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(Post-)Industrial Memories
Oral History and Structural Change

Introduction

Stefan Moitra and Katarzyna Nogueira

> *You cannot turn everything into a museum, that's for sure. In the beginning we joked with bitter irony: "Well, we can create new jobs if we travel the Ruhr region as museum miners. So we'll all be a museum ourselves. And people can visit us as a vanished reality" (Interview Gottfried Clever).*[1]

This recent quote from an early-retired miner from Germany's former hub of coal extraction touches on a complex of important problems faced by regions undergoing the structural transformation of their industrial base. This concerns issues of memory and representation just as much as very concrete questions of re-positioning former workers and employees inside and outside the labour market. How can the gap left by a vanished industry be filled both in terms of employment and with regard to the wider meanings that industries developed in shaping local and regional societies, often over generations? How can value systems, structures, places and cultural practices that used to hold a community together be saved for the future without the economic centre that defined all these practices? And to what extent can museums – or other forms and spaces of historical representation – manage to bridge the gap between the levels of "authentic" experience and "professional" (industrial) heritage practice in order to come to terms with the transformation of industrial communities?

The study of deindustrialisation has been in the focus of scholarly interest for quite some time now and in a variety of disciplines. Most frequently the term is applied to economic change in Europe and North America since the 1970s (for overviews see: High 2013; Strangleman/Rhodes 2014). This geographic and temporal scope might well be broadened, given that developments of deindustrialisation did not just occur "after the boom" (Doering-Manteuffel/Raphael/Schlemmer 2016; Raphael 2019) following post-war reconstruction after 1945 and can even be observed in pre-modern contexts inside and outside Europe and thus rather be understood as an intrinsic part of capitalist production cycles. Thus, deindustrialisation is also always a global phenomenon, with industry and production moving between states and continents, just as the goods produced circulate (Johnson 2002; Schindler et al. 2020). Another instance of widening the perspective might be seen in research concerning the deindustrialisation processes in Central and Eastern Europe in the wake of integrating the post-

1 Archiv im Haus der Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets (AHRG), Bochum, Sammlung Lebensgeschichtliche Interviews, LINT 81.

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.01

socialist economies into the broader capitalist market (Kideckel 1995; Morris 2016; Böick 2018; Wawrzyniak 2019).

At least two approaches to understanding deindustrialisation can be distinguished very broadly: one that describes the process of shrinkage first and foremost as an economic phenomenon and one approaching the "lived reality" in which deindustrialisation "becomes a phenomenon of human agency" (Johnson 2002: 33). It is particularly in this latter respect that researchers of varying disciplinary backgrounds – historians, sociologists, anthropologists, contemporary archaeologists, geographers – have looked at individual plant closures, industrial communities and regions, or industrial branches that have undergone what in the German context is frequently termed "structural change" or "structural transformation" (Goch 2018). As regions and communities have to process the various moments of loss, it is increasingly the modes of coming to terms with the deindustrial shift which are coming into focus. The "half-life" of deindustrialisation (Linkon 2013; Strangleman 2017; Linkon 2018) often reflects memory formations that continue to determine the present. This concerns both the memories of individuals and the wider post-industrial landscapes, either in the guise of thriving industrial heritage practices or – quite in contrast – in the very absence or the erasure of the material remains of a neglected past (Berger/Golombek/Wicke 2018; Berger/High 2019; Berger 2020). Individual memories and – often ambiguous – experiences of work and the loss of work that sent "people into the maelstrom" of unemployment or early retirement (Buss Notter 2006: 99; McIvor 2013: 240 ff.) might resonate with the wider public and form collective narratives or, by contrast, might be neglected and difficult to be voiced or heard and thus contribute to the traumatic aspects of loss.

Oral histories and the collection of life stories have played a major role almost from the start in approaching the experiences and legacies of deindustrialisation "from below" (amongst others Frisch/Rogovin 1993; High 2003). And while this has often implied a tendency to stick with a local and regional framework, there is today a stronger urge among deindustrialisation scholars to connect local, regional and national experiences on an international scale and bring them into conversation (Kirk/Contrepois/Jefferys 2012; Orange 2015; High/MacKinnon/Perchard 2017). This seems not only appropriate as industry itself moves between regions and borders but also because comparison highlights the differences and similarities in managing crisis, in the social and cultural politics of industrial closure or in shifting identity formations that go along with the erosion of the established industrial structures – be it work, class, gender or regional and national identities.

It was against this background that a working group dedicated to memory cultures of deindustrialisation was formed in 2015 as part of the newly established European Labour History Network (Eklund/Wicke 2016; Jaramillo/Harlov-Csortán/Moitra/Garruccio 2020). The first thematic workshop organised by the working group, some results of which are presented in this special issue, aimed to facilitate cross-regional and cross-national comparisons by bringing together colleagues from Germany, Italy, Scotland, Spain, Hungary, Canada and Australia at the *Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum* in December 2016. The workshop, entitled *(Post-)Industrial Narratives: Remembering Labour and Structural Change in Oral History*, initially focused on three industrial sectors: shipyards and harbour work, iron and steel production, and

the mining industry; furthermore, it looked at issues of representation and the "heritagisation" of the industrial past in various contexts.

The contributions selected here cover some of these branch particularities but, moreover, touch on a range of themes and approaches that go beyond narrow distinctions and instead address the underlying problems reflected in the particular cases. Most fundamentally, this concerns the memory narratives of (active) work and the significance such memories can take on in an environment in which the old contexts of industrial wage labour have vanished. While this is a motive that connects most of the contributions in this issue, a theme more specific addresses the ways in which industrial closures have been tackled by politicians, trade unions and companies and how these strategies are remembered and discussed by the people affected. This includes the problematisation of various models of crisis management, not only with regard to the consequences of market-liberal policies of deregulation and increased insecurities for workers and communities facing unemployment – as the Scottish example by Arthur McIvor illustrates – but also concerning measures that aimed at cushioning the hardships brought about by closures, e.g. by introducing early retirement schemes. As the cases from Spain and Germany imply, even such measures in the tradition of the post-war West European welfare state could be perceived as highly ambiguous both individually and in the wider communities concerned. A further theme addressed is the history of emotions linked to the deindustrialisation process and its half-life. This includes the emotions experienced in the very midst of struggle and job loss as well as the "residual structures of feeling" (Williams 1977) and "moral economies" (Thompson 1971) attached to the old worlds of labour that continue to have an impact in the deindustrialised present. On both levels, the deindustrialisation process can have traumatising effects, individually and collectively, even though, as the examples of a "socially responsible" downsizing indicate, such effects are not inevitable.

Finally, most articles in this issue explicitly or implicitly touch on aspects of representing the industrial past and the role oral history plays in this context. The question of agency and visibility, of who speaks and is heard and seen, is crucial and can be highly contentious. "History struggles" for the "right" interpretation of the past may start in the museum as a conflict between curators and their living subjects (as shown by Janine Schemmer). But they can also amount to exploitative structures when parts of the collective experience and the deindustrialised communities' material as well as immaterial heritage are neglected while more "usable" knowledge is reframed according to the hegemonic functions of capital. As Antoinette Holm and Erik Eklund show with regard to the Australian Latrobe Valley, old constellations of power between the industrial periphery and the urban centre continue to be important in defining what is recognised as heritage and what is rejected – which is a good reminder that rather than being confined merely to a local or regional frame, the half-life of deindustrialisation remains entangled with the broader social and economic power relations on the national as well as international levels.

