However, this is an aspect that is still not fully addressed by researchers in architecture and planning. As Harper clarifies, photo-elicitation as a visual method is based on the production and use of photography that contributes to the postmodern debate in ethnography, in that the researcher considers the polysemic quality of images and questions the authority of the subjects that researchers involve (Harper 2002: 15). Visual representations and visual (ethnographic) methods may help to understand the changing role of researchers within these disciplines, given their potential in architecture and planning studies (see for example Sandercock and Attili 2010a; 2010b; Siemiatycki 2012).

The overall aim of this study, and of the wider research project on public housing it is embedded in, is to contribute to a transdisciplinary conversation by reflecting on the usage of visual representations. Researchers interacting with people and residents and educators using visual representations may have some interest in the present analysis².

The article is divided into five sections. Sections 1 and 2 provide an outline of the reasons why a participatory pilot project involving children was conducted for the present study on visual representations in a housing complex that underwent stigmatization, and why the local educational institution was involved as part of the author's postdoctoral project. Section 3 focuses on the photo-elicitation methodology as it was developed in Eastern Naples for the purpose of the project. In section 4, an analysis of its applications using participatory research rooted in feminist research and critical pedagogy as an analytical framework is provided so as to discuss how the sessions in photo-elicitation, among other participatory activities, contributed to reconfigure power relations between the participants. So much so that it also contributed to stimulating the involvement of youth in the other case studies of the international project after the pilot project ended. The final section provides an overview of the study limits. It also explains why photo-elicitation using pictures from international housing complexes can be an effective methodology, provided that it is part of a wider project for the active involvement of residents.

1) Photography and stigma in the research project

The international research project on public space in social and public housing started in 2019. It involved four national groups of researchers engaged in the study and production of visual representations of publicness³. That same year, my postdoctoral project began as a participatory process. The project entailed the investigation of the use of visual representations in case-study in European housing complexes and how they could be experimentally used in public housing research including the Italian case marked by stigmatization⁴.

The local institutions, media and some residents described the entire neighbourhood where the housing complex is located as a 'problematic context'. This 'public perception' was considered. In a

² I would like to share a personal experience that I had as co-supervisor of Italian students in architecture and planning participating in the international research project as interns, and working on the use of visual representations of Italian public space for the project exhibitions. A student was photographed by some of the residents and the pictures were published on social media. Another student was invited by NGO members to present her visual production in a public event. Their agency as research-students and the very act of producing images significantly changed compared to their predefined roles. In this sense, visual representations in neighbourhood studies should be seen as a process more than a product, also in disciplines where there are still strong assumptions, such as the role of the researcher as mere observer.

³ The international research is conducted by the University of Copenhagen, NMBU - Norway, ETH Zürich, and DiARC - University of Naples "Federico II".

⁴ For the concept of stigmatization of neighbourhoods see Wacquant (2016) and Wacquant, Salter and Pereira (2014). I refer specifically to the stigma as a performative idea attached to a specific place: "(...) territorial stigma has become nationalized and democratized, so to speak: in every country, a small set of urban boroughs have come to be universally renowned and reviled across class and space as redoubts of self-inflicted and self-perpetuating destitution and depravity. Their names circulate in the discourses of journalism, politics, and scholarship, as well as in ordinary conversation as synonyms for social hell." (Wacquant, Salter and Pereira 2014: 1273).

report published in 2012 by the Municipality of Naples, the area is represented as follows: “In a social fabric so degraded, so fragmented, with almost non-existent urban spaces and without meeting places it is easy to imagine how organized crime became part of the territory with a radical presence”⁵ (Comune di Napoli 2012: 17). Stigmatization was also detected in media and social media products as well as in conversations with the people directly or indirectly involved in the research project. More specifically, the housing complex under investigation was often associated in media products with words such as ‘desperation’, ‘poverty’ and ‘crime’.

The research – considered the specific aspects of the Italian housing complex⁶ – was designed in light of the following premises: (1) an existing link between stigma and visual representations in the Italian housing complex under investigation; visual methodologies could become a strategy aimed at including marginalized people (Warr et al 2016), or they could reproduce the same processes of stigmatization of both people and places; (2) the risk that visual representations of the local, stigmatized public housing complex may have a negative impact onto the study, because of the fact that the Italian housing complex differs from other research cases pertaining to the same project⁷.

Officially, the neighbourhood was described as having a high concentration of low-income people and with a pervasive presence of organized crime. The housing complex in the neighbourhood has more than 1.000 apartments and was built for the massive relocation of people in the years following the well-known Irpinia earthquake (Central-Southern Italy) that took place in November 1980. It was indeed one of the most devastating events hitting the south of Italy in the last century. The realization of the complex fell under the reconstruction process along with 3.988 public housing units to be built in a rural area (Vitellio 2011).

In the public discourse, the specific site under investigation is considered one of the most problematic due to criminal organizations operating therein, over time coupled with a generalized disinvestment in the management and maintenance of post-earthquake constructions. So much so that a 40-year-old resident explained, while approaching one of the sites in the housing complex where an abandoned building is located, that “*this is why we are Zero, nothing*”⁸, thus recalling the history of the housing complex’s name, which ultimately contributes to its definition as a marginalized and stigmatized place⁹.

The narrative of stigma was a frequent and pervasive element emerging during the interviews with residents and operators of NGOs and institutional services. The use of visual representations for the analysis of people’s everyday experiences in public space and the research through photographs was a specific challenge of the project, in order to address dominant ideas over imposed by external agents and reproduced in the local context. Methodological experiments can help overcome standardized narratives that could emerge when seeking for comments or answers from people through photographs (Schoepfer 2014), for instance when using neighbourhood images in the interaction with residents. Moreover, as it was this study’s aim to make narratives emerge through visual methods, the process of selecting participants for the study became an intrinsic part of the methodological design which was shaped in line with the characteristics of the context.

The case study was seen as a possible manifestation of urban marginality (Wacquant 2008; 2014) where visual representations can lead to a decrease in the sense of place. In this and similar contexts, researchers should take into account the ‘erosion of a sense of place’ (Wacquant 2008: 7) occurring in space, through material phenomena and discursive practices at the same time. There is a risk of the reproduction and justification of the same dynamics that emerge from those manifestations. In conducting the investigation, I was well aware that socio-spatial narratives and visual evidence (as seen

⁵ All the quotations from Italian reports and transcripts of conversations are translated from Italian into English by the author of this article.

⁶ The research was not comparative, but the researchers acknowledged the influence derived from conducting the five cases together. Four of the case studies, excluding the Italian case, had similar characteristics: good or excellent level of maintenance of buildings and open spaces; heterogeneous population by social class and ethnicity; limited and episodic crime phenomena. The Italian case differed in the poor state of maintenance of the residential buildings and open areas; the presence of a homogeneous population (whites, Italians, high poverty levels); widespread and frequent crime phenomena; high sense of insecurity among residents; turnover of inhabitants linked to a perceived sense of insecurity.

⁷ See note 4.

⁸ From a personal conversation with a resident (November 8, 2021).

⁹ The building complex is defined as marginalized and stigmatized in reference to objective spatial characteristics and public discourses on the site (see note 4). Within the debate on the stigmatization of the housing complex, it should also be considered that the complex is bordered on all sides even by metropolitan roads, increasing the sense of spatial isolation.

and photographed by researchers) may influence not only the participants in the study, but also the researcher herself while trying to overcome those narratives. This triggered the urge to critically reflect upon the reproduction of stigma in visual representations, which consequently required to deal with questions about how to do visual research in the specific context of marginality (Mitchell 2011; Warr et al. 2016) such as public housing complexes.

During a private conversation about one of our first photographic explorations in the housing complex, one resident said:

I remember one of you photographing me when I was hanging out the laundry and that made me feel like an animal in the zoo, so I started to shout at you, and I was very upset! (woman, 60-year-old.)¹⁰.

It is worth pointing out that the housing complex under investigation was photographed after events connected to local criminal activities. The above statement testifies to some of the risks that come with the usage of photographs in public housing as well as the impacts that photography may have on the residents, as some perceived being photographed while immersed in their daily routine as an intrusive practice. Based on this statement, it therefore became necessary to take a different route and use my privileged position as a researcher traveling through the sites of the international project to turn the place images into valuable research means. Operating in a housing complex required being attentive to people's space and intimacy (Orellana 1999). For this reason, setting up a mutual sense of trust and discussing the international project with residents was crucial to the study, as was their inclusion in the project itself.

In Eastern Naples, the team agreed to design activities following participatory approaches and action research (Reason and Bradbury 2006; Torre and Fine 2008). On the other hand, research in the field of feminism and feminist action research (Maguire 1987, 2000, 2001; Reid and Frisby 2008; Frisby, Maguire and Reid 2009; De Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014; Hundle, Szeman and Hoare 2019; Lather 1988, 1991) helped to deconstruct the categories of residents, operators, and researchers as different homogeneous groups. The two – participatory research and feminist action research – helped to cross a boundary between insiders and outsiders and to build relations with people that deepened our understanding of the case, critically reflecting on the difference between the researchers and non-researchers, the residents and the people working in the housing complex. Among the people involved over time, there have been local school teachers, local associations based or working in the complex, higher education students and residents of all ages. Numerous participatory activities were conducted during the first two years of the project. Some activities are still in place. Other scholars called for collective spaces of transnational feminist research (Hundle, Szeman and Hoare 2019); contact zones for investigation and transformation (Torre and Fine 2008; Askin and Pain 2011); spaces to connect personal experiences with larger social processes (Cahill 2007); time-space social arena (Kesby 2005) where collaboration between researchers and non-researchers developed. The attempt to build spaces of interaction with residents in Eastern Naples within the international research project can be seen as being part of the creation of spaces to enhance critical listening processes with a transformative attitude (Forester 2006; Sclavi 2003), based on which photographs can potentially stimulate a deeper understanding of the overall context of action in planners and architects.

2) Engagement in researching with photograph: a perspective on children

A 31-month agreement with a local school was signed in October 2019, with the aim to start a pilot project for mutual learning between the Italian research team and the local educational institution in Eastern Naples. After informing the families and getting their consent, a two-month interaction of one/two hour/s per class per week started. Following the teachers' suggestions, the activities were organized during school hours to encourage students to come to school, considering the significant level of dropouts recorded by the school. As a scholar trained in architecture and planning, and as a previous child educator, I offered my expertise in producing maps and models in exchange for the participation of the school in the pilot project. The pilot activities were meant to understand how to create an inclusive and supportive research space that could increase the school's involvement. They were also necessary to

¹⁰ From a personal conversation with a resident (June 19, 2021).

assess whether the school teachers felt comfortable in continuing their collaboration to the research project.

The participatory activities involved visual representations carried out by students. In one of the activities, selected pictures of the European neighbourhoods were used to initiate a class debate. The local educational institution served as a gatekeeper with the families to introduce the project and obtain informed consent (Fargas-Malet et al 2010). The experiment was designed and enacted using photo-elicitation (Soaita and McKee 2021; Burningham 2020; Rose 2016; Harper 2002; Pretto 2015), using photographs to stimulate the discussion with children. First, the international project's five cases were introduced to the participants to explore their opinions and perceptions of their own public spaces and other public spaces they were not familiar with. The participants were then invited one by one to select images from a set of proposed pictures portraying other housing complexes.¹¹ In the second part of the activity, the participants were asked to motivate their choice. The research design was guided by an interest in power dynamics between researchers, young residents, and female educators, in light of the framework offered by feminist participatory action research (Maguire 1987; 2001), feminist pedagogy (Luke 1996; Lather 1988; 1991) and critical pedagogy (Freire 1971; Dolci 1988; 2020) for their contribution to the construction of research projects in educational contexts.

In planning studies, scholars started to discuss children as one of the most vulnerable groups more than thirty years ago. This new way of seeing children as vulnerable emerged in the wake of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly, when many scholars overtly stated that urban development plans, policy and practice were based on an abstract idea of childhood. The researchers emphasized that children's needs were misconceived or unaddressed, regardless of their backgrounds and different conditions (Bartlett 1999), and that they were often seen as a problem (Davis and Jones 1997). Western planners saw children as immature and irrational subjects (Edwards 1996), while the experience of childhood was dangerously universalized (Valentine 2004). Although the participation of people was introduced in international planning disciplines, still, investigating children's perspectives was seen as unnecessary. Indeed, adult participation replaced children's involvement, whose exclusion was tacitly accepted (Edwards 1996). Starting from 1989, planning scholars have shown occasional interest in promoting the well-being of children. Some years later, though, the need for an exquisitely child-focused perspective, based on children's involvement, emerged as a critical necessity to reshape generic policies and planning prescriptions that could harm children (Bartlett 1999). Although there was still some scepticism about the introduction of participatory practices in local planning and decision making, the involvement of children was seen as an important step. In fact, it gradually led to the recognition of their voices as well as of their ability to be experts of their own environments, so much so that children were granted the right to participate in community development and planning (Bartlett 2002).

During the 1990s, in Italy, experiments were conducted with children to institutionalize their participation in activities aimed at fostering civic education and direct democratic participation. For example, children councils and youth forums were created and are still functioning in some Italian regions (for an account see Corsi 2002). The debate was led by pedagogists and was limited to a segment of the Italian scientific planning community¹². International studies recalled the importance of the inclusion of children as social actors (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Many methodological experiments have recently flourished on visual representations in planning with children, e.g. on the use of participatory maps (Freeman and Vass 2010), digital platforms for mapping (Hanssen 2019), tools for the co-design of physical space (Özdemir 2019). Nowadays, children's involvement seems to be still partially, if not addressed at all in planning research showing a critical pedagogical approach (Freire 1971; Dolci 1988; 2020) aimed at recognizing a legitimate role to children. Research in planning and architecture can also engage children at various levels, ranging from their 'full' participation to 'tokenism' (Hart 1997), which can result, as much literature on participation states, even in their overall

¹¹ I personally took some photos during my research trip, while others were retrieved from social media and/or official websites. All the photographs represented the housing complexes selected as case studies for the international project.

¹² It is emblematic that, at the beginning of the new millennium, the housing complex in Eastern Naples was selected as a destination for one of the Children's City experiments, with the aim to combine training and practice for child support. In Naples the project should have addressed the multiple problems affecting children and could have promoted alliances between institutions. Unfortunately, the plan was never finalised and the half-built building was abandoned within the housing complex, even though several attempts to complete it over the last fifteen years have been undertaken.

exclusion from the urban environment (Mansfield, Batagol and Raven 2021). Advancing methods, and focusing on approaches or paradigms (Knowles-Yáñez 2005), are both fundamental parts of the research involving children as participants.

A self-reflexive analysis on visual participatory activities and participatory approaches in planning studies can help to distinguish between structural impediments to participation (i.e. difficulties in reaching specific individuals or groups) and frictions that may emerge when participatory approaches occur in existing power dynamics (i.e. inclusion and exclusion of participants inside and outside participatory processes).

Despite the frequent references to young people, the risks they are exposed to and the problems affecting children, their direct participation in the public debate seemed not encouraged. Local authorities profiled the neighbourhood as featuring the highest presence of children and young inhabitants (Comune di Napoli 2012: 9). Children and youth are pervasively present in mediatic and institutional discourses on the neighbourhood as well as in discourses of local NGOs and institutional operators, through statements such as

Young people are the future of this place, and we should help them”¹³.

On the other hand, an ‘improved understanding’ (Liebenberg 2009) of youth experiences may overturn the role of young people as passive objects of discourse in mediatic and public debates. The case we will discuss in the next section is an attempt to overcome the exclusion of children residing in the social housing complex that was selected as a case study. The analysis of the structural causes related to the school context, of the barriers and of the opportunities that emerge during the research process will provide insights into some of the challenges I have encountered.

3) Exploring “with children”: seeing things differently

This section focuses on the photo-elicitation activities undertaken with a group of children selected for the purpose of the study. Eighteen pictures from the five case studies pertaining to the international research project were chosen: 5 photographs from Naples; 6 from Denmark; 4 from Switzerland about case one and two; 3 from Norway. The collection of photos was named ‘traveling pictures’. The name was chosen because each photo came with a personal account of my experience visiting the sites or, alternatively, with a description published online by the residents, in case of places I had not had a chance to visit yet. The selection process and the activity itself was conducted in December 2019 and supervised by a senior researcher from the project team that had previous experience with photo-elicitation.

Two sessions were organized with the assistance of schoolteachers. The two sessions (A and B) were conducted separately with two different groups of students. Each group consisted of the same number of students, who were all the same age. Session A comprised 8 students and 1 teacher; session B, 8 students and 2 teachers. The duration of each session was the same. First, the photos were placed on a desk in the classroom (Figure 1). The photos represented interiors and open spaces, with street furniture and greenery, elements of space delimitation (curbs, fences, gates, etc.), and/or people doing some activities in different settings. We asked both students and teachers to select three photos. Then, we discussed each picture in a pre-established numerical order, mentioning the person who had selected each picture. We were interested in how images representing public housing complexes could help to produce narratives of the Italian housing complex. The activity raised enthusiasm among all the participants. Even the instructors were very participative and curious, as opposed to previous activities¹⁴, when the participants lost their interest very fast and the instructors seemed overwhelmed (i.e. by interacting with their students while the researchers were there).

The photo-elicitation experiment lasted approximately two hours per group. This method was effective in keeping the attention alive and increasing the participants’ involvement. The insights that emerged constitute one of the most notable results. Some opinions and ideas about the sites pictured in

¹³ Extract taken from a public speech given by a teacher during the commemoration of a young victim in the local church (June 8, 2021).

¹⁴ Some additional test activities were also conducted for the pilot study, for a total of ten meetings of two hours each. The activities consisted in collaborative mapping, collages and models, through which children could practice some visual representation techniques. See the next paragraph for an assessment of the different methods we used.

Figure 2 and 3 were outlined, that suggested alternative perspectives and perceptions of those sites. Other insights pertained to the places in Figure 4, that I later visited having in mind the children's perspective. Insights regarding the Italian housing complex where the children lived were also relevant in that alternative viewpoints with regard to the complex emerged that were different from our understanding of the public space. Overall, these insights expanded our set of hypotheses formulated in previous steps. The results helped to develop a deeper understanding of how the children made sense of the spaces and to gain a new look on the sites that were discussed. Aspects emerged that had been previously overlooked or not considered at all, given possible preconceptions due to my gender, age and social condition that put some distance between the researcher and the site under investigation (Liebenberg 2009). Photography allowed the creation of a link connecting different realities (Pink 2013): that of the participants' and the reality of the other sites. The participation of children revealed a nuanced perspective (Kesby 2005), thus enriching my own point of view¹⁵.



FIGURE 1-2: (left) The pictures on the teacher's desk during one of the sessions; (right) Outside one of the apartments in the Danish complex. ©Marilena Prisco - 2019.

Session A and B were conducted using the same protocol. Surprisingly, in session A no participant chose Figure 2 (coded as n. 10), although, in our opinion, it showed elements that we had previously identified in the children's neighbourhood. When the children were asked why nobody selected the photo, one student said: "Desolation. Unhappiness. It looks like a storage room to me". Some context was therefore provided and it was explained to the participants that in the place showed in the picture it was common that people of that housing complex left their personal belongings, like bicycles and shoes, out of their apartment door. When the children were asked whether any of them had the same habit, one of the students replied as follows: "If you do it here, your things will be stolen!" The conversation went on for a while. In the following session, again no student selected Figure 2. When the same question was posed (i.e. why nobody selected it), one participant asked to have a closer look. The photo went from hand to hand through the classroom. Again, we provided some context to understand the picture. This time, though, the picture enabled a longer and crowded conversation during which many of the participants voiced their opinions at once. One student said that the photo could resemble the entrance hall of one of their apartment buildings, while another said that storage rooms in his building were located on the roof or on the ground floor.

Another interesting fact regards Figures 3 and 4 (coded as n.16 and n.18). Figure 3 was the second most chosen, while, in both sessions, nobody selected Figure 4. When discussing Figure 3, a comparison was suggested. A student in session A said, regarding Figure 3, that "there is a table and some empty chairs where nobody is sitting... so we can go there together and spend some time without being bothered". Another referred to Figure 4 as a 'train station', another as 'a boring place'. They all agreed that Figure 3 represented a space where they could play and spend some time. This was the first time I realized that none of the courtyards in their neighbourhood is furnished with chairs or benches to sit.

More than a year later, when visiting the site portrayed in Figure 4, my perception of that space, influenced by what emerged during the photo-elicitation activity, was shared with the international

¹⁵ For example, debates emerged on the role of food in public space, on the maintenance of public gardens, on furnishings in open areas.

research group and it animated a conversation with the other researchers.



FIGURE 3-4: (left) A courtyard in the Danish site - ©Marilena Prisco - 2019; (right) The entrance of the community centre in one of the two Swiss sites - source: www.tschami.ch.

The use of representations (especially photos) proved to be of great potential to this study when combined with a self-reflexive attitude towards the conversations generated through the photo-elicitation activities. The photos triggered useful conversations and encouraged all researchers to share their own stories or hearsay conveyed by media reports and social media about the places and the situations portrayed. And so did the children and their teachers, when sharing their personal perspectives. Nonetheless, it was essential to avoid the oversimplification of children's engagement, and to question my power position in the research project and the housing complex based on the reflexive practice proposed by participatory and feminist research.

Other scholars maintain that a self-reflexive attitude is not sufficient to justify participatory studies with children to empower them in research processes. They also highlight that there are risks connected to their participation in structured activities. For example, standards and rules set by adults in sessions may reduce their freedom (Gallacher and Gallagher 2008). The next section draws on the political dimension of participation as a situated practice (Cornwall 2002), addressed by placing participatory visual representations and photo-elicitation within the context in which the longer research project was designed and conducted (the context of the public housing complex and the context of the international research project) and the effects that the pilot project had in the process.

4) Understanding the experience through the lens of power

The participatory experiments were helpful to understand why architecture and planning scholars should interact with the participants in a research project using a self-reflexive approach. This is crucial especially in the context of public housing, in order to deal with possible stigmatization in the interaction with residents and for rethinking power dynamics determined by the research process. The processual nature of participation – not 'taken for granted' but critically analysed for how it developed (or not developed) during the pilot project – unveils structural, contextual and relational barriers which may cause the exclusion of children. Such an exclusion may occur in case attention is not given to power and to the micro-politics of participation as a situated practice (Cornwall 2002). This is particularly relevant in research involving residents of public housing and especially when it comes to children. By addressing power dynamics in participatory contexts, scholars in participatory studies provide insights into how such dynamics can temporarily be dismantled. Participatory and feminist participatory research encompass many studies that adopted participatory methods with children (see for instance Hunleth 2011; Morgan et al 2002; Clark and Percy-Smith 2006; Fargas-Malet et al 2010; Burningham et al 2020). The perspective provided by participatory literature helps to move the attention from participatory products in the form of visual representations (i.e. maps, platforms, drawings made with children), to consider how power relations are restructured in research processes, within the participatory space where visual representations are produced or taken from elsewhere (i.e. the 'traveling pictures').

