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Our mission is to empower undergraduate and graduate students of anthropology in Utrecht to feel that their work matters. As such, we work to create a collaborative and independent intellectual space for all students.

Our goals

We strive to *facilitate knowledge exchange* by creating an accessible space equipped for learning new insights and skills. In addition, it is our goal to *foster student engagement*. Students are part of every step in our publication process. SCAJ thus reflects efforts of Utrecht-based anthropology students through and through.

Our values

We operate in the pursuit of *inclusivity* as a means to further develop as a platform. Utrecht-based anthropology students of all backgrounds are included in our publication process and thus all these students of anthropology may appeal to this platform. For this to be true, we value *transparency* in all our teams, selections and processes. As such, we strive to ensure that there is no mystery as to how we operate.

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Introduction

It is with great joy that I get to introduce you all to SCAJ's 10th edition as the new Editor-in-Chief. Being part of SCAJ's wonderful team in the first year of my road to becoming an anthropologist has been a truly memorable experience. Let me start by expressing my immense gratitude towards everyone on the welcoming and cheerful team and board of SCAJ for all the work they have put into creating such a beautiful and important journal. I would like to say a special thank you to Jonna for teaching this technophobe how to master the ever-daunting worlds of excel and word, and a big thank you to Miriam for taking me under her wing and for giving me the confidence to take on the role she filled so perfectly. As a massive bookworm, the publication process has always been somewhat of a magical world to me which I have wanted to get to know for a long time. I could not have wished for a better way in then by joining SCAJ and getting to experience how the written word becomes a tangible finished product. Being a part of a journal that empowers students by acknowledging their work's worth, especially

during these uncertain times where our voices need to be heard, fills me with great pride. There is no better time for this 10th edition of SCAJ to show the importance of anthropological insights in this dynamic world. So, without further ado, allow me to introduce the creators behind this year's fall edition.

This edition's papers discuss the important topics of identity, structural violence, the clashing of global and local scales, and both human and non-human agency. Looking at these topics from within different cultural contexts, the authors give important insights in the everyday lives of people from around the world.

Livia Barcessat Lewinski invites us to engage with the stories of quilombola communities in her home country Brazil. Considering the historical context of colonialism, this paper looks at the processes of self-definition and identity politics in contemporary Brazil, as well as the role of racialization and the state in the dynamic formation of quilombola identity.

The second paper brings us all the way from Brazil to the agricultural landscape of Etna, Sicily. *Nina Mara van Aart* shows us how in the context of climate change, people use their knowledge of the local ecosystem to deal with contemporary challenges and global influences.

Moving our perspective from human to non-human agency, *Zofia Prończuk* brings us to Poland to tell the story of how the materiality of church interiors influence people's religious experiences.

Finally, bringing us back to the Netherlands, *Nûri Topcu* discusses the structural racism embedded in this country in light of the PVV's victory in recent elections. Using his own racial identity and family history, Topcu shows how the racialization of bodies influence in- and excluding practices.

My hope is that this diverse compilation of stories will remind us of the importance and beauty of anthropological work. If there is one thing we can learn from these uncertain times colored by political conflict, it is that all people and their voices need to be seen and heard. Personally, I think it is safe to say that this edition's authors have done a beautiful job of reminding us of exactly that.

Dear readers, thank you for letting me introduce this 10th edition of SCAJ to you all and happy reading!

Sophie Albert
Editor-in-Chief

Before reading

Before you start reading the papers that have been selected for this edition of SCAJ, we feel it is important to share a few comments. First, the core team of SCAJ would like to emphasize that both the content of the papers as well as the added motivation for producing the work (as quoted beneath the author's name), are completely written by the authors. Each work was checked for possible errors regarding spelling, grammar, and referencing. Any corrections were relayed back to the respective authors, who were then given the opportunity to revise their work accordingly. SCAJ's reviewers and editorial board have thus not made any alterations to the works you are about to read.

To elaborate, the papers in this edition of SCAJ have been selected by our selection committee from a broader range of submissions. This edition's committee consisted of six students of Cultural Anthropology from different years of study, as well as three members of our core team. During the process of selection, the committee was divided into three groups, each led by one of our core reviewers. Each group used the same set of reading questions as a guideline for the selection process. These reading questions focused on readability, creativity, originality, and structure. However, every reviewer was given the freedom to deviate from these reading questions. We believe that the ability to discuss freely allows for dynamic analyses, providing more valuable insights than rigidly conforming to any guideline. Every group read a number of fully anonymized papers, of which they made a selection fit for publication. Afterwards, the three members of the core team discussed the results and considerations of their respective selection groups to make this final selection.

The order in which the papers are published in this journal is not based on our judgement of their respective qualities. Rather, we have tried to organize it in a way that is pleasant to read. This means we have tried to avoid placing papers with similar topics and lengths in sequence to each other. Other than that, the arrangement of papers is completely random.

“The Wretched of the Earth” in Contemporary Brazil

Exploring Identity Politics among Quilombolas

Livia Barcessat Lewinski

“I’m excited to submit this work because I want to shine a light on the often-overlooked stories of my home country, Brazil, and how they connect with the experiences of other colonized peoples. It’s surprising how many people are unaware of the challenges faced by the quilombolas, even on a national level. By amplifying these narratives, I hope to challenge the norms that keep these stories in the shadows. It’s important to celebrate these histories, not just for our communities, but for anyone who cares about justice and recognition.”

Abstract

This paper examines the contemporary identity politics of quilombolas in Brazil through the lens of Frantz Fanon’s “The Wretched of the Earth.” Quilombos, originally communities formed by escaped slaves, have evolved into resilient communities that face ongoing marginalization in a society dominated by white supremacist structures. Using Fanon’s theories on colonial oppression and the reclamation of land as a means of liberation, this paper explores the ever-changing identity of quilombolas, shaped by both historical struggle and cultural resistance. Through an analysis of ethnographic sources and interviews with quilombola leaders, I delve into the nuances of quilombola identity beyond reductive frameworks of Blackness, Africa, or slavery, emphasizing their right to self-definition in modern Brazilian society. This paper further critiques the Brazilian state’s role in marginalizing these communities and contends that the fight for quilombola rights—particularly land demarcation—requires a national commitment to anti-racism and justice. By tracing these dynamics, the study underscores the urgency of viewing quilombola identity as both historically grounded and dynamically evolving.

Introduction

As denounced by Frantz Fanon in 1966, the "Wretched of the Earth" are the victims of slavery, excluded from access to a proper land to live with dignity (Milanez, 2016, para. 16). Fifty-eight years have passed since those ideas have been systematized; yet, they remain applicable. This atemporality is linked to the prevalence of white supremacy - a racist ideology embedded in modern social systems and institutions that perpetuates white dominance and undermines the rights of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) (Saad, 2020, p. 23). An illustration of how white supremacy runs to the detriment of the "Wretched of the Earth" in current societies is the case of quilombos in Brazil, to be explored in the present paper.

Historically, quilombos were instituted in Brazil during colonial times by runaway slaves to serve as hiding places. Although originated under this context, quilombos gave rise to traditional descendant communities that exist and resist to this day. Similarly to indigenous communities, they remain socially marginalized and struggle to have their constitutional rights to lands assured, as the latter often contradict the interests of the agribusiness sector and mining companies (Dos Santos et. al., 2021) .

According to data collected by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) in 2022, there are currently at least 386.750 quilombo members in Brazilian territory - or quilombolas, as they are called (CONAQ, 2022). In this research, IBGE acknowledged the status of quilombolas as an ethnic group. Indeed, throughout history, those communities have developed an identity that goes way beyond their initial purpose of resisting slavery, growing into ethnicities per se. Located in different parts of the country, each quilombo has developed in its particular way, placing Brazilian society with a common challenge: to rethink and redefine what "quilombo" means in contemporary Brazil. As argued by Marques (2009, p. 354), it is necessary to overcome colonial, outdated, oversimplified definitions of quilombos that reduce them merely as territories traditionally occupied by descendants of formerly enslaved people. Along their centuries of existence, quilombos and quilombolas have naturally grown complex identities that transcend their oppressive past to a great extent. If in the past, colonialism enslaved, subjugated, and "systematically stripped" black people of their personhood and idiosyncrasies" (Faloyin, 2022, p. 12), a post-colonial society cannot

perpetuate such processes. Brazilian society owes quilombolas the acknowledgement of their transformations. Beyond that, it must let them define what constitutes their own identity.

Hence, discussing the meaning of "quilombos" through the lenses of their own community members is essential to fight racism in contemporary Brazil. In other words, redirecting quilombolas to the mission of defining themselves is a form of empowerment, allowing them to reclaim the freedom and the humanization long stolen by the colonial structures. For this reason, in the present study, my central investigation of what constitutes the quilombola identity will rely primarily on ethnographical sources that have heard diversified quilombola viewpoints, namely the ones by Elizabeth Farfán Santos (2016), and Felipe Gibson Cunha and Sebastião Albano (2017). Moreover, I will explore how the power dynamics posed by academia, politics, laws, and history played a role in forming and reforming such identities, using Fanon's (1966) theory on "The Wretched of the Earth". In the first section, I will build on a theoretical framework of Fanon's (1966) ideas applicable to the case study. Then, I will describe my findings, diving into the central

debates identified in academic production focused on quilombolas.

Theoretical Framework

According to Frantz Fanon (1963, p. 4), the world under which the colonizers live is "a world with no space", in which people are "piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed together". Deprived of the products of the land they produce through their labour, the colonized peoples are "hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light". Fanon (1963) evidences the oppressive relationship between the land and the enslaved beings in the colonial system in this passage. Their social existence as enslaved people - determined by the colonizers - undermines their consciousness. As a result, they are placed in the zone of non-being (Drabinski, 2019). To illustrate how this place (or lack of place) is perpetuated in post-colonial contexts, Fanon (1963) mentions in his book a moment in which a child points to him and says, "Look, a Negro!" - with a racist connotation. Fanon (1963) deems that the white gaze "fixes blackness, making it a slur and an epidermal character, thus sealing blackness into itself" (Drabinski, 2019, para. 10).

To revert the colonial logic of external and internal alienation, Fanon (1963, p. 40) proposes that colonized peoples seek material and psychological liberation. In practical terms, a way to achieve this is by transforming their relationship with the land - namely, by turning the Wretched of the Earth, who work in the land to serve others, into owners of their land. As Fanon (1963, p. 40) argues, "for a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land", as "the land (...) will bring them bread and, above all, dignity". Therefore, land represents a chance for the colonized to reclaim their humanity, leaving the zone of non-being in the act of resistance against the colonial power.

Building on the previous notions, Stephanie Claire (2013, p. 73) points out that Fanon's (1963) comprehension of subjectivity is connected to the land - the same land appropriated and physically transformed through work. Thus, the Earth references the subject who has transformed it by delineating their lives and social existence. In this sense, Fanon's (1963) understanding of life is dependent upon the land. One cannot live without a "space within to act, entities that can nourish it, and places from which it can emerge" (Clare, 2013, p. 67). In return, the

land is also transformed by the relationship with the subject, used to promote their survival (Clare, 2013, p. 73). Ultimately, Fanon (1963) approached the symbiotic relationship between subject and land to propose one of the ways that the colonized peoples can revolt: transforming how they associate with land and, as a result, transforming their consciousness and the physical world. By doing so, they can leave their condition of wretchedness on the Earth and free themselves from the simplification of their identities as uniquely "colonized".