The editors are indebted to the *Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum* for hosting the 2016 conference and to the *Stiftung Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets* as well as the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG) for funding it. We would also like to thank Almut Leh and the editorial board of BIOS for offering us the opportunity to publish

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“Scrap-Heap Stories”: Oral Narratives of Labour and Loss in Scottish Mining and Manufacturing

Arthur McIvor

Introduction

I witnessed in his later life my father’s deterioration from proud industrial worker and stable breadwinner (he was a father to four kids) to redundancy and poorly paid, precarious, degraded work. Arthur McIvor (snr) had held a steady job almost all of his working life (for 32 years) on the assembly line in a car factory until being made redundant at age 54 as the company downsized in 1980. Thereafter his body was drained in work that was beyond his physical capacity (in a small, old-fashioned dirty steelworks). His deeply engrained work ethic, shaped by wartime service in the Royal Navy, would not countenance premature retirement. He ended up diminished and stigmatised (in his eyes at least) as a factory cleaner, sweeping floors. But at least he had a job. He found some consolation in booze; there was rarely a time when the Bell’s whisky bottle was far from his reach near his favourite armchair in these last years of his life. His degeneration was heart-breaking. My Dad died in 1992 and his life is one I’ve been struggling to make sense of ever since. He shared the fate of millions of industrial workers in the UK and elsewhere facing structural economic change as factories, mines, steel mills, ports and shipyards downsized and closed. They were thrown, as often said, on the “scrap heap”. What was the meaning of such industrial work and its subsequent loss to such men as my father? How did they make sense of all this themselves, through relating their own life stories and narrating the lived experience of this profound rupture in their lives?

This article is an attempt to understand this process through listening to the voices of workers like my father and reflecting on their ways of telling, whilst making some observations on how an oral history methodology can add to our understanding. It draws upon a rich bounty of oral history projects and collections undertaken in Scotland over recent decades, including interviews oral historian Ian MacDougall did for the Scottish Working People’s History Trust. At the Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC) we have also been collecting and archiving oral interviews since 1995 and have a series of collections on working lives and a growing number of projects relating to deindustrialisation, including a number of outstanding student projects (Clark 2013, 2017; Ferns 2019; Stride 2017). Other sets of archived and extant interviews include excellent sources for the county of Ayrshire, including those undertaken on the Johnnie Walker

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plant closure in Kilmarnock in 2011 and the University of West Scotland collection on deindustrialisation in Kilmarnock and Cumnock.[1]

Scotland's Deindustrialisation

Deindustrialisation has dominated the cultural landscape of Scotland since the 1970s and has been the focus of considerable academic study. Important work has examined the economics of industrial decline, the impact of deindustrialisation and plant closures on communities and the extraordinary lengths that Scottish workers went to protest against and resist job losses and the attack on their livelihoods (see, for example, Foster/Woolfson 1986; Phillips 2012, 2017; Perchard 2013, 2017; Clark 2013, 2017; McIvor 2017). Much of this work draws upon oral history interview methodologies with those directly affected, some very extensively. Many of us have also been influenced by path-breaking work on the social and cultural impacts of deindustrialisation in North America, including the inspirational work of Steven High and Alessandro Portelli, to whom we owe a great debt (cf. High 2003; Portelli 2011; Linkon/Russo 2003; K'Meyer/Hart 2009; Walley 2013; Strangleman/Rhodes/Linkon 2013).

Scotland was an archetypal "industrial nation" built on coal, textiles, chemicals and the heavy industries of steel, engineering and shipbuilding. At mid-twentieth century the economy was still dominated by industry and such blue-collar jobs were heavily concentrated in west-central Scotland, in the Clydeside industrial conurbation centred around the port city of Glasgow. From the 1950s the country experienced a particularly rapid and steep rate of deindustrialisation, which accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s recession under the neo-liberal onslaught of Thatcherism where so-called "lame duck" industries were left to the savage vagaries of the market. In Glasgow, industrial jobs as a share of total employment fell from 50 percent in 1951 to just 19 percent in 1991 (Phillips 2017: 316 f.). As elsewhere, deindustrialisation was an uneven and complex process – associated with full plant closures and large-scale job losses, but also persistent and progressive downsizing and company restructuring, with the concomitant rising levels of work intensification, job insecurity and worker disempowerment that went along with mass unemployment and under-employment. There was a shifting in response to market pressures towards lower cost, more flexible labour and a concerted managerial offensive – bolstered by the resurgence of neo-liberal ideologies – to increase workloads, attack trade unions and undermine the labour contract. These processes adversely affected Scottish workers' health and well-being in complex ways, adding another dimension to a pre-existing poor health record linked to high levels of overcrowding, poverty, deprivation and poor standards of occupational health and safety (for more detail see McIvor 2017: 25 ff.; McIvor 2014). As social researchers Mackenzie and colleagues recently remarked: "Scotland […] now has the worst mortality outcomes, and the widest health inequalities, in Western Europe" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 4; see also Walsh/Taulbut/Hanlon 2009).

1 I am grateful to all narrators for telling their stories and to interviewers for permission to use this material and for depositing and archiving interviews with the SOHC (see bibliography for full details).

Narrating Industrial Lives and Job Loss in Scotland

Turning then to the oral testimonies: Workers involved in downsizing and plant closures in Scotland narrated their lived experiences in many ways as they struggled to interpret and make sense of their working lives and draw meaning from it. Industrial work was central to the lives of most men and many women in the post-1945 generation and a source of pride, dignity and identity (McIvor 2013). To lose such work was traumatic and closure could be met with shock and disbelief. Ex-steel worker Martin Kerr said "I never saw so many men cry at the demolition of the Ravenscraig plant [Scotland's largest steelworks] in 1996" (Kacieja 2013: 17). Margaret Cullen described Springburn in its heyday in the 1950s when she had her first job at the local cooperative store:

> *You would see the men comin oot, oot the factories, Cowlairs Works and eh one or two different works. And they used to come up three deep coming up Springburn Road … when they heard the horn, aw the men coming from their work you know. The place was black with people … It was a busy, busy place then. Industrial. But then it just … once they closed all these places, then Springburn died (Cullen 2014).*

When the BMC Leyland truck and tractor factory in Bathgate closed in 1986 with over 2,000 redundancies, one worker (Jim Bilsborough) declared: "I just could not believe that they would shut that plant. I kept saying to myself, and I wisnae alone, how can they shut a place like this?" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49).[2] Another (John Cooper) reflected: "When the plant closed I was absolutely shattered. I'd never, ever been paid off before" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49). A prevailing theme in the stories of plant closures was loss; a deep, profound sense of bereavement, of mourning for lost skills, opportunities (for themselves and their kids), relationships, income and security seeps from the testimonies. Another BMC Leyland factory worker (Tam Brandon) reflected about the closure:

> *Don't mind telling you I cried because I was looking forward to my family getting work there. The Leyland had a tremendous input in the social life of people. You've got to understand how many thousands of people worked in there … and their skills were unsurpassed. I got that word and I came home and I sat and I held my wife's hand and I said "we're finished" (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49).*

The workers built a coffin on the final day before closure to denote their acute sense of loss. Losing work was invariably articulated as a disturbing and health-eroding experience for this generation of blue-collar workers brought up within a powerful work culture in communities that exalted hard graft and honest toil and stigmatised laziness (Wight 1993). This was expressed in stories emphasising the work ethic, the joy of work, pride in the job and the close social relationships and camaraderie developed over the duration of working lives (McIvor 2013). In these articulations of the meaning of

2 Jim was one of 59 oral interviews undertaken in this Heritage Lottery funded community oral history project.

work, narrators often emphasised pride in their skills, as Tam Brandon did, and demonstrated their awareness of risks and dangers in industrial work, the physicality of it, as well as the positive health and welfare connotations of being in stable, secure, enjoyable work. They recognised the innate duality of work: its frustrations as well as its joys; its risks to health as well as the benefits to health and well-being conferred by work. But, a recurring motif in their stories was the deterioration that came along with plant closure**.** A whole gamut of emotions bubble to the surface in the telling of these job loss stories: sadness, frustration, bitterness, outrage, anger, pride, stress, embarrassment, shame.

Oral testimonies of workers speak revealingly of the stigma of unemployment and the journey through identity disintegration as traditional breadwinner masculinity was challenged by the loss of the provider role. Corrosion of self-esteem; a sense of being on the "scrap heap" pervades the narratives of workers displaced by plant closures. One Cumnock ex-miner commented on being "a drain on society" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 8). A Kilmarnock woman recalled her father "felt absolutely worthless [after] being made redundant" whilst another recalled of her husband after being laid off: "he became really depressed and he was on sleeping tablets for a long time" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 9). Springburn woman Joan Pollock recalled her husband losing his job as a welder around 1982, commenting: "He felt terrible you know. He got depressed and all and had a heart attack" (Pollock 2014). Taking alternative lower paid, subordinate work could also be demeaning, stigmatising and embarrassing (Walkerdine/Jiminez 2012). Shame was one of the salient emotions expressed in these stories. "I hated being unemployed", recalled Alex Moffat after being laid off from BMC Leyland, Bathgate in 1986 (Workers' Educational Association 2012: 49). The writer Farquhar McLay, who started work in 1951 in an iron foundry, commented 40 years later on the "workerist and productivist notions we were brought up on" – continuing, "having pride in our role as indispensable (though cruelly exploited) units of production, taking identity from the jobs we did and suffering a terrible kind of shameful death with its loss" (McLay 1990: 10).

Unemployment impacted on identity and well-being in many ways, and workers' own oral narratives suggest a clear awareness of this. Ayrshire miner "Tommy" argued that work had kept miners fit and focused and when unemployed "your system's shutting doon" (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 10). Sedentary post-industrial lifestyles contributed to obesity whilst rising para-suicide and suicide rates were linked to trauma and to mental illness induced by job losses. Ayrshire coal miner George Montgomery recalled two suicides, asserting: "When they close pits, and dae these things, these are the effects it has on people" (Montgomery 1997: 101). When Kvaerner announced redundancies in 1999, it pushed one of the workers over the edge. A colleague recalled:

> *We came in to the yard the next morning [after receiving their redundancy letter], sadly Eddie had committed suicide the night before, he had hung himself and they thought it was due to – well we dae – due tae the letter he got the day before that he was getting paid off. It was a sad time in the yard. Eddie was a good boy … a good lad (Campbell 2016).*

Another shipyard worker reflected on the closure of Robbs shipyard in Leith in 1984, commenting: "And a lot o' them went downhill very quickly, because their life had

been taken away from them wi' Leith closing" (Keggie 1997). Particularly in Scotland, suicide rates for men rose sharply in the 1970s and 1980s, at 40 percent more than the suicide rate in England and Wales (Mok 2012: 246).

Emasculation was another recurring motif in oral testimonies. Heavy industrial work forged masculinity, and a "hard man" style of hyper masculinity, it has been argued elsewhere, was particularly defined in working class communities like Clydeside (Johnston/McIvor 2004). As a Scottish ex-miner noted:

> *This idea, "I'm the man of the family". Whether you've got a family or not doesnae matter, you're supposed to be a macho man, like, go out and earn a wage, like, you know. When you cannae do that it makes you less of a man in other people's eyes (Wight 1993: 102 f.).*

Going "downhill" (as John Keggie put it) could lead to depression, self-harm, alcohol and drug abuse, sleeping tablets and tranquiliser dependency. Witnesses lamented that former vibrant working-class communities had been "spoilt", ruined. A Clyde shipyard worker recalling the 1980s remembered the explosive growth of heroin use in Govan (and his own addiction at the time) and reflected on the lack of job opportunities as a cause: "Disaffection. Know what I mean? They're wanting something, you know? Like there's nothing here so they want something to belong tae, something that means something" (Quigley 2016).

Work then provided meaning and a sense of belonging. Another fundamental form of loss as plants closed were relationships, both personal and collective. Betty Long from Springburn, a chronically deindustrialised community in Glasgow, reflected: "It hurt a lot of men. Not just not getting their money but just missing all their colleagues" (Long 2014). An ex-miner reflected on the impact loss of work had on relationships:

> *They'd nae work, nothing else to dae in the morning, got up, go to the pub, come back hame, go to the pub. It ruined ma brother's life. His wife left … An awfy lot of men seemed to just go aff the rails (Mackenzie et al. 2015: 12).*

Trade union shop stewards, company welfare officers and industrial chaplains all played a role in the pastoral care and welfare of workers during run-downs and plant closures and their testimonies relate a range of impacts, attesting to the disintegration of the social fabric in Scottish working-class communities. One Glasgow industrial chaplain reflected on the "savage" nature of unemployment, noting: "when you're unemployed you almost become a leper in the eyes of a lot of people" (Potter 2008).[3] This is a powerful and emotive narrative, deploying the "leper" metaphor to denote a sense of mutation from inclusion to exclusion and evoke the devastating impacts loss of work could have. The process was profoundly shaming: job loss could mean being outcast, a "waster", not a worker.