Given our interest in power alterations and visual representations in public housing research, the pilot project was designed as part of a three-year process activated within an international project. Since the photo-elicitation activities were meant to be part of the wider pilot study resulting in a future project with the local school, some additional test activities were also conducted, for a total of ten meetings of two hours each for each of the two groups. The activities consisted in collaborative mapping, collages and models, through which children could practice some visual representation techniques. Of all the applied methods, photo-elicitation proved to be the most effective in fostering confidence, granting inclusion between the children, and having performative effects (Schoepfer 2014) which triggered conversations and debates. It worked very well also because it prompted the participation of the schoolteachers. Conversely, during other activities, children and schoolteachers had showed less interest or seemed to be less confident in the techniques of visual representation that we were testing together. Unfortunately, the image-based activities only lasted only two hours per session and the entire pilot study lasted two months. As Pat Maguire emphasizes (1987) it takes time to build relationships and to practice the ability to listen as paying attention to the participants during processes which might be uncertain and surprising – being attentive to ‘the other side of voice’ (Maguire 1987: XVI) –. The use of photographs has been shown to increase participant interest and accelerate relationship building in such a limited time pilot project.

In participatory studies, lots of critical attention has been devoted to issues of power and practices of empowerment. More specifically, research in feminist participatory studies addressed the production of knowledge by vulnerable people (Greenwood 2000). The Italian case study favoured critical reflection on the use of photography in all the other four case studies, also among the scholars that had different epistemological perspectives. Participatory Studies that rely on action research have extensively worked on research processes that may connect the feminist challenge to power structures with the interventionist approach of action research studies (Greenwood 2000; Reid and Frisby 2008). Rooted in action research and in its attempt to reconfigure power embedded in everyday relations, societal structures, and institutional practices (Reason and Bradbury 2006; Frisby, Maguire and Reid 2009; Reid and Frisby 2008), participatory studies have devoted special attention to observe the dynamics emerging during participatory activities and if or how these dynamics are conducive of understandings of hidden dynamics. They share the same interest that critical pedagogists have in the ‘oppressed’ (Freire 1971; Dolci 1988; 2020), in the causes of their oppression, and in the processes and structures of oppression and exploitation they intend to transform. Visual representation in the history of public housing and, more specifically, in this public housing neighbourhood (as discussed previously in this paper), has not addressed the inclusion of children as participants, in most cases. The possibility that children can raise their voice is usually limited. Even more so because of their objectification in research pictures. Through photography, silencing, stigmatization or celebration may also permeate institutional research, even in participatory studies. The approach in this study entailed careful consideration of the risk of silencing children’s voices in the design of a participatory research process (Checkoway 2011). Children are not the oppressed, voiceless people as they exercise their agency at different levels, also in public housing. The oversimplification of power dynamics (Cahill 2007) can ultimately undermine the evaluation of their real potential, as their ability to contribute to overcoming the dynamics between children and adults can be consequently overshadowed.

It is worth noticing that during the photo-elicitation activity, students that had not taken part in other activities within the same group developed increased confidence in sharing their own opinions. By means of creating a protected space, the superimposition of restrictive rules and surveillance was avoided, which is a problematic aspect of participatory activities conducted in non-protected areas (Orellana 1999).

The two sessions provided further examples of how confidence can be gained during photo-elicitation activities. The first is the case of a girl aged 12, who had partially joined the activities proposed in the previous weeks and was presented to us as a student having some difficulties in her relationship with the rest of the class. Initially, she put her head on the desk and strongly manifested her unwillingness to participate. Later on, she reluctantly agreed to participate in the first part of the session, consisting in the selection of pictures. She therefore selected pictures 4, 12 and 14. While the group members were commenting on the pictures in numerical order, her attitude towards the activity changed. Contrary to the rest of the group, she did not comment on picture 4. She was also unsure about what to say regarding picture 12 and she answered the questions “why do you like this picture? What do you like about it?” saying “... there are light, plants, colours and clothes hanging”. But, by the time we turned to picture

14, she had become confident enough to firmly state that she liked that picture because of “its bright colours and because there are groups of people, bikes, games”. At that point, the entire group had become more confident and much focused on the activity. The second case is that of another 12-year-old girl joining the second session, who showed similar difficulties in the interaction during previous activities. She selected pictures 1, 4 and 7. When asked about her opinion in regard to picture 1, she simply replied with yes or no answers, after being encouraged by her teachers. In commenting picture 4, she looked for the support and approval of her teacher, while saying: “how can you say, Prof... I don't know what they are doing”. However, later on, she actively participated in group comments by providing details of the places she knew, expressing her personal opinions, etc. (i.e. “here there is a pizzeria!”; “this is very ugly!”).

To understand how the activity may facilitate or not the rearticulation of roles and power, session A and B were compared. A relevant difference in the two sessions consists in the role that the teachers played throughout the activities (all female and residents). In session A, the teacher was a long-term employee who had been working in the housing complex for more than 25 years. She therefore knew the context very well. In session B, the two teachers were contract teachers employed on temporary engagements with the school. They had recently started working there and, for this reason, had only a limited knowledge of the context. In session A, the experienced teacher participated in the selection process with the students. In the comment's session, she shared her opinions too, showing a different perspective compared to the students. When we presented the place where the pictures had been taken – part of the pictures taken by me during the research visit in Copenhagen – the teacher spontaneously joined the conversation by providing additional information about the housing complex and its residents. She also commented on the disappointing quality of the space in the Italian housing complex compared to what she could see in the pictures, and expressed her own desires for the students. Speaking of Copenhagen, she asked “Why don't you bring us with you next time?” and added “it is a pity that the international researchers will come here, we would have liked better to go there!”¹⁶. She saw the international research space as an opportunity for her to put her knowledge of the residents to good use, and for her students to leave the housing complex. In session B, the two teachers joined the experiment as well by adding information during the activity. They mainly asked for more details about the contexts in which the pictures had been taken or shared their genuine opinions: “What is the name of this housing complex?”; “I didn't know that this is something you may find around here!”; “this reminds me one of the neighbourhoods in Naples”; “no, I don't agree... that neighbourhood is less green than you think”. In session B, the teachers acted as participants rather than instructors. This was very important in order to reconfigure power relations during the session and to involve the participants in a meaningful way, thus disrupting daily dynamics in the school setting. The pictures successfully structured the dialogue during the photo-elicitation activities. The pictures we used helped to change group dynamics, although temporarily and partially; they enhanced the conversation on how space is conceived in housing complexes, and on pre-established roles that were temporarily suspended. We could notice, though, that the genuine interaction between the students and their instructors decreased when the teacher showed her knowledge of the context. Using photographs of international settings taken from the other case studies was important not only because it triggered the participants' curiosity for ‘faraway and different’ contexts (a narrative which was often mobilized by me and by the participants to the school activities) but also because it allowed them to experience the production of other narratives, as the experiment was based on acknowledging them as co-researchers in an international research project on public housing.

Unfortunately, the pilot activities did not result in a participatory action research project that brought to a prolonged inclusion of the children, because the school building was shut down in March 2021, due to the pandemic emergency. The photo-elicitation activity and the other activities of the pilot project were an important step in the ongoing research. However, they also proved that there are risks and downsides in linking a visual participatory project to the specific site where the activities take place, relations of trust are established and rules are set up. Because of the pandemic outbreak, the site of the school remained closed for most of that school year and the following. We managed to re-design some activities for a second pilot project based on interactions with the students, their families and the operators as virtual activities. Despite our efforts, though, the participatory activities were only sporadic

¹⁶ The pilot project preceded the research visit of the international team in Naples, a few weeks after the completion of the here discussed activities.

and brief (few sessions between April 2020 and May 2021). Due to the virtual activities, we were unable to create a personal bond with the teachers that could support the involvement of the students in a long-term project with children. The first pilot project (with physical activities) and the second pilot project (with virtual activities) did not contribute to identifying long-term objectives in the interest of the researchers, the teachers and the children.

Overall, the potential of photo-elicitation as a research method in international housing research encompassing cross-case studies should be further explored. However, its ability to activate trans-local empowerment is confirmed. For instance, the research activities conducted with the children gave rise to two additional collaborative activities involving youth, in which cooperative relations took different forms. As a matter of fact, the research team connected the school in Eastern Naples with a school located in one of the Swiss neighbourhoods involved in the international project. Interaction was facilitated between the two schools, consisting in the students exchanging presentation letters. Another opportunity for trans-local collaboration was offered by the Swiss research team. A Swiss-based NGO working with one of the Swiss local schools was asked to collaborate on the production of a storytelling style video about the public space in the neighbourhood. Both pre-established links between the Swiss researchers and some residents, schoolteachers and NGOs – the pre-existing relations of trust between researchers and non-researchers – and the example of the Neapolitan pilot project seemed to guide the decision to design such activities within the project. The video was presented and discussed with the researchers and the young participants from Switzerland during one of the international research meetings. Although the activities conducted in Eastern Naples by the Italian team succeeded in inspiring other researchers to include children in their research projects, they remained isolated cases also due to the lack of funding (Burningham et al 2019), time, skills and safety (due to spread of the pandemic) in all research groups.

5) Conclusion

This paper is the result of a self-reflexive practice on the use of photographs in a stigmatized public housing context in Eastern Naples, from my perspective as a postdoctoral researcher in architecture and planning collaborating to the project. The case-study of Naples was selected for an international research project conducted by a team of planners, anthropologists, architects, and landscape architects. In the specific case the production of research pictures and their publication may have affected stigmatization processes at the detriment of residents and children as well. Specific challenges for researchers emerged in terms of accessing the housing complexes for the purpose of conducting the research, developing trust with residents and being inclusive towards different groups that tend to be excluded in research conducted by architects and planners. For this reason, the use of visual representation – especially of photography – was tested in participatory activities with children and schoolteachers within a pilot project in the local school.

The pilot project involved a group of young students, where negative narratives combined with a high level of material decay of the housing complex. Based on our experiment, photographs in elicitation activities and ‘traveling pictures’ – photographs of the other housing complexes of the international project – can contribute to the creation of participatory spaces in international research on public housing complexes that are also meaningful and significant for architects and planners. The project provided inspiration to test new forms of collaboration between researchers and participants. Photo-elicitation allowed children and teachers to share their personal opinions in a more open and collaborative way compared to previous activities conducted using different methods, and pictures of the international case-study proved to have a potential that could be tested by architects and planners. Cases were recorded in which students, who had not taken part in previous activities, enthusiastically participated in the photo-elicitation experiment and managed to express their opinions in a more confident way. We had a good result also for how the use of photographs redefined the role of schoolteachers, while in other types of participatory activities with children they tended to reproduce stigmatizing narratives in the interaction with children (e.g. co-mapping). As in the case I presented, participatory visual research may be suited for researchers that are using visual representations in public housing studies to redefine power dynamics in international research studies that require the researcher's presence on site. Educational sites such as the school may be considered as sites for participatory research with children especially in case of stigmatized complexes and participatory research can have multiple

positive effects in those sites – for the residents of the housing complexes, local operators such as schoolteachers and for the researchers. Based on our experience, it seems safe to say that investigating children's reasons for participating in research (Hunleth 2011) as well as teachers' reasons for joining the activities should not be underestimated.

As for the international research group, we rediscussed the relationships between researchers and young residents. Visual methodologies were of great help in boundary crossing (Liebenberg 2009) and in stimulating other researchers in involving children. Photographs of the five international case studies (used for the photo-elicitation in the pilot project) helped in this purpose because they showed the potential to facilitate connections between academics and non-academics of different ages and between researchers from different units and research disciplines. However, only some of the members of the international group included children – in quality of residents – through schools or families. They did so when, for instance, pre-established links between the researchers and some of the residents already existed. The lack of funds, time, skills and security (due to the spread of the pandemic) we have encountered suggests that specific budgets and flexible research schedules should be considered for the participation of children and fragile groups in research projects in housing complexes. These aspects should be carefully considered, while also looking at the opportunities that the researchers may create when bridging local contexts and international research spaces.

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“ICI ON SÈME”: A PHOTOGRAPHIC DEPICTION OF URBAN GARDENING IN A *BANLIEUE*

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ABSTRACT

Based on a photo-ethnography of gardening practices, this visual essay explores how photographs might be used to critically depict the gardening experience of a community project in a French banlieue. By situating the representations of people, spaces, and interactions I reflexively portrayed the experiences of the urban gardeners through engaged photographic activities. Concerned with the plastic and iconic representation of the local community, this photo essay brings the viewer into the sensitive environment of urban gardening.

KEYWORDS

Photography, ethnography, urban, representation, arts, aesthetics, gardening, France, banlieue, space

BIO

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In France, there are urban areas, often located on the periphery of major cities called *banlieues*. The areas are characterized by the presence of significant socio-economic and socio-spatial inequalities compared with the central cities they surround. These territories, frequently neglected by public institutions, host primarily low-income populations often with immigrant backgrounds.

The shape of these territories is variable. Generally speaking, they are characterized by a high density of social housing complexes. In France, Sarcelles is probably the symbol of this urban model. Located in the Val d'Oise department, 15 kilometers to the north of Paris, it consists of two major sectors: Sarcelles Village, to the north, a semi-rural, suburban area that is more wealthy than the local average, and the Grand Ensemble, located 3 kilometers to the south. This imposing urban complex was built between the 1950s and 1970s. It is part of the ‘villes nouvelles’ born in the post-war during the baby-boom period in a social context marked by the absence of adequate social housing in the major metropolises. To cope with what was called the ‘housing crisis’ (*crise du logement*), from the 1950s onwards, large housing complexes (*grands ensembles*) were built. These structures appeared as a solution to the lack of proper sanitary installations in the main metropolitan areas. They provided a rapid solution to the serious problems of overpopulation in the cities. Thanks to the *grands ensembles*, thousands of low-income dwellers were able for the first time to have access to new and spacious facilities with basic housing services such as running water, toilets, and heating.



PHOTO 1: The Grand Ensemble of Sarcelles under the snow.

If the rise of large housing projects redefined the morphology of French cities, it also redefined the relationship toward the low-income classes who lived in these new cities. Public opinion quickly blamed the *grands ensembles* for being the vectors of a dehumanizing and disruptive modernity.



PHOTO 2: Setting up of the first planters in the "vignes blanches" neighborhood within the Grand Ensemble.

Sarcelles is probably the city that better exemplifies this misguided public image in France. When it was built, this city was initially seen as a model of functional modernity. This initial avant-garde impression did not last very long. From the 1960s onwards, the emphasis was placed on the 'vices' derived from urban planning. One of the symbols of the mythology was the 'sarcellite', a pejorative neologism widely used during the 1960s to designate the supposed "pathology" that characterized the social life in the *grands ensembles*. This first image was followed by a second one that depicted Sarcelles as being the symbol of the marginalization, exclusion, and violence phenomena surrounding banlieues. In addition to the structural problems of segregation, impoverishment, and lack of public investment, there was also social stigmatization supported by media, film, and photographic narratives released over more than 60 years (Canteux 2004; Roth 2007).

In this context, I was interested in exploring the social construction of what I called an imagined community (*communauté imagée*) by investigating the visual materials and practices that were involved in the collective definition of this city (Leon-Quijano 2020). To this end, between 2015 and 2018, I undertook a photographic ethnography of urban experiences¹. Engaged as both an anthropologist and a photographer, I developed an ethnographic approach based on the creation and sharing of pictures as a way to rethink the place of the researcher in the field.

Following phenomenological and participatory approaches (Desjarlais 2019; Fattal 2020; Pink 2001), I undertook a critical representation of the daily experiences of the local community. Photography was certainly a way to establish a privileged relationship with the people I worked with, but beyond this socializing quality, photography allowed me to consider differently the relationship to the subjects of my photographs. Through a critical depiction of the spaces, interactions, and bodies of the participants, I wanted to contribute to the development of reflexive approach attentive to the plastic and narrative forms of representation of the participants in the field.

¹ As part of a doctoral research at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) (Leon-Quijano, 2020).



PHOTO 3: Abdel, one of the members of the Engraineurs.

Based on this double ethnographic (Cefai 2010) and photographic (Leon-Quijano 2019) commitment, I undertook a creative activity with the residents. As part of this, in January 2017, I met Emmanuel, a 32-year-old informatics worker living in Les Vignes Blanches, a popular neighborhood located in the very heart of the Grand Ensemble. With Anne-Claire, his wife, a 30-year-old teacher, they initiated a community project that aimed to change the use of the communal areas in their neighborhood.



PHOTO 4: Emmanuel distributes invitations in one of the housing complexes.

Emmanuel has lived in Sarcelles since his childhood. He experienced the spatial degradation of some municipal structures and is concerned with the lack of sharing spaces between neighbors. For this reason, he and Anne-Claire decided to create a collective garden called *Les Engraineurs*². The urban garden is located in the middle of the apartment blocks where they live:

Emmanuel: The idea of the Engraineurs is of course to grow fruits and vegetables, but the real purpose is to bring people together. I'm doing this to connect neighbors. I've been in this apartment for years and we realize that we don't talk too much to our neighbors. We're afraid of each other. The idea of the Engraineurs is to make a shared garden, everyone takes what they need but beyond that I want this to be a place to meet, to grow³.

This citizen initiative aims to offer a new activity to the inhabitants of these densely populated neighborhoods and to give a different image of the city, largely represented under the angle of ghettoization and violence.



Photo 5: Ici on sème. The garden is located in between three housing complexes. It is surrounded by social housing buildings.

Between January and February 2017, they arranged the containers, the wooden structures, and a geodesic greenhouse in the middle of the housing blocks. From the beginning, I photographed their activities. Sometimes I left my camera aside to give a hand for the installation of the materials. In this way, I quickly socialize with the habitués.

² This is a neologism that I translate as "The seeders".

³ The garden's slogan is "Ici on sème" (Here we sow). It is a word game: on s'aime and on sème, "we love each other" and "we sow".



PHOTO 6: Sarcelles.

Gardening requires a material, temporal, and moral investment on behalf of the organizers. Emmanuel, for example, makes rounds in the neighboring buildings to invite locals to join the events organized by the Engraineurs.



PHOTO 7: The Engraineurs work in the weeding of the garden.

These collective activities encourage new encounters between neighbors. The place previously underused by the residents rapidly became a sharing space. Moreover, the Engraineurs brought to the community a manual activity that is very little known in the neighborhood and that allows young people, in particular, to experience farming.



PHOTO 8: Geodesic orchard in the middle of the garden.

Furthermore, this citizen appropriation of the communal spaces drew the attention of media and local politicians. Some local media contribute to publicizing this initiative. At the same time, my photographic activity got more and more appreciated since I captured their daily life, but also since I shared my photos with them so that they could use them to communicate on social networks.

My photographic practice was in that sense accepted and solicited by the gardeners who regularly used my photographs in their communication supports.



PHOTO 9: The neighborhood of the Vignes Blanches.

Most of the time Emmanuel and Anne-Claire took care of the garden and once or twice a week other residents participate in the maintenance. This activity was followed by other events that made it possible for the residents to meet each other in greater numbers.



PHOTO 10: Construction of the geodesic orchard.

Space is the product of interrelations at different social scales (Massey 2005). This citizen initiative transformed the way the space of the garden was seen and experienced by the local community.



PHOTO 11: Meeting between neighbors close to the garden.

By taking over a territory that was previously neglected by the public institutions, the Engraineurs created a new way of experiencing and using the collective places.



PHOTO 12: Barbecue.

Barbecues, neighborhood parties, and movie screenings constituted a way to attract local people who do not spontaneously attend this project.



PHOTO 13: Community celebration.

This photographic ethnography aimed to raise awareness about the visual representation of these spaces and to propose new visualities about communities that have long been represented through the lens of marginality.



PHOTO 14: Youssouf, Engraineur.

Les Engraineurs aimed to show the agentivity of the inhabitants and the citizen appropriation of spaces considered violent and dangerous.



PHOTO 15: Visit of the deputy of the 7th district of Val d'Oise Dominique Da Silva (LREM) during a meeting organized by the Engraineurs.

The intention was to consider a critical representation of local dwellers and to propose new imagery in connection with the ordinary activities of the residents. This attempt to rethink the politics of visual representation in visual anthropology involves the creation of a critical narrative at the plastic and narrative dimension (Leon-Quijano 2021). For this purpose, I enquired into the ordinary activities of the local community, but also the discourses promoted by the people involved on social networks.

"Emmanuel: we want to show that it is not because we are in Sarcelles that we are barbarians. I want to show that we are seeds, that we will germinate, and that we will change the image of our neighborhood on a small scale [...] that's what we deserve."

Countering the collective image that portrays Sarcelles as a "concrete jungle" plagued by violence and drugs, the Engraineurs use visual materials as a way to counteract this negative image. For instance, showing their daily lives as gardeners in social networks was the best way to collectively reshape the imaged community⁴.

⁴ A broader analysis of the group's visual strategies on social networks is developed in the third chapter of my dissertation (Leon-Quijano 2020).



PHOTO 16: Young Engraineurs after gardening.

Conclusion

Based on a photo-ethnography of gardening practices, this visual essay explored how photographs might be used to critically depict the gardening experience of a community project in a French banlieue. By critically situating the representations of people, spaces, and interactions I reflexively portrayed the experiences of the urban gardeners. Through photographic creation, I proposed a disruptive iconography of the local community in the light of a previous hegemonic form of representation that disowns the capabilities of local actors. By examining the politics of photographic representation in visual anthropology, I intended to do critical research on the representation of communities considered as marginal (Bourgois & Schonberg, 2009; Fattal, 2020). To do this, I advocated for an iconography that highlights the capacity of local dwellers to occupy public spaces. Therefore, I defend the idea of a necessary photographic engagement that takes into account not only the description of the observed situations, but also the reflexive, sensory, and critical figuration of the lived experiences in the field.



PHOTO 17: The Engraineurs arrange the garden after an event with the neighbors.

Finally, this visual narrative is a valuable opportunity to expand existing photographic initiatives in anthropology such as *Writing With Light* (American Anthropological Association). By exploring new publishing practices, we can further reflect on the critical scope of photographic experiences in anthropology.

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GREETINGS FROM GELA. A VISUAL RESEARCH ON INDUSTRIAL IMAGERY AND A LATE-INDUSTRIAL TERRITORY

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ABSTRACT

'Greetings from Gela' explores the Sicilian industrial exploitation and its dark legacy through the dialogue between documentary photographs taken in 2019, and postcards produced in the second half of the twentieth century, when the black-gold dream grew with the glorification of the myths of 'modernity' and 'progress'.