Description of Findings

Quilombolismo, identity, and the land under a Fanonian analysis

The work "Black bodies, black rights: the Politics of Quilombolismo," by the medical anthropologist Elizabeth Farfán-Santos (2016, p. 106) is an essential reference within the studies produced on quilombola identity. The author spent a year developing her ethnographic research in Grande Paraguaçu's quilombo, finding that the community's identity is deeply connected with the lands they have historically occupied. The subject becomes particularly relevant in the broader context of Brazilian

society, in which land and labour are critical social, racial, and ethnic markers. Most citizens in extreme poverty identify as Black or pardo, subject to racism and marginalization. Among quilombolas, those struggles are mainly manifested by the denial of their right to live in certain lands they have historically occupied.

Diving into the topic, Farfán-Santos recounts the occasion of a speech by Dona Maria das Dores, leader from the community, who stated that God had given the community their "coarse hair", "skin colour", and their "origins", all "with a lot of pride". Das Dores carried on, saying that "rights cannot exist only on paper", and claiming for the respect of "the rights of each person to carry their machetes on their waist and work in the fields planting their manioc" (Farfán-Santos, 2016, p. 107). As identified by Farfán-Santos (2016, p. 107), Das Dores draws a clear connection between the racialized body - with specific hair, colour, and origin - and the space in which quilombola communities "sit, bend, lean, walk, eat, breathe, sweat, speak", and work.

In this context, Fanon's (1963, p. 40) ideas on the supreme importance of the land for the colonized peoples become evident. Das Dores, the Grande Paraguaçu

community, and other quilombolas perceive the land as an essential value, a source of food and dignity. What has in the past been a refuge for runaway slaves has been humanized and transformed over time as a result of the new relationship the quilombolas established with the territory. It has become their home, and their subjectivity is now connected to the land, where they plant manioc and other products for subsistence.

Concerningly, the same way that a little boy looked at Fanon and said, "Look, a Negro!", the Grande Paraguaçu's quilombolas are constant victims of racism from the white gaze. They have been consistently labeled as land thieves, violent, conflictive, and problematic by sectors of Brazilian society who deem their collective experience attached to a particular land a fraud. Inserted in a white supremacist system, it is a common experience for black people to be placed in a zone of non-being. In the case of quilombolas, the non-being is represented by the denial of their constitutional right to a self-defined identity historically connected with a territory. Farfán-Santos (2016, p. 158) considers physiological exclusion as one of the "calculated ways" black identities were "historically, politically, and legally conceptualized".

In this sense, Clóvis Moura's (2001) conceptualization of quilombism as a radical protest against the slavery system proves helpful. He divides the consciousness of the rebellious enslaved person in the quilombos into individual and collective stages. At first, the individual rebellion against the colonial system leads them to escape. Then, in a second moment, once the individual goes through the process of socialization in the quilombo, together with other runaway African descendants, their rebellious consciousness is potentialized. From fugitive, the social agent of the quilombo turns into a quilombola (Cunha & Albano, 2017, p. 179). This gives rise to a new level of consciousness, collective and organized, that poses a challenge to a system that only runs through institutionalized slavery, as posed by Cunha and Albano (2017, p. 179). Moura (2001) defends that it is in the shared act of resistance, materialized by the quilombo that the enslaved person is rehumanized, as not only are they refusing to work, but they are doing so along with others. Organizing a new society in a territory of their own becomes an ultimate act of resistance and liberation from colonial power, via which the community, as a collective, achieves what Fanon (1963, p. 40)

refers to as material and psychological liberation.

Hence, as part of a permanent process of "systematic denial of the slavery system and its values", the quilombo turns into a "social, cultural, economic, and political continuum" (Cunha & Albano, 2017, p. 179). However, despite slavery being abolished in 1899, the racist values that allowed it to develop are still prevalent in Brazilian society, with quilombolas and other black people disproportionately occupying the lowest socio-economic positions. In this sense, quilombos in contemporaneity remain symbols of resistance against racism never truly overcome, for historical reasons approached in the following sections. Raising their voices against this pervasive inequality, Das Dores and other members of the quilombola leadership actively advocate for their rights to "work in the mangroves, plant manioc, and live from the forest" without fearing dispossession (Farfán-Santos, 2016, p. 108). There is no other option for the Wretched of the Earth other than to fight "simply because he cannot conceive a life otherwise than in the form of a battle against exploitation, misery, and hunger", as Farfán-Santos (2016, p. 109) states, applying Fanon's (1952) theory on "The Negro and

Recognition". In this inescapable fight between oppressors and oppressed, the quilombolas are obliged to stand for their rights, requiring them to reflect upon their identities.

Identities beyond "Africa", "blackness", and "slavery"

The runaway people that set in the quilombos had in common their rebellious spirit and their desire to set in a specific land. Besides, they shared a particular background: black, African, and enslaved. Nevertheless, at first, there was no bond of ethnicity between them. As Kabengele Munaga (1988) explains, the word "quilombo" derives from the Bantu etymology, meaning "warrior camp in the forest". It was, thus, a reference to the Bantu peoples. As elucidated by Cunha and Albano (2017, p. 158), this joint ethnolinguistic group includes hundreds of ethnic subgroups who lived in territories under the borders of what are today Angola and Zaire. With colonialism, the Portuguese brought people who spoke the most distinct Bantu languages to Brazilian territory, such as Lunda, Ovimbundu, Mbundu, Imbagala, and Konga, with a complex history of conflicts and alliance.

Hence, the fact that the enslaved people originated from the same continent and shared the same skin colors did not necessarily mean they identified with each other. The simplification of the identity of those people to the labels of "slave", "black", and "African" was a colonial construction that suppressed ethnic differences (Cunha & Albano, 2017, p. 156). In fact, as highlighted by Cunha and Albano (2017, p 157), Africa, as well as the national borders correspondent to African countries, are European creations that erased the vast cultural diversity existent in the territory, summarizing the black as a "unique", "monolithic" being. As a result, Barros (2010) argues that the Black in Brazil, more broadly in the Americas, eventually adhere to the colonial labels, leading them to search for a new cultural identity. Therefore, the quilombolas represent one of the forms in which, confronted with colonial adversities, the enslaved black people reshaped their understanding of themselves.

In truth, quilombos were a direct product of slavery as "there were only runaways and quilombolas because there were enslaved men being explored and violated" (Gomes, 2006, p. 12). Escaping the colonial ties, quilombos provided ex-slaves the chance to freely define themselves in a

transcultural environment enriched by cultural elements of different ethnicities - with a prevalence of Ibangala ones (Cunha & Albano, 2017, p. 158). The consequence of this form of aggroupment was the creation of a new ethnic group (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 180), which incorporated, for instance, samba, capoeira, jongo, candomblé, terreiro - all communicative of black identity (Cunha & Albano, 2017, p. 158).

When analyzing the culture developed in the quilombos, the notion of reminiscent communities, used to refer to quilombolas nowadays, proves extremely useful. According to the anthropologist José Maurício Arruti (1997), the word "reminiscent" serves to classify the quilombolas, as it admits the permanence of the traditions brought by Bantu people while also considering the loss of original traits. Moreover, as elaborated by Gibson and Albano (2017, p. 170, 174) it is a word that accounts for evolution, for an ongoing process of transformation and the "production of new political subjects, through the maximization of the alterity.

A historical background on the term "quilombo"

Approaching the meanings behind quilombo, Arutti (1997) explains that the term was initially employed by the Portuguese colonizers in official documents, carrying a negative connotation. Later, particularly from the 1960s onwards, it was reappropriated by the quilombolas to proudly designate their ethnic identity - reactionary to colonialism and a self-affirmation of black culture in Brazilian social movements (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 160). Evidently, from colonizers' first use of quilombolismo to the acquisition of the contemporary connotation, there was a long process of shaping and reshaping meanings. In this short section, I shall analyze the development of the word throughout time, mainly relying on the legislation attached to it.

Following the end of slavery on May 13, 1888, and the beginning of the Republican period in Brazil, quilombos were no longer mentioned in official sources in an attempt to invisibilize such communities socially. Gibson and Albano (2017, p. 159) explain that the national imaginary could not conceive the continuation of quilombos outside of a slavery-based system. Therefore, rather than

acknowledging their existence and creating public policies to include the black population in society, the Republican government employed efforts to restraintment of "antique and counter moral practices" (Cavalli Junior, 2020, p. 78), including Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Candomblé, which was practised in some quilombos.

Despite the official invisibility, quilombos continued to mark their presence in social reality. The term acquired an ideological facet at the end of the 19th century when it was used as a symbol of black resistance for movements advocating for a national project of freedom, union, and equality (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 159). In this search for a joint national project and identity, a myth that would influence the public perception towards blackness in Brazil was born: the myth of racial democracy. According to the myth of racial democracy, black and white coexist harmoniously in Brazil, with the same opportunities (Nascimento, 1978, p. 41). This fake equality turned into a reason for national pride. In reality, it served as a metaphor for racism in the Brazilian manner: neither as evident as in the United States nor as legalized as in South Africa, "but still efficiently institutionalized in

all the levels of the government and widespread in the social, psychological, economic, political and cultural instances of the society" (Nascimento, 1978, p. 92). Under this myth, if quilombolas and other black people were under conditions of extreme poverty, they - and not the unrepaired past of slavery - were the ones to blame for their social status, as, hypothetically, they enjoyed equal opportunities as the white people.

Only in 1988, with the promulgation of a new constitution, quilombolas received legal rights. In recognition of the "unfinished process" of the abolishment of slavery and the debt of society with the black population, the constitutional charter established the juridical figure of the "reminiscent quilombolas communities" and set the responsibility to the state of issuing them land titles (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 159). However, the constitutional text failed to clarify the procedures to assure the fulfillment of the state's legal obligation towards the reminiscent communities - which translated into a lack of action by the state.

Finally, in 2003, this issue was technically solved with Presidential Act 4887, which established new governmental bodies to apply the constitutional text, demarcating the lands of the quilombos. In this same act,

article 2 established a definition of "reminiscent quilombolas communities" as "ethnic-racial groups, defined by self-attribution, with a particular historical trajectory and territorial relations, and presumption of black ancestry associated with the resistance to historical oppression" (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 161). In other words, to enjoy the privileges of public policies on land demarcation, the quilombolas are required to self-recognize as such. On the one hand, that is a huge advancement, as it empowers the community members, letting them define their identities. On the other hand, self-identification is often challenging, as, regardless of the community's past, they need to prove cultural connections between this past and present. This legal requirement is often an instrumental rather than an organic process that "demands the creation and recreation of sociocultural features" to be recognized by the public authorities who are in charge of land demarcation (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 177).

Discussion & Analysis

In the previous sections, the literature reviewed has demonstrated the importance of the land to the quilombola identity. After

all, the land represented to quilombolas an alternative to the condition of slavery when occupied collectively by a group of rebellious runaways. Hence, applying Fanon's (1963) ideas previously referred to, the alternative social organization of quilombolismo was a way that the colonized people revolted, - metamorphosing, all at once, their relationship with the land and their consciousness. In other terms, they passed from Wretched of the Earth, bound to the soil by forced labor, to owners of their own Earth, developing a humanized association with the land where they set out to escape.