This harrowing sense of loss was connected to the deep attachment many men had to their work. This was very evident in mining, shipbuilding, steelmaking and other "heavy" industries. For example, Glasgow shipbuilding worker Danny Houston commented: "I don't think I would change anything […] Proud to be a Clyde shipbuilder"

3 I am grateful to Dr Morrison for providing a transcript of this interview.

(Houston 2016). He went on to reflect on the social relationships forged at work, the solidarity and the banter, reflecting, "everyday a came intae work, even if I come in pretty sad, a went hame laughing" (ibid.). Losing work could be overwhelming, especially perhaps for the old-timers. Gerry Slater, made redundant from the Harland & Woolf shipyard in Glasgow in 1963, commented on a long-serving older colleague's reaction on hearing the news he was being laid off:

> *I turned roon and the tears wur running doon the man's face. He didnae know wit tae say because it was new tae ye, ye know wit a mean? That kind a scenario was new tae ye (Slater 2016).*

Another shipyard worker recalled his redundancy:

> *I was actually shattered because that's aww I had ever known. I had stayed in Govan, educated in Govan, served ma time in Govan, worked in Govan, so I was sitting saying, "Where do I go from here?" (Campbell 2016).*

Andy Perchard has recently identified in his study of coal mining in Scotland "the prevailing psychological and deep cultural scars of deindustrialization", where a recurring motif in oral testimonies was that of "broken men" (Perchard 2013b: 80). Alessandro Portelli's brilliant oral history-based study of coal miners in Harlan County, USA uncovers a similar narrative of devastated communities, where the broken body featured frequently in witnesses' oral testimonies (Portelli 2011).

"Work Changed": Downsizing, Insecurity and Pressure

The deindustrialisation literature in Scotland has tended, I think, to focus on the trauma of closures and resultant redundancies and unemployment, somewhat neglecting the longer, more drawn-out process of cranking up workloads, disempowerment, stress and pressure imposed on those who managed to survive and hold down fast-disappearing industrial jobs. Protracted downsizing really characterised Scottish industrial decline from the 1970s to the present. Deindustrialisation brought a sense of insecurity, destabilisation of customary patterns, of precarity. Narrators elucidate how this felt*;* how working in restructured and downsizing mining and manufacturing companies struggling for survival with rising unemployment and insecurity invariably involved an intensification of work, higher working hours, taking on more risk and rising stress levels testing physical and mental capacities to work. National Union of Mineworkers' President Nicky Wilson, for example, recalled the re-emergence of a "long hour's culture" as working shifts rose, for some to 12 hours, after the defeat of the 1984–1985 miners' strike; "the work-life balance just disappeared completely for a period of time" (Wilson 2014). Disempowerment marked this process. A Govan shipyard worker recalled the failure of a strike in 1999 at the downsizing Kaeverner (formerly Fairfields) yard which resulted in a four-night shift being extended to a run of five nights:

> *They just broke the unions then. I thought the unions let us doon there, pretty badly. To me, that put a lot a people aff the unions because after that, we wir never really the same. Any grievance we had wae the company, the guys oan the*

> *shop-floor would say, "Wits the point!?" because the unions cannae dae anything anyway (Campbell 2016).*

Here was a profound sense of loss being articulated; loss of power as exemplified in a strong trade union capable of protecting workers' rights, and a sense of hopelessness: "Wit's the point". A Clydebank mother articulated this in a similar way talking of her son who "desperately wants to work", reflecting "they just lost the whole will […] don't know how to motivate themselves anymore. They're like "what's the point" (Garnham 2017: 7). Established working patterns and support networks were uprooted, and "protective practices" that enabled bodies to be shielded and energies conserved were abandoned. This was inherently destabilising. Trade unions struggled in this context, as membership collapsed. By the early 2000s, trade union membership density in Scotland (at 25 percent) was down to around half the level it had been at peak in the 1970s (McIvor 2013: 233 f.). One outcome was slippage in occupational health and safety standards, recognised by the UK Health and Safety Executive in their coining of the phrase "a Scottish anomaly".

Loss was felt differently across heterogenous workforces and communities and more acutely for some than for others. I've argued elsewhere that particularly vulnerable people, such as older workers and the disabled, were hit especially hard by the social exclusion that went along with job losses and plant closures (McIvor 2017: 32 ff.). The history of the disabled within deindustrialising communities remains to be written, but some oral narratives from within such communities suggest the impacts could critically reduce opportunities and markedly exacerbate social exclusion, thus widening health inequalities. As one ex-miner noted: "The reality is there isn't any sympathy for you if you've got a form of disablement" (Guy 2004). Older and disabled workers were often more immobile and less capable of moving to find work in the remaining viable pits. And their support networks dwindled as communities became depopulated. We need more work to explore the experience of older, more vulnerable and disabled people in deindustrialising communities and how they narrated their own experience.

Gender Mattered: Scottish Women's Work Loss Narratives

These reflections on the loss of stable, well-paid and rewarding jobs and the social networks at work that went along with them were articulated by male and female workers alike who lost their jobs as deindustrialisation deepened in Scotland. In her study of South Chicago, Walley has made the point that deindustrialisation is not just about white male workers and that we need to shift our focus to embrace the stories of others (Walley 2013: 157). But were deindustrialisation narratives gendered? Some research has suggested that women's storytelling differs from men's, the former characterised as "rapport talk" and the latter as "report talk" (Summerfield 2004; Pattinson 2011). In the "hard man" macho culture of industrial Clydeside, women were perhaps able to express their emotions rather more openly than men. The Scottish literature has tended to rather neglect the lived experience of female industrial workers. Clark's recent oral history-based work on several factory occupations in the early 1980s by Scottish women demonstrates how the threat of job loss could equally mobilise women workers as men (Clark 2013; Clark 2017). These women were deeply invested in their occupations and unwilling to allow companies to strip them of their livelihoods without a fight.

In other instances, mobilisation to oppose closure was more difficult, such as at the Singer sewing machine factory in Clydebank (closed 1980) and Templeton's carpet factories in Glasgow (downsized 1979; closed mid-1980s) where plant closures were accepted without significant resistance (Stride 2019).

A series of oral interviews undertaken with male and female workers at the Johnnie Walker whisky plant in Kilmarnock just prior to closure in March 2012 provided revealing insights into how working lives and job loss are narrated and felt.[4] The Johnnie Walker Kilmarnock plant employed 1,800 workers in 1970 and 707 in 2009 when the closure was announced (The Herald, 8th March 2012). The oral interviews suggest similarities in the ways that men and women narrate job loss but also divergences, especially in the case of older, long-serving employees. The male employees at Johnnie Walkerwere more likely to mourn the demise of skill, job knowledge and experience, and identity, to mark corrosion of working-class breadwinner masculinity, and to express a sense of moral outrage at the loss of their right to work. The Johnnie Walker women's narratives focus more on lamenting loss of personal independence and the fracturing of close relationships forged at work. Perhaps partly these differences were connected to the types of jobs men and women did in a gender-divided labour force where the men did most of the skilled and supervisory jobs and the women the lesser skilled (and lesser paid) jobs in the plant. Impacts were differentiated, experienced through the lens of the acculturated values of femininity and masculinity. Several of the female narrators referred to social relations at work being like "family": "it is like an extended family" (Janice Withers 2011); "coming in here every day it's like coming home to your family", said Rhona Roberts, continuing, "It's been interesting, exciting and sad. It's been all of those things, and it's a massive end to think that they're going to close it. Because this is all we've been used to and suddenly it's not going to be here" (Rhona Roberts 2011). As with many male "scrap heap" stories, here we see articulated a clear sense of profound loss and rupture; of a changed world compared to "all we've been used to".