KEYWORDS

Postcards; late-industrialisation; Sicily; visual research; photography; industrial imagery; representation; territory.

BIO

Chiara Scardozzi holds a Ph.D. in Ethno-Anthropological Disciplines at the University of Rome, "La Sapienza". Currently she is Adjunct Professor of Visual Anthropology at University of Foggia, Italy. Since 2009 she has been working between Italy and Latin America, where she develops her research activities, mainly concerning the ecoregion of Gran Chaco, the processes of inter-ethnic coexistence, and land rights of indigenous peoples and *campesino* families. In 2014 she received the "Francesca Cappelletto Award" from the University of Verona, (Centre for Ethnographic Research and Italian Society for Applied Anthropology), for the best MA thesis in the field of public anthropology. In 2015 she graduated from the Roman School of Photography and Cinema, where she read for her master's in "Reportage and creative personal research". Her works are published in *Visual Ethnography Journal*, *National Geographic Italia*, *La Repubblica*, *Witness Journal*, *Yogurt Magazine*, and *C41 Magazine*.

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‘Greetings from Gela’ is a photo-essay extracted from a larger visual research project named ‘Nerosogno’ (Black Dream), carried out in 2019 in some industrialised areas of south-eastern Sicily.¹ Starting in the second half of the twentieth century, the territories have been the subject of accelerated industrialisation processes, mainly linked to the petrochemical sector, making them the most important in Europe, both in terms of extension and production.

United by a prescriptive, hetero-directed and extractivist development model, and based on state intervention and the creation of giant productive poles (Benadusi and Ruggero 2021: 7-8), these areas are now classified as ‘Sites of national interest’ (SIN), due to the high levels of water, air and soil contamination, mainly caused by the release of chemical pollutants and toxic waste from the oil refining process.

In Gela (province of Caltanissetta), the photographic documentation is divided between the sea and the land, the Gulf and the *Piana* (lowland), and joins the postcards produced in a specific period, collectively remembered as the era of maximum splendour of the city: the Sixties of Enrico Mattei, the founder of Eni, the creator and supporter of Gela’s petrochemical centre, built on a large area of about 500 hectares.

These are the years in which an idealised ‘modernity’, accelerated and imposed from above, allowed for rapid urbanisation and the birth of a working-class culture that was transplanted from Northern Italy to the South; it promised employment, material benefits, and new lifestyles; it engulfed every alternative of endogenous development, possibly linked to seaside tourism and archaeology, and temporarily, and ideally, removed the stigmas and hardships of agricultural society. After just over a decade, the initial productive and occupational dynamism underwent a sudden slowdown, while an irreversible labour and environmental crisis advanced.

In 1990 the industrial area was declared ‘a high environmental risk’: while fragmentary ‘green’ reconversion processes were being sketched out in the name of elusive ‘sustainability’²; the great late-industrial expanses show themselves as ‘dense deserts’, kilometric voids, ruins of a bygone era that triggered radical socio-ecological changes. This has left a very high price to pay: environmental disaster, cancer, neonatal diseases, and the highest mortality rates in Sicily.

In these scenarios, characterised by risk and a general condition of existential uncertainty, different substances produce a ‘second nature’; starting with oil, understood as ‘matter’ and as ‘history’, plants, animals and human beings are residual presences in an altered environment, where the extractive areas overlap agricultural land and pastures, cultivated spaces with perforated lands; personal interests and environmental protection. The different cities, of which Gela is made up, seem to merge with each other, but each of them reflects the omnipresent ‘industrial city’, and, in some ways, they are the consequence, (even in the photographic space): the ruins of classical antiquity coexist with the waste of the recent past, the signs left by human beings allow us to understand what could have been and is not.

Visible and invisible, manifest and occult, past and present are confused to the point of giving us the impression of not understanding exactly what we are seeing, or what kind of space we are crossing, forcing us to think about what can be directly photographed and what can only be evoked.

To account for this complexity, the contemporary decadent scenario is counterposed with the iconic images of the industrial epoch which I found in the multimodal virtues of the postcards (Gugganig and Schor 2020), personally purchased in some shops in the city, and from private collectors.

What is the role of these images in the identity formation of the city, in the permanent tension between shown and hidden, near and far? What are the implications of these representations in political and patrimonial terms?

As the anthropological literature about tourism shows, touristic images, and especially postcards, could be intended as a political representation of identity, and a way to show the “authenticity” of a place (Selwin 1996) that becomes a “locality” (Simonicca 2015).

“There are no new postcards from Gela, because there is nothing more to see in Gela”, said the owner of a shop, when I went to look for postcards of the city.

¹ The visual survey was conducted within the project, “*Eco-frictions of the Anthropocene*” (Research Project of National Relevance, (PRIN) Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research). The project was carried out in the Sicilian Provinces of Syracuse, Caltanissetta and Messina, in collaboration with the researchers, Mara Benadusi, Alessandro Lutri, and Andrea Ravenda, and with the supervision of Mara Benadusi (University of Catania), and Berardino Palumbo (University of Messina). Available: <https://www.ecofrizioni.it/en/about-2/>

² On the problematic ‘green’ reconversion process, see the works of Lutri (2018), Saitta (2009), Turco (2018).

In that 'nothing more' is held in the ethnographer's/photographer's eye, attempting to make this imagined, yet dense void visible.

As "multifaceted objects" (Andriotis and Mavrič 2013: 35), a visual and tactile media, postcards could be read as documentary images that testify a precise sensibility and gaze, the will of a specific era connected to the industrial imagery and its propaganda, symbols of a dream dyed black, reflections of a contradictory and excluding "progress".

In a world that now seems distant, postcards were travelling images which transformed every element linked to industrialization into an iconic heritage, a visual vehicle to communicate Gela's desirable identity.



PHOTO 1: Gela, train station. Postcard.



PHOTO 2: Herd grazing in the Gela countryside. In the background, on the left, a drill for oil extraction. In 1956, at a depth of 3400 metres, the first oil field was established in the Piana del Signore.



PHOTO 3: Acropolis of Gela, the remains of the ancient city built by Cretan settlers, dating from the sixth century B.C. In the background, the petrochemical plants. Today the archaeological site cannot be visited due to the lack of funds necessary for the conservation and maintenance of the site. Postcard.

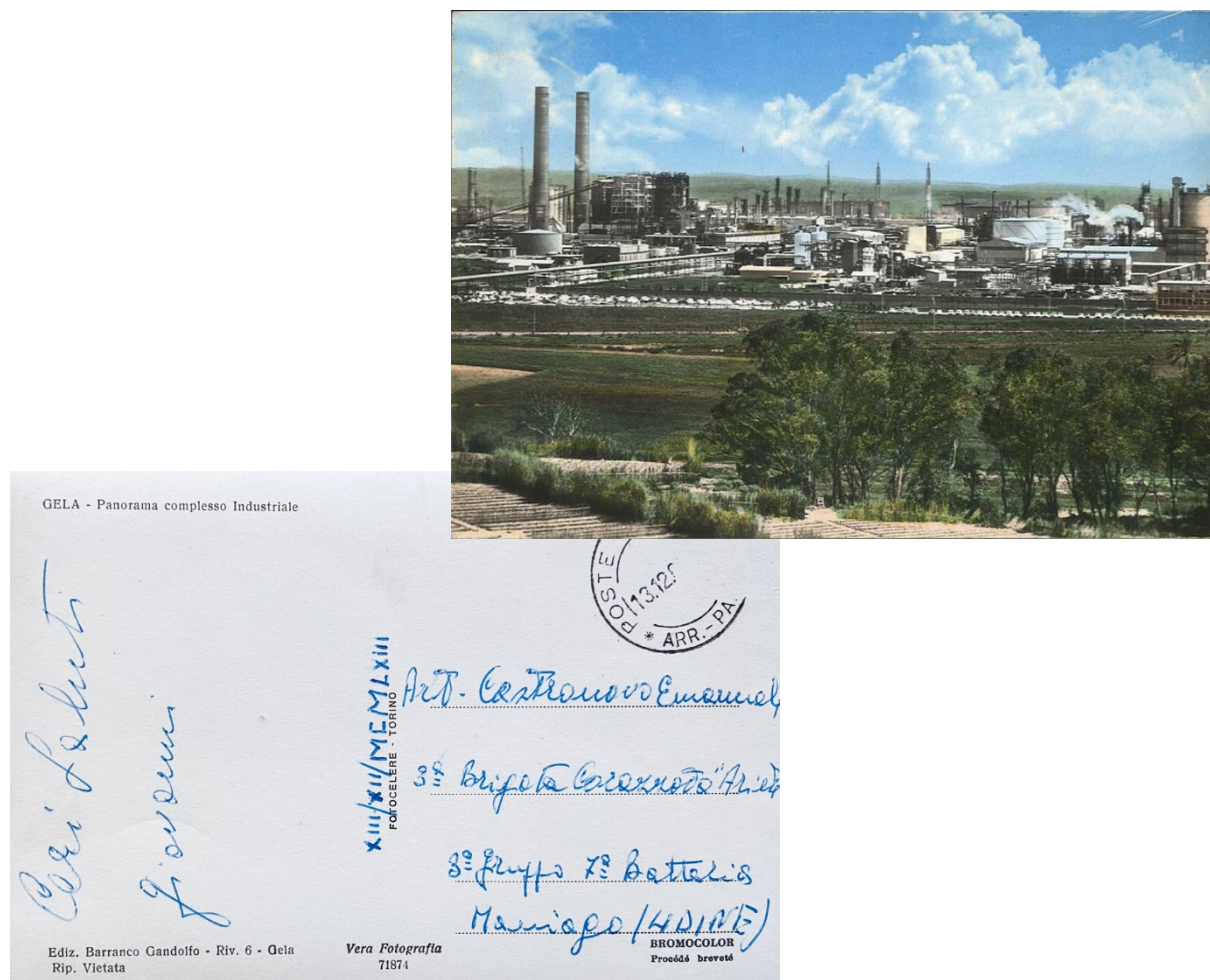


PHOTO 4: Gela, panorama of the industrial complex. Travelled postcard, dated 13 December 1963.



PHOTO 5: Gela, Macchitella District, Eni Group Club. Section "E. Mattei ". The neighbourhood was created in the 1960s as a satellite of the petrochemical centre. Totally separated in urban and social terms from the rest of the city, it offered accommodation to Eni employees.



PHOTO 6: Gela, Macchitella district. Billiard room inside the Eni Group Club. In the 1960s the neighbourhood was equipped with a series of unimaginable comforts for the local inhabitants, such as the continuous availability of drinking water and health, commercial and cultural services, such as a hospital, a shopping centre and a cinema-theatre.



PHOTO 7: Until the industrial boom of the 1960s, Gela and the surrounding areas were mainly characterised by an agricultural economy. Today the land, the air and the aquifers are severely compromised by the damage of emissions, plant losses and the spill of pollutants.



PHOTO 8: Gela, the petrochemical centre seen from the city. Postcard.



PHOTO 9: Gela has higher percentages of congenital malformations than the Italian and European average. Some recent surveys estimate that in the last fifteen years at least 450 children have been born with malformations due to environmental pollution.



PHOTO 10: The first offshore drilling rig in Europe (1958), built in the United States and called “Scarabeo”, together with the Saipem motor ship, used for oil exploration at sea. Postcard.



PHOTO 11: Bath-house, “La Conchiglia” (seashell), and, in the background, the “Scarabeo”. La Conchiglia was inaugurated in 1958 and enjoyed national fame, hosting social events and personalities from the world of entertainment, culture and politics. It was built in reinforced concrete on the remains of an ancient bathing establishment which from the 19th century was only installed in the summer season. Postcard.



PHOTO 12: The remains of the "Conchiglia" today. Its decline began in the 1980s, mainly due to oil pollution of the waters and sea currents that caused a progressive retreat of the coast. Today the structure is under seizure.



PHOTO 13: Eni refinery plants.



PHOTO 14: Drill in the plains of Gela. Postcard, detail.



PHOTO 15: The effects of pollution on the health of the local population are devastating. Numerous medical reports have established the correlation between the presence of different polluting chemicals and the high rates of cancer.



PHOTO 16: In the Macchitella district, the streets bear the names of the Eni executives; this one in particular is dedicated to Enrico Mattei, the founder of Eni.



PHOTO 17: Gela. Oil area - pump for the extraction of crude oil. Postcard.



PHOTO 18: Gela, refinery. Torch chimney in operation. The torches burn the gases eliminated in the production plant.



PHOTO 19: "Greetings from Gela". Postcard. Among the sites of interest in the city, also the drilling probe of the oil zone.

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THE CITY AT THE END OF THINGS

Damián Arteca, *McGill University and the European Graduate School (EGS)*

ABSTRACT

What does it mean to photograph a *remainder*? Sudbury Ontario, a Northern city responsible for a vast chunk of the world's nickel production, has produced a landscape full of distances, absences, and looming architectures. In this photo essay, I take my hometown of Sudbury as an example of what Phil A. Neel (2018) dubs *Hinterland*, that growing desert between urban centers characterized by active (and abandoned) sites of extraction. Sudbury's nickel mine remains active, but recent economic decline, catastrophic cuts to educational funding, and a crippling wave of fentanyl addiction have multiplied the *presence of absence*. In this photo essay, I have attempted to photograph the feeling of aesthetic *remainder* – whatever is left of a city's presence when something fundamental has been *subtracted*. Empty streets. Closed businesses. The slow creak of a rusty sign. Factories subtracted of workers, looming watertowers subtracted of water. Occasionally, a freight train wanders south, subtracting a few thousand tons of ore. It is the remainder of these subtractions that I have hoped to capture.

KEYWORDS

hinterland, anthropocene, ontario, partial object, anthropology, visual ethnography

BIO

Damián Arteca is a master's student in psychiatry at McGill University (Montréal, Canada) and senior research fellow at McGill's Building 21. He holds a Bachelor's in Philosophy and Anthropology. He currently studies the dynamics of cultural ontologies from the perspective of neuroscience and cognitive anthropology. Outside of his more scientifically-oriented work, however, Damián remains interested in the methodologies of visual and textual ethnography. Returning to his hometown of Sudbury, Ontario, for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, he composed this photo essay over the months of February and March of 2021.

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“The Hinterland is the sunken continent that stretches between the constellation of spectacular cities, the growing desert beyond the palace walls” (Neel 2018)

“Lurid and lofty and vast it seems; It hath no rounded name that rings, But I have heard it called in dreams; The City of the End of Things” (Archibald Lampman, 1899, writing about Sudbury, Ontario)

Two Cataclysms Make a Hinterland

The city of Sudbury Ontario finds its origins in the mid 1800's, at the conjunction of two cataclysms of production. The first of these cataclysms was colonial. In the 1850's, the Robinson Huron Treaty was formed between the British Empire and the Ojibwe First Nations of the Algonquin group. On this front, the cataclysm continues: the Ontario government, over 150 years later, is appealing a recent decision won by First Nations groups regarding honoring the treaty's terms. The second of these cataclysms was prehistoric. Nearly 2 billion years ago, a meteoric impact shattered the earth's crust, creating a basin vast enough to cup the entire municipality. This apocalypse left a soil rich with metallic ore -in particular nickel, which was discovered accidentally during the construction of the Canadian railway. The intersection of these two catastrophes – the colonial expansion and the Paleoproterozoic meteoric impact- set the stage for one of the globe's most intensive projects of raw material extraction. Decades of pollution have stained Sudbury's granite hills an ebony black (photo 7) in an irreversible chemical reaction. A folk tale (I'm told is at least half-true) tells that the Sudbury's landscape was once so desolate that the moon landing was practiced on its surface. Everywhere, evidence of extraction and relocation – the symptoms of a *Hinterland*.

What is a Hinterland? In his 2018 essay “Hinterland”, Phil A. Neel defines his eponymous concept as “[a] often heavily industrial space - a space for factory farms, for massive logistics complexes, for power generation, and for the extraction of resources from forests, deserts, and seas” (Neel 2018: 17). The Hinterland is the space of negative extraction which sustains the political-administrative urban cores concerned with productive generation: manufacturing, cultural commodities (‘creatives’), finance, real estate, and so on. The material substrate which sustains this economic superstructure is provided by those communities which exist as sites of extraction.

Hinterlands paradoxically sustain global flows of power while remaining isolated from them: Sudbury's nickel built the bulk of the United States' accumulation of missiles during the cold war, but received little of the spoils of the military-industrial complex. During my childhood, the nickel mine was bought out by Brazilian multinational *Vale*: but again, this link to global flows left the community *more* severed from them, as work conditions in the mine have steadily deteriorated since the buyout. The inhabitants of these extractive sites, active or abandoned, are the ‘hinterlanders’. And what of the lives that are lived there – the lives that perform this extraction? And when this extraction is abandoned – what of *those* lives, that exist as a sort of intergenerational remainder?

To be clear, it is not that Sudbury can be fully characterized by lack. Sudbury is not purely a *negative space* – it insists upon its own positive existence. There are many beautiful presences in Sudbury – many avenues of joy, creativity, friendship, and community. However, it remains true that when a community owes its inception and continued existence to a site of productive extraction, negativity remains in some sense at its core. Sudbury exists as an extractive site (a perpetual act of negative removal) that must constantly justify its connection to the outside world by expelling flows of raw material substrate. Without this constant export, there is always a fear that nothing *but* the negativity will remain, rendering the city a sort of partial object – a doorknob without a door, or an organ without a body (Zizek, 2004).

Attempts to circumvent this partiality are a constant site of struggling desires. The city is dotted with abandoned projects dictated by external investors promising economic growth. An abandoned beer factory (Photo 5) is promised to become high-end condos, and despite heavy subsidies from the municipal government, it sits unchanged. Attempts to diversify the city's economy so as to become independent have had mixed success. It is this constant grappling with the status of *hinterland as partial-object* which leaves its landscape littered with what I suggest be called ‘aesthetic remainders’.

Aesthetic Remainder

In the late 20th century, Sudbury underwent a concerted effort to reduce the environmental impact of its mining practices. Part of this effort involved the construction of the *superstack* (photo 17), a towering chimney that was once the tallest in the world. Its height would allow the gaseous waste produced by nickel mining (namely, airborne sulfuric acid) to catch the winds above the city and avoid creating acid rain. For much of my childhood, the sunset was cut by a thick dark plume heading eastwards. Recently, the chimney was shut down, if only because new technology allowed the acid to be captured and sold as a commodity. It stands now, out of operation, a surreal monolith peering over the city like a vast sundial.

Without its industrial function, the colossal concrete-and-brick tube seems uncanny. When emitting its plume, it remains connected to its industrial core, and thus retains comprehensibility. Once disembodied, its continued existence becomes obscene and melancholic. Thus, severed from its perceived existential source, it becomes uncanny, seemingly having an autonomous quality external to any human intervention (Zizek, 2004). This is the core of the uncanny hinterland: retaining comprehensibility only when affixed to the urban cores, once detached from their extractive function they must confront their own autonomous quality: the aesthetic result being the proliferation of *remainders*.

What I mean by an aesthetic *remainder* is simply an aesthetic quality of *emptiness* that seems to demand, in of itself, a return to fullness. The remainder of a water-tower lacking water. The remainder of a factory lacking workers. The remainder of a chimney lacking smoke. The remainder of a University lacking professors – just this past month, facing bankruptcy, over 30% of Laurentian University's (Sudbury's post-secondary institution) tenured staff were fired, permanently crippling the intellectual community of the city. The remainder of an empty corner store. The remainder of a church without a congregation. Whatever is left of nickel ore after yet one more, just one more train heads south. It is hard not to perceive the effect of all this *remaining* in the souls of the community's citizens. A friend of mine once told me that Sudbury's high rates of drug use, pregnancy and smoking amongst youth could be explained by one unifying pathology in *boredom*- quite literally, in the absence of any autonomous reality, what remains is the diversion of slow self destruction.

In my neighborhood -the city's downtown core- one of the most salient traces of economic decay is the stark influx of fentanyl addiction. In much the same way material flows of nickel ore and sulfuric acid leak south from the city by rail, material flows of heroin and fentanyl leak north into the veins of its citizens. Both flows are productive of economic and subjective realities. Despite the sharp spike in homelessness and addiction, the city has recently lost one of its few homeless shelters. Safe injection sites are delayed. Overdoses are constant. Passing through a concrete tunnel which cuts underneath a train line, I encountered a piece of graffiti labelled the "RIP (Rest in Peace)" wall (photo 2). Underneath, four names were listed. Among them, the *Tanner*. Tanner had been a friend of mine in my teenage years. I had not spoken to him in half a decade. A few weeks ago, he had died of an overdose. Now that small, starkly beautiful shrine is part of what remains of him in the city. In the event of each of these overdoses, the city remains uncannily animated in their absence, like a key without a piano. In this sense we are all remainders – we are what remains of one another.

Ultimately, what is at stake in the Hinterland -in the land of remainders- is nothing politically new to anthropological discourse: ultimately the stakes are a matter of *autonomy*. As Phil A. Neel indicates in his 2018 essay, the existence of Hinterland is always the product of an asymmetry in the power of governance.



PHOTO 1: *The All Nations Church's unique architecture was modelled after the so-called "apocalypse proof" hurricane-resistant domes used in Florida. February 2021.*



PHOTO 2: *The "RIP" wall. Scrawled by anonymous artists in the tunnel that connects Sudbury's downtown, the wall lists the names of recent fentanyl victims (as well as a tribute to 2pac). March 2021.*



PHOTO 3: *The old watertower, now used for advertising, looms through morning fog. February 2021.*



PHOTO 4: *Freight trains and a hill of oxidized stone and slag block the view of the lake. February 2021.*



PHOTO 5: *A house and its garden add a bit of colour to the palette of an abandoned beer factory. February 2021.*



PHOTO 6: *Kilometers of the trainyard bisect the city. Behind the yards, the watertower looms. March 2021.*



PHOTO 7: *Years of pollution have left the granite hills around Sudbury jet-black. Lichen dots its surface. March 2021.*



PHOTO 8: *A train line curves its way through a residential neighborhood. February 2021.*



PHOTO 9: *On a clear day, a friend lies on his back on the frozen Ramsey Lake to get a look at the winter sky. February 2021.*



PHOTO 10: *An accidental crucifix. March 2021.*



PHOTO 11: *The land rusts. March 2021.*



PHOTO 12: *ABC Taxi, now abandoned, lingers at the edge of the neighborhood. March 2021.*



PHOTO 13: *The old corner store holds its Kāt-Kāt sign proudly. March 2021.*



PHOTO 14: *The hilly landscape requires bridges for rail. March 2021.*



PHOTO 15: Another view of a rail line. Just off frame, a couple EverGreen containers zip past, a reminder of the economy's global scope. March 2021.