Thus, as the history of quilombolismo evidence, there was, indeed, a direct influence of power relations in the formation of those communities' identities attached to the land, as quilombos were direct reactions to the colonial power and its system of slavery. Moreover, they serve as living proof that, differently than commonly portrayed, enslaved peoples were never docile, submissive bodies, wholly acceptive of the cultural impositions of whiteness. Additionally, the perpetuation of their existence in marginalization proves the ongoing myth of racial democracy in Brazil wrong - since, as demonstrated, throughout history, they were consistently denied rights,

never indeed occupying a position of equality in relation to the white people.

At first, they were hunted down by the so-called "capitães do mato" ("bush captains"), hired by the planter owners with the mission of escaping slaves. Then, with the end of slavery, there was an attempt to invisibilize their existence, as the absence of references to quilombos in official documents clarifies. Only in 1988, with the most recent constitution, the Brazilian state recognized the need to demarcate their lands, which, in reality, often contradicts the interests of the agribusiness and mining industries that want to explore the resources within their lands. This, along with the complicated bureaucracy of land demarcation, results in a scenario of disrespect towards quilombolas' legal rights. In this sense, despite the existence of at least 3600 quilombos along Brazilian territory, by August 2022, only 154 had actually received land titles (Senado, 2022, para. 3). Thus, resistance against institutional oppression and inequality has become another essential trait of quilombola identity. They have defined and redefined themselves dynamically in response to persistent inequality, fighting political battles to leave a zone of non-being colonialism placed upon

them, using Fanon's (1963) terms. Fanon (1963) argues that in the fights against the oppressors, the Wretched of the Earth transforms in their subjectivity, freeing themselves from the colonial mindset - which applies perfectly to the context of quilombolas, and their political fights against bush captains, plant owners, a historically oppressive Brazilian state, and institutionalized racism.

Nevertheless, their past of oppression is far from summarizing all that quilombolas are, representing only a fraction of their identity. Another essential aspect approached throughout the paper is their socially and historically produced ethnicity - which, naturally, has been influenced by their oppressive past. Indeed, the members that initially founded the communities had been trafficked from all parts of Africa to serve as slaves and, thus, did not belong to the same ethnicity. They belonged, for instance, to Lunda, Ovimbundu, Mbundu, Imbagala and Kongo communities, which possessed their own particular culture and traditions. Still, slavery united them in Brazilian territory, simplifying their complex existence into simple categories such as Black, slave and African. In this new context of identity erasure employed by the Portuguese through

colonialism, the people who gathered in the quilombos to start a new, free life in the limits of the territory were, besides being Black, enslaved, and of African origin, rebellious. In this new form of social organization that formed in quilombos, they developed a new ethnic identity which, in reality, borrowed cultural elements from the multiple ethnicities represented among the quilombolas. In different parts of Brazil, the quilombo cultures developed in singular forms - something that is, again, a symbol of resistance against the very narrow representation of African identities that prevails until this day among Western societies.

In the respective territories, the "communities reminiscent of quilombos", as they are juridically referred to, developed cultural traits "inseparable from their spatial structures," as the territory is "a crucial space for the ethnic groups to communicate their identities and differences" (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 175). In this sense, I share Gibson and Albano's (2017) views that the territory is not only a recipient but also actively communicates what unifies and differentiates quilombolas identities - in the plural, because they are not monolithic. Borrowing ideas from the two authors, culture and territory

work as "ethnic-communicative dispositives", which "structure and communicate identity" (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 178). Examples of such dispositives in the practice of quilombolas are, for instance, the traditional dance of "Pau-furado" in the community of Capoeiras, the "espontão" dance in the community of Boa Vista dos Negros, and the craft ceramic of "louça de barro" in the community Negros do Riacho, in the city of Currais Novos (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 178).

Despite the importance of historic social practices shared by quilombolas, the connection with the past should be optional for them to self-identify as quilombolas and acquire their rights. After all, obliging them to be permanently tied with the past to have their lands demarcated is a way to resonate the racist and colonial idea of Africa and blackness as "primitive", "timeless", and "tribal". Instead, the affirmative actions protecting the traditional quilombolas communities should consider their dynamicity and complexity, allowing for the incorporation and transformation of traditions. The development of those new, broad understandings of quilombolismo are ultimately connected with the reconstruction of the notion of blackness, as a result of the

urgent global fight for racial justice (Gibson & Albano, 2017, p. 160). Identifying as black, as well as quilombola, is an act of liberation, rather than terms exclusively associated with a past of subjugation.

Conclusion

This work has highlighted the narratives surrounding quilombos, which have been consistently marked by attempts of erasure, invisibilization, and oppression, beginning with Brazil's history of colonialism and slavery, and continuing along the Republican period up to the present. The fact that, despite legal dispositions, the rights of the reminiscent communities continue to be disrespected justifies the necessity of the present paper. It is evident that the racial relations in Brazil should be reflected upon to demystify the understanding of Brazil as a racial democracy, to combat the socio-economic inequality that disproportionately plagues black people, and to finally concretize the constitutional right of quilombolas to land demarcation. Recapping the words of the quilombola leader, Dona Maria das Dores, "rights cannot exist only on paper."

Given the legacy of slavery, Brazilian society has a debt to the black people, which

means the mobilization for quilombola rights should resonate with all Brazilians rather than being a battle exclusively fought by members of the traditional communities. However, the election of former right-wing Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, in the 2018 elections shows that a majority of Brazilians are still willing to support politicians who scorn and neglect the quilombola cause. During his 2018 campaign, Bolsonaro stated that, once in power, he would not "demarcate a single centimetre for indigenous or quilombola lands"(Instituto Socioambiental, 2017). On the same occasion, he also infamously remarked that he "had been to a quilombo, and the lighter afro descendent there weighed eight 'arrobas'" (Veja, 2017, para. 5 & 6). The term "arroba" refers to a weighting measurement used for cattle, invoking a painful and not-so-distant past in Brazilian history, when "humans were weighed, shackled, then traded into slavery" (Faloyin, 2022, p. 27). By equating enslaved peoples with livestock, Bolsonaro perpetuates a dehumanizing narrative against quilombolas and black people more broadly. Yet, that did not prevent over 58 million citizens from voting for him, serving as an alarming evidence that the Brazilian

nation lacks knowledge of traditional communities.

Hence, the importance of the present paper lies in the attempt of raising the historically silenced voices of quilombolas, providing a better understanding of their complex identities and what is behind their claims for land demarcation. As demonstrated, their identity is ethnic, multicultural, and plural, having developed in particular ways in each region. Furthermore, it is an identity directly attached to the land. If the colonial world was one with "no space", as Fanon (1963) states, the post-colonial one should provide the colonized peoples with land - "which will bring them bread, and, above all, dignity" (Fanon, 1963, p. 40). Accordingly, to overcome the slavery past, assuring quilombolas can live peacefully in their lands is primordial - and, hopefully, will be part of the national project for Lula da Silva, who has taken over the position of Brazil's President in January 2023.

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Negotiating Traditional Agriculture

“Living under the Shadow of the Etna”

Nina Mara van Aart

This ethnographic chapter of my thesis explores the challenges faced by traditional farmers in Etna, Sicily, amid the Anthropocene. It highlights the impact of environmental changes on farmers' livelihoods, culture, and their relationship with nature. Grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the chapter examines how farmers' deep understanding of the local ecosystem informs sustainable practices and how these practices intersect with globalized systems and capitalist food markets. It reveals the tensions farmers navigate between economic survival, tradition, and ecological responsibility. More than that, this chapter is also an homage to the farmers whose resilience and connection to nature taught me invaluable lessons. Through their stories, I aim to honor their wisdom and shed light on the challenges they face in adapting to the Anthropocene.

Abstract

This Thesis chapter explores how climate change impacts agricultural practices on Mt Etna, Sicily. Grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the analysis reveals how Etna's farmers apply a deep, site-specific understanding of the ecosystem to create sustainable agricultural models. However, while TEK is increasingly recognized in sustainable development and climate adaptation, its intersections with globalized, capitalist food systems remain understudied. This chapter examines the tensions farmers face between economic survival, traditional practices, and ecological integrity as they navigate a complex interface of local knowledge and global market forces. Using Patel and Moore's concepts of “cheap nature” and “cheap food,” I illustrate how global pressures clash with local sustainable practices. Finally, I analyze a case where farmers struggle to maintain traditional methods, highlighting the dual pressures of tradition and modernity that define agricultural adaptation in the Anthropocene.

"I am learning that every year, there is something new," Nunzio shares with me, as we stand in the middle of the Vigna Grande. A breeze ripples through the air while the sun bathes the vineyard in its warm glow. Nunzio, the owner of the winery, recounts the problems his vineyard faces on the slopes of Etna. "First it was rabbits, and then pigeons eating our vines. This year, the adversary is even smaller but no less devastating. Now we have this bug," says Nunzio as he gestures towards the fields. "It killed 15% of all our grapes. Across Italy, it was a tragedy. So many vineyards, not just ours, have suffered." Shaking his head, Nunzio reflects on the unpredictability of it all. "In the first year, I was joking about this," he recalls, a faint smile touching his lips. "I said, 'Next year let's see who's coming,' but now I know something else is coming, bringing issues." For Nunzio, however, there are little remedies to overcome these challenges. "As an organic and traditional farm, there is nothing much you can do,"¹ he says with a shrug. His commitment to organic, traditional farming, rooted in respect for the land and a desire for sustainability, often feels like a double-edged sword. It limits his options for adapting to pests and diseases, making each new threat a potential catastrophe. As we continue to

walk through the vineyard, Nunzio's words echo in the stillness. Here, in this serene landscape, the very environment that promises life and abundance also presents relentless challenges, testing the adaptability of those who call it home.

This chapter examines specific climate change-related ecosystem changes to analyze how traditional agricultural practices on Etna are navigated and adapted in the face of contemporary challenges. Embedded in the theory of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) I show traditional agricultural practices on Etna are informed by an intimate understanding of the local ecosystem, creating site-specific agricultural models (Berkes 2001). However, while TEK is increasingly valued in strategies for sustainable development and climate mitigation, I argue that its intersection with broader globalized contexts remains understudied. While TEK considers the inherent sustainable nature of traditional practices, insufficient attention is focused on how traditional agricultural practices are increasingly entangled in Anthropogenic changes and modern, capitalistic food trading systems. In the third section of this chapter, I illustrate how within this intersection farmers face tensions between

economic survival, adhering to tradition, and maintaining ecological practices. I explore how these socio-economic dynamics are influenced by Patel and Moore's (2018) concepts of "cheap nature" and "cheap food", highlighting the intersection of TEK with contemporary capitalist models and markets. This analysis reveals a clash of scales between a global system that prioritizes cheap food and the local systems sustained by farmers (Eriksen 2016). Finally, I examine an example of the struggles faced by farmers moving away from traditional agricultural practices. This analysis illuminates the complexities and dualities inherent in navigating the interface between tradition and modernity in agriculture during the Anthropocene.