In these female work loss narratives, the meaning of work was defined as so much more than just the labour process and a wage. This was an all-inclusive community where life was centred in the workplace around close friendships and communal shared experiences which had a deep significance at a personal level. Humour – joking and "banter" – mediated the monotony and grind of the working day and that too was lost with factory closure. Stride has argued of female workers laid off at Templeton's carpet factory (Glasgow) that the transition to new work was "less severe" but that nonetheless this represented a "profound rupture" (Stride 2019). Whilst there may have been differences in how the experience of plant closures was felt and expressed by men and women workers, the demise of personal networks and mutual support was evidently felt deeply by all in the aftermath of plant closures. That said, we desperately need more research focusing on the experience of women through deindustrialisation and the gendered dimensions of this.

4 These 16 interviews, titled "Stories from Kilmarnock" were undertaken by Diageo Archivist Joanne McKerchar and are deposited in the Diageo Archive in Menstrie. I am indebted to Joanne for permission to cite them here.

Resistance, Escape and Adaptation Narratives

Job loss might be internalised, accepted and stoically endured; and for some the trauma induced silence. However, in west Scotland there was a radical, unionised working-class culture that drew upon the collective memory of what was known as "Red Clydeside" (Gibbs 2016). This contributed to Scots' resilience to the cultural bombardment of neo-liberal ideas and the attack on working class communities and bolstered the resources to resist and the language to mobilise against Thatcherite discourse and policies. Those who were already activists opposed plans to close companies and mobilised support for campaigns of resistance drawing upon a moral economy and "right to work" narrative. Perhaps the best-known example on Clydeside would be the 1971 workers' occupation of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders threatened with closure (Foster/Woolfson 1986). The dominant activist narratives here were almost exclusively class-conscious and male, epitomised by one of the communist leaders, Jimmy Reid, and his often-quoted plea that "we not only build ships on the Clyde, we build men" (cited in Bellamy 2001: 199).

Others narrated how the traumatic experience of closure radicalised them, energising or angering them into protest and organisation; or how it shifted their politics to the left, or towards Scottish nationalism (Phillips 2012; Clark 2013, 2017). In Scotland post-devolution (1999) this contributed to much more aggressive and extensive state intervention to protect jobs and the rights of more vulnerable citizens, including disabled workers and the victims of chronic industrial disease. This is evidenced, for example, in the recent (2017) Scottish Parliament intervention to reopen the last remaining steel plant after its Indian owners TATA closed it down.

However, focus on the episodes of collective resistance and activist narratives need to be weighed and balanced against alternative stories (or "silences") relating accommodation, acquiescence, adaptation and consent to change. There were many more examples of closures and downsizing accepted without any or much resistance. Perchard's work on the Scottish Highlands also highlights how important place was and how different local communities could respond very differently to plant closure (Perchard 2013, 2017), whilst Ferns' recent work on the closure of the giant Ravenscraig Steelworks shows how emasculation and adaptation were complex processes – and merits more attention (Ferns 2019). And there were also narratives (including coal miners, shipbuilders and steel workers) that welcomed change, for a number of reasons, for example because working in the industry had been so dangerous, or opportunities limited, or work so alienating. So, in these narratives, deindustrialisation and plant closure was articulated as liberating; as escape, as an opportunity and as a respite from "bad" work; as health-enhancing. Such stories, whilst contradicting the dominant ruination and loss narrative, also merit our attention. Glasgow writer Farquhar McLay reflected back in 1990 on his early working days in the 1950s in a Glasgow iron foundry, commenting: "I could easily understand why the working man would be suicidal. He was trapped in a nightmare" (McLay 1990, 7). He continued:

> *The old jobs are vanishing. Nostalgia for these outmoded forms of production – now a marketable commodity in art and culture – is surely misplaced. It was hard, miserable toil in deplorable conditions. People forget the crude anti-Catholic discrimination operated by management and foremen which kept workers*

> *at each other's throats; as well as the callous indifference which led to an accident rate which is hardly credible today. Ships were built on the Clyde because labour was cheap on the Clyde and the people in work were for the most part too cowed and too terrified of unemployment to make any real trouble (McLay 1990: 10).*

Some welcomed the opportunity to get a substantial financial redundancy pay-off, using the money to invest in a new business, like window cleaning or a taxi, and expressed a sense of enjoying the job change. Shipbuilding worker Danny Houston, who was made redundant at the age of twenty-nine from Kaverner in 1987, recalled:

> *I thought it was great; paid a holiday, got a wee car and that but I got a job right away. I done driving, labouring, done window fitting … I did a bit a joinery work. I'm quite good wae ma hands, but then, the wages were dreadful compared to the wages in here (Houston 2016).*

His oral testimony was probably more sanguine towards his experience because he was one of the lucky ones and had been successful in getting another job and in getting back into the shipbuilding industry eight years later (at Yarrows). The precarity and low wages of this interlude between shipbuilding jobs was also a fairly typical post-plant closure experience.

Others, including ex-Scottish miners and steelworkers, exhibited multi-layered responses to the demise of industry which could be mourned and welcomed at the same time. One miner reflected that Thatcher, almost universally reviled in mining communities, "saved his life" by closing the pits. He didn't think he could have survived another 15 years working underground (Hall 2012: 460). Another miner commented that "wi' the health problems that all miners had ah think it's the best thing that ever happened" (Graham 1999). Whilst miner Joe Bokas recalled: "Glad it's forgotten about … Death traps … Oh, no, ah'm delighted tae see it's finished" (Bokas 1999). In a similar vein, Scottish coal miner James Bush reflected:

> *Well, ye see, in one sense it's a sad business, loss o' livelihood. In the other sense, there's a hell o' a lot of deaths in the pits, a hell o' a lot of disease – pneumoconiosis, silicosis, bronchitis, emphysema … people are living longer now (Bush 1997).*

In this commentary James articulated a sense of the range of emotions that could be generated by job loss associated with deindustrialisation – registering a sense of relief, almost of joy from escaping exhausting and dangerous work regimes, tempered against the sadness of "loss o' livelihood". His testimony was undoubtedly affected by the premature death of his father, aged 42, of pneumoconiosis. Heavy industry could also pollute neighbourhoods, leaving a toxic environmental legacy behind. One local resident reflected on the Ravenscraig Steelworks: "The Craig, it was good when it was there, but you should have seen the muck that came out of it at night, it was ridiculous. All this shit came out" (Kacieja 2013: 26). The coke oven waste was later discovered to be carcinogenic. Jim McCaig, a former Scottish steel worker who retrained as a

teacher, provides a good example of the minority who successfully adapted to change after plant closure. He emphasised the positives of his career transition:

> *I used to make jokes every day of my life with my colleagues [teachers] who were complaining about their conditions of employment and their salaries and I would stand up and say: "Look, you guys don't have a real job, this is not a job, this is a vocation ... you're never gonnae get an explosion, you're never gonnae get killed, you don't breathe foul air and you're better paid than we were in the steel industry" (McCaig 2013).*

These narratives recognise the health benefits of the flight from dangerous and unhealthy heavy industry. They mirror what K'Meyer and Hart found in the wide range of emotions on display in job loss stories in Louisville, Kentucky in their beautifully crafted book (K'Meyer/Hart 2009). In these testimonies, the lived realities of participants who had experienced stressful, toxic and dangerous industrial jobs first-hand and the culture of overwork during deindustrialisation "run-downs" temper any sentimental nostalgia.