PHOTO 16: The sky opens over frozen Ramsey Lake. February 2021.



PHOTO 17: Once the tallest chimney in the world, the smokestack dominates all other Sudburian landmarks. February 2021.

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MAMA-ING

Dina Benbrahim, *University of Arkansas*
Kári Björn, *Independent photographer*

ABSTRACT

This collaborative photo essay follows an auto-ethnographic methodology to reflect and reject the shaming of nursing bodies in public. Polaroids are used as a medium to capture everyday life situations between a mother and a son, where sexualization has simply no place to be.

KEYWORDS

auto-ethnography, nursing, public space, polaroid, visual archive

BIO

Dina Benbrahim is an Endowed Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at the University of Arkansas. She graduated from the University of Florida with an MFA in Design and Visual Communication. She also holds an MS in Marketing and Communication from the Université Internationale de Casablanca and a Bachelor in Business Administration from Al Akhawayn University, Morocco. Dina has 8 years of industry experience in NYC and Casablanca, working with clients including the National Women's History Museum and Absolut Vodka. She also taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo and University of Florida.

Kári Björn is an Icelandic photographer, currently based in the United States. Björn is inspired by his naïve childhood conception of "America the great!" In parallel, he is fascinated by its most blatant flaws such as wealth inequality and mass incarceration. His works have been exhibited on both sides of the Atlantic, at Aperture Gallery in New York City, Eastern State Penitentiary Museum in Philadelphia and the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Björn's series have been awarded by Hasselblad and his documentary stories have been published in *American Photography*, *Dazed*, and *States of Incarceration*.

Naël Kárasón is our beautiful and kind son who loves his mama's breastmilk, Lapinou the bunny and bath times.

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PHOTO 1

This collaborative, auto-ethnographic project was born out of exhaustion. We felt exhausted by all the efforts that were put together to shame women for breastfeeding in public. Why are we sexualized during a moment of necessity—bonding and feeding our child? Why should I have to breastfeed in tiny

rooms of the size of a closet? During a faculty orientation, I have been asked to breastfeed in a toilet. Why should I feed my newborn between people urinating and defecating? I was in a car dealership full of men to buy a new car and because the process is long, I had to breastfeed my son. A salesperson blatantly took a photo of us and was not held accountable for his deplorable actions. Was that so surprising that I was not wearing any product to hide my breasts when breastfeeding then?



FIGURE 1

Amy Bentley (2014) argues that female breasts became objects of desire when breastfeeding during the nineteenth century which coincides with the rise of processed baby food. This latter was advertised as the most hygienic and nourishing food a baby could possibly have, making lactating bodies unnecessary for feeding. Breastfeeding only became legal in all 50 states until 2018, with Utah and Idaho finally removing it from their public indecency statutes. Women's breasts have been sexualized to sell toothpaste, so is that so ridiculous to think that a breast out in the public is seeking the male's gaze? Yes, it is, and here is why. Women do not belong in the domestic sphere anymore. In nineteenth century American culture, the concept of True Womanhood dictated the behavioral code of a 'good' woman. Barbara Welter's essay *The Cult of True Womanhood* (1966) defines *True Womanhood* with four attributes: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Domesticity centered the lives of women on the home, immersing themselves in domestic tasks of housekeeping, child-rearing among other family-oriented tasks. We have left the nineteenth-century two centuries ago.

Moreover, the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* - CDC (2021) recommends exclusive breastfeeding until at least the age of 6 months because breastfed infants have reduced risks of asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, severe lower respiratory disease, acute otitis media (ear infections), sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), gastrointestinal infections (diarrhea/vomiting), and necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) for preterm infants.



PHOTO 2

Additionally, breastfeeding can help lower a mother's risk of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, ovarian cancer, and breast cancer. Doctor Ruth Petersen, the director of CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, believes that "breastfeeding provides unmatched health benefits for babies and mothers. It is the clinical gold standard for infant feeding and nutrition, with breast milk uniquely tailored to meet the health needs of a growing baby. We must do more to create supportive and safe environments for mothers who choose to breastfeed." If 90% of families breastfed exclusively for six months, the United States would save \$13 billion per year and prevent 911 deaths, all of which would be in infants, each year.

The three of us started this project, *mama-ing*, as a form of silent protest against the shaming of nursing in public. We named it *mama-ing* because I chose to breastfeed in my process of being a mother to Naël, and all ways of mothering are valid. Every time I had to breastfeed in public, Kári snapped a polaroid. The polaroid has been a medium of memory for families since the late 1940s. Edwin H. Land, who was behind the Polaroid Corporation, was inspired by his three-year-old daughter who asked why she could not see the picture he had just taken of her on his camera during their family vacations. This is how the instant camera film was born. As a result, capturing what should be commonly accepted as an innocent family moment could not be done with anything else than polaroids. The polaroid makes it a statement of its own.

At the beginning of this creative journey, snapping a polaroid picture made me feel uncomfortable. I felt the weight of people's looks becoming suddenly heavier and heavier. But as we kept going with this idea, the world around me vanished. In these polaroids, I rarely look elsewhere than at Naël. He has my full attention from start to end and no one else matters. My breast is not a sexual object. My breast is a powerful part of my body that adapts to Naël's needs in a way that no processed baby food can ever replace. And if society wants to sexualize and condemn this natural act, it is not on me. It is not on nursing bodies. It is on those who perpetuate this idiotic shame. We hope this project inspires a visual photographic archive for all to feel safe nursing in public.



PHOTO 3



PHOTO 4



PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6



PHOTO 7



PHOTO 8



PHOTO 9



PHOTO 10



PHOTO 11



PHOTO 12



PHOTO 13



PHOTO 14



PHOTO 15



PHOTO 16



PHOTO 17



PHOTO 18

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THE GOLDEN BOUGH

Gianluca Ceccarini, *Sarab Collective*

ABSTRACT

Research photography, with its experimental languages and openness to interaction with other media, is a powerful means of contemporary reflection. With *The Golden Bough* I tried to investigate the origins of the 'Science of man' and an imaginary -the colonialist one- which should belong to our past but which perhaps still concerns us more than we can imagine.

KEYWORDS

anthropology; ethnography; photography; colonialism; racism

BIO

I graduated in Cultural Anthropology, at the University of Rome "La Sapienza"; in 2001 I was a founding member of ARSDEA, Association for Research and Demo-Ethno-Anthropological Studies, through which I carried out various activities: research on the territory, museum installations, participation and organization of conferences, publication of articles. With Nahid Rezashateri, Iranian photographer-filmmaker, in 2018 I founded the collective SARAB. In recent years I have dealt with the relationship between Anthropology and Photography, addressing issues of the ethno-anthropological method, such as identity, memory, landscape, body, etc., through experimental photographic projects.

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The origin of Anthropology as 'science of primitive societies' is to be found within the intellectual climate of positivist Evolutionism where the history of human society appeared as the result of identical cumulative laws. Therefore, the 'contemporary primitives' represented the most remote stage of cultural development. An ethnocentric vision that presupposed a division of societies into 'inferior' and 'superior'. Non-European ethnic groups were observed and analyzed as 'living fossils' of evolutionary stages surpassed by western civilization, useful to study as cavies to shed light on our past. The pattern of historical and cultural development adopted by the Victorian evolutionary anthropology was that of the three evolutionary stages of eighteenth-century derivation. The peoples were classified and placed on three evolutionary steps, savage-barbarian-civilized.

An anthropology based on these strongly ethnocentric concepts was functional to the colonial States that saw in the science of primitive peoples an effective tool for ruling over ethnic groups considered inferior: know better to govern. Parallel to the vision of the savage as a representative of a humanity firm in the evolutionary path, matured the false idealist myth of the 'good savage', full of stereotypes: a romantic vision not free from ethnocentric drifts. Fortunately, modern anthropology will release itself from the meshes of power until it becomes a self-reflexive science often active in the defense of the rights of ethnic minorities, making participating observation a central method: to understand, the anthropologist must pitch his own tent in the center of the village.

The project *The Golden Bough*, borrowed from the famous essay by the evolutionary anthropologist James Frazer, aims to investigate the imagery of this period so controversial that it has seen entire ethnic groups disappear and subjugate millions of human beings at the hands of the European conquerors in the name of progress and an alleged superiority.

But how much of Victorian ethnocentrism still survives in our imagination, in political thought and in the sciences, how much do we still think standing on that highest step?

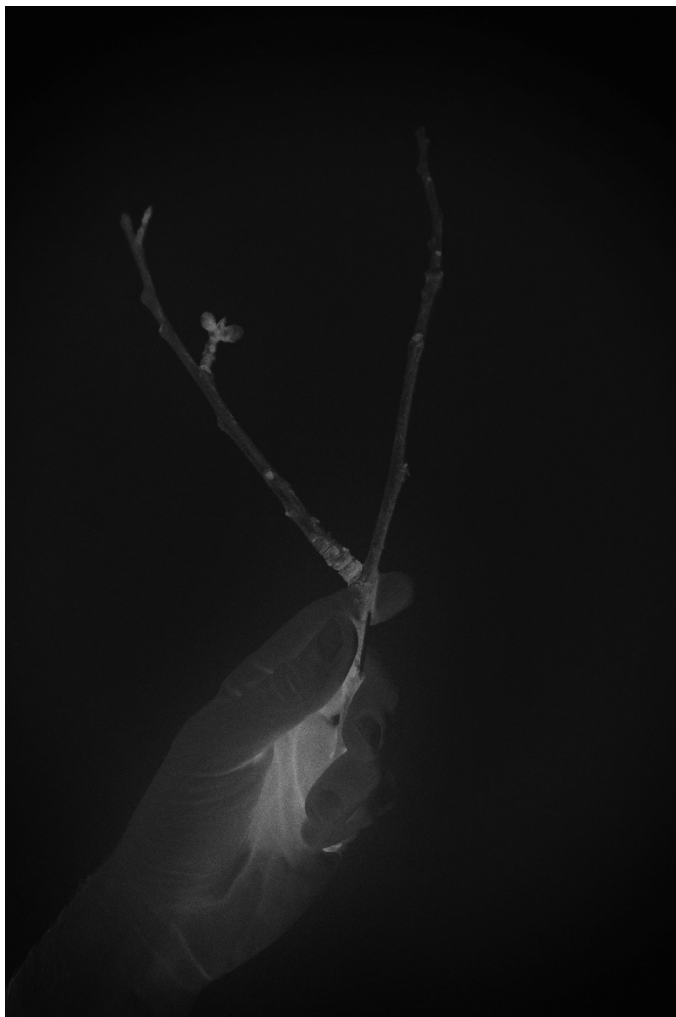


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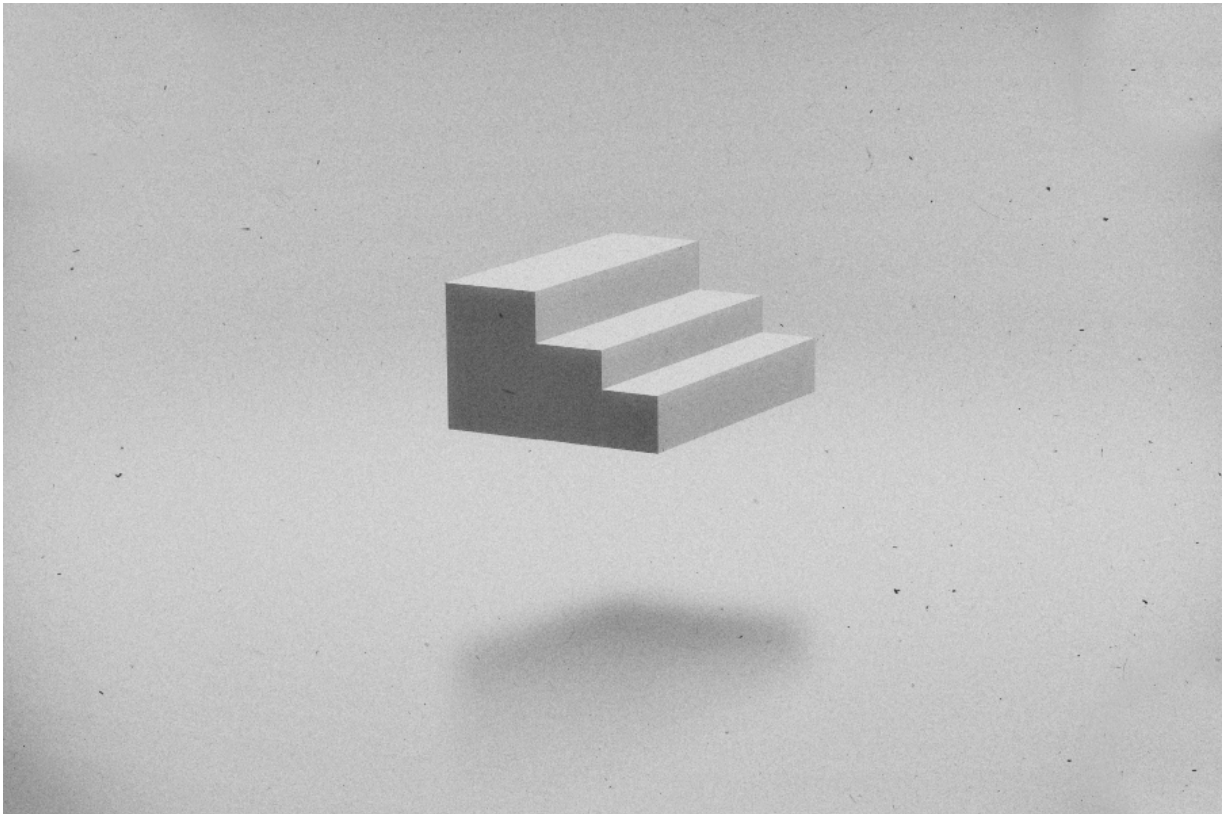


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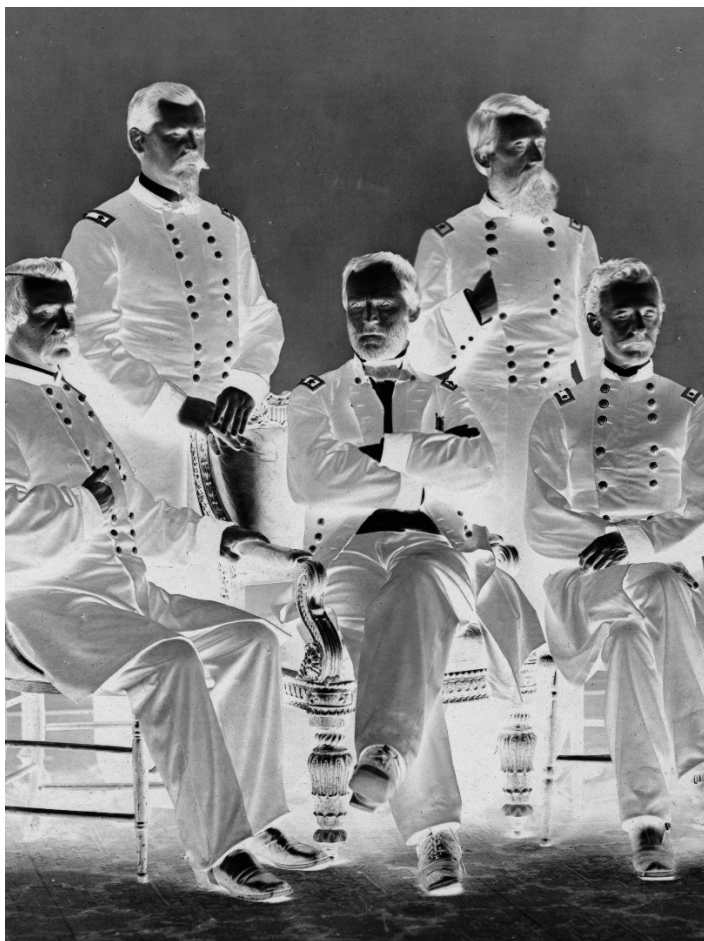


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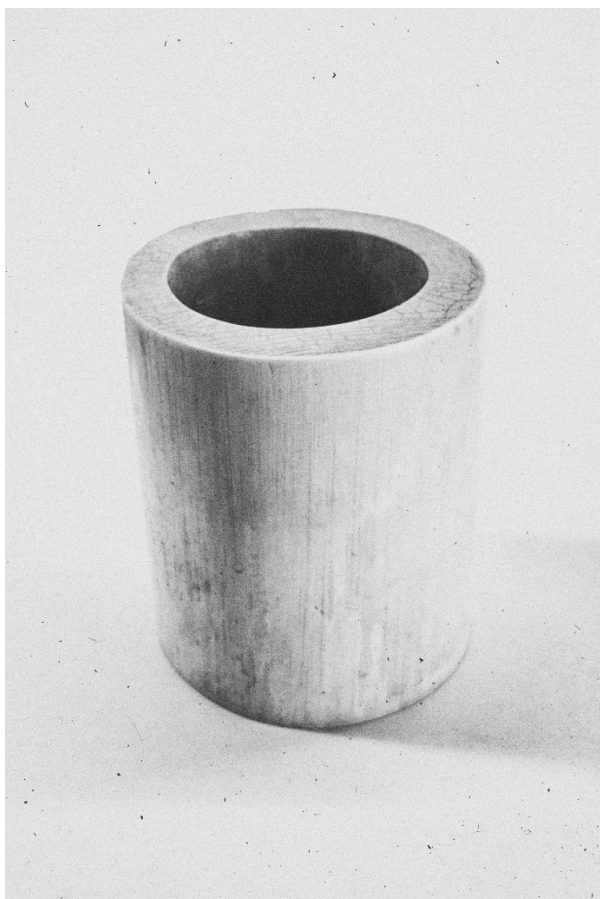


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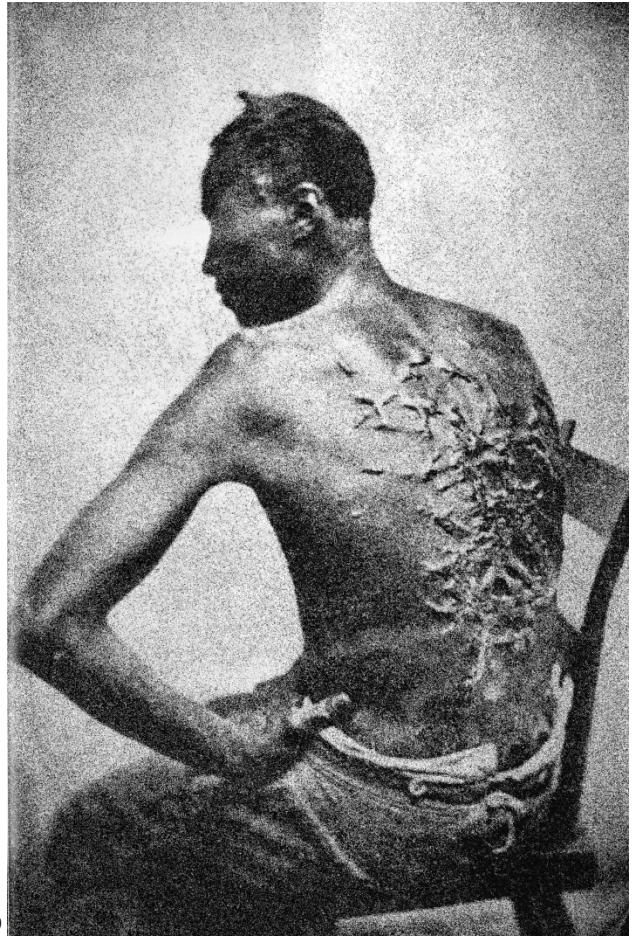


PHOTO 19



PHOTO 20

IN-GAME PHOTOGRAPHY.

**ANTHROPOLOGICAL NOTES AND VISUAL PERSPECTIVES FROM THE
IMAGINATION OF *THE OPEN WORLDS***

Marina Berardi, *Ph.D. candidate, University of Basilicata, Italy*

ABSTRACT

This photo-essay is a reflection on in-game photography, which is a particular visual practice widespread in the video game world, that helps us to re-read, and to then reconsider, our relationships with new forms of visual representation in the increasingly porous contexts of online and offline life, of digital and analog environments, of authenticity and inauthenticity. The images created in virtual and imagistic worlds force us to reconsider the notion of body, of the presence of light in the scenarios, marked by new contingencies and contexts in which the paradigm of truthfulness is definitively unhinged, leaving ample space for emotional experiences as discourse and reflective narration.

KEYWORDS

In-game photography; virtual photography; open worlds; digital environments; digital ethnography.

BIO

Marina Berardi is an anthropologist and a photographer. She is a Ph.D. candidate in *Cities and Landscapes: architecture, archaeology, cultural heritage, history and resources*, at the University of Basilicata, with an anthropological research project on politics, rhetoric and abandonment processes in small towns of Basilicata, Italy. She graduated at the School of Specialisation in Beni Demoetnoantropologici, after graduating from the University of Rome, La Sapienza. She works as a visual anthropologist in intangible and material heritage, depopulation, material culture, and vernacular imagery. Some of her photographic works have received national and international mentions and awards, including *Nikon Talents 2013*, *Sony World Award*, and *Metropolis 2017*. In 2019, she was among the winners of the *MAVI Photography Competition* (Museo Antropologico Visivo Irpino). Since 2019 she has been the Photo Essay Editor of *Visual Ethnography*, a peer-reviewed journal, Classe A, Macrosettore 11/A5.

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“This is not a struggle between truth and lie, reality and copy. Rather this is a space hosting experiences that can be conceptualized and lived differently by different viewers depending on their own choices, contexts and viewing positions. Parallel worlds. This ongoing pendulum between positions can perhaps be addressed in terms of agency versus ownership” (Favero 2018: 1518 position kindle Edition)

Among the recent visual practises in which it is possible to reconsider the relationship between real and virtual, digital environment (Pink 2017: 9) and analogue environment, online and offline life - going in the direction of a reading that definitively undermines the paradigm of truthfulness and objectivity of the visual world and welcoming a radical dialectical transformation of the ways in which we are used to talking about representation - it comes from a context that anthropology rarely deals with, represented by the world of videogames, and by the diffusion of some practises of visual representation that take the name of *in-game photography*.

As with the advent of cinema, we are witnessing profound and radical transformations in terms of the use of experience and perception. Fontcuberta, for example, looks at the digital revolution and the fluidity of the works that overflow the existing channels, assigning the name of the *post-photographic culture paradigm* (Fontcuberta 2018: 22).