Preserved traditions of agriculture

As I make my way down the San Giovanni la Punta highway in suburban Catania, a flicker of doubt dances through my mind. On the lower flanks of the volcano, surrounded by an urban landscape, the presence of a vineyard seems out of place. Yet, the name "Urban Winery" suggests a story waiting to unfold. My concerns disappear instantly as I pass through the winery gate and find myself surrounded by sprawling vineyards and, in the midst of it all, a blue, 17th-century

palmento.² Inside, next to two 10,000-liter wooden barrels and an old wine press, I am warmly greeted by Nunzio, the driving force behind this project. Over a steaming espresso, he begins his story about reviving the old family estate. "This land has remained within the family for centuries; however, it was last harvested in the 1970s," he reflects. Wine, Nunzio tells me, was once the most important product of Etna. The success of Etna's wine industry began in the 18th century when the Phylloxera disease devastated Europe's vineyards, but Mt Etna remained unaffected due to its geological isolation, causing an industry boom transforming family vineyards into commercial businesses (Nesto and Di Savino 2013). However, once a remedy was found, Etna's wine market collapsed, leaving many vineyards abandoned. During the 1960s-70s, Sicily's economic growth led to urbanization, transforming abandoned vineyards into urban areas, including the surroundings of this urban winery. This piece of land was spared, now finding itself between a highway and a gas station. To preserve the rich history of this land, Nunzio and his cousins recently decided to revive the vineyard and put it into commercial use.

"We have tried to keep everything the same as it was before," Nunzio tells me as we make our way through the vineyard. With every step we take, a bit of history is revealed. Nunzio shares family anecdotes and knowledge of traditional farming techniques, each thread a testament to the family's endeavor to resurrect age-old practices, or as Nunzio calls it: an homage to the land's history. "It's not just a piece of family history hidden here, but also the broader cultural tradition of winemaking on Etna, which is important to preserve in this urban environment," Nunzio shares. One way to preserve its history is by using the Alberello Etneo technique. Alberello Etneo, meaning "little tree" (of Etna), is a vine cultivation method passed down from generation to generation by Etnean communities. It includes head-trained bush vines supported by single chestnut poles that help regulate yields, increase ventilation, and promote even ripening of the Nerello Mascalese grapes.³ The technique involves several phases, from preparing the soil, planting the vine, pruning the stems, and ultimately harvesting grapes: all performed by hand (Nesto and Di Savino 2013, 115). It is specifically tailored to the conditions of the volcano, where every element of the

ecosystem is taken into account, ranging from temperature variations between night and day to limited water availability.⁴

Nunzio's description of these practices falls under the concept of traditional agriculture. According to González Jácome (2021), traditional agriculture emphasizes ecological processes, biodiversity, and local cycles over artificial inputs. This form of agriculture starkly contrasts with intensive agricultural practices. Industrial agricultural, characterized by monocultures and factory farms, has dominated Europe over recent centuries. It is known to heavily exploit land, exacerbate climate change, harm human health, deplete natural resources, and pollute the land, water, and air (EEB n.d.; Mohr et al. 2023). However, although industrial agriculture is widespread across Europe, these developments are not homogeneous and are shaped by diverse socio-economic conditions and farming practices (Netting 1993). On Etna, beyond winemaking, I continuously observed a commitment to traditional agricultural practices, often rooted in history, culture and specifically tailored to Etna's volcanic conditions. Some practices are a testament to intergenerational transmission, passed down together with inherited land. Conversely, a new wave of

farming entrepreneurs, often younger generations like Nunzio, are revitalizing ancient agricultural customs on ancestral or newly bought lands, catering to a burgeoning market of environmentally conscious consumers.⁵

To analyze the agricultural practices of Etna, the theory of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) serves as a lens for evaluating the formation, practice, and maintenance of these traditional methods. TEK is understood by Berkes (2001) as the cumulative body of knowledge on the natural environment that evolves through adaptive processes and is passed down through generations by cultural transmission. Guided by the theories of Berkes (2001-2013), Berkes, Colding, and Folke (2000), Olsen (2013), and Whyte (2012), I illustrate how traditional agricultural practices on Etna are shaped and sustained.

As Nunzio has noted, cultivated areas on Etna are often inherited within families and historically only cultivated for family use rather than commercial purposes. This generational inheritance has led to the creation of a complex knowledge–practice–belief system, that includes the traditions of these agrarian societies, both cumulative and dynamic, that build on the historical

continuity of land use (Berkes 2013). This means that farming practices are learned through the shared knowledge of land management techniques within the community (Whyte 2012). This is exemplified by the Alberello Etno technique, that is specifically tailored to Etna's conditions and therefore widespread on Etna but not used outside of this area. A second factor of the persistence of traditional practices relates to the steep terrain of Mt Etna that has impeded the adoption of intensive agricultural practices. Intensive agriculture is often characterized by the creation of flat, uniform plots of land amenable to shorter fallow periods, allowing increased labor and mechanization (Frattaroli et al. 2014; Netting 1993). On Etna, especially due to the geomorphological roughness of the volcanic area, intensive monoculture systems are not suitable. This means that the advancements of intensive agriculture did not cause major shifts in knowledge or the use of natural resources, thereby allowing traditional practices to persist (Cullotta and Pizzurro 2011; Olsen 2013). Thirdly, farms on Etna are small in scale, typically ranging from 0.5 to 10 hectares per farmer where multiple crops are cultivated simultaneously. As a consequence to these small scales, the generated income

tends to be limited, affording farmers only minimal resources for investments in irrigation systems, machinery, or technological advancements.⁶ And fourthly, this traditional form of cultivation has endured and succeeded for millennia on Etna, facilitated by the symbiotic relationship between farmers and the volcano as discussed in Chapter one. The rich soil full of minerals, favorable microclimates, and indigenous crop varieties adapted to the unique conditions of Mt Etna have minimized the need for human intervention like the intensified use of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, fostering the widespread agricultural systems that are still largely traditional and linked to typical cultivars. Such local practices, deeply rooted in long-term, intimate involvement with these ecosystems, demonstrate a profound understanding of the peculiarities of farming on a volcano: knowledge that often diverges from Western scientific agricultural methods and innovations due to its context-specific nature (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000). This makes Etna a compelling site for investigating how traditional practices, rooted in TEK, intersect with modern global challenges. It is widely acknowledged that agriculture significantly contributes to

anthropogenic changes. However, it is essential to differentiate between industrial and traditional practices, as they do not equally impact the environment. Traditional agriculture often uses more sustainable methods. Despite this, climate change poses unprecedented challenges to these traditional practices, as they are deeply reliant on ecosystems disrupted by the Anthropocene.

The Myth of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Recently, the ideas of “traditional agriculture” and “Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)” have gained favor in sustainable development policies and literature alike. They are seen as offering a different way of knowing and practicing agriculture, holding the potential to mitigate climate change impacts by moving away from industrialized methods and integrating agricultural practices with the natural environment, guided by the social and cultural knowledge of local communities (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000). This closely aligns with the principles outlined in Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (2018), which serves as a framework directing the transition toward a sustainable food system aligned

with the EU's climate objectives and environmental conservation strategies.⁷ The EU's overarching agenda aims to diminish the reliance on chemical pesticides by 50% and to allocate at least 25% of agricultural land to organic farming by 2030. Within this policy framework there is a notable preference for traditional agricultural methods (European Commission nd). In an interview published in 2013, FAO's director Parviz Koohafkan suggested that "traditional agricultural systems could serve as benchmarks of sustainability for agricultural policies."⁸ This statement underscores the increasing application of traditional agriculture and TEK in advocating for sustainable development, suggesting a potential integration of deep-rooted, context-specific agricultural practices to inform and enhance agricultural policies. I want to emphasize the critical importance of traditional agricultural practices and incorporating these local practices and understandings of ecosystems into policy, which I will explore further in Chapter 3. However, I also challenge the notion that traditional practices alone can address modern environmental issues. The idea that traditional practices serve as a complete alternative to intensive or industrial agriculture overlooks the challenges

traditional farmers already face amidst climate change. Nunzio, exemplifies this tension:

We are honestly very worried. Last year we suffered a 15 percent loss in production due to a climate change related disease. We are a small-scale, agricultural start-up relying on traditional and organic farming practices. So, there is not much we can do to fight these diseases. And that's not all, we are fighting many battles: there's the perspective of wildfires, relentless drought, and the possibility of losing more land to urbanization. Getting help from the European Union? Yeah, you wish.⁹

Nunzio's experience underscores the reality that traditional agricultural methods cannot be seen as an isolated sustainable agricultural model. Instead, they are increasingly vulnerable to contemporary global challenges, while having little means available to navigate these issues. This connects to what Milton (1996) has coined the "myth of primitive environmental wisdom." Herein, Milton argues that adopting the practices and cultural perspectives of traditional societies to address environmental challenges in industrialized societies is a "myth." Unpacking this, he illustrates the point that romanticizing traditional practices as a

panacea or cure-all for modern environmental issues overlooks how they intersect with the complexities of our current globalized world. Assertions like the one of Parviz Koohafkan (2013), can therefore create misleading impressions, suggesting that achieving a sustainable way of life is simply a matter of “going back,” when, in reality, we are already entrenched in our current circumstances. In the case of agriculture, it neglects the struggles faced by traditional farmers, whose challenges are multifaceted and deeply intertwined with the broader socio-economic and environmental issues of our time. Accordingly, it emphasizes the need to explore how traditional knowledge and practices intersect with these contemporary challenges, an area often overlooked area in TEK studies.

As part of this struggle to adapt, I found many farmers grappling with newfound challenges such as soil degradation, water scarcity, and severe production losses. Amid this backdrop, one memory remains vivid in my mind. It unfolded on a serene February afternoon when young farmer Patrizio extended an invitation to partake in a traditional Sicilian Sunday family lunch. Seated at a table with multiple generations of the family and

surrounded by an assortment of pasta dishes and wines, Patrizio’s family members inquired about my research. After I had the opportunity to elaborate, Patrizio’s father spoke up immediately: “You have arrived at a critical moment.” He proceeded to share grim predictions about Sicily’s future, painting a picture of a landscape reminiscent of Morocco: a desert in the making. This alarming trend poses a significant threat not only to the verdant landscapes that characterize Sicily, but also to its agricultural sector, which serves as a vital economic and cultural cornerstone for the region (ANBI 2024). “And it is already happening,” Patrizio’s father shares with me while he picks up his phone from his pocket, showing me an App that tracks the level of rainfall on their land where I see the alarmingly low levels of precipitation for this time of year. Patrizio spoke up too, redirecting the conversation to the dinner table: “You will soon see for yourself the effects this has on the land.” Later, as we wandered through the campagna (the land), the shifting climate indeed revealed its tale. Patrizio guided our steps across the estate adorned with olive groves, fichi d’India (prickly pears), and newly planted pistachio and almond trees that dot the terrain, along with a few orange and

lemon trees reserved for family use. At the orange groves, Patrizio picked a fruit for me, and I remember my initial confusion, as it resembled more of a tangerine than a typical Sicilian orange, which is usually two to three times larger. The drought and abundance of sunshine have stunted its growth. Moving along, Patrizio and his father explain another consequence of the heat: the proliferation of diseases, parasites and fungi. Patrizio plucks a leaf from one of the olive trees, revealing the light and dark circles formed on it. Locally, they refer to this disease as *occhio di pavone* (peacock-eye), owing to the circles resembling the tail of a peacock. The peacock-eye fungus, prevalent in the Mediterranean, attacks healthy olive trees, leading to defoliation, reduced crop production, and deterioration of tree limbs (Williams 2023). Nonetheless, the family refrains from using pesticides: “We want to respect nature and produce as organically and biologically as possible.”¹⁰