Conclusion

This paper has argued the case that an ethnographic oral history approach bringing eyewitness participants into conversation with academics can add really significantly to our understanding of the impact of deindustrialisation and the connections between job loss, identity, health and welfare. The rich detail, thick description and often intense articulated emotion help us as academic "outsiders" to better understand how lives (like my father's) were profoundly affected by plant closures, getting us beyond statistical body counts and overly sentimentalised and nostalgic representations of industrial work to more nuanced understandings of the meanings and impacts of job loss. The "spirals of destruction" (Walley 2013: 162) associated with deindustrialisation led to widening social inequalities, and Scottish industrial workers' oral narratives speak directly to this lived experience of rupture, loss and deterioration. In this evolving conversation, however, we must be aware of a wide range of voices and narratives and try to encompass these different voices and perspectives in our analysis. It may be tempting to see one set of narratives as representative, but plant closure stories sieved through the collective trauma and dislocation of the event are characterised by their diversity. We might identify a dominant or hegemonic strand of "scrap-heap narratives" where workers felt deeply shamed, emasculated and diminished by their loss. There were others who expressed their agency and resistance in classic, heroic "activist narratives" where injustice was a core motif, whilst others still articulated forms of "liberation narratives", describing the loss of industrial jobs as positive, providing opportunities for change, expressing a sense of relief and escape. And these understandings are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In narrating their lived experience of job loss and plant closures, interviewees are informing and interpreting; projecting a sense of self in the process and drawing meaning from their working lives. We need to listen attentively and learn from those who bore witness and try to make sense of these diverse, different and sometimes contradictory stories and take cognisance of silences and transgressing voices as

well as dominant, hegemonic narratives if we are to understand the complex but profound impacts that deindustrialisation had on traditional working-class communities in Scotland, as well as elsewhere.

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to comprehend deindustrialisation and the impact of plant downsizing and closures in Scotland since the 1970s through listening to the voices of workers and reflecting on their ways of telling, whilst making some observations on how an oral history methodology can add to our understanding. It draws upon a rich bounty of oral history projects and collections undertaken in Scotland over recent decades. The lush description and often intense articulated emotion help us as academic "outsiders" to better understand how lives were profoundly affected by plant closures, getting us beyond statistical body counts and overly sentimentalised and nostalgic representations of industrial work to more nuanced understandings of the meanings and impacts of job loss. In recalling their lived experience of plant run-downs and closures, narrators are informing and interpreting; projecting a sense of self in the process and drawing meaning from their working lives. My argument here is that we need to listen attentively and learn from those who bore witness and try to make sense of these diverse, different and sometimes contradictory stories. We should take cognisance of silences and transgressing voices as well as dominant, hegemonic narratives if we are to deepen the conversation and understand the complex but profound impacts that deindustrialisation had on traditional working-class communities in Scotland, as well as elsewhere.

Conditions for a Successful Farewell

Memories of Coal Mining in Ibbenbüren

Thomas Schürmann

In conversation, Ibbenbüren miners sometimes call their colliery a small Gallic village. This term refers to the relationship with RAG Aktiengesellschaft, which owns the Ibbenbüren colliery since 1999. However, the pitmen always add that the expression is not meant maliciously but entirely amicably. Unlike the fighting Gauls in the Asterix books, the citizens of Ibbenbüren do not regard themselves as the last shelter of resistance against an all-powerful opponent. The term "Gallic village" rather means that the colliery occupies a special position in the corporation where it is managed as a limited liability company, located at some distance from the Ruhr area, the largest German coal field, and far from the administrative centres of the coal industry. The Ruhr remains a frequent point of reference when it comes to the self-description of the Ibbenbüren miners. But perhaps the word also simply means that Ibbenbüren is the smallest coal mine in Germany.

The Ibbenbüren colliery was one of the last two German coal mines to cease production in December 2018. The coal district in northern Westphalia comprises the town of Ibbenbüren and five neighbouring municipalities (Fig. 1). It has a total population of about 110,000. This region is the field for a long-term documentation of mining culture in Ibbenbüren (Schürmann 2015)[1], a key feature of which will be a collection of oral history interviews undertaken with active and retired miners as well as with other people involved in the wider Ibbenbüren community. Based on these interviews, this article will have a closer look at the changing self-images of miners in Ibbenbüren, particularly in the recent context of an accelerated deindustrialisation process both in Ibbenbüren and in German coal mining at large.

1 Between June 2014 and August 2018, I conducted 100 interviews. I would like to express my thanks to the interviewees and also to the RAG Anthrazit Ibbenbüren GmbH for giving me the opportunity for the interviews. The recordings and transcriptions are kept in the archive of the Volkskundliche Kommission für Westfalen, Münster, Germany. The following text references to the interviews also contain the date of the interview and the page of the transcription. The documentation can be seen as a parallel project to the documentation "Menschen im Bergbau" set up in Bochum: http://www.menschen-im-bergbau.de/ (21.06.2018). Thanks to Roy Kift (Essen) for making a completely new translation of this text.

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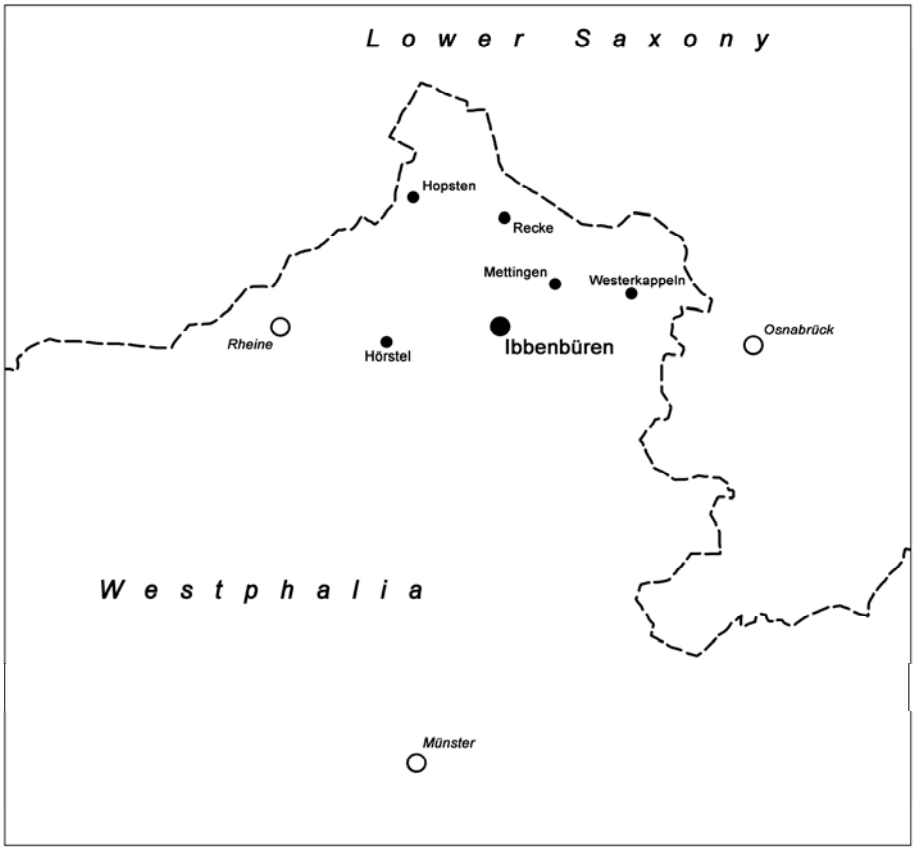