The applications borrowed from the video game industry can find important uses in the cultural and social industry in general, just think of the immersive experience of virtual reality (Favero 2018), which can also generate a new appeal with respect to the imagination of present and future scenarios, as Favero suggests

that emerging immersive images should not be addressed solely through a focus on novelty and on the future, but rather within a conceptual space capable of highlighting the extent to which immersion has constituted an important way through which human beings in different times and places have engaged with the visual world (Favero 2018: 1048 position Kindle edition).

The universes and meta-verses present us with challenges that also concern the body experience; as such, an example comes from the recent statements about the development of the AI Research SuperCluster (RSC), the super computer for Artificial Intelligence of Meta (formerly Facebook), which is implementing computer vision models, natural language processing and new tools for augmented reality.

In 1934, Marcel Mauss defined the body is "is man's first and most natural instrument. [...] technical object, and at the same time technical means" (1973 :75) which takes on completely new connotations, and which we can read through the inner curvature of the gaze that takes on a new horizon. Through *in-game photography*, the player actively participates in the construction of his or her own imaginary; the player has the ability to choose, frame, compose, select, and create images - within the confines of the game space, often *open world*, a virtual world in which to move, and freely explore - that forces us to question the meaning of looking and seeing.

This is possible, both from in-game modes, such as *photo-mode*, which emulate digital post-production software, and offer additional features, such as the change of framing within the 3D space, or the pose of the character. Through an aesthetic that in some cases recalls the aesthetics of documentary photography, the representation of reality in *in-game photography* creates a form of suspension between universes, which is made possible due to the realism of video game production.

Vision, which is historically situated and culturally determined, confronts us with the dilemma of what it means to see, and whether, as for Arnheim, "seeing something means assigning it a place in the whole," (Arnheim 2002: 30) that *whole* assumes boundaries that go beyond the reach of our gaze, where it is possible to generate new itineraries and new ways of passing through space; just think of the new forms of digital tourism also conveyed through images in the game worlds.

"Through the eye - writes Francesco Faeta - the process of distinction takes place, an initiation into the mystery of otherness," (Faeta 2003: 109)¹ and it is vision, the eye of the player, that shares their emic vision. It is the player's own point of view that takes one inside the sublimation of otherness where the boundary between real and non-real becomes another space in which the narration of the imaginary is placed, a mediation between the self and the game world.

An 'open-air' visual archive of the game universes is shown on the social network, Instagram, where it is possible to grasp in the hashtags, #inagamephotography #photomodephotography, #virtualphotography, the breadth of shared images, in which some, so-called, triple-A titles are reminiscent of blockbuster film productions, in terms of investments and scope, where the photo mode is integrated into the features of the game, such as in *The Last of Us Part II*, *Spider-Man*, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, *God of War*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Cyberpunk 2077*, and *Death Stranding*.

In-game photography causes one's inner eye to act in a space that goes beyond the ordinary. The game settings can take place on completely extraordinary synchronic and diachronic levels compared to reality outside the game world. We can find ourselves in the dystopian worlds of the future: as happens, for example, in the Night City of *Cyberpunk 2077*, where we play characters with completely different ethics, compared to our own way of being. We can be part of worlds in which the dynamics of power might mirror those of everyday life, as well as interpret roles, genders, and statuses, that do not correspond to us directly in everyday life, or that perhaps we hope will correspond.

The symbolic dynamics are multiple, and all draw on the anthropological experience of playing, which we reserve for future considerations. The aspect that I would like to emphasise here concerns the moment in which we decide to stop the game world, to take a picture because, regardless of who we are, there is a will dictated, on the one hand, by algorithmic parameters, and on the other, by subjectivity that is contributing to generate a new imagination of the world. And, if, as Alberto Sobrero writes

man lives in the world and fills it with images, projects in the kingdom of the mind, the realm of the things, perceives totality, convergences, similarities, and these similarities are transformed into metaphors, they settle into archetypes and the set of archetypes defines the relationship between the human being and his environment. A collective unconscious heritage (*imaginary*) that is hidden in the stories, in the narratives (Sobrero 2009: 117)²

then it is the emotional significance as a discourse (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 2005) that must be observed by going beyond the concept of reality.

The series of images that I propose here, are a starting point for reflecting on visual language in a context in which the boundaries of the gaze transcend truthfulness as an ontological assumption in which, through this gaze, we are witnessing a form of representation of emotions in the one who lives the immersive experience in the game world as well as for the observer. The photographs were taken by me within the open world of *Death Stranding*, a video game conceived by Hideo Kojima, and developed by Kojima Productions with the collaboration of Guerrilla Games, (published in 2019 by Sony Interactive Entertainment for PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5 and Windows). I chose to present images as a sequence of visual suggestions, to reflect on the evocative power of vision, while being aware of the context of their creation. The creative process of in-game photography evokes the creative process of pictorial art; the imaginary, paraphrasing the reflections on Merleau-Ponty's painting, offer the gaze "traces of vision, from the inside, in order that it may espouse them; it gives vision that which clothes it within, the imaginary texture of the real" (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 126), putting into practice a kind "of magical theory of vision" (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 127).

Many lives today are inextricably linked to their representation and the complexity of expressive representations (movies, novels, travel reports, virtual experiences) need to be assimilated into our ethnographies, not only as technical and technological devices, but also as devices with which to build and interrogate our own representations and existences. In-game photography brings us closer to some great (and existential) events that are changing the way we look, imagine and represent and exist.

¹ Translated by the author.

² Translated by the author.



PHOTO 1



PHOTO 2



PHOTO 3



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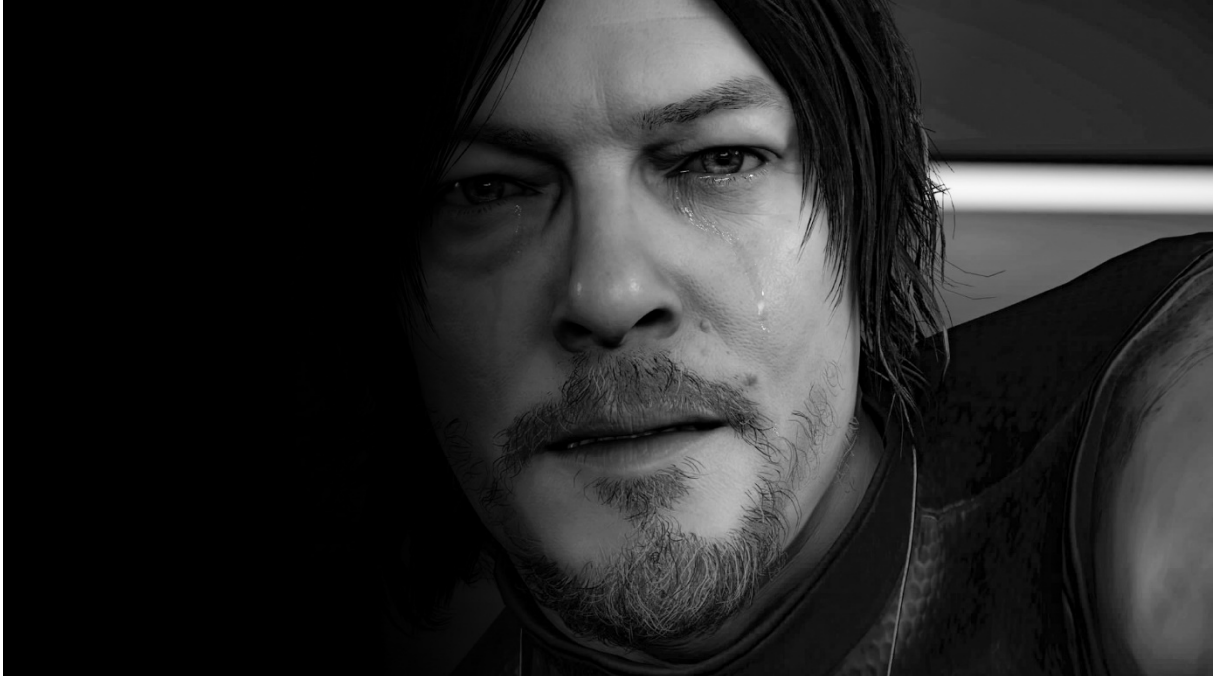


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PHOTO 12

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**IMMIGRANT SISTERHOOD:
VISUAL NARRATIVES OF ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN IN ITALIAN
RECEPTION CENTERS**

Sabine Tiefenthaler, *Free University of Bolzano*

Gemma Lynch, *HMKW University of Applied Sciences - Independent Photographer*

ABSTRACT

Immigrant Sisterhood is a feminist ethnographic collaborative research project where young female asylum seekers in first reception centers in Sardinia show through pictures and narratives different aspects of their life. The dominant visual representations of female refugees in media depict them as helpless victims or sexualized objects and this disregard women's agency, voice and their resources. The aim of this PhotoVoice project is to focus on the strengths and challenges of female refugees in first reception centers in Italy. The female asylum seekers were included in the whole research process and used academic and non-academic strategies to show their results.

KEYWORDS

PhotoVoice, agency, resilience, participatory research, visual ethnography, refugee women

Bio

Sabine Tiefenthaler, PhD: Born in Austria in 1986, living in Italy since 2015. Researcher in the Faculty of Education at the Free University of Bolzano where she conducts field research on the topics of migration, gender and child protection.

Gemma Lynch: Originally from the United Kingdom but based in Italy since 2007. She works as a photographer and creative producer for the audiovisual industry. She has made several photographic and documentary projects on intercultural issues and expat experiences.

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Introduction

Immigrant Sisterhood is the photographic part of a feminist ethnographic collaborative research project about the resilience of young female asylum seekers in Italian first reception centers. During the PhotoVoice project four young female asylum seekers in first reception centers in Sardinia were involved in the whole research process and acted as co-researchers. They developed their own research questions, made pictures about a topic of concern, told stories about their pictures and their lives, and showed them to the public with the hope to create awareness about their specific situation. In the following Photo-Essay some of the pictures of the asylum-seeking women and their narrations will be exposed. The PhotoVoice project was supported by the photographer Gemma Lynch, whose pictures will also be shown in the section 'Reportage pictures' and give some insight in the process of the project.

Female refugees belong to a marginalized group of the population whose perspectives and voices are rarely included in the public discourse. The dominant visual representations of female refugees in media depict them as helpless victims or sexualized objects. These images contribute to harmful gender stereotypes that often trivialize violence against women and disregards women's agency, voice, and their resources as survivors, protectors and providers (Krause 2017).

An important area of impact of these stereotypical images relates to the actions of psychosocial professionals in first reception centers. Through previous research in Italian first reception centers, Pinelli notes that "these organizations represent immigrants as human beings in need, devoid of any autonomy and agency" (2016: 31). In view of these circumstances PhotoVoice was used to disrupt pictures of the helpless, passive victim, in which women with refugee biographies are often cemented, and to develop counter narratives by focusing on the resilience of women asylum seekers but also on the complexity of their experiences of intersectional discrimination.

The research project was conducted in Sardinia, a Mediterranean Italian island with 1.5 million inhabitants. Sardinia as a research location is characterized by its geographical and social nature. The Mediterranean Sea as a natural border as well as the massive economic decline has triggered strong emigration instead of immigration flows in the last decades. Asylum seekers arrive in Sardinia with the hope of creating their own future but are confronted with a lack of access to educational opportunities, few job opportunities or a lack of psychological care. Sardinia thus becomes a typical transit location, which for many stands in contrast to a hoped-for permanent place of residence in Europe. Given the long waiting times of the asylum procedure, asylum seekers often spend years in first reception centers. When women in Europe are accommodated in refugee reception centers, the longstanding view is still that violence and discrimination are limited exclusively to experiences in countries of origin and transit and are therefore a thing of the past. Freedman (2016), on the other hand, notes that women who have fled alone, i.e. without children or partners, like the women in the project, are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination also after their flight. This danger is even greater when there is a lack of adequate accommodation. To better understand the impact of these conditions on the daily life of asylum-seeking women in first reception centers in Italy this aspect will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Gendered perspectives on living in Italian reception centers

In Italy more than 80% of the asylum seekers live in so-called emergency reception centers (CAS-Extraordinary Reception Centers), which were actually only intended to provide temporary accommodation for not more than six months to compensate for a lack of regular reception centers.¹ However, the reality is different and the majority of asylum seekers spend the entire duration of the asylum procedure, often more than three years, in the emergency reception centers. In the course of time and primarily due to legal changes², accommodation in emergency reception centers turned from exception into the rule.

1 https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/report_download_aida_it_2019update.pdf (access:10.09.2021).

2 Introduction of the "Security Decree" 132/2018, which has had a significant impact on the living conditions in the emergency centers.

It appears that sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination play a significant role for women in the context of flight. The reasons for flight, the flight itself and also in reception centers different forms of violence and discrimination are represented. While much research has been done on the different phases during the migration process, little attention has been paid to connecting and analyzing these phases and forms of violence. Elizabeth Ferris (1990) pioneers a discussion of what forms of violence occur in the different stages, how women refugees cope with them, and makes connections. She argues for considering sexual and gender-based violence in the migration process as a continuum in which certain variables may change, but violence is a persistent constant. Violence is thus not tied to a geographic and temporal conflict situation but occurs along a continuum that even extends to reception centers in peaceful areas (Cockburn 2004). Krause defines a continuum of violence as 'the linearity of the prevalence and continuity of sexual and gender violence in the phases of conflict, flight and displacement (...). The continuum is distinguished by transformative character due to changing structures, forms, spaces and conditions, and reveals a diachronic increase of complexity' (2017: 189).

An insight of the complexity of experiences of discrimination and violence while living in emergency centers and impressions about the living conditions are expressed through the exposed images and narratives of the asylum-seeking women. In order to better grasp how these images and narratives were created, we will discuss the method in more detail below.

Due to the report of In Migrazione (2018)³ the conditions in the emergency reception centers lack of quality in nearly every area: legal assistance with the application for international protection, language teaching, intercultural mediation, psychological and social support, labor market integration measures and leisure activities. According to the report of Pasquero and Palladino (2017) these centers affect especially asylum-seeking women as staff do not meet the qualifications and skills to assess and respond to the needs of people in need of protection (according to 2013/32/EU vulnerable people)⁴. The missing psychological support, but also the insufficient qualifications of intercultural mediators, harbors the danger that people who are actually in need of protection will isolate themselves more and more, thus further reducing the possibility of recognizing vulnerabilities. This danger is particularly great in larger centers. The SWIM (Safe Women in Migration) study (Lombardi 2019) explores the situation of women in reception centers in Europe and concludes that women travelling alone, without partners or children, are particularly at risk: physical and psychological abuse is reported by most women, sexual abuse and rape by more than 50%.

Methodology

Through a feminist-ethnographic-participatory approach, the asylum-seeking women are not only considered as informants, but as co-researchers and is based on an intersectional understanding. This manifests in paying constant attention to the status and privileges of all persons in the field and it is always reflected who exercises power over whom and in which way (Reid & Frisby 2008). The ethnographic fieldwork began in September 2018 and it ended in March 2020, with the outbreak of the pandemic. The project started with a seven-month intensive fieldwork period in one of the facilities, during which participant observations and numerous informal interviews were conducted, and later continued in two other facilities due to the women's relocation. For the participatory part of the research, the PhotoVoice method was used. The PhotoVoice project consisted of three group discussions, eight individual photo interviews and three so-called 'walking interviews'.

PhotoVoice combines photography, focus groups and social action and aims to highlight the strengths and challenges of a marginalized community through discussion and reflection from the images taken by the protagonists. Socially disadvantaged groups such as migrant women can be integrated throughout the research process and their perspectives can be captured through the photographs and narratives developed. The method has proven useful in generating local knowledge and identifying a community's problems and strengths. It is also acknowledged that PhotoVoice has the power to elicit personal experiences and is beneficial in addressing and coping with gender-based

³ https://www.inmigrazione.it/userfiles/file/oxfam_invece%20si%20pu%C3%B2_paper%20accoglienza_web.pdf (access: 10.09.21).

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013L0033&from=EN> (access: 10.09.2021).

violence and experiences of intersectional discrimination (Wang and Burris 1997, Padfield 2021, Köppen, Schmidt, Tiefenthaler 2020). The use of PhotoVoice can also be a way to reduce language barriers, which is particularly important in working with a group of women with different immigrational backgrounds. Images can additionally contribute to making verbally difficult to describe aspects of everyday life tangible and ease the presentation of concerns of a community, start a critical dialogue and thus reach decision-makers as it would not be possible with text-only material (Lenette 2019). Before the start of the PhotoVoice project a primary consideration was to evaluate which tools should be used and how the material aspect of the work could be optimized. Analogue photography seemed to be good fit for a number of reasons; firstly, the young artists in our group already used their cellular phones and were avid selfie takers and users of social media platforms, therefore, for the purpose of this research it was important to distinguish the images they would produce from the aesthetic conventions of social media and their impetus on performative photography. Arguably, analogue photography is also better at creating dialogue from a reflexive perspective as there is a significant time delay between shooting and seeing the developed image. It encourages a process of remembering and as Kuhn (2002) states “(...) Memory work offers a route to a critical consciousness that embraces the heart as well as the intellect, one that resonates, in feeling and thinking ways, across the individual and the collective, the personal and the political” (p. 9). Remembering within the process memory work in a PhotoVoice project can lead to dialogue about how the image was created in the first place.

None of the group had ever used an analogue camera and as most photographers study photography beginning with analogue and then progressing to digital, it seemed an important rite of passage for the group. Analogue photography also requires patience and encourages you to be more selective with what you shoot. After printing, you have a tangible and material proof of the image and the memory bound up in the creation of the image itself. As Barthes states in *Camera Lucida* (1980) “A photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see”. We also had access to a darkroom and so we were able to bring the co-researchers in to show them how to process and print their pictures, giving them more agency over each stage of the process.

Many of the women had no possibility of formal educational experiences and therefore had neither writing nor reading skills. During the participant observations it became apparent that within their own community photography was used as a primary means of communication. Using this form of communication within a research project was hence positively received by the group. After the first group discussion the photographer conducted some informal introductory lessons about composition, frame and subject but tried to avoid imposing image conventions onto them so they could freely photograph how they wanted to. A batch of black and white and color disposable Kodak cameras were given to the young asylum seeking women. Since the exposures for these cameras are automatic, there was less chance of eventual disappointment from the group from images returning blank from the printers. The results too are often obscure, blurry or over or underexposed which can often lead to much more interesting results that are more removed from reality and therefore leave the photographer feeling a little bit less exposed. This was certainly the case in the images created by the group as the now displayed photos demonstrate.



PHOTO 1: *When I am walking on the street, old italian men think that all black girls are just prostitutes. They always say ‘Andiamo, andiamo!’ or ‘Quanta costa?’ They should stop to see all black girls like this, because not all black girls are like this. We have our own story, our own experiences. I want to say that we are all human beings and we don’t want to be seen only as sex objects.*



PHOTO 2: *Just because I am black and wear shorts it doesn't mean that I am a prostitute. Prostitutes come to you, you don't have to come to the girls. If the girl is not coming to you it means she is not a prostitute.*



PHOTO 3: *When I walk on the street I feel angry, because they often stop me and ask me stupid questions. Like 'Would you like to come with me?'. Just because I am walking on the street it doesn't mean that my body is for sell. I just want to beg them to stop this nonsense.*



PHOTO 4: *My experience in this reception center is better than where I was before. But I had to leave the reception center. I could not stay there and do nothing. I have the need to do something. I want to make a contribution to society.*



PHOTO 5: *Living in the reception center is not easy. You are forced to live with strangers. Different behavior, different characters. I have never experienced anything like this before in my life. It was very difficult to deal with this situation.*



PHOTO 6: *The only thing you can do in the reception center is wait for time to pass. You just wait for your papers. It just didn't make sense to stay there. I just wanted to keep going and have something to do.*



PHOTO 7: *I am no longer in a center. I am in another Italian city. I am working there. At least for some time I have something to do.*



PHOTO 8: *This is the holy virgin Mary. She is the mother of us all. I ask the Mother Mary for help to speak with her Son. She helps me to put my life on the right path. She speaks for us. Every morning in the reception center I pray. This is my happiness.*



PHOTO 9: *I had a plan for me and I thought I will work. I wanted to send money to my family.*



PHOTO 10: *I know there is a great future ahead for me. When there is hope, there is life.*



PHOTO 11: *Before I came to Italy they told me it is the land of milk of honey, but I can't find the milk, I can't find the honey. In my future I want to become an artist. I want to help people. I want to live a normal life, like the rest of the people.*



PHOTO 12: *I am suffering. Tell them I need my documents. I want to work. I am tired of waiting, just sitting in my room. I am not a lazy person. I want to work.*



PHOTO 13: *How do I feel when I look at this picture? It's love, happiness, joy it's like that. He's like a Dad to me, a best friend.*



PHOTO 14: *The mother in the picture says: It feels good to be a mother, you feel beautiful and you feel loved, it's kind of a little bit difficult when the baby is in your stomach, then the baby comes out and you feel joy. At the CAS they made me feel important and special with my baby.*



PHOTO 15: *I feel good but I feel sad also because everything is quite difficult but we got to look ok, just to be ok.*

Reportage Pictures (by Gemma Lynch)



PHOTO 16



PHOTO 17



PHOTO 16

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KABRISTAN-LAND OF GRAVES

Simone Mestroni, *Anthropologist and freelance photographer*

ABSTRACT

Kabristan, meaning 'graveyard' in Urdu, is an attempt to represent the paralyzed potential of the long-standing conflict of Kashmir, highlighting a mixture of anthropological ingredients which look temporarily dormant like tombs but about to explode into a new massive stage of violence. The project was developed in Srinagar, the valley's main city and the core of Kashmir's cultural and political history, and it blends different aspects of the relation between people and the pressure of the past, primarily perceived as a deadly and pressurizing atmosphere that intertwines with inner and outer landscapes, past and future, grief and anger, introspection and violence, political utopia and bitter realities of the conflict.

KEYWORDS

Kashmir, Conflict, India, Pakistan, Violence, Separatism

BIO

After completing his Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Messina, Simone dedicated himself to conveying his academic background into filming, narrative writing, and photography. During his ethnographic research in Indian Kashmir, he got especially interested in the moral background surrounding political violence and the relations between aesthetic and ethics of the conflict. His first documentary, "After Prayers", was realized with the support of Wenner Foundation Grant and was awarded at Vienna Ethnocineca and Film Southasia. Simone has written extensively about Kashmir in several Italian magazines and has published a monograph (*Linee di controllo, Meltemi*). He is 2019 Deeper perspective photographer of the year at IPA with his photographic project Kabristan-Land of Graves.