Indeed, many farmers I spoke with recounted experiencing a surge in pests and diseases which they struggled to manage. It came forward in my conversations with farming couple Rosalia and Massimo, who suffered a nearly complete loss of their wine production in 2023 due to Downy Mildew

disease, and Lorenzo, a hazelnut farmer in Linguaglossa, who faced a 30 percent decline in production last year due to a new fungus affecting the hazelnuts.¹¹ According to the Organic Research Centre (ORC) (2023), this is likely to be related to the Anthropocene. The ORC (2023) highlights that rising temperatures lead to an increase in pests and a decrease in crop resilience. In response, most agricultural businesses resort to using greater quantities of (chemical) pesticides. However, this escalated use of pesticides causes insects and weeds to develop resistance to herbicides and insecticides. This not only harms human health and the environment but also creates a vicious cycle of chemical dependency, while exacerbating climate breakdown. In farms practicing traditional and organic cultivation, such as those owned by Patrizio, Nunzio, Rosalia, Massimo, and Lorenzo, the use of pesticides seemed non-negotiable. Most of them consciously refrained from using them due to their values and traditions, prioritizing respect for nature and Etna’s natural processes. Besides, many traditional farmers in Etna have gained recognition as organic farms, acquiring labels and certifications that enhance their market value and prices.¹² This has attracted a growing market of conscious

customers both locally and from outside of Sicily, fueled by rising trends of eco- and agrotourism in the region. Adopting pesticide use to combat diseases jeopardizes their organic labels, thereby diminishing their competitive advantage.¹³ Additionally, in my discussion with an agronomist in the field, I learn some traditional farms lack awareness of pesticides.¹⁴ Nonetheless, these farms are experiencing significant declines in productivity, with some reporting decreases of up to 60 percent in recent years.¹⁵ Consequently, their economic resilience has been severely compromised. This renders them increasingly vulnerable to potential acquisitions by larger agricultural corporations, which are often perceived by participants as indifferent to pesticides and fertilization usage, monoculture, and the adoption of greenhouses.¹⁶ Traditional farms on Etna thus confront a dilemma: facing either gradual disappearance of their traditions due to Anthropogenic pressures, compromising sustainability to survive, or risking the loss of their beloved lands through potential buy-outs. This dilemma underscores the challenging predicament where farmers must navigate between what may seem like choosing between multiple unavoidable hardships.

Cheap nature, cheap food and tradition in the global food system

The constant negotiation between economic survival, maintaining tradition and ecological sustainability is further exemplified by Patrizio and his father, staunch advocates of traditional organic practices. They prioritize natural solutions to climatic challenges while minimizing intervention on their land, purely out of “passione per la natura e rispetto per l’ambiente e per le tradizioni.”¹⁷ Their approach aims to bolster the ecological resilience of their farm and preserve Sicily's natural landscape and heritage. However, they also acknowledge the economic risks inherent in their commitment: “We have experienced years without olives and no oil, resulting in no income from the farm.” Their ability to sustain this approach is contingent on alternative sources of livelihood within their family stating: “Otherwise we would not be able to survive with this farm.” This underscores the delicate balance between ecological survival and economic viability in traditional agricultural practices.¹⁸ A similar struggle was shared with me by farming couple Rosalia and Massimo, owners of a small family winery in Passopisciaro on the northern slopes of Etna:

*We don't want to use pesticides, we don't want to use all the extra things, because they are so wasteful and ultimately they harm everybody. It's not easy, we are small so everything is more expensive. I mean we lost our whole harvest. Other people, who have like no principles, or they are not sticking to them, they had plenty of grapes. But their wine bottles don't say organic. We can pad ourselves on the back for that one.*¹⁹

This quote too, illustrates the negotiation faced by farmers. On one hand, they express a commitment to sustainable farming practices. However, they share how adhering to these principles comes at a cost. Despite the commitment of Rosalia and Massimo in organic farming, they suffered the loss of their entire harvest, while others who may not prioritize sustainability saw greater economic success, encapsulating the essence of farmers' negotiations in this specific agricultural context.

To further elicit the socio-economic position of Etna's traditional farmers, I draw upon the concepts of "cheap nature" and "cheap food" by Patel and Moore (2018). Cheap nature refers to the commodification of natural resources and ecosystems for economic gain. In this framework, "cheapness" is often used as a strategy of

capitalism to increase profit margins by devaluing and exploiting resources. In the case of agriculture, this has consequences regarding environmental sustainability and social equity, wherein the long-term consequences associated with the exploitation of natural resources on the environment and local communities, such as the traditional farmers of Etna, are often disregarded. Linked intricately to this notion is the concept of "cheap food," which refers to the pursuit of inexpensive food leading to unsustainable agricultural practices that involve the exploitation of both human and non-human resources, encompassing land, water, and agricultural labor (Patel and Moore 2018). The concepts of cheap nature and cheap food have fundamentally reshaped land-use and food systems, shifting from traditional production-oriented to profit-driven farming practices (De Schutter 2009). This is exemplified by the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers contributing to "cheap food", facilitating year-round, large-scale agricultural production to meet global demands at reduced costs. However, the use of these chemicals frequently leads to land and soil degradation, water pollution, biodiversity loss, and compromises the resilience of ecosystems

(ORC 2023). This illustrates how capitalist-driven agriculture prioritizes short-term economic gains over ecological sustainability. These approaches of “cheapening” impose significant burdens on traditional farmers. They must navigate a food system that prioritizes low-cost production, where their economic survival is increasingly influenced by the market dynamics dictated by the global food system. The situation of Etna’s farmers is further complicated by the liberalization policies of Italy and Europe, which have reduced trade barriers and increased market competition. These policies have exposed local farmers to the volatility of global markets, deepening their dependency on international trade (De Schutter 2009). In local models, decreases in global prices for exported agricultural goods cause economic losses for farmers reliant on these exports. Local producers also struggle when cheaper imported goods flood domestic markets, undermining their competitiveness. This has resulted in decreased resilience for farmers and growing disparities between traditional agriculture and production characterized by intensification and standardization (ibid). Traditional farmers are often forced into a position where they must balance their commitment to traditional and sustainable

practices with the need to engage in profit-driven activities to survive economically. At the same time, Anthropogenic effects have notably augmented the financial burden associated with farming. On Etna, this is exemplified with the need for costly irrigation systems to combat drought, while the region's water scarcity has led to rising water prices.²⁰ Overall, this has resulted in a steep decline of traditional agriculture and agrodiversity, and further contributed to environmental degradation and social disparities (Frattaroli et al., 2014).

Eriksen (2016, 131) describes these tensions between the local, traditional farmers and the complex global food system as a “clashing of scales”, a process that happens when opposing social, political and economic systems clash with each other. This phenomenon signals how local communities are overshadowed by large-scale interests, such as the rapid industrialization and standardization that have characterized agriculture in recent decades. The scaling up of agriculture has created economies of scale in which small-scale producers become outcompeted. Hence, both the economic and ecological flexibility of small farmers is greatly reduced. This shows that such scale ups may be good for the “world economy,”

but not for the ones who are directly affected by them (Eriksen 2016, 134). This conflict shows how traditional agriculture clashes with broader economic pressures, leading to the continued decline of many traditional agricultural practices (Frattaroli et al. 2014). At the same time, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which is deeply rooted in long-standing know-how of the local ecosystem, clashes with the global scale of climate change challenges. It struggles to address the broader and more complex issues posed by global climate change, highlighting the disconnect between local practices and global environmental processes.

Ultimately, in a capitalistic model that emphasizes cheap nature and cheap food, traditional practices continue to be out-scaled in favor of industrialized approaches. This not only risks the loss of valuable local ecosystem knowledge but also threatens the overall sustainability and biodiversity of the region, affecting the more-than-human world notably. The decline of small-scale traditional farms leads to a loss of agricultural diversity, which in turn leads to a decline in biodiversity. These clashes of scale underscore the intersection where traditional agricultural practices and Traditional

Ecological Knowledge (TEK) meet the global food system; a system that remains driven by capitalist imperatives of trade, exchange, and exploitation (Patel and Moore 2018). Farmers are caught in the delicate balance of preserving their traditional practices while facing escalating vulnerabilities to climate change exacerbated by global capitalist economies. At the same time, they must participate in this expanding global food system for economic survival.

When life gives you lemons, cultivate avocados

Amidst the negotiations of traditional farmers within the global food system, the Etna region is experiencing rapid agricultural changes that are already evident. "Something strange is happening on Etna",²¹ Gianni Petino, Geographer at the University of Catania tells me. I connected with Gianni after reading his article on local foodscapes in the Etna region, which he composed together with colleague Donatella Privitera in 2023 seeking to understand changes in the agricultural landscape and food market in the Etna area. Gianni's observations point to a concerning trend: the increasing number of traditional cultivators on Etna pivoting toward the cultivation of tropical fruits like

mangoes, papayas, and avocados (Petino and Privitera 2023). This transition primarily occurs on the lower slopes of the volcano, in Piana di Catania. These lands have traditionally been reserved for citrus cultivation, like lemons and oranges, which hold significant economic and cultural importance. Italy is the world's eighth-largest lemon producer, with a significant portion of its lemons coming from Sicily (Testa et al. 2015). Sicilian oranges hold special cultural status, known as "symbols of passion, tradition, and territory" (AgriSicilia nd). The transition away from citrus farming is particularly notable given their cultural and economic significance. Nonetheless, the allure of tropical fruits is prompting a reevaluation of agricultural practices among traditional farmers.²² Tropical fruits share similar soil and treatment requirements with citrus fruits, facilitating an easy transition. However, while they are perceived as better suited to new climatic conditions due to their resilience to rising temperatures, they also necessitate ample rainfall: a resource currently scarce in Sicily after months of drought.²³

I observe the implications of this shift firsthand when I am invited by Chiara, a mango and avocado farmer. I met Chiara on

her farm, nestled in the flatlands of the volcano in Mascali, where she tends to over 700 trees. Yet, even amidst this abundance, I found Chiara grappling with similar issues as traditional farmers, including diseases, soil health maintenance, fertilization needs, and, most significantly, drought. The scarcity of rainfall poses a significant challenge, particularly as mangoes and avocados demand loads of water. Chiara has resorted to employing irrigation systems, but the escalating costs of water exacerbate her financial burdens. She highlights the substantial expense, estimating approximately €100 per tree annually for water alone: a significant financial strain considering her total tree count. Despite these challenges, the economic incentive remains a primary motivation for transitioning to tropical fruit cultivation according to Chiara. As previously noted, the pursuit of cheap nature and cheap food significantly impacts farmers' economic survival due to market dynamics that continue to value cheap agricultural products. This market-reliance is evident in the pricing of tropical fruits, with avocados standing out as a prime example. Chiara reveals that avocados command a premium price of €1 per fruit, in stark contrast to

oranges, which sell for a mere €0.15 cents each.²⁴ This pricing asymmetry is underscored by the burgeoning demand for avocados in Europe, evidenced by a 17% surge in consumption from 2019 to 2020, as reported by CBI (2024). The limited cultivation of avocados within Europe necessitates heavy reliance on global trade to meet domestic demand, thus driving up their market value. Meanwhile, the escalating costs of agricultural production, spurred by climate change, further widen the gap between avocado and orange prices. This disparity is compounded by intensified competition in the citrus market, both domestically from Europe's intensive agricultural firms and internationally from the Global South, where production and labor costs are lower, ultimately shaping the economic landscape for farmers like Chiara (De Schutter 2009). As I walked around Mascali with Chiara, the effects of this shift were tangible: avocado, mango, and papaya farms seemed to sprout from every corner. The remaining orange and lemon groves of Mascali bore a stark contrast. Oranges lay abandoned, left to rot on the ground – a consequence of rising production and labor costs, where allowing the fruits to go to waste

becomes more cost-effective than harvesting and selling them.