Fig. 1: The mining region of Ibbenbüren in the North of Westphalia (Source: own illustration)

Pitmen and Farmers

One of the things that characterises the self-image of the Ibbenbüren region is the fact that Ibbenbüreners assume people in the Ruhr area are unaware of its existence. And if they are, its image seems determined by agricultural stereotypes: the miners there wear wooden shoes (Interview 68 *1962), they drive to the colliery on tractors (Interview 95 *1978), and they tend to dig out sugar beets rather than coal (Knappenverein 2005: 23). An ink drawing made in 1960 in Ibbenbüren humorously illustrates how the people of Ibbenbüren imagine the way people in the Ruhr area see their district: as rural and rather backward (Fig. 2).

The people of Ibbenbüren would strongly dispute the opinion that their colliery is backward. Technically speaking, they were up to date – from today's point of view one can say: until closing. So they proudly point out that one element of the mechanisation of coal mining, the coal planer, was developed decisively in Ibbenbüren. In addition, for many years Ibbenbüren was the deepest coal mine in the world, its shafts going deeper than 1,500 meters below the surface. Indeed, because of the immense depth and

the high pressure underground, the miners were forced to work on new concepts of tunnel construction. Thus, they developed the so-called Ibbenbüren system on the basis of the New Austrian Tunnelling Method. By contrast, the people in Ibbenbüren would hardly dispute the relatively strong rural features in which the mine is embedded. And here lies another truth behind their own description of being a Gallic village.

Fig. 2: "The von Oeynhausen shaft seen from the Ruhr". Indian drawing by J. Stallbörger, Ibbenbüren, 1960. (Source: Mining Museum Ibbenbüren)

Another characteristic feature of the Ibbenbüren district was that mining developed in smaller leaps than in the Ruhr area. Hard coal has been mined in Ibbenbüren since the 16th century (Rickelmann/Röhrs 1983: 14). The colliery's employees mainly came from Ibbenbüren and its neighbouring towns – in contrast to the Ruhr area, where after the mid-19th century the workforce rapidly expanded and most of the workers were recruited from the east of the German Reich.

This difference can also be seen in the townscape. Since Ibbenbüren did not need to provide large amounts of living quarters within a short period of time, there are no classic colliery settlements of the kind that characterise the Ruhr area. The few settlements built according to plan were constructed after the Second World War. In the 1950s, for example, the Hollenbergs Hügel housing estate was built in the neighbouring village of Westerkappeln, something which also alleviated the post-war housing shortage. In Mettingen, near the north shaft, the North Shaft Settlement was built in 1967/68. Here the miners built their own houses with their own efforts and with reciprocal help. The people of Ibbenbüren are well aware of the difference to the housing estates in the Ruhr area. The mayor of Ibbenbüren at that time, Heinz Steingröver, recalls in an interview with the author:

> *Once, maybe twenty years ago, I drove from one shaft to the next with a group of SPD members from the state parliament. We passed through a settlement, the North Shaft Settlement. And as we drove around, they commented as one: "Oh, this is where the foremen live." – "Nah", I said, "this is where they all live!" In other words, the people here all built their own houses (Interview 1, *1942).*

This story, especially coming from the mouth of a Social Democrat, indicates the pride in the fact that the living conditions of the majority of the ordinary miners in Ibbenbüren are as good as people in the Ruhr area would expect of their foremen. Indeed, it is more the rule than the exception for workers in Ibbenbüren to live in their own houses. And as the interviews reveal, the autobiographical narrative usually involves either the construction of a house or work on an inherited house. From a local history point of view, the striving for a home of one's own is attributed to the down-to-earth nature of the miners from Ibbenbüren (Rickelmann/Röhrs 1983: 299). However, the high proportion of home owners among the miners is not a special feature of Ibbenbüren but a characteristic of small mining fields in rural areas.

One of the traditional economic structural features of the area is the great importance of part-time farming. Quite a number of miners from Ibbenbüren kept a small farming plot in addition to their mining work. They not only kept a goat (in the Ruhr area this was known as the "miner's cow") or a pig, but also pursued several different types of farming: agriculture, cattle breeding and dairy farming. Until the late 19th century, part-time agriculture helped the employees of small mines to compensate for their irregular income (Brüggemeier 2016: 203 ff.). In the course of industrialisation, employment at the mines became more secure. With the change of generations, small-scale farmers who worked in mining as a sideline became miners who worked in agriculture as a sideline.

Part-time agriculture remained in existence until the late 20th century and, in a few exceptional cases, its remnants still exist today. At the beginning of my survey, I suspected that the people of Ibbenbüren would stress this fact to underline their self-image of being down-to-earth miners. In fact, however, several of those questioned were still personally active in agriculture, or their parents ran a farm. The close link between miners' work and agriculture is also evident from the fact that in exceptional cases two of those questioned actually did drive a tractor to get to the colliery. In this respect, they confirm the stereotype of Ibbenbüreners as rural farmers.

One feature of rural mining regions is that the incidence of sick leave increases at harvest time. This was already noticeable in the Saar district around 1910. At the time this seems to have been tacitly tolerated in the interest of maintaining social stability (Reif 2016: 315 f., 367). In Ibbenbüren, part-time farmers sometimes behaved in a similar fashion when they were otherwise unable to cope with gathering in the harvesting. This is how one miner recalls the 1960s:

> *You can imagine what it was like with all the farming. In spring we had to make hay, then we cut the rye, then the potatoes had to be dug out. And in autumn the fodder-beet had to be got out. And by then my holidays were used up. So I went to the doc. I said: "Doctor, I've got to take a break for a few days." – "Yes", the doctor said, "I see, you have some back problems." – He knew very well that*

> *I had to do the harvest. So he wrote me a sick note for a week (Interview 82 *1944).*

But the interviewee assured me that he only went to the doctor once a year to prolong his holidays.

The idea of the miner and farmer in one person often only disappeared in the late 20th century. One example is the parish of Recke to the north of Ibbenbüren. About forty miners lived in a part of the village called Langenacker until the 1980s. They all ran small farms, each covering one or two hectares. A bus drove them to the colliery. In the course of time, most of them changed their main profession, and later they ceased farming altogether. Now agriculture on the small part-time farms has been replaced by three full-time farms (Interview 54 *1965). If miners do give up farming, they usually lease the land rather than sell it. This is not a peculiarity of Ibbenbüren but a general characteristic of part-time farming: the land is meant to be kept in the family for later generations (Mahlerwein 2016: 49).