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Since 1947 Kashmir's region has been at the core of a controversial dispute between India and Pakistan, who fought three wars over it in 1947, 1965 and 1999. Moreover, since 1989, an anti-Indian guerilla warfare has erupted in the Indian side of the territory. The separatist insurgency, massively supported by the Muslim majority population, was fuelled by Pakistani army, and deeply embroiled in Islamic political ideologies, formally covered by the slogan “Azadi”, meaning freedom in Urdu. The guerilla warfare in the long term was brutally crushed by the Indian army, and, after 2001, the Azadi movement witnessed a widespread downfall and a general disappointment towards separatist politics. Notwithstanding this, Kashmir is still the most militarized place on earth and a nuclear flashpoint, besides being a permanent low intensity conflict area, where political violence, separatist and military violence, the culture of martyrdom and resistance are imbricated in every aspect of social life.

Kabristan, meaning ‘graveyard’ in Urdu, is an attempt to represent this paralysed potential, this mixture of anthropological ingredients ready to explode into a massive new stage of violence. The project, based on long-term ethnographic research was developed in Srinagar, the valley's main city, and it blends different aspects of the relation between people and the pressure of the past, primarily perceived as a deadly and pressurizing atmosphere which intertwines with inner and outer landscapes. It is mainly the feeling of a calm preceding a predictable storm that I tried to portray throughout a series of visual gravestones, differently balanced in their aesthetic and metaphorical composition, giving the impression of an intimate tension between past and future, grief and anger, introspection and violence, political utopia, and bitter realities of the conflict.



PHOTO 1: Abdul Hameed Sofi staring at his son's grave in the main martyrs' graveyard of Srinagar. Kaiser Hameed was tortured and killed by Indian forces at the age of 16, during 2016 agitation.



PHOTO 2: Central Reserve Police members dealing with riots in Srinagar downtown after Friday's prayers. Kashmir, with over 700.000 soldiers on duty on its territory, is the most militarized place on earth. Most of the troopers come from the poorest areas of India and belong to Hindu religion.



PHOTO 3: An abandoned truck in an army dismantling area in Bishember Nagar area.



PHOTO 4: Oyoub was among those who started the armed insurgency in the valley at the end of the eighties, after being trained in Pakistan during Russian-Afghani war. He was a commander of Hizbul Mujahideen group in Srinagar, till he lost his sight due to a mine explosion in 1993.



PHOTO 5: A barber shop decorated with Allama Iqbal's portraits. Iqbal, also called the “philosopher of Pakistan”, was among the main intellectuals who supported the idea of a Muslim state in the subcontinent. Even nowadays he is very popular among the Muslim majority population of the valley.



PHOTO 6: Layers of scratched posters of Jammu&Kashmir Liberation Front, portraying Maqbool Bath and others among the early martyrs of the anti-India armed struggle. Beside being the organization that launched the armed struggle, in 1994 JKLF has formally abandoned violence as a political path.



PHOTO 7: Bashir (19 years old), portrayed inside a vandalized Hindu temple. Sameer is often involved in stone-throwing riots (kanijang, stone-battles) against Indian soldiers which use to take place near the main mosque after Friday's prayers. He spotted several injuries on his back and forehead due to pellet-gun often used by the army. The temple, hidden in Srinagar's old city, was abandoned by the Kashmiri Hindus when they fled in early nineties and it has become a popular hideout for local teenagers.



PHOTO 8: Jamia Masjed (Friday Mosque) on the eve of Eid festival. This is the historical stage of separatist and pro-pakistani politics since the Indo-Pakistani partition of 1947 occurred. At the time Kashmir, which was the only Muslim majority state in the subcontinent which ruled by a Hindu maraja, became the “casus belli” for the first war between India and Pakistan.



PHOTO 9: Chill out atmosphere in tea-stall in the heart of the old city during a strike called by the separatist organizations. These political groups, which have become structural in the geopolitical dynamics, have lost their grip on the local population due to the internal fragmentation and the inefficacy of their strategies. Hanging on the stall's inner wall, as usual in the subcontinent, there's an ancestor's portrait.



PHOTO 10: Sunked houseboat in Chinarbagh area, Srinagar. Houseboats, once filled by tourists coming from over the world, nowadays are often empty due to the turmoil. In Kashmir the tourist business in general has been deeply affected since the armed struggle has started in 1989.



PHOTO 11: Masked youth preparing for after prayer's stone-pelting riots in Srinagar's old city.



PHOTO 12: Indian soldiers waiting for after prayers' clashes to start near Jamia Masjid.



PHOTO 13: A stray dog roaming nearby a Kashmiri Hindus' abandoned house in Habba Kadal area. The Hindus of the valley, once the ruling minority in the valley, have left their property when they fled due to the insurgency in early nineties.



PHOTO 14: A stone-pelter teases Indian soldiers during Friday riots. Next to him a hand-painted portrait of Mirwaiz Yousuf Shah. The Mirwaiz's (main preachers) dynasty, due its influence on confessional politics in the valley, embodies the anti-India mobilization. The main separatist organization of the valley, Hurryat conference, is presently headed by Yousuf's grandson, Umar Farooq Mirwaiz.



PHOTO 15: A low cast family squatting a Moghul ruin in Srinagar. Moghul dynasty conquered and ruled Kashmir till the 18th Century.



PHOTO 16: An ancestor's portrait hanging inside a grocery shop.



PHOTO 17: A man waiting for the horror show to begin at an amusement park.



PHOTO 18: A girl roaming inside the ruins of a building where two militants from Lashkar-e-Toiba militant outfit were spotted and martyred by Indian army.



PHOTO 19: Makdoom Sahib's grave, which today has become one of the main shrines of Srinagar. As many others sufi saints he is remembered as one of the first Kashmiris who spread Islam in the valley between 14th and 16th century. On the windows, guarding the place and giving blessings, there are the so-called mutawallis, believed to be the saint's heirs.



PHOTO 20: Children playing near the grave of Sheikh Abdullah, the first prime minister of Jammu&Kashmir, historically considered the main responsible of the controversial accession to India. His dynasty and his party (National Conference) are the main proxy of Indian electoral politics in the valley. Nowadays almost nobody goes to visit Abdullah's grave.

DIETRO LE QUINTE.

**L'EREDITÀ DEL MONDO MEZZADRILE E LE TRACCE DELLA MODERNITÀ
NELLA DOCUMENTAZIONE FOTOGRAFICA DI MAURO GUERRINI**

Fabio Mugnaini, *Università di Siena*

ABSTRACT

An intersection of paths – urban, literally – but also cultural or ideal and political- leads to the publication of part of a photographic reportage that covers the transition from the sharecropping society to the contemporary world, a phase that in the Sienese province almost touched the end of the last century. The photographer – Mauro Guerrini – enjoyed a personal and particular intimacy with families, places, practices, contexts in which the extreme edge of a secular culture hybridized with the modern. Sharecropping system social world was marked by hierarchy, by the subordination of individual with respect to the family, of the woman with respect to the man, of the worker with respect to the landownership, a back-stage with respect to the frontstage of bourgeois, urban and progressed world and for these reasons its own actors hastened to abandon it, guarding however a resisting cultural legacy. The photographer witnessed the change, an experience in which both conditions were legible: this is the core of the published reportage, here partially offered, and of the anthropological reading of those images. Through and beyond their esthetic values, they have had the power of triggering free intuitions, to solicit memories and to drive analysis relative both to the sharecropping world that disappears, and to the present time: the implicit comparison they inspired, underlines some actual trends, such as the ongoing heritagization of the past, the gentrification of its real estate and landscape inheritance, the current resemantization of the humanity/world relationship but, regrettably, also the removal of what was something positive such as thriftiness ethics, sustainability, the value of working skills.

KEYWORDS

Sharecropping, Heritagization, Technic and Material Culture, Domesticity.

Bio

Fabio Mugnaini, SIEF, SIAC, ISFNR member, is associate professor at the University of Siena, where is Rector's delegate for the didactic in prison and coordinator of Unisi.cares (academic supporting team for asylum seekers and refugees). He is currently lecturing at graduate and postgraduate levels in Storia delle tradizioni popolari, Antropologia della Performance and Anthropology of Cultural Heritage; his fieldwork experience, though touching extraeuropean areas, such as Mexico, where he worked on urban popular culture as well as on traditional community life, or more briefly, Somalia, has been carried out mostly in Tuscany with a national and European comparative perspective; has published in the subjects of storytelling and oral tradition, festival and public events, heritage and local memory practices, contemporary popular culture and, together with Pietro Clemente, on epistemology of folklore studies.

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Incroci

Via di Pantaneto, centro storico di Siena, sopravvissuta all'assalto dei grandi marchi che con il sistema del franchising hanno monopolizzato le altre vie del passeggio cittadino e del transito turistico, si è caratterizzata per l'offerta gastronomica "multietnica" e per le opportunità di socialità incentrate su bar e caffè. È anche la via che dal centro storico porta alle sedi del polo umanistico della locale università, traendo evidentemente anche da tale funzione, una parziale caratterizzazione dei suoi frequentatori. Tra i più longevi esercizi commerciali, ormai, spicca il negozio di abbigliamento, bigiotteria artigianale, complementi di arredo, di Mohsen Sariaslani, esule decenni orsono dalla teocrazia iraniana, che ha trovato a Siena la sua seconda casa. Interessi culturali, passione politica, militanza libertaria e antifascista e uno sconfinato amore per la fotografia - che pratica e insegna in svariati contesti, tra cui la locale associazione di promozione sociale e culturale "La Corte dei Miracoli", hanno fatto di lui una presenza costante nel panorama delle offerte culturali della città, esemplificata dall'iniziativa di curare e allestire regolarmente, nei locali del suo negozio, mostre fotografiche aperte ad una vasta gamma di autori, non solo locali, e di tematiche. Questa sua iniziativa, in particolare, ha spinto un fotografo di provata esperienza, Mauro Guerrini, a visitarlo e a proporsi per una personale, lasciando a lui la scelta tra le varie tematiche già preallestite nel proprio portfolio. Sport, Palio, paesaggio, ruderi e patrimonio archeologico, scorrono tra le dita di Mohsen, che rimane colpito, invece, dalla serie che riproduce momenti del vissuto contadino, tra la fine degli anni '70 e il nuovo secolo¹. Mohsen avverte - come avrà poi modo di esplicitare - una risonanza particolare tra quel mondo, che si è esaurito prima del suo arrivo in Italia, e la memoria che si è portato dentro del suo paese originario, le immagini interiorizzate di una vita segnata dal lavoro nei campi, dal rapporto con gli animali, con la natura, con la fatica e la materialità del vivere e con il clima sociale che ne scaturisce. La scelta cade su questo tema: Mauro Guerrini gli lascia centinaia di scatti da visionare e a distanza di mesi, una selezione di circa cinquanta immagini appare appesa alle pareti del negozio. Poi, considerato il successo della mostra e il proprio personale apprezzamento dell'opera fotografica di Guerrini, sente la necessità di dar vita a una pubblicazione, un libro di fotografia², che testimoni la complessa trasformazione del mondo contadino, intrecciando al linguaggio fotografico lo sguardo poetico e l'approccio scientifico. Saranno così chiesti dei commenti - poetici e analitici - nell'ordine a Francesco Burroni³, performer poliedrico e improvvisatore in ottava rima, e a me, uno tra i tanti antropologi che si sono occupati di mezzadria e di memoria contadina, entrambi frequentatori del suo negozio e facenti parte di quella cerchia sociale che emerge saltuariamente come comunità ideale, unita da interessi culturali, motivazioni politiche e frequentazione di via Pantaneto.

In questa circostanza faccio conoscenza con Mauro Guerrini, fotografo di esperienza⁴, poliedrico e dal "dito pesante", come lui stesso si definisce, ovvero attratto dal momento che gli si presenta davanti,

¹ Una selezione del reportage sulla mezzadria era già stata esposta presso il Museo della Mezzadria di Buonconvento (Si), 2003-2004, poi apparsa nel catalogo M. Guerrini, a cura di, *Frammenti di un mondo scomparso*, Siena, Amministrazione provinciale di Siena-Sistema dei musei senesi, 2003.

² M. Sariaslani, a cura di, *Argo. Villan fottuto*, fotografie di Mauro Guerrini, Arezzo, Bottega Antonio Manta, 2021. Per informazioni e per reperire il volume: mohsensariaslani@gmail.com.

³ Attore e performer professionista, protagonista della scena teatrale senese, dove si riverbera il ruolo svolto nel consolidamento dell'improvvisazione teatrale a livello nazionale (F. Burroni, *Match d'improvvisazione teatrale. La storia, le regole, la tecnica e gli esercizi dello spettacolo più rappresentato al mondo*, Roma, Dino Audino editore, 2007), Francesco Burroni si riavvicinerà alla tradizione popolare - già oggetto di una tesi di laurea di taglio demo-antropologico sui canti d'osteria (F. Burroni, *Canti senesi d'osteria. Raccolti dal vinaio Cafiero*, Siena, Betti, 2017) - attratto dalla riscoperta dell'improvvisazione poetica in ottava rima (F. Burroni, *Improvvisare e scrivere in rima. Un manuale pratico-teorico*, Roma, Dino Audino editore, 2009). La sua recente produzione poetica spazia liberamente, dal rapporto con la dimensione locale (F. Burroni, *A un tratto Siena. Guida poetica della città*, Siena, Betti, 2020) alle grandi opzioni ideali (F. Burroni, *Nel bosco da sempre. Poesie e immagini sulla Resistenza*, Arcidosso, C&P Adver-Effigi, 2021).

⁴ Mauro Guerrini ha al suo attivo numerose partecipazioni a volumi, spesso cataloghi di mostre personali o collettive, in collaborazione con il collettivo di fotografia costituitosi in seno all'Archi.

Un sommario bilancio dei lavori in cui è significativamente presente, quando non autore esclusivo, come in M. Guerrini, *Fine 900: Gente di Palio*, Siena, Betti editore, 1997, comprende: *Siena, un secolo di sport. Storia illustrata di uomini, di imprese e di passioni ruggenti*, Siena, Alsaba, 1988; C. Cresti, a cura di, *Agostino Fantastici. Architetto senese, 1782-1845*, Comune di Siena/ Umberto Allemandi & C., 1992 (dove partecipa con il corredo fotografico in

più che dalla ricerca formale, dalla costruzione della bella fotografia. Mauro Guerrini ha superato la sessantina, ha lasciato per età l'impiego nel comparto tecnico dell'amministrazione comunale senese, dove ha avuto modo di valorizzare le sue competenze di fotografo⁵, ha praticato, a lungo, sport a livello dilettantistico, da velocista e poi, da allenatore, in seno all'UISP, ma ha soprattutto trovato modo e maniera di dedicarsi alla documentazione fotografica nei suoi svariati campi di interesse, accumulando un patrimonio di immagini che, limitatamente al formato analogico, si aggira intorno ai 150.000 scatti⁶, e che è ulteriormente cresciuto con la svolta digitale. Mauro Guerrini proviene da una famiglia mezzadrile, che solo con la metà degli anni '60 avrebbe abbandonato la campagna (la Val d'Arbia) per ricollocarsi nella dimensione operaia, avvicinandosi alla città. In questa prossimità Mauro Guerrini ha avuto modo di cogliere le residuali presenze del lavoro contadino tradizionale: mentre, infatti, le campagne post mezzadrili restavano incolte o erano coinvolte nei processi di modernizzazione, le aree più prossime alla città – le mura che delimitano il centro storico, ad oggi, per tre quarti del loro perimetro sorgono dalla terra – restavano in una sorta di limbo in cui non era possibile la riconversione edilizia, grazie ai piani di tutela urbanistica della città, né era economicamente conveniente impegnarsi in una riconversione produttiva. È così che la familiarità con il vissuto contadino che Guerrini aveva acquisito, sebbene limitatamente ai suoi primi anni di vita, veniva sollecitata da questi incontri di prossimità, che gli consentivano di stabilire relazioni di confidenza, documentando pratiche che erano a tutti gli effetti contemporanee, pur riecheggiando tecniche, o utilizzando strumenti, di lunga tradizione. Questa sensibilità all'eredità culturale contadina, in un ventennio cruciale che la vedrà prima adattarsi alle condizioni della modernità, poi, selettivamente, trasformarsi in memoria coltivata in quanto tale e, infine, in patrimonio, sarà motore di una pratica di documentazione continuativa, allargata anche ad altre aree territoriali (la familiarità con la parentela acquisita, tramite il matrimonio, lo porterà a documentare capillarmente lo stesso fenomeno in ambito chiantigiano), un interesse permanente che caratterizzerà il proprio personale contributo anche nel quadro dell'adesione ad un collettivo fotografico, la Lega fotografica facente capo all'Arci senese. La lega fotografica è stata una vera e propria fucina di competenze, rivolte in maniera particolare alle tradizioni culturali cittadine e delle campagne. Sull'abbrivio dato dal promotore, Marco Bruttini, il gruppo – cui aderisce precocemente Mauro Guerrini – ha coperto sistematicamente ogni evento festivo, rituale, cerimoniale, sacro o politico che fosse, mercato, festa dell'Unità o patronale, sagra o fiera, del territorio senese estendendosi fin dove si riteneva di poter rintracciare continuità culturali indubbie: la Tuscia, per esempio, territorio per certi aspetti più conservativo della pur scarsamente dinamica campagna senese. Un'impresa culturale di documentazione collettiva che si è sviluppata su basi puramente volontarie ma con la continuità propria di un progetto, accumulando tempo, perfezionando tecniche e stili, seguendo fedelmente, anno dopo anno, l'evoluzione del fenomeno festivo nelle sue varie forme, e che solo a posteriori rivela la sua portata di grande patrimonio documentario, maturato in totale autonomia rispetto a quanto la pur vitalissima scuola etno-antropologica senese veniva producendo⁷.

collaborazione con Giancarlo Cini; *Siena che cambia. Mestieri, vita, strutture*, Siena, Siena Foto club/ Protagon, 1993. Cura l'apparato fotografico dei volumi: M. Ascheri, V. de Dominicis, a cura di, *Tra Siena e il Vescovado: L'area della Selva*, Siena, Tenuta della Selva, Accademia senese degli Intronati 1997; *Archeologia e paesaggio in Etruria. Dagli acquerelli di Sir James Ainsley alle immagini d'oggi*, pubblicazione fuori commercio su iniziativa del Rotary club di Grosseto, 2003 poi riedita nel 2012; Paolo Cammarosano, Vincenzo Passeri, *I Castelli del senese. Strutture fortificate dell'area senese-grossetana*, Siena, Nuova Immagine Editore, 2006. Oltre a una collaborazione quasi trentennale con il periodico "Carroccio di Siena", 1985-2018, Avio Cambi Editore, partecipa alla serie "Scatti in campo", pubblicata a Siena dal 2013 a cura del Consorzio per la tutela del Palio.

⁵ Ne sono esempio il corredo fotografico apparso in G. Brino, *Le facciate delle case di Siena (1900-1902). Catalogo della mostra (Siena, 5 maggio-17 giugno 2007)*, Siena, Protagon, 2007; in E. Cioni, a cura di, *Sigilli della collezione del Museo Civico di Siena. Secolo XIII-XV*, Siena, Crea Edita, 2018 e, infine, sempre insieme ad altri fotografi locali, il contributo iconografico a G. Collo del, *Manuale per la sicurezza del cavallo da Palio*, Siena, Comune di Siena, 2020.

⁶ La produzione analogica è catalogata in M. Bastianelli, a cura di, *Archivi fotografici italiani. 600 fondi e raccolte di immagini*, Roma, Reflex, 1998.

⁷ Il punto di contatto più vicino risale al 1982, quando partecipa alla ricerca su un rito del fuoco celebrato a Santa Caterina di Roccalbegna, (R. Ferretti, a cura di, *La Focarazza di Santa Caterina. Indagine su un rito del fuoco nell'entroterra grossetano. Atti dell'incontro di studi e catalogo della mostra fotografica*, Grosseto, Comune di Grosseto, 1984), curata da Roberto Ferretti allora collaboratore alla cattedra di Storia delle tradizioni popolari tenuta a Siena da Pietro Clemente. Tuttavia, le esigenze, da un lato, di coerenza teorico-metodologica proprie di un polo di ricerca universitario e, dall'altro, il desiderio di sperimentare liberamente linguaggi e stili, proprie di questo collettivo di

Entro questo contesto, ciò che qualifica il lavoro di Guerrini, rispetto agli altri colleghi e amici – dato da non sottovalutare, per comprendere anche le ragioni della solidità del gruppo e della continuità della pratica collettiva – sarebbe rimasto il suo sguardo ravvicinato, capace di cogliere nell'intimità delle relazioni familiari, parentali, amicali, il gesto, l'espressione, il momento rappresentativo del vissuto quotidiano tradizionale nella fase della sua ricollocazione epocale: le ultime immagini della mezzadria, colte nell'attimo del mutamento.

Mauro Guerrini è un fotografo, non un etnografo né un antropologo. Il suo fare è orientato dall'assumere l'immagine come linguaggio e l'estetica come ambito; nel suo fare, tuttavia, ha attinto spesso alla propria esperienza, al proprio sé: sportivo, testimone di una cultura in via di trasformazione. In tal caso, e nel secondo caso in particolare, l'immagine dialoga con la memoria e l'estetica inevitabilmente sollecita una riflessione storica e antropologica. Tim Ingold scrive che l'artigiano “pensa tramite il produrre”, il filosofo “produce con il pensiero”, (Ingold 2019: 23) nel nostro caso, il fotografo – artista, più che artigiano, esprime il proprio pensiero e insieme alimenta una memoria che lo include, tramite gli scatti che produce; l'antropologo – e non il filosofo – parte dalle immagini, condividendo come già detto la stessa matrice biografica del fotografo, e produce parole, ricostruisce nessi: i *puncta* (Barthes 1980: 43) che di volta in volta ho colto possono anche non coincidere con gli intenti dell'autore delle fotografie – sebbene nel dialogo instaurato con Guerrini, abbiamo riscontrato non poche consonanze. Il mio commento è autonomo e resta, tuttavia, focalizzato sull'oggetto delle sue fotografie, non sul suo fotografare; ciò che condivido nella mia scrittura è il processo innescato dalla loro lettura, senza pretendere di parlare del processo produttivo all'origine di quel fissare l'immagine che attiene alla creatività del fotografo, il quale, d'altro canto, parla da sé e con le immagini prodotte e selezionate. Nel propormi di torcere in documento etnografico le immagini che non sono nate così, non ho inteso svilupparne una didascalia arricchita o integrata, ma ho cercato di assecondare ciò che evocano senza descriverlo (Putti 2021: 5).

Passato prossimo, participio presente.