The story of Chiara, much like those of Patrizio, Rosalia and Massimo, speaks to the account of cheap nature and cheap food, although on different levels. The narratives of olive farmer Patrizio and winery couple Rosalia and Massimo underscore how the global pursuit of cheap nature has contributed to ecosystem degradation and destruction in regions such as Sicily, resulting in heightened temperatures, drought, and new diseases. Despite their dedication to traditional practices, their efforts are constrained in effectively mitigating the impacts of climate change, finally leading to a vulnerable economic position. Chiara's story gestures to the implications of navigating the marketization of nature, a side effect of "cheap nature" and "cheap food", where neoliberal policies emphasizing privatization and profit maximization have opened up the agricultural sector to foreign competition (Patel and Moore 2018). In the case of citrus on Etna, the pursuit of cheap food has led to the marginalization of small-scale farmers who struggle to compete in a market dominated by industrial agriculture and large agribusinesses, where the transition to tropical fruits seems more

attractive to combat the loss of livelihood. However, this transition further pushes the water stresses of the region, impacting the sustainability of these practices, while culture and tradition gets lost in the process. This underscores the challenging decisions confronting traditional farmers on Etna: navigating between preserving tradition, ecological sustainability, and economic viability. This paradox highlights their efforts to uphold traditional practices and ecological balance within a global food system that undervalues their contributions and imposes financial pressures. It also exposes the “myth of primitive knowledge,” demonstrating that a revival of traditional practices and a re-emphasis on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) cannot fully succeed without addressing the systems that have largely eroded these practices in the first place.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the incompleteness of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) framework – both in theory and in policy – by emphasizing its failure to address the intersection of traditional practices with contemporary challenges. Traditional agricultural on Mt Etna, deeply

rooted in TEK, is sustained through generational inheritance, the region's geographical complexities, small-scale farming, and its symbiotic relationship with the volcano. However, these traditional practices intersect with the impacts of climate change, such as drought and the emergence of new diseases, shedding light on the vulnerability of traditional farmers and the paradoxical choices they confront. The choice between economic survival and ecological preservation presents farmers with constraints in their need for adaptation. Sustainability-driven pest management may result in severe production losses, and economic imperatives may push for transitions to tropical fruits which further amplifies the water stresses of the region. These complexities are compounded by the notions of “cheap nature” and “cheap food”, which highlight the externalities of industrial agriculture and the pressures of market dynamics (Patel and Moore 2018). The clash of scales between traditional practices and global food systems has compelled farmers to participate in global markets for economic survival, despite these systems devaluing their practices (Eriksen 2016). Therefore, while traditional practices and TEK are increasingly valued for their sustainability, it is crucial to

recognize their challenges in adapting to and sustaining themselves within the Anthropocene. The integration of these models into sustainable development hinges on understanding their influence within the global food system. These tensions faced by traditional farmers are critical in assessing their ability to benefit from sustainability policies.

Endnotes

¹ Fieldnotes (23-02-2024)

² A palmento is a traditional building used for winemaking. It was typically owned by one family, but used by many villagers to press their grapes after the harvest season. The color of the building is often blue to repel mosquitos (Interview Nunzio, 23-02-2024).

³ Nerello Mascalese is an indigenous blue grape variety found exclusively on Etna (Interview Ricardo, 15-02-2024).

⁴ Fieldnotes (23-02-2024)

⁵ Interview Nunzio (19-03-2024), Interview Salvatore (27-03-2024)

⁶ Interview Salvatore (27-03-2024)

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on Organic Production and Labeling of Organic Products and Repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007." Retrieved from agriculture.ec.europa.eu

⁸ Parviz Koochafkan (2013) Interview on World Heritage

⁹ Interview Nunzio (29-03-2024), Fieldnotes (23-02-2024)

¹⁰ Fieldnotes (18-02-2024), Interview Patrizio (18-02-2024)

¹¹ Interview Rosalia and Massimo (21-02-2024), Interview Lorenzo (29-03-2024)

¹² Interview Nunzio (19-03-2024), Interview Rosalia and Massimo (21-02-2024)

¹³ Interview Alessandro (05-03-2024)

¹⁴ Interview Salvatore (27-03-2024)

¹⁵ Interview Rosalia and Massimo (21-02-2024)

¹⁶ Interview Salvatore (27-03-2024)

¹⁷ Interview Patrizio (18-02-2024). Translated from Italian to English: "Passion for nature and respect for the environment and traditions."

¹⁸ Interview Patrizio (18-02-2024)

¹⁹ Interview Rosalia and Massimo (21-02-2024)

²⁰ Interview Salvatore (27-03-2024), Interview Roberto (08-04-2024)

²¹ Interview Gianni Petito (21-02-2024)

²² Interview representatives Distretto Argumi di Sicilia (12-03-2024)

²³ Interview Roberto (09-04-2024)

²⁴ Fieldnotes (09-03-2024)

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“Power of the Interior”

Understanding the Material Practice of Roman Catholicism in Poland Through the Lens of Church Interiors

Zofia Prończuk

“Upon entering any church, the first thing one encounters is, of course, its interior. It seems that its structure as a unified material tapestry determines our experience and, consequently, how we will behave in it. Seeing the diversity of the interiors of Poland’s numerous Catholic churches, I wanted to examine how practising Catholics perceive the influence of the church interiors on their religious experience. How can material religious spaces help shape and create spiritual relationships? Or, more broadly, how does power flow from the interior?”

Abstract

This paper examines the materiality of Roman Catholic practice in Poland, focusing on how church interiors influence religious experience. By understanding Catholicism in terms of material religion and taking church interiors as its expression, the study aims to explore believer’s relationships with the religion through the attitude towards this material aspect. Four interviews were conducted to gain more understanding of this topic - with a priest, an interior designer, and two practitioners. By analysing them and the existing literature, the study explores how church interiors act as “affective spaces” that evoke faith, spirituality, and community. It becomes apparent that religious interiors do have an agency and a “power” over believers. Moreover, depending of the aesthetic style of the interior tends to enforce specific values, policies, and religiosity. The paper focuses on the “minimalism versus maximalism” issue to examine how these two tendencies in interior design affect the believers (minimalism resonating with more progressive, younger Catholics and maximalism with more traditional, conservative ones). This aesthetic split reflects broader cultural and ideological differences within the Polish Catholic community.

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church is Poland's biggest and most important church. In 2021, 85 per cent of the population was recorded as baptised and hence part of the Catholic community in Poland (Eurydice, n.d.). Growing up there, I confronted religion at every step and in every domain of my life. A lot of my friends are practising Catholics, and my family is Catholic. In primary school, I had religion classes (which were more resembling Bible classes as we only learned about Christianity and most of the time about Catholicism exclusively), as did the vast majority of my peers, I was baptised and had my first communion. Seeing as Catholicism is omnipresent for at least 85 per cent of Poles, and more probably for more because of its affiliations with the state, in this essay, I strive to explore Roman Catholicism in Poland as a material religion and Catholic practice as a material one. In order to do so, I will solely focus on the Catholic church interiors to examine what agency they have over believers, what their role is in the practice of Catholicism and how, through analysing them, we can get closer to understanding the role of material objects in the Roman Catholic Church in Poland.

There are more than 10,000 Catholic churches in Poland, and this number is only getting bigger (Kościół W Polsce. Ile było Ślubów I Ile Chrztów Twojej Diecezji, 2016). Due to the Second World War, which destroyed numerous church buildings in Poland and the changes in architectural conceptions, most of the churches are relatively new and look very different from the historical ones. Knowing that, I also want to explore how different church interiors impact believers differently. My investigation of this topic is based on relevant academic literature and four interviews I conducted - with a Catholic priest, a Catholic church interior designer and icon writer, and two Catholic practitioners (Róża and Weronika). Together, the interviews constitute a conversation about the materiality of Catholicism in Poland; however, the demographics of my interviewees are not differentiated enough for me to make any generalisations about the whole country. What I aim to do in this essay is to find patterns in the four conversations, my lived experience and literature to propose an analysis of the relationship between the church interiors and upper-middle-class practitioners from big cities such as Warsaw and Cracow.

Materialism in the Roman Catholic Church

Nothing is surprising in saying that Catholicism is a religion in which materiality plays an enormous part, as this statement would be true for every religion. Moreover, the material, tangible realm is necessary for a religion to be present in the world (Mayer, 2010), and by some definitions, the very thing that constitutes a religion is its materiality needed to evoke the immaterial beyond it (Verkaaik, 2013). In the case of Catholicism, its material forms and practices are very apparent - confession, eucharist, sign of peace, baptism, to name a few. When I asked the priest (favourite church interior – the Dominican Church Służew, Warsaw) about the importance of the material aspect for the Catholics, he told me about the Christian notion of *creatio continua*. According to this belief, God is creating the world every second of every day (as opposed to the idea that he created the world in 6 days and has rested since) (Judycki, 2008). As such, God is sustaining all life, allowing all to exist and happen, so accordingly, the realm that is the closest, most directly connected with God and his will, is, in fact, the material realm. "My body just exists and, as such, depends on God the entire time. The closer my consciousness is to my body and thus the

material realm, the closer I am to God," explained the priest. Following this logic, it becomes very clear that material objects work as vessels for God's will and presence in a theological sense. They play a crucial role: "If the spiritual and inner does not express itself materially, then it is empty, a pure abstraction, and has no value," as the priest framed it. His ideas fall in line with the understanding of religion introduced by Meyer (2015) as a medium bridging a gap between here and now and something "beyond" by "materialising the sacred."

This thought is necessarily interconnected with the dualist conception of the human as a spiritual-material entity present in Christian theology. According to the designer (favourite church interior – the Dominican Church Służew, Warsaw), "Everything sacred has its material basis; there is no way and no point of separating those two aspects. Any, even divine, message needs a material transmitter." The same concept is present in words of Saint John of Damascus - "Since we are dual in nature, being composed of soul and body, we cannot reach spiritual things in isolation from the bodily ones. Thus, through bodily contemplation, we arrive at spiritual contemplation" (Kardas, 2023, p. 76). That is

the role of the material transmitters in Catholicism, and one type of these transmitters is religious art, especially church interiors.

Church Interior as Religious Art

"The process of making art is the process of ordering matter in such a way that it transmits a message so that the recipient could receive it," the church interior designer told me during our conversation. He always thinks about his art (including the interiors he designs) as a transmitter of certain values. "My practice is expressed in the attempt to encode the religious relations and the understanding of God, Church and the human relations." His practice can be defined as illustrating the values and notions of the Catholic faith. However, it is not only through the iconography that he achieves this goal. More often, it is through the material form and the "mere" fact of making abstract notions into tangible objects. His main objective is for his end-product to help others in their spiritual relation by sharing what he knows of the religious experience. This idea makes the practice of religious art seem exclusive for people who are themselves not believers, which stands out as not every religious artist is a practitioner

themselves (take, for example, Boris van Berkum, an artist who created Kabra mask for practitioners of Winti religion) (Modest, 2015). This begs the question - which objects do, in fact, become transmitters, and does it depend on the maker, spiritual entities or believers? As the designer follows, he explains that "only people with certain habitus" will be able to encode the message "beyond the object," proposing a response that the "vessel" quality of religious art is not only dependant on the maker but mainly on the recipient. That is not to say that religious objects do not have any agency on their own, but a certain background is needed to fully "unlock" and be aware of their spiritual influence.

Interestingly, the habitus of the recipient also impacts which types of religious objects are seen as effective, suggesting that taking religious Catholic art as a whole and analysing it in this way would not allow for the full understanding of different "powers" held by different sets of objects. As Róža, a student from Warsaw and a Catholic practitioner, explains, "I do not feel any relation with or influence of the material objects in a religious context, which mostly has to do with the fact that I do not understand or care for the practices

connected to them." However, once asked about the church interiors, she responds, "That is a completely different case! It is a material space that I walk into, so of course, it does affect me; it is not a question of whether I feel it or not - I am in it, so there is no way it could not affect me." What differs then when it comes to the church interiors? After all, if we were to deconstruct it, we would be left with singular material objects which do not necessarily affect believers (as in Róża's case), yet, when put together, they make up a material tapestry that has a completely different power of affecting even over the "immune" to the agency of singular religious art.

Church Interior and its Power to Affect

One of the main roles of churches as buildings is to section off a religious, sacred space for the believers; the interiors, as active creators of the space, however, have arguably more influence over the religious experiences of their recipients. They do not solely function as a contour line between sacral and secular areas; they are generative "characters" that evoke particular sensations depending on their design and the habitus of the believers in them (Tweed, 2015). From the theological perspective, every part of a

church materialises a particular notion of the Catholic faith (Kardas, 2023). Without a doubt, a big part of the church interior's power to affect comes from the singular objects or structures contained within them, such as the art, crucifixes, the altar or the tabernacle with the eucharist inside. All those things demand a certain approach to them and behaviour in the space they are located in. There is no doubt that the presence of the eucharist as the holiest sacrament and the embodiment of Christ makes the space of a church extremely important and sacred in a theological sense. Moreover, its sheer presence in a space dictates the movement of the visitors - its central setting creates an axis throughout the whole church on which believers usually kneel "in an act of worship and humility towards the most holy sacrament," as the priest explained.

Even though the separate objects play an undeniable role in making the space sacred and, as follows, affecting practitioners, all four of the interviewees, when asked what it is in a church that makes an impact on them, responded that it is not particular, singular elements but "arranging the space aesthetically" (Róża and Weronika), "unity and symphony of the design" (the interior designer), "the atmosphere of tranquillity

achieved by the architecture along with the usage of its facilities such as good lighting or acoustics" (the priest). Looking at those answers, it becomes clear that the effect of the church interior as a set of religious objects is not the same as the "power" the interior has understood as a uniform space. Following Navaro-Yashin's (2009) notion of "affective spaces," we see that church interiors are exactly that - they are manmade products which have agency, an impact on human experiences (tranquillity), direct movements (eucharist), impress practitioners (aesthetics), and affect the senses (acoustics and light) (Verkaaik, 2013). In the same way, as Pentecostal/charismatic churches base their sensational appeal on the music and powerful oratory, which makes the presence of the Holy Spirit in the practitioners' bodies evident (Meyer, 2010), I argue that the Roman Catholic Church sensational appeal comes in a significant part from their interiors which, as a whole, make the presence of God tangible and palpable.

In order for it to be achievable, religion has to have a shared aesthetic that the believers can receive in a certain way (Meyer, 2010). This idea that aesthetics influence the perception of a particular space and the religious experience is emphasised

throughout the interviews. Weronika (favourite church interior – Church of Reconciliation in Taizé), a student and Catholic practitioner from Warsaw, even states that "it is nicer to be in an aesthetic church, it is harder for me to make myself go to a church with an unaesthetic interior." This is a testimony to the importance of the religious interiors. When designed in a certain way and in line with those shared aesthetics, they have, as Róża said, "the power to make religion more attractive." Their influence expands beyond the church walls and not only makes the religion look attractive in a political sense for other non-practitioners, but, according to Róża, it makes religion more attractive for already-practitioners, strengthening them in their faith and the sense of religious community. Another "confirmation" of this phenomenon is found in my conversation with the designer when he told me about the new church he is involved in producing and how the parish priest insisted on not constructing a temporary, "portable" space (a shed) in which the masses could be led during the construction of the final church but on already building an even smaller piece of the final church that would play this role. "The interesting thing is," the designer explained,

"the priest said that from his experience, he expects people to go to the neighbouring church instead of the temporary shed in their parish." The most striking and puzzling thing for the designer was the fact that people would pay more attention and even follow the aesthetic space instead of the priest conducting the mass, so "the actual reason people go to church."

What differences between one church interior and another make one of them so much more compelling, desired and needed for a religious experience? Both interiors (the temporary shed and the neighbouring church) have all the essential singular objects needed for mass, so the "content" is all there; what is lacking is the right, acceptable form to convey and activate the spiritual feeling. What the interior lacks, is the aesthetics of persuasion, an essential quality of any religious form to evoke the divine transcendental presence and "persuade" the visitors of its realness and power (Meyer, 2010).

The "Right" Aesthetics

Even though it is true that all Roman Catholics in Poland share particular religious aesthetics based on their shared history, region and theology, it is also true that within

this broad category of Roman Catholic aesthetics, there are different "sub-aesthetics" often representative of different attitudes towards the materiality in the religion, theological notions, or political views. An important divide in the aesthetic that came up in every interview and numerous debates throughout my life is centred around the problem of "minimalism versus maximalism."

The "minimalism versus maximalism" issue is concerned with two main trends in interior church design. The first trend is minimalism, which I understand in a very broad sense here. Interiors designed in the minimalist trend would have strived to reduce decoration and emphasise the architectural structure and the material used in the construction. I use this broad term to describe all levels of reductionist conceptions in the church interiors in a relative way - not only extremely minimalist churches but every interior in which this idea is evident for the practitioners compared to other maximalist churches (Wiśniecka, 2021). The maximalist churches understood in relation (or in opposition) to the minimalist ones will, in turn, aim for the splendour of decorative elements and represent the "legacy" of historical eclecticism of the XIXth century along

with the post-Council of Trent preferences of church interior designs (Wiśniecka, 2021). While the maximalist conception of the church interior will correspond to the historical tradition of the Roman Church and (in Poland) to the Orthodox Byzantine interiors, the minimalist tendency can be seen as influenced by Protestantism (and the progressing globalisation of its ideas in the XXth century) and more recent developments in architecture (like modernism) (Wiśniecka, 2021). The Protestant approach to art and aesthetics, which regards form as distracting from the content, in line with Weber's notion of stereotyped religiosity, which uses material forms for their "magical" efficacy as "lower" than higher rational religiosity severed from art is strongly visible in the minimalist trend (Meyer, 2010).

This almost protestant approach to maximalist churches (while at the same time, appreciation of material objects and their role in more minimalist churches) is very evident in the interviews with Róża and Weronika. At the very beginning of my conversation with Weronika, I asked how she understood the role of materiality in Catholicism, and she replied, "In Poland, most Catholics worship material objects, and I think it is okay, but

what does it have to do with faith?" Róża, when asked the same thing, started explaining how she does not understand and does not see the value of the "rites" surrounding the material objects in Catholicism, excluding the eucharist. This dismissive approach to the excessive focus on materiality and lack of connection between it and the "core" of faith is the backbone of their views and preferences of the church interior designs. Both of them strongly favour minimalist churches. "In the churches, which are strewn with decorations, there is such a splendour that there is no room for anything else. Even for God," said Róża. In maximalist churches, there are "countless meaningless figures" (as Róża called them) occupying the space and "showing exactly what faith is not about. You do not go to church to look at little gold putti." The nearly iconoclast critique of maximalist churches strongly reminiscent of protestant notion of problematic aestheticism as substituting the true religion with the worship of objects (Meyer, 2010) directly corresponds to Róża's and Weronika's perception of the maximalist-church-goers regarding the values they hold. Since, from their experience, most maximalist, "fake-historical" (as Weronika put

it), churches they encountered were in the countryside, they have an immediate connection between maximalist churches and the countryside. Moreover, since the countryside demographic tends to have more conservative worldviews and values than big cities' residents (Latos, 2023), the particular aesthetics of maximalist churches are, therefore, for Róża and Weronika, inseparable from the particular, more conservative Catholic values.

While sharing her experience from attending a mass at a countryside church, Weronika stated, "The ugliness of the church was not just about the aesthetics but the values that were praised there." In particular, she mentioned that during the sermon, the priest was very strictly talking about the sin of premarital sex - "for me, this is the definition of form over substance, form being the meaningless and unnecessarily strict rules and substance being the true essence of Christianity." This way, she draws a parallel between the extended, emphasised form of conservative Catholic practice and the form of the church interior. The other direct connection she draws is between the minimalist churches and more "leftist and progressive" views on faith. To this understanding, the minimalism of the form of

the interior responds to the focus on the core of Catholicism. The distinction between the two aesthetics leads to the inevitable differentiation of the Catholic practitioners along the same lines, what Róża states very clearly by saying that "for me there were always two main types of Catholics [in Poland] - highly educated upper-middle class, who hate on the institution of Church, the materiality of it and are in it only for the abstract and intellectual, and the more "traditional" Catholics who are completely (even blindly) devoted to the material aspect."

Another aspect of the "minimalism versus maximalism" issue is that since maximalism is necessarily connected to the tradition and the canon of Catholic architecture, while minimalism regarding church interiors is a relatively new trend in Poland, it is a controversial convention for many practitioners. Interestingly, this phenomenon is portrayed in the construction of the Dominican Church in Katowice. The tense situation and heated discussions among the visitors were oscillating around the view that extreme minimalism of the interior is not in line with the "Christian thought" (Wiśnicka, 2021). E. Chudyba even argued that "modernity is

intrinsically anti-Christian" (Wiśnicka, 2021). In a similar longing for the past aesthetics, the priest complained to me that "today it is a free-for-all. We live in a world deprived of cannon." For him, a lot of new churches simply do not fulfil the role of a "proper liturgical space" as a form of bridging the distance between God and people (Meyer, 2010). A radically different view on this topic was expressed by the interior designer, according to whom "Clinging to the canon means that there is no added value, there is a risk of copying patterns so strongly that the space will not become home for people brought up in modern interiors of office buildings as they might feel that an interior which is too afraid to experiment, is not his fairy tale." Here, once again, we turn to the certain habitus that can "unlock" a space's effectiveness. Following Kippenberg's economic notion that we only recognise stereotypes well known in our own culture and not likeness as we believe (Meyer, 2015), it is important for new generations raised in relatively "new" cultures filled with different aesthetics to have something they recognise from other spheres of their life.

Conclusion

Analysing the materiality of Catholic practice through the lens of church interiors allows for further exploration of their effectiveness, expanding beyond this of singular material objects. Understood as material tapestries, they are capable of evoking spiritual experiences, creating community, or even strengthening visitors' personal religiosity. Focusing on the different "sub-aesthetics" within the broader Roman Church aesthetics unravels the ideological and cultural divides within the Catholic community. It allows for an understanding of how different material practices of church design convey or enforce various religious and political notions, which can be observed in the "minimalism versus maximalism" issue. Further research on the differences between preferences of the types of church interiors appears needed to uncover different attitudes of Catholic practitioners and to examine what constitutes an "affective" interior.