Tra i contributi della scuola antropologica senese sulla mezzadria, spicca il volume collettivo del 1988, intitolato “Un mondo a metà” (Clemente, Li Causi, Mugnaini 1988). Il titolo, al tempo lungamente meditato dai tre curatori, riassume la tesi che la vicenda storica di questa forma contrattuale⁸, durata per sei secoli e poi svanita in un paio di decenni, nel secondo dopoguerra, avesse prodotto un mondo in sé, agendo sul piano culturale, sociale, economico, plasmando paesaggi e corpi, trasmettendo per generazioni atteggiamenti, posture, saperi tecnici e credenze. Un mondo in sé non avulso dai processi storici – come dimostrava la sensibilità nei confronti delle idee socialiste, prima, e comuniste, poi, senza negare il fascino esercitato dalla retorica ruralista, familista, maschilista e nazionalista del ventennio fascista. Un mondo a sé che, tuttavia, era parte di un mondo più ampio, che lo includeva e lo determinava: rappresentato e costituito, giuridicamente, dalla sfera dei padroni e dei ceti cui appartenevano, altolocati o piccolo borghesi che fossero. Sempre padroni però, che si stimavano in quanto tali diversi dai “loro” contadini, reciprocamente percepiti da questi ultimi come un'altra razza. Proverbi, novelle, aneddoti in quantità, circolanti come tradizione orale (Mugnaini 1999), corroboravano l'idea di una peculiarità contadina che poteva essere vista, dall'interno come un valore e dall'esterno come uno stigma.

“Villan fottuto” è l'espressione di questo stigma che Mohsen Sariaslani ha voluto adottare, provocatoriamente, come titolo del portfolio di immagini di Mauro Guerrini, facendo ricorso ad un sintagma che ricorre da secoli nella letteratura come nella poesia di tradizione orale – ancorché scritta e stampata su fogli volanti.

Il “Villan fottuto” è un topos, cui si attribuisce nobile origine – dall'Alighieri all'Angiolieri all'Aretino – e che ricorre frequentemente nella tradizione goliardica, ma che è sostenuto dal filone importante della

fotografi, finiranno per dare vita a un lungo e produttivo procedere in parallelo, su temi condivisi quali il patrimonio demoetnoantropologico dell'area senese-grossetana.

⁸ L'estesa bibliografia storico-economico-politica sulla mezzadria, di cui non potrebbe essere qui dato altro che un parziale resoconto, è invece esemplarmente ripercorsa da Piccini, 2005. Come accaduto per la sua natura economico-politica, anche la fine della mezzadria ha alimentato dibattiti relativi alla sua eredità e ai suoi effetti nella configurazione sociale, culturale ed economica della regione (Becattini 1986, Ciuffoletti – Contini 1994).

satira contro il villano (Piccinni 2013). Adottato come sottotitolo di questa raccolta di fotografie (dopo l'omaggio ad Argo, mitica patria dell'agricoltura) che raccontano dall'interno l'ultimo scorcio di vissuto mezzadrile, il sintagma cambia significato e viene a ricordare la sua natura di eteronimo, viziato in quanto tale da una deformazione culturale e intriso di concezione egemonica rispetto al mondo che viene raccontato dalle immagini ed evocato dai cammei poetici di Francesco Burroni.

Ripartire dal "villan fottuto" è stato, per il curatore della mostra e del volume, un modo per rivendicare il valore di civiltà di ciò che veniva con tale epiteto stigmatizzato, ribaltando lo stigma su chi ha immaginato il mondo contadino da sopra, da fuori, da lontano, ignorandone la ricchezza, la razionalità, la moralità e la compatibilità ecologica: il mondo dei villani non conosceva scarto, non produceva quasi rifiuto; un inimmaginabile dispendio di fatica individuale consentiva di vivere senza consumare più risorse di quelle che potevano naturalmente riprodursi o che potevano essere, con il lavoro, ripristinate. Non è irrilevante sottolineare questo aspetto, visto che ne stiamo parlando nel momento in cui gli squilibri climatici della terra devastata dal capitalismo senza freni sembrano destinati a sfociare in un'esiziale era del fuoco.

Ogni mutamento dalla fine della mezzadria – in realtà da poco più di cinquant'anni – ha visto incrementare il valore e il tasso di profitto della proprietà fondiaria, variandone sia i titolari che le modalità di investimento, e diminuire il valore morale ed economico del lavoro fino a lasciare che il caporalato portasse braccianti a giornata a operare nelle vigne dei grandi nomi dell'enologia toscana. Con la trasformazione produttiva si sono ridotti sia la presenza che il controllo umano e sociale sul territorio e si sono alterati quegli equilibri ecologici che il lavoro mezzadrile aveva prodotto e conservato per secoli (Pardi 2002). Si è parimenti dissolta una concezione del rapporto con la terra e con la ricchezza quale quella che circolava nel ceto dei possidenti e che aveva portato in più occasioni a confermare la mezzadria come sistema che garantiva stabilità ad un tempo economica, sociale e, alla luce delle nostre attuali priorità, anche ecologica.

Salvo le poche isole costituite dai distretti biologici in via di consolidamento – e gli ancor più rari casi di imprenditoria eticamente responsabile – la campagna toscana un tempo appoderata è diventata da un lato terra di coltivazioni intensive e industrializzate, dall'altro luogo di ozio turistico, scenario per fotografie, area residenziale di lusso (cfr. Pardi, 2002, pp. 72:7)⁹. La campagna è ancora oggi risorsa e opportunità di lavoro, più o meno precario, più o meno retribuito e più o meno remunerativo per gli imprenditori che vi investono: non possiamo, però, più considerarla come sede di una cultura in sé, come territorio vissuto da una collettività consolidata, unificata da linguaggio, condizione sociale, competenze lavorative, visioni del mondo, come civiltà contadina: un mondo in sé ed al tempo stesso metà di un mondo inclusivo, vicino ma altro e altrui. Il passaggio dal prima all'oggi si è prodotto nell'arco di una generazione; l'oggi non lascia quasi trapelare più niente del passato: ma per un ventennio, dall'altro ieri a ieri, il movimento è stato percepibile, la modernità è entrata a erodere l'arcaico, a marcare la differenza con il passato profondo, convivendoci e dando vita a un equilibrio funzionale, fatto di ibridazione estetica, tecnica, composto da oggetti e logiche d'uso, pratiche e investimenti di valore simbolico molto diverse, distanti quando non contraddittorie.

Proprio di questo scarto ci parlano le fotografie di Mauro Guerrini, uno iato che la dissoluzione del mondo mezzadrile rendeva visibile e che è stato colto e fissato per immagini dalla sensibilità estetica ed emica del fotografo, di Mauro che, come me, viene da quel mondo e, come me, lo ha marginalmente vissuto prima di guardarlo, da adulto e – lui – da fotografo¹⁰.

Due mondi quindi, che nello spazio di un ventennio si allontanano e si trasformano: valore economico e valore estetico mutano di proporzione nel determinare il nuovo capitale della terra che non sarà più terra di mezzadri; il nuovo, il mercato, il moderno, entrano a fondersi con le persistenze secolari e tradizionali, dando vita ad un periodo di transizione che è testimone del prima tanto quanto anticipa il dopo, che sta arrivando.

⁹ Sulla campagna toscana in quanto paesaggio, ampiamente celebrato e studiato, si veda Bonelli Conenna – Brilli – Cantelli 2004.

¹⁰ La traduzione in una etnografia retrospettiva (Piasere 2002) della mia vicinanza biografica marca gran parte della mia produzione saggistica (Mugnaini 1999). Ciò che fu motivo di perplessità personale, agli inizi del mio lavoro, si è poi consolidato sul piano epistemico come approccio consapevole, riflessivo e produttivo (Collins – Gallinat 2013).

Uno degli interpreti più lungimiranti del mondo sociale, Erving Goffman, ci ha lasciato la proposta di leggere le interazioni alla luce del paradigma drammaturgico, facendo riferimento al teatro e distinguendo ciò che va in scena da ciò che invece, si muove nella profondità del retropalco, del retroscena, degli spazi in cui si produce l'illusione scenica (Goffman 1997, ed. or. 1959).

Questa distinzione torna utile per avvicinarci al repertorio fotografico di Mauro Guerrini e ci può aiutare a rivedere ormai la memoria o l'idea di quel passato contadino che ha marcato la storia del nostro territorio e che è completamente stravolto dai recuperi contemporanei. La generazione dei *millennials*, se si concedesse il piacere di vagabondare nelle campagne attuali, non potrebbe neppure lontanamente immaginare le condizioni di vita e di lavoro degli uomini e delle donne della mezzadria – e comprendere così le ragioni che spinsero i mezzadri a lasciare la terra in massa – né potrebbero raffigurarsi lo stesso paesaggio agrario del passato e non solo per le trasformazioni dovute ai cambiamenti dell'economia rurale, per i quali le campagne in generale si sono desertificate di alberi da frutta e si sono iperspecializzate in vigneti e oliveti. Né, infine, saprebbero cogliere appieno l'offesa inedita di quell'erba prima rosa e poi secca, che a fine inverno appare tra i filari di molte vigne, dovuta al glifosato: tardivo oltraggio ad una terra che era stata resa produttiva dalla fatica e dal concime umano e animale, conoscendo molto tardi la violenza della chimica.

Sono decisamente cambiate le strutture abitative, poderi trasformati in residenze di status o in condomini di lusso che hanno cristallizzato la forma delle grandi case destinate alle famiglie polinucleari, rivoluzionandone le destinazioni e il senso. Tanto la campagna attuale è scena e ribalta, set cinematografico e fotografico, tanto quella campagna restituitaci dalle immagini di Guerrini, era retroscena. Potremmo pensare di rileggere il passato contadino partendo da questo stesso apparato concettuale: partendo dal concetto di scena e ipotizzando che la caratteristica del mondo mezzadrile fosse quella di essere interamente concepito e vissuto come retroscena, sia dai suoi attori che dai loro padroni e dal mondo urbano, borghese che lo guardava da fuori. Un mondo costruito come *backstage* perché retroscena di un'altra parte di mondo, come abbiamo visto; un retroscena su cui i padroni, titolari della scena sociale più rilevante, avevano un diritto di visione. Il contratto autorizzava infatti la figura del padrone tramite i suoi rappresentanti (fattori, sottofattori, guardie) a vedere cosa succedeva nelle più riposte intimità del mondo mezzadrile. Il potere padronale interveniva sulle date dei matrimoni, sull'ordine dei matrimoni, sulle crisi familiari, sugli esempi di scarsa moralità (Clemente, Coppi, Fineschi, Fresta, Pietrelli, 1980). Dovevano essere aperti al suo sguardo e alla sua esplorazione le stalle, le cantine, i magazzini, tutto ciò che era parte del potere. Unica esclusione, forse, le camere da letto, la sfera più gelosamente difesa di quei nuclei coniugali che erano costretti a compensare le loro aspettative nelle economie e nelle economie morali delle grandi famiglie polinucleari (Papa 1985, Grilli 1997, Solinas 2004), sottostando all'autorità dei capocchia, accettando di conformarsi alla guida della donna cui veniva delegato il compito di amministrare il bilancio familiare. Con l'eccezione delle camere da letto, il mondo contadino era esposto al diritto di visione e di verifica. In molti poderi si allevavano pecore: poche unità, per lana, carne e latte-da dividere con la parte padronale; la tradizione orale ci racconta di un fattore particolarmente scrupoloso che usava frequentare i ricoveri per tener conto delle gravidanze e dei periodi di "calore" affinché i suoi contadini non potessero nascondere qualche nascita, onde vendere un agnello in proprio o consumarlo in famiglia, senza doverne riconoscere la metà al padrone. Finché un contadino meno timoroso degli altri, una sera, ne colse la presenza nello stalletto e ce lo rinchiuse, tutta la notte, fino al mattino successivo quando una delle bambine di casa andò a riaprire le pecore per portarle al pascolo. Il retroscena è per definizione mondo della tecnica, del lavoro, delle soluzioni tecniche. La luce è ingrediente della scena teatrale, ma non la lampadina, né il filo, né l'operatore che ne dirige il fascio; il tecnico non ha posto sulla scena – e quando lo si vede è perché l'autore ha voluto produrre del metateatro, inscenandone il ruolo, non la funzione. Il mondo contadino può essere immaginato come il retroscena strutturale di quel mondo padronale che era la scena sociale vera e propria, in cui i magazzini erano riforniti, le tavole erano apparecchiate, i cibi erano serviti, le stanze erano pulite, le dispense ben fornite, mentre il mondo mezzadrile era il retroscena da cui provenivano quei prodotti del lavoro, quei cibi e quelle risorse, quelle mani che preparavano, uccidevano, spennavano, dando vita a quell'economia e a quello stile di vita che improntava di sé la messa in scena finale. Tuttavia, in quanto mondo in sé, anche quello dei contadini aveva la propria ribalta, produceva e difendeva le proprie messe in scena. Nell'organizzazione della grande casa mezzadrile, la cucina era il palcoscenico su cui si svolgeva la rappresentazione della vita familiare; le

coppie avrebbero affrontato e spento, più che risolto, i loro conflitti nell'intimità della camera da letto; i chiarimenti e i litigi tra fratelli sarebbero avvenuti prevalentemente nella stalla o nell'isolamento della campagna. Gli attrezzi del lavoro campestre venivano lasciati fuori, sotto le parate, sulle logge. La cucina era il luogo in cui andava in scena la famiglia, in cui la famiglia offriva la scena di sé stessa accogliendo gli altri: anche molti, nella stagione delle veglie, nelle serate da ballo, nella notte del 30 aprile, quando in val d'Orcia i 'maggerini' visitano le case portando l'augurio della bella stagione (Fresta 1983). Alcune, poche, famiglie potevano permettersi il lusso straordinario di una stanza ulteriore, sottratta alla ragione pratica e materiale dell'immagazzinamento dei prodotti di consumo (grano, olio, fagioli, cipolle, patate...) e potevano ostentare un salotto quasi come le famiglie dei loro padroni. Un salotto arredato con una vetrina magari autocostruita; nobilitato da un rosso cinabrese¹¹ accuratamente lucidato sul pavimento di cotto e che, al contrario di quanto accadeva nelle altre stanze, si conservava immacolato per l'intero anno, a dimostrazione dello scarso uso di quella stanza di rappresentanza. Nella casa contadina il salotto era il teatro allestito per un pubblico che non veniva mai, o poco più che saltuariamente. Erano luoghi della scena contadina anche le occasioni cerimoniali, le ritualità nuziali, in misura minore i battesimi e gli altri riti di passaggio in cui subentrava l'elemento del solenne associato al sacro. La solennità in chiave contadina non godeva dei grandi supporti della musica o delle volute barocche; il sacro proposto ai contadini aveva magari come contesto qualche spoglia pieve romanica, con altari tardo barocchi in gesso dipinto a falso marmo; la solennità attingeva in parte a tradizioni musicali di antica e nobile origine¹², ma aveva poca consuetudine con Bach e doveva contentarsi di *Tu scendi dalle stelle*. Il sacro celebrava allo stesso modo santi padri della chiesa e santi oscuri, negletti, persino inventati, abusivi, titolari di qualche parrocchia rurale, dalle rendite basse, accreditati di taumaturgie minori, santi resi più vicini da proverbi che ne esaltavano qualche virtù, al limite della blasfemia, come si usava dire di Santa Francesca, ovvero Santa Checca che da "quanti miracoli fece venne sui coglioni al popolo"; onorati però con la stessa devozione dei protagonisti principali del dramma sacro, resi anch'essi familiari da una vulgata concentrata sulle storie, sugli aneddoti, su agiografie spesso attraversate da temi leggendari e da filoni della tradizione narrativa. Fra questi protagonisti, ovviamente la Madonna e Gesù Cristo: lui, il secco, il biondo rinominato come uno di noi salvo essere sinceramente compianto nella rappresentazione teatrale e processionale della sua morte e moderatamente celebrato nel giorno della sua resurrezione, su cui il credo contadino ha coltivato sempre qualche inespressa riserva. Un sacro che la proverbiale blasfemia del contadino toscano più che negare, evocava e incastonava nel paesaggio emozionale quotidiano. Un sacro che si manifesta nel mondo anche attraverso la sua utilità: ecco il sant'Antonio abate che benedice gli animali, san Biagio la gola, Santa Lucia gli occhi. Ecco anche quel San Giovanni che benedice la rugiada del suo solstizio facendone un linimento per la pelle o un unguento di bellezza per le giovani desiderose di apparire. Un sacro che fuoriesce dalla chiesa, onorato da croci e immaginette appese in casa, magari dietro la porta d'ingresso, insieme ai rami di abete per tenere lontane le streghe e che si allarga, espandendosi al territorio coltivato: è l'intera campagna, lo spazio di vita di questa comunità a maglie larghe, la cosiddetta maglia poderale, che andava riconosciuta, protetta, definita come ambito parrocchiale e riconsegnato alla protezione divina. A peste, fame e bello, libera nos domine; a folgore e tempestate, libera nos domine; a flagello terremoto, libera nos domine...¹³ Le Rogazioni di maggio, insieme ad altre processioni campestri erano i riti itineranti che portavano la croce astile, l'acqua santa, le immagini sacre in campagna in modo che il loro sguardo potesse abbracciare l'orizzonte della terra contadina e l'acqua disseminata nell'aria con l'aspersorio potesse garantire uno schermo protettivo.

In questi momenti il quotidiano contadino si ricomponeva e si concentrava nello sforzo di restituire alla divinità una propria decorosa immagine di sé. Ricordo per esperienza personale, per quanto limitata ad una fase poco più che infantile, l'affanno con cui si spazzavano le strade alla vigilia delle Rogazioni; gli uomini tagliavano l'erba ai piedi delle croci campestri che sarebbero state stazioni del rito processionale; ricordo l'ansia di togliere dalla strada qualunque traccia di sterco di vacca o di maiale,

¹¹ Sottoprodotto della produzione di mercurio, ricavato dalla lavorazione del cinabro negli stabilimenti minerari del Monte Amiata, ritirato dal commercio nel secondo dopoguerra per la sua tossicità.

¹² Per una rassegna aggiornata sui contributi degli etnomusicologi (M. Agamennone, I. Macchiarella, P. Sassu, ecc..) in merito, cfr. Colicci 2021). Sulla persistenza nella tradizione popolare del canto liturgico e paraliturgico, alcuni documenti preziosi in Marranci, 2009.

¹³ La preghiera, cantata in latino (approssimato), è riprodotta in Marranci 2009.

per dare di quella campagna, offerta allo sguardo ritualizzato della divinità, l'immagine più decorosa possibile e come poi bastassero pochi giorni perché quelle erbe ricrescessero e sulle strade tornassero a fiorire le merde delle vacche. La scena che il mondo contadino costruisce è effimera e il vissuto quotidiano si svolge prevalentemente nello spazio del retroscena, dove si sviluppa un'estetica propria, complementare a quella padronale, dominata dal principio di funzionalità, delimitata da una economia dell'autosussistenza, dell'autoproduzione e della riduzione al minimo dei costi. Il retroscena è prioritariamente la scena del lavoro¹⁴, esteso oltre la fatica nei campi. Il mondo contadino è quello in cui gli animali vengono allevati con cura, lavoro, fatica e dedizione per un fine preciso, quello di essere avviati al macello: la macellazione, essendo una ulteriore occasione di teatralizzazione, si sarebbe sviluppata come un evento, una vera tragedia, dove al posto del capro ci sarebbe stato il maiale, che era stato cresciuto, custodito, vezzeggiato, protetto perché arrivasse bello, grasso e sano all'appuntamento con la sua uccisione. Quando il maiale sente avvicinarsi l'operatore – un contadino che sa anche ammazzare il maiale e porta con sé il sentore degli altri animali morti – urla, si ritrae, forse si dispera fin quando trascinato appena fuori dal suo stalletto e messo a terra viene stordito, nella foto da un colpo di pistola, o ucciso, come nel mio ricordo da un coltello che gli apre la giugulare, o che gli cerca il cuore, secondo la tecnica praticata dall'"ammazzino". Lino Quercioli, il mattatore di cui ricordo, operante nella mia zona, uccideva cercando la giugulare, diceva, ed il maiale moriva per dissanguamento mentre una donna, una massaia o un'altra donna da lei delegata, con le mani immerse nel sangue ne diluiva i grumi. Il sangue serviva (buristo, migliacci, sanguinaccio) e non per via simbolica, niente sarebbe andato sprecato.



FOTO 1: Lavorazione del maiale - Pari (Gr) - dicembre 1986 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini)



FOTO 2: lavorazione del maiale - podere S.Giusto, Castelnuovo B.ga (Si) - dicembre 1981 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini)

Dopo un paio di notti di freddo, andava in scena il secondo atto di quella tragedia: la trasformazione della carcassa in carne [foto n. 1, 2], in cibo e il passaggio ad un'altra estetica, quella dei prodotti che per i contadini erano garanzia di risorse proteica nei momenti di pluslavoro ma che erano allo stesso tempo elementi di un patrimonio gastronomico eccellente, sopravvissuto in quanto tale alla crisi mezzadrile: prodromi di un'estetica del gusto che si sarebbe impiantata nelle campagne pubblicitarie che vendono la Toscana per la sua gastronomia, insieme al paesaggio, ai turisti e ai consumatori della nuova era. Salame, prosciutto, salsicce, buristo, soppressata, icone al tempo della frugalità della dieta contadina che campeggiano, oggi, all'ingresso dei ristoranti o nelle vetrine delle boutiques gastronomiche. Questa trasformazione avveniva nel secondo atto della tragedia del maiale. Ma altre

¹⁴ Per un esempio magistrale di approccio non documentaristico al lavoro, tramite la fotografia, cfr. Harper, 1988.

tragedie si consumavano nell'indifferenza: quella del coniglio, del pollo, casi in cui non c'era bisogno di un cast, bastava la massaia, o una donna, secondo la prevalente distribuzione del lavoro¹⁵.

Una donna bastava per uccidere una gallina, un coniglio; poi il pollo veniva spennato, il coniglio denudato, magari con l'aiuto di un'altra persona, magari un bambino o un vecchio, e sparivano nell'estetica del consumo quotidiano. Chi consumava quel pollo arrosto aveva avuto davanti tutto lo spettacolo della vita di quell'animale; i conigli si erano visti nascere, si erano visti pulcini i polli che poi si vedevano sulla tavola. Si era persino giocato, con qualcuno di loro, stabilendo una relazione di cura e confidenza [foto n. 3]. La tavola imbandita diventava così una messa in scena che non negava i propri precedenti, tutti coloro che mangiavano sapevano di aver visto quel pollo pulcino, di aver visto quel coniglio appena nato, di aver accudito quel maiale di cui si gustava il fegatello.



Foto 3: Gioco con gli animali da cortile - Caprera (Si) - febbraio 2001 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Il retroscena è lo spazio proprio di chi sa come il mondo è fatto; di chi vede il lavoro attraverso il prodotto finale e di chi sa far profitto delle soluzioni che la tecnica, la modernità rende, via via, accessibili. La tradizione è una risorsa ma non una gabbia e, come ci insegna Hermann Bausinger, non ha mai avuto paura di cambiare (Bausinger 2005 – ed. or. 1961).