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De Lichamen van mijn Voorouders

Nûri Topcu

In het huidige politieke en sociale klimaat in Nederland verwacht ik dat velen mijn onzekerheid en frustratie delen wanneer wordt gesproken over "de Nederlander", en wanneer duidelijk wordt dat zij niet binnen dit beeld passen. De oorzaak van deze gevoelens heb ik onderzocht, en in dit essay probeer ik duidelijk te maken hoe ongegrond deze opvattingen over "de Nederlander" zijn. Ik hoop dat mijn essay kan dienen als een herinnering dat nationalistische en populistische ideeën over "ras" ongegronde constructen zijn, en daarbij dat deze ideeën gereconstrueerd kunnen worden.

Abstract

Raciale identiteit en nationaliteit lijkt steeds relevanter te worden in het hedendaagse politieke klimaat, zoals blijkt uit de recente verkiezingswinst van de Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). Met de slogan "Nederlander weer op 1" suggereert de PVV een beperking op wie als "Nederlander" wordt erkend. Dit essay onderzoekt hoe mijn raciale identiteit, als "Witte" persoon met een Turkse achtergrond, het concept van "de Nederlander" nuanceert en de grenzen die Wilders trekt kan ondermijnen. Binnen het begrip "political blackness" van Stuart Hall wordt "Witheid" gebruikt als een geprivilegieerde sociaal-economische positie in plaats van uitsluitend een huidskleur. Hieraan gekoppeld gebruik ik het concept van de "Witheid met de plus" van Essed en Trienekens, een norm waaraan ik lijk te voldoen, maar die mij in Wilders' retoriek nog geen plek in Nederland garandeert. Het essay maakt inzichtelijk hoe racialisering en klasse een rol spelen in deze manieren van uitsluiting en illustreert hoe "witte onschuld", zoals beschreven door Gloria Wekker, bijdraagt aan het onvermogen van Witte Nederlanders om structureel racisme te erkennen en daarmee de marginalisatie van raciale groepen in stand houden.

De dag na de bekendmaking van de uitslag van de Tweede Kamerverkiezingen 2024 sprak ik af met een goede vriendin. Geert Wilders en zijn partij, de Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), haalden 37 zetels (tweedekamer.nl, 2024). Dit maakte indruk op mij, wat ik uitte naar mijn vriendin. Blijkbaar luisterde haar partner, die op de PVV heeft gestemd, aan de andere kant van de kamer mee. Hij zei, "Ah joh, maak je maar geen zorgen. Jij mag wat mij betreft wel blijven!". Toen ik hem aansprak op de racistische toon van deze opmerking, gaf hij de volgende welbekende reactie die veel witte mannen geven als zij worden aangesproken op hun racisme; "Je weet toch dat het maar een grap is, ik ben toch niet racistisch!".

De opmerking over mijn "mogen blijven" hoor ik vaker, dit doelt op het feit dat ik Turkse voorouders heb. Over het algemeen word ik omschreven als "half-Turks". Dit is de manier waarop anderen mijn raciale identiteit omschrijven. Na hierop te reflecteren realiseerde ik mij dat ik dit zelf ook doe, vooral om te voldoen aan de raciale omschrijving die men verwacht te horen. In het idee dat ik "half-Turks" en "half-Nederlands" ben ligt de nadruk erg op welk "bloed" ik heb. Dit laat echter de context waarin ik ben opgegroeid buiten

beschouwing. Mijn Turks cultureel en linguïstisch kapitaal is veel minder groot dan mijn Nederlandse. Ook is het veelzeggend dat de "Turkse helft" wordt benoemd om mijn raciale identiteit te omschrijven, en niet mijn "Nederlandse helft". Ik ben nog nooit omschreven als een "half-Nederlander", ook niet door anderen met een Turkse achtergrond. Dit heeft waarschijnlijk te maken met het zien van witheid als de "neutrale positie", waar ik later nog op terug zal komen (Wekker 2020, 7-9).

In ieder geval is het blijkbaar zo, omdat ik een Turks-Nederlandse vader heb, dat ik behoor tot de groep die "mogelijk niet mag blijven", of de groep die niet gewenst is in Nederland. Daarbij komt nog dat de PVV de verkiezingen heeft gewonnen met de slogan "Nederlanders weer op 1" (PVV, 2023). Betekent dit dat ik geen Nederlander ben? Ik ben in Nederland geboren, spreek mijn hele leven alleen Nederlands en ben even vaak in Turkije geweest als het gemiddelde Nederlandse gezin op de camping in Frankrijk, maar een plek in Nederland is voor mij schijnbaar geen gegeven.

Bovendien doet de "grap", en vooral de opmerking na mijn aanspreken op de racistische toon, denken aan wat Gloria Wekker "witte onschuld" noemt (Wekker,

2020). Hiermee bedoelt zij het gebrek aan zelfbewustzijn in Nederland over witheid als een geracialiseerde positie, waardoor (structureel) racisme niet als een 'Nederlands probleem' wordt gezien (Wekker 2020, 7-9). Juist dit toont het witte privilege, concepten van racialisering niet onder ogen te hoeven zien, goed aan. Als witte man maakt de partner van mijn vriendin een "grap" over wie er wel/niet in Nederland mag blijven nu de PVV de grootste partij is. Een van de groepen die schijnbaar in aanmerking komt om niet te mogen blijven, zijn Turkse Nederlanders. Door tegelijk een "ras" toe te schrijven aan de groep mensen die niet zouden mogen blijven, om daarna te ontkennen dat dit een racistische grap was, is een perfect voorbeeld van deze witte onschuld (Wekker 2020, 75). Deze racialisering en ontkenning van racisme spreken elkaar direct tegen.

Dit laat ook zien hoe geracialiseerde machtsstructuren geïnternaliseerd zijn. Wekker gebruikt het "cultureel archief" als een collectief (Nederlands) geheugen waarin deze machtsstructuren verwickeld zijn geraakt, na een lange koloniale historie van het onderdrukken van Anderen door "Witten" (Wekker 2020, 9). Dit heeft vaak als resultaat een agressieve reactie van ontkenning als er wordt gevraagd om

sensitief om te gaan met thematiek als "ras" (Wekker 2020, 273-275). Zo dus ook de felle ontkenning van de racistische ondertoon in de eerdergenoemde "grap".

Het gebruik van de termen "allochtoon" en "autochtoon" is tegenwoordig niet meer gebruikelijk. Dit komt voor een groot deel door de onvolledigheid en generalisering van de diverse migratieachtergronden die zouden vallen onder deze termen (Essed en Trienekens 2008, 59). In dit deel van mijn essay gebruik deze termen wel. Dit om de visie van mensen die het gedachtegoed van Wilders steunen te kunnen analyseren. In 2011 deelde de PVV dat zij het gebruik van de term "allochtoon" tot drie generaties na de aankomst in Nederland door wilde laten lopen (Benschop, 2011). Mijn opa en oma van mijn vaders kant zijn in Turkije geboren en zijn in 1967 en 1969 als arbeidsmigranten naar Nederland gekomen. Mijn moeder, haar ouders, en hun ouders, zijn in Nederland geboren. Als we uitgaan van het onderscheid tussen "autochtoon" en "allochtoon" gewent door Wilders, maakt dit mijn moeder dus een autochtoon, en dus 'Nederlands', en mij een (niet-westerse) allochtoon, ofwel een "niet-Nederlander".

Dit verschilt echter wel met mijn dagelijkse realiteit. Alledaags racisme is iets wat ik zelf amper meemaak. Dit komt waarschijnlijk omdat ik "Wit" ben. Hiermee bedoel ik niet alleen dat ik een witte huidskleur heb, maar ik voldoe ook aan de "plus" voorwaarden om als een "volwaardige Witte Europeaan" gezien te worden (Essed en Trienekens 2008, 69). Ik ben hoog opgeleid, heb een redelijk hoge economische status en bezit voldoende cultureel, sociaal en linguïstisch kapitaal om als een positieve representatie te worden gezien voor "de witte Nederlandse Europeaan". In dit essay refereer ik naar deze witheid met "de plus" door Wit met een hoofdletter te schrijven. Het is vaak pas wanneer mijn naam ter sprake komt dat men mij gaat zien als een mogelijk "niet-volwaardige Nederlander" of dus een onderdeel van de groep mensen die geen plaats in Nederland is gegarandeerd. In bepaalde contexten, maakt mijn naam mij Zwart, zoals Stuart Hall de term Zwart gebruikt als hij doelt op political blackness, ook wel het collectief van de onderdrukten, ongeacht het hebben van een daadwerkelijk zwarte huidskleur (Guadeloupe 2022, xxv). Omdat ik voldoe aan andere aspecten om wel als Wit gezien te worden, heeft dit

racisme voor mij aanzienlijk minder consequenties dan voor iemand die minder cultureel, sociaal of economisch kapitaal bezit. Dit laat alleen wel zien dat behoren tot een bepaalde klasse iemand niet per definitie wel of niet Zwart of onderdrukt maakt. Dit ligt genuanceerder en blijft sterk afhankelijk van context.

Wat mij Zwart maakt, in de context wie wel en niet wordt gezien als "de Nederlander", of Wit, zijn mijn voorouders. Mijn opa en oma, die een stuk minder sociaal, economisch, cultureel en linguïstisch kapitaal bezaten in Nederland dan ik nu doe, waren daadwerkelijk Zwart in Nederland, in vrijwel alle mogelijke contexten. Zij hadden te maken met honden die hen op het commando "Turk" achterna zaten, slechte en gevaarlijke werkomstandigheden in vervuilende fabrieken en het dagelijks moeten incasseren van racistische en islamofobische opmerkingen. Mijn opa en oma, die dus wel dagelijks en structureel met extreem kwalijk racisme te maken kregen, moeten via mijn lichaam alsnog racistische vooroordelen en opmerkingen verduren. Al is het in een veel beperktere mate dan het racisme wat hun lichamen te verduren kregen; toch is het zo dat zelfs als hun Turkse identiteit, trots, religie en nostalgie niet meer

verbonden is aan hun “Turkse” of Zwarte lichaam, dit blijktbaar nog invloed heeft op de mate waarin mij, met mijn Witte kapitaal en lichaam, een plek in Nederland wordt gegarandeerd. Het hebben van een niet-wit fenotype in combinatie met het behoren tot een lagere economische klasse leidt vaak tot onderdrukking in de vorm van racisme (Guadeloupe 2022, xxxii-xxxiii), maar zelfs als je Wit bent is het schijnbaar nóg geen gegeven dat je valt onder de categorie van “de Nederlander” die Wilders weer “op 1” wil gaan zetten. Ik voldoe aan alle voorwaarden om als een goede representatie van de “ideale Witte Europeaan” te dienen (Essed en Trienekens 2008, 69), maar omdat mijn voorouders, die trouwens noodzakelijk werk ten gunste van de Nederlandse economie hebben verricht (Amatmoekrim, 2018), Zwart waren, ben ik blijktbaar niet “Nederlands genoeg” voor Wilders en (in ieder geval een deel van) zijn kiezers. Dit dient hierbij als een van de vele voorbeelden van het probleem van racialisatie door populistische, nationalistische denkwijzen als die van Wilders en zijn kiezers. Mijn opa en oma zijn ondertussen permanent geremigreerd naar Turkije, weg van hun kinderen en kleinkinderen.

Maar eigenlijk zou ik niet moeten klagen, ik mag tenslotte blijven!

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