Immagini dal retroscena

Negli scatti di Mauro Guerrini il passato contadino filtra tra segni concreti della trasformazione e della modernizzazione, rendendo così visibile la dinamica culturale che ha caratterizzato la fase temporale coperta dal reportage (fine anni '70-2000) e che sarebbe stata messa in ombra dall'ondata estetizzante che ha travolto quanto rimaneva della tradizione contadina, del paesaggio agrario, che si sarebbe concentrata su cipressi e tramonti, vigne in autunno, case poderali trasformate in residenze da sogno. La presenza umana si sarebbe rarefatta: la popolazione ex-mezzadrile si sarebbe concentrata nelle periferie e nei nuclei abitati favoriti da servizi e infrastrutture; i pochi rimasti, inesorabilmente e felicemente invecchiati, diventavano icona di un passato nostalgicamente riscritto e immaginato da chi

¹⁵ Un'insostituibile lettura, dal punto di vista femminile, è l'autobiografia di Dina Mugnaini – mia omonima ma non parente, mezzadra nel comune di San Gimignano; Di Piazza, Mugnaini 1988, oggi interamente accessibile online: <https://www.storicavaldelsa.it/publicazioni/io-so-nata-santa-lucia> (07.12.2021).

non lo aveva conosciuto (meloni 2014), entrando a far parte di una gentrificazione della memoria, complementare a quella che le dinamiche del mercato immobiliare stava portando a termine sul territorio già terra di mezzadria.

Il retroscena tecnico e produttivo, già scena contadina rispetto a quella padronale, subisce così un ulteriore messa tra parentesi: le cantine progettate da architetti sublimano la tecnicità ingombrante della viticoltura intensiva e diventano cattedrali del vino; le colline nude destinate a grano vengono abbellite dalle rotoballe e si aggiungono agli altri “paesaggi” celebrati da macchine fotografiche di tutto il mondo, insieme ai girasoli, ai tetti di tegole, ai muri di pietra, ai gatti e, via via, ai dettagli del nuovo abitare la campagna toscana che fioriscono sulle riviste di arredamento. Trasfigurata in puro capitale estetico, l'immagine della Toscana acquisisce quasi forza normativa (Meloni 2021) e si riproietta all'indietro, agendo nelle istanze di ricongiungimento con la memoria del passato (Scarpelli, 2007, Meloni 2014).

Il nuovo paesaggio – incluso quello sociale – espunge la fatica, il processo di meccanizzazione della produzione, rimuove la presenza migrante che ha, al contrario, il merito di aver accolto quanto restava dei saperi contadini di un tempo, dalle tecniche di autoproduzione alla toponomastica. La fase conclusiva e dinamica della mezzadria ha lasciato il posto ad uno scenario ad altissima vocazione patrimoniale, turistica ed essoterica: ecco la differenza da cercare mentalmente, scorrendo le immagini che lo sguardo intelligentemente partecipe di Mauro Guerrini fissava sulla pellicola.

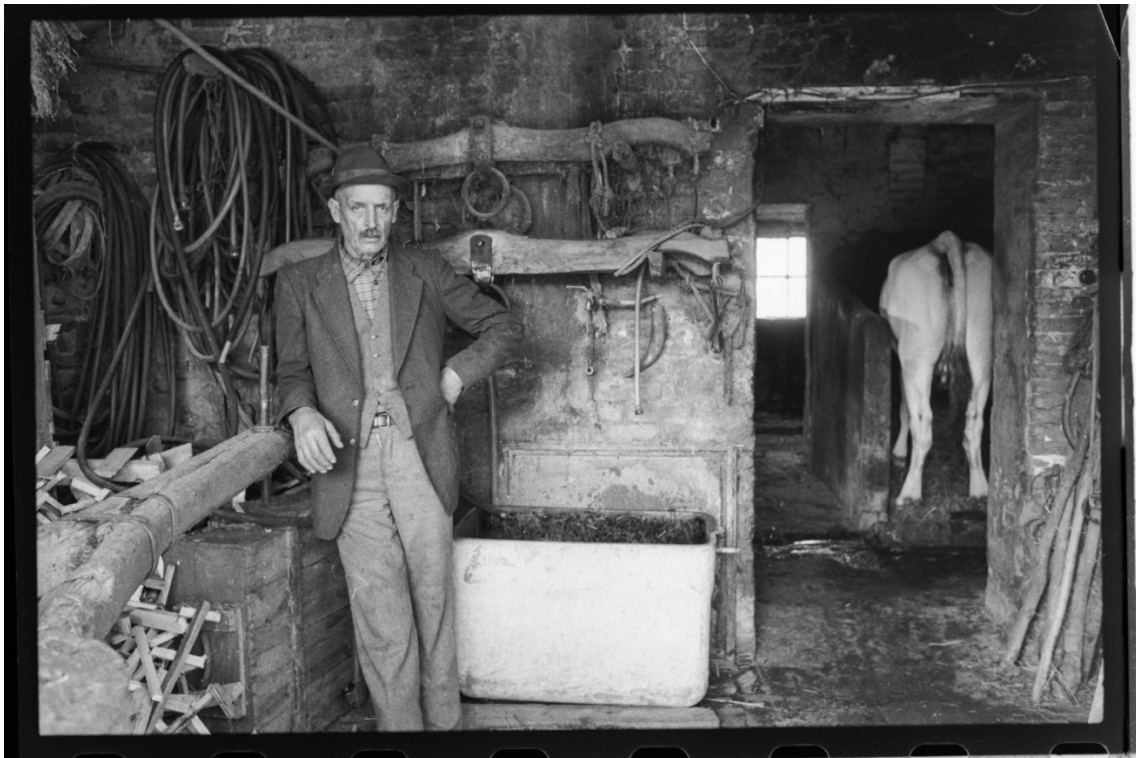


FOTO 3 BIS: Famiglia Vannini, fuori dalla stalla - Siena - marzo 1991 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Le fotografie che seguono sono belle [foto n. 3 bis]; ma sono anche fonti: preziose, per un antropologo, utili e necessarie, per chiunque abbia voglia di capire cosa vi sia stato prima, della Toscana brandizzata e quali alternative siano immaginabili tramite il confronto con il processo di mutamento storico. Senza alcuna pretesa di guidare alla lettura delle foto, che deve restare libera e senza condizioni, si possono condividere delle evidenze, alcune tra le tante che il repertorio concede alla meditazione di cui lo percorre.

Già la fotografia della cucina [foto n. 4] con la coppia che si fa protagonista al posto della grande e complessa famiglia polinucleare, mostra i segni della transizione: c'è un frigorifero, forse già un congelatore, elemento che ha rivoluzionato le economie della conservazione alimentare integrandosi e in parte sostituendo le tecniche tradizionali; una “mezzina” di rame, il contenitore per l'acqua da bere che, con la crescita delle reti idriche e l'arrivo in casa dell'acqua potabile, è stata declassata, rimossa e

promossa a soprammobile; una caldaia che convive con la cucina economica: anch'essa, a sua volta, snodo tecnico dell'ultima fase del vivere contadino, seme di domesticità e risorsa multiforme che assomma il riscaldamento dell'ambiente domestico con il rendere possibili tecniche di cottura inarrivabili con agli altri mezzi più moderni, sostituendo quasi del tutto la funzione del focolare.



FOTO 4: Famiglia Vannini, interno di casa - Siena - marzo 1991 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Lo sguardo emico ed etico allo stesso tempo di Guerrini coglie la presenza femminile in azioni solitamente nascoste e ne fa risaltare la perizia e l'informalità, allo stesso tempo. La donna che distribuisce il beccime ai suoi polli, [foto n. 5] in un luogo che le impalcature appoggiate ad un muro segnalano come interessato da un processo di mutamento (una ristrutturazione?), da cui potrebbe anche provenire il secchio di plastica da dove viene attinto il beccime.



FOTO 5: beccime ai polli - Ville di Corsano (Si) – 1979 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Tanti polli, vivi, preludono a quelli che vediamo nel momento dell'uccisione – due scatti, [foto n. 6-7] come i due tempi della tecnica più indolore per ammazzare un pollo – o nella fase della spiumatura, in una quantità che è compatibile o con una festa o, più probabilmente, con il congelatore che occhieggia nella precedente fotografia.



Foto 6-7: Uccisione di un pollo - Caprera (Si) - aprile 1993 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Anche il coniglio che vediamo appeso e spellato [foto n. 8-9] evoca il momento in cui da attenta e premurosa allevatrice la donna si carica del compito di uccidere e preparare: immagini che la netiquette attuale riterrebbe “disturbing” e che facevano, al contrario, parte del paesaggio quotidiano, senza esclusione dei più giovani.



Foto 8: Animali da cortile come cibo - Caprera (Si) – 2000 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).



Foto 9: spennatura dei polli - castelnuovo b.ga (Si) – 1992 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Il principio dell'autosussistenza portava all'autoproduzione e al recupero come risorse di cascami e scarti produttivi: il grasso, quello immangiabile, del maiale veniva usato per la produzione di sapone; la lana, prodotto secondario ma un tempo prezioso e oggi classificato come rifiuto speciale – l'economia globale del filato ha condannato così tanta parte della lana dei nostri ovini, privando i loro allevatori di un legittimo rientro economico.

L'autonomia produttiva del podere è rimasta come valore (come abitudine ereditata) per quanto concerne alcuni prodotti: il vino e l'olio, per esempio, che si ostina a produrre in proprio chi è riuscito ad acquisire anche piccoli appezzamenti, o che diventano disponibili grazie ad una rete di accordi – lavoro in cambio di olio – che cuciono insieme relazioni di vicinato o amicali con la soddisfazione di consumare ciò che è stato fatto in casa, estraneo al circuito del mercato e, alla luce di questa priorità, viene bene anche il fiasco di plastica. [foto n. 10] La ricerca estetica e morale, nel perseguire questo valore, non si nutre di estetismi e filologie ridondanti.



FOTO 10: Vendemmia - Ville di Corsano (Si) – 1988 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Alcune pratiche hanno dovuto adeguarsi, come ad esempio la raccolta delle olive che il calendario tradizionale associava ai primi rigori dell'inverno [Foto n. 11-12]. L'adattamento all'evoluzione del gusto dell'olio di oliva e quindi alle aspettative di un mercato sempre più internazionale, ne ha richiesto l'anticipo ad un periodo decisamente più caldo (settembre, ottobre al più tardi), d'altro canto anche le stagioni, come si dice in tutte le sale d'attesa, non sono più quelle di un tempo. E chi lavora la terra sa quanto la banalità del modo di dire oscuri la drammaticità dei cambiamenti climatici in corso.

Il gelo, il caldo, l'acqua e la siccità: gli elementi che rendevano precaria la sussistenza contadina – e precarie le economie delle imprese agricole odierne – come ci racconta Francesco Burrone, portavano al nesso con il sacro, quel sacro che si esprime, come già detto, nell'affidamento e nella familiarizzazione con le sue forme; la Madonna non si offende se viene portata in giro da un trattore [foto n. 13], né il trattore viene a perdere la sua natura di strumento se adornato di fiori o dalle scritte di esultanza, stampate in serie dalle tipografie locali. W Maria, W il vescovo.

Viva il primo maggio: si vede, invece, scritto a mano [foto n. 14]. Sì, perché a proposito di affidamento non può essere taciuto quello che comincia a scardinare la relazione subalterna con il paternalismo padronale già a partire dai primi anni del XX secolo: la mezzadria diventa terra di istanze politiche radicali, una nuova cornice viene proposta a raccogliere e coagulare sentimenti di insofferenza, volontà di riscatto, conati di ribellione e desideri di liberazione. Il movimento socialista prima, comunista (Pazzagli – Cianferoni – Anselmi 1986; Li Causi 1993) dopo la parentesi fascista – la cui fascinazione si dileguò con la guerra – avrebbe portato le masse mezzadrili a vivere l'impegno politico con la stessa intensità del sentimento religioso [foto n. 15].



FOTO 11: Raccolta delle olive - podere Apparita, Castelnuovo B.ga (Si) - novembre 1983 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).



FOTO 12: Raccolta delle olive - Ville di Corsano, Monteroni (Si) - novembre 1990 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).



FOTO 13: Festa della Compagnia - Monastero (Si) - ottobre 1987 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).



FOTO 14: Festa del lavoro - Montalcinello (Si) - 1990 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).



FOTO 15: Festa dei lavoratori 1°maggio - Montalcinello (Si) - maggio 1990 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Il calendario dei mezzadri, così, si arricchisce con il primo maggio, con il 25 aprile e le ricorrenze locali della stragi nazifasciste, con le feste dell'Unità. Occasioni di festa e di lavoro per la festa [foto n. 16] che si aggiungono a quelle consuete del calendario religioso, cui dedicarsi con impegno anche dopo che le soluzioni sostenute dal partito comunista al problema contadino erano state fagocitate dai mutamenti del mercato e del mondo sociale.



Foto 16: Festa del lavoro - Montalcinello (Si) – 1990 (Foto di Mauro Guerrini).

Nessuna nostalgia, nessun rimpianto, devono trovare spazio nel guardare al passato, ma attenzione critica e accoglienza alle domande che scaturiscono dai dettagli, interrogandosi sulle differenze; in tal modo si può trasformare l'esperienza estetica con cui ci si avvicina alle fotografie, nell'opportunità di cogliere il declino dell'età che Pasolini definì l'età del pane (1990)¹⁶, per far posto ad una diversa fase, quella del superfluo in cui stiamo tutt'ora vivendo e che ci porta a consumare il nostro stesso mondo.

Non è un caso se, nel pantheon personal di Mauro Guerrini, oltre all'amico Marco Bruttini, che lo ha accolto e ha guidato i suoi primi passi nel mestiere, ci sono Ferdinando Scianna, Franco Pinna e, all'apice, su tutti, Sebastião Salgado: è all'altezza di quello sguardo, di quella coscienza globale, di quell'impegno a leggere e proiettare sul *visual-scape* mondiale le immagini del male fatto dall'uomo al mondo e a se stesso, che occorre predisporre la visione delle immagini del nostro passato: perché la bellezza non faccia velo alla conoscenza, e alla coscienza.

¹⁶ Lettera a Italo Calvino, 1974, poi in Pasolini 1990.

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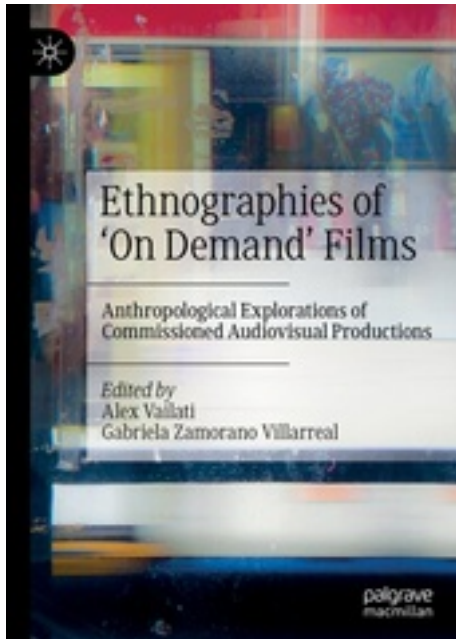
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Alex Vailati, Gabriela Zamorano Villareal

Ethnographies of 'On Demand' Films. Anthropological Explorations of Commissioned Audiovisual Productions
Verlag, Palgrave, 2021

<https://www.schweitzer-online.de/buch/Vailati/Ethnographies-Demand-Films/9783030789107/A60459472/>

Over the last two decades, the advent of cheap, user-friendly video technologies has contributed to a revolution in representational agency. Videos are now made by production units that are at times composed of families, churches, musical groups, community associations or other institutions. Thus, on-demand videos produced and distributed within local and atypical networks profoundly shape contemporary urban imaginaries. This book explores the intertwined relations among infrastructure, technology, and modernity through an ordinary, yet little studied field of "on-demand" audiovisual production, which involves processes of negotiation and interaction between clients and commissioned video makers. On-demand films are considered as a space of collaboration and self-representation, that allows to reflect on the potential of fiction, artifice, and montage to render material desires, aspirations, and ideas of the future.

Alex Vailati is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Museology at the Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil. An anthropologist and documentarist, he is the coordinator of the university's Visual Anthropology Laboratory (LAV). He is the author of *Migration of Rich Immigrants: Gender, Ethnicity and Class* (2016, with Carmel Rial).

Gabriela Zamorano Villareal is a Professor and researcher at the Centro de Estudios Antropológicos in El Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico. She is the author of *Indigenous Media and Political Imaginaries in Contemporary Bolivia* (2017). Her current research includes work on popular photographic and audiovisual archives in Michoacán, Mexico and La Paz, Bolivia.



Arnd Schneider

Expanded Visions. A New Anthropology of the Moving Image

London, Routledge, 2021

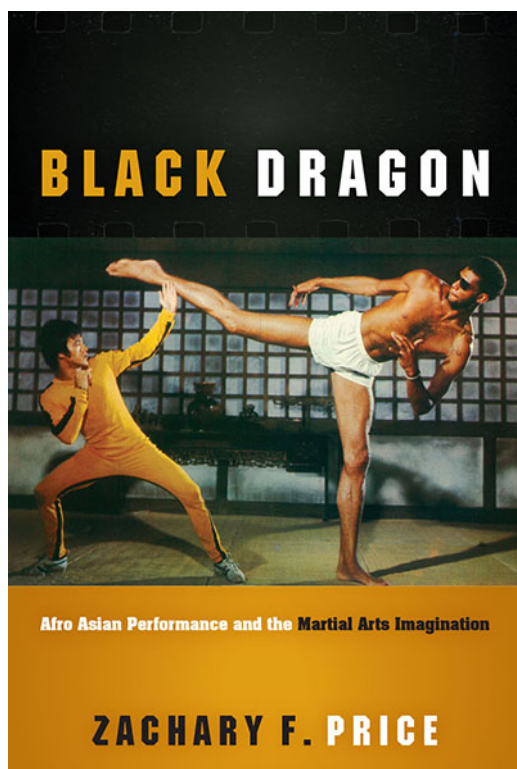
<https://www.routledge.com/Expanded-Visions-A-New-Anthropology-of-the-Moving-Image/Schneider/p/book/9780367253684>

This book argues for a new anthropology of the moving image, bringing together an important range of essays on time-based media in the contemporary arts and anthropology.

It builds on recent attempts to develop more experimental formats and engages with debates on epistemologies of ethnography, relational aesthetics, materiality, sensory ethnography, and observational and participatory cinema. Arnd Schneider critically revisits Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum and the hyperreal, engages with new media theory, and elaborates on the potential of the Writing Culture critique for moving image practices bordering art and anthropology.

This important work will be essential reading for anybody working across the fields of visual anthropology, film and media studies and visual studies.

Arnd Schneider is Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo, Norway, and has published widely on contemporary art and anthropology. He is the Editor of *Alternative Art and Anthropology: Global Encounters* (2017) and *Art, Anthropology and Contested Heritage* (2020).



Zachary F. Price

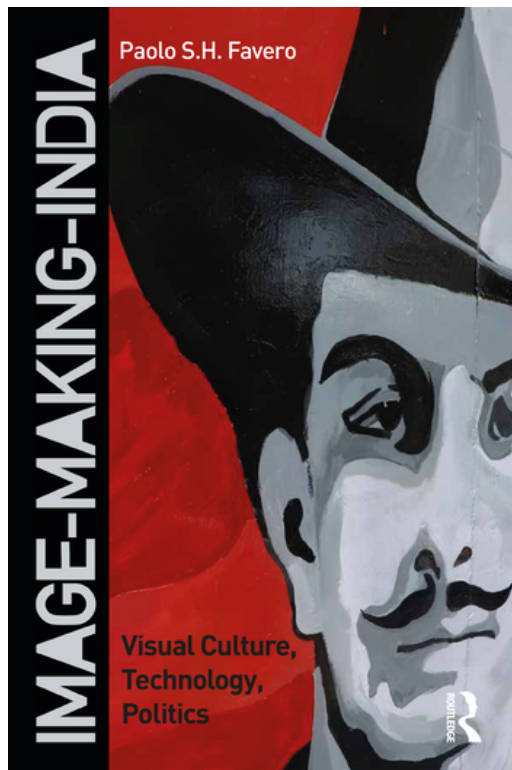
Black Dragon. Afro Asian Performance and the Martial Arts Imagination

The Ohio State University Press

<https://ohiostatepress.org/books/titles/9780814214602.html>

In *Black Dragon: Afro Asian Performance and the Martial Arts Imagination*, Zachary F. Price illuminates martial arts as a site of knowledge exchange between Black, Asian, and Asian American people and cultures to offer new insights into the relationships among these historically marginalized groups. Drawing on case studies that include Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's appearance in Bruce Lee's film *Game of Death*, Ron van Clief and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, the Wu-Tang Clan, and Chinese American saxophonist Fred Ho, Price argues that the regular blending and borrowing between their distinct cultural heritages is healing rather than appropriative. His analyses of performance, power, and identity within this cultural fusion demonstrate how, historically, urban working-class Black men have developed community and practiced self-care through the contested adoption of Asian martial arts practice. By directing his analysis to this rich but heretofore understudied vein of American cultural exchange, Price not only broadens the scholarship around sites of empowerment via such exchanges but also offers a compelling example of nonessentialist emancipation for the twenty-first century.

Zachary F. Price is Assistant Professor of Drama and African American Studies at the University of California, Irvine.



Paolo Silvio Harald Favero

Image-Making-India. Visual Culture, Technology, Politics
London, Routledge

<https://www.routledge.com/Image-Making-India-Visual-Culture-Technology-Politics/Favero/p/book/9781350029880>

Image-Making-India explores the evolving meaning of images in a digital landscape from the vantage point of contemporary India.

Building upon long-term ethnographic research among image-makers in Delhi, Mumbai and other Indian cities, the author interrogates the dialogue between visual culture, technology and changing notions of political participation. The book explores selected artistic experiences in documentary and fiction film, photography, contemporary art and digital curation that have in common a desire to engage with images as tools for social intervention. These experiences reveal images' capacity not only to narrate and represent but also to perform, do and affect. Particular attention is devoted to the 'digital', a critical landscape that offers an opportunity to re-examine the significance of images and visual culture in a rapidly changing India.

This volume will be of particular interest to scholars of visual and digital anthropology and cultures as well as South Asian studies.

Paolo S.H. Favero is Associate Professor of Film Studies and Visual Culture at the Visual and Digital Cultures Research Centre (ViDi), University of Antwerp, Belgium.