One reason for the decline in part-time agriculture was the structural change in agriculture: the pressure on costs that burdened agriculture forced the formation of ever larger units and specialisation. Agriculture became increasingly difficult to pursue as a sideline. Mining work also forced them to concentrate exclusively on a single job, e.g. foremen were duty-bound to work in the mine for well over the usual eight hours.

Just as in full-time agriculture, generation change was often the reason for abandoning the business of farming. One example is the story of a miner whose father had also worked as a collier and farmed the land as a sideline, but was now retired. In 1990 the father became an invalid and as a result his family decided to disband the farm and lease the land. Until then the miner's parents had mainly borne the brunt of running the farm. But often they demanded help from their son: "When my father or mother were sick, I would milk the cows before going off to my shift. Everything got done beforehand" (Interview 32 *1960). But the work in the mine also demanded increased commitment:

> *Sometimes I was tired because the shift had begun at two o'clock in the morning. I worked overtime, and after that I had to make hay or straw. Or at weekends, I had to work an extra shift because this used to be compulsory; and then, in the afternoon, come home to bring in the straw or something like that. As a foreman you were around ten or eleven hours in the mine. Parallel to that I had an afternoon shift with a report in the evening. In between I used to be called in by the pit when they had problems, so I had to drive back to the colliery. And if that was during harvest time it was bad for the harvest because the work at the shaft had precedence (Interview 32 *1960).*

Shrinking Workforces and Early Retirements

The settlement structure of the Ibbenbüren district has retained rural features. The town itself has about 50,000 inhabitants. Without mining it would not have become the medium-sized town it is today. This makes the transition that accompanies so-called "structural change" all the more serious. Since the end of the 1950s, the number of employees in the mine has been permanently decreasing. The workforce peaked in 1958

with over 8,000 employees. With the onset of the coal crisis, this number quickly fell to 6,854 in 1965 and 5,204 in 1970 (Rickelmann/Röhrs 1983: 184). In mid-2016, as a consequence of a drastic reduction in the workforce, the plant employed less than 1,500 people (Steinkohle 2016, no. 9: 31). The plant has long since lost its position as the largest employer in the region. In 2015, the Coppenrath & Wiese cake factory, founded in the neighbouring town of Mettingen in 1975, employed 2,600 people.[2] For the miners, the contraction of their colliery is already noticeable in small details, for example in the growing number of vacant parking spaces:

> *From the tiny details alone you can see that things are getting increasingly difficult. Visually this is easy to see from the fact that there are more and more parking spaces available. We have large parking spaces for our employees, which you used to have to drive around to find a parking space if you came a bit later. But today this is no longer a problem (Interview 49 *1969).*

The reduction of the workforce within the plant has resulted in a large fluctuation. This is also noticeable in the oral history project: employees with whom an interview was scheduled had occasionally already retired before the scheduled meeting. Other employees have been given further responsibilities and now manage several departments instead of one. In the past, fluctuation was an opportunity for social advancement. But now it no longer seems worthwhile for most people to expose themselves to the considerable pressure of further training and familiarise themselves with new areas of work when they only have a few months left in their new position.

In other respects too, the reduction of the colliery has made the work more complicated rather than easier. This is already evident in the relationship of the mine to outside companies when the mine places an urgent order. The colliery is no longer perceived as an important major enterprise but as a medium-sized business. As such it no longer enjoys such preferential treatment. The employees responsible for procurement are only too aware of this:

> *Of course, it's a problem for us that RAG, which has always been perceived as a group, and at one time there were [...] around 600,000 people [...] employed nationwide [...]. And today, whether you like it or not, I don't like to say this, but we are actually only a medium-sized company. [...] When in the past we put in an order for something from any company, that meant immediately. The mine is calling! And then it had to be delivered the next day. Today this is no longer the case. They say: "Yes, well, there are other bulk buyers." So they don't treat you so preferentially anymore (Interview 39 *1958).*

This was also confirmed by another employee:

> *Now I also hear similar stories when we order relevant parts from companies somewhere or other. In the old days you could phone them and, bam!, they were there. They immediately dropped everything for us because of the size of our orders. Today it's different. Mining is, how can I put it, dying. Yes, really. It's*

2 https://www.coppenrath-wiese.de/karriere/wir-als-arbeitgeber.aspx (09.04.2018).

> *diminishing all the time, and companies have reoriented themselves because they are getting larger orders elsewhere. Now we're no longer number one in mining. Now I'd say we're number 15. So we have to wait for the parts, that's the way it is. It's not like it used to be when people rang up and said, "Right now! Get a move on. Just do it." That's no longer possible (Interview 28 *1959).*

Another side-effect of the contraction in the mine is that a growing number of activities above and below ground are being taken over by temporary employment agencies, officially known as "friendly partner companies". These companies' staff work at the mine for a limited period of time. However, since high safety regulations apply to everyone entering the mine, all staff have to be given comprehensive safety training before they can start work.

> *We are now in the extreme situation of being confronted with employees from temporary employment agencies, and as a result no new workers are hired. It doesn't make sense. And these employees come from completely different working backgrounds. This may still be feasible where surface work is concerned, but underground it can sometimes be a bit dangerous. So you can't just leave them to their own devices, you have to take them in hand. That's what we do. So they're watched very closely. They always have an experienced employee at hand (Interview 39 *1958).*

A rapid reduction of the workforce can only be achieved in a socially responsible manner by retiring miners at an early stage. The conditions for this were agreed in 2007 in negotiations between representatives of the Federal Government, the relevant state governments of North Rhine-Westphalia and Saarland, RAG company and the IG BCE trade union. In the same year a federal law set out the grants necessary for transition measures and for draining the decommissioned mines. The transition funds granted to underground miners enable them to take early retirement at the age of 50. Miners without "underground status" go into early retirement at the age of 57 and with reduced salaries. This early retirement scheme was fought for by the unions, and after 2007 it had to be defended against subsequent attempts to overturn the agreement. For those affected, however, it is a two-edged issue because at 50, many miners are not yet at an age when they can really benefit from being professionally inactive. The first few months are like a long vacation, but at some time or another all the repairs in the house and the garden have been completed, and this can give rise to a cavernous feeling of emptiness. Some of the interviewees were therefore also very concerned about their imminent retirement. A foreman who had retired four years earlier told us:

> *When I turned fifty, I had to retire early, which was very, very difficult for me. You can't really say, "immediately, from now on". You knew that. You could prepare for it, so as not to jump in at the deep end. But it wasn't so damn easy. No, in midlife, when your life is full of juice, to say, at fifty! One moment I was used to speaking to 150 people at six in the morning, and the next I was sitting at home alone in front of my daily paper (Interview 5 *1960).*

In this case, my interviewee had found a counterweight in his increased commitment to voluntary work by taking over the management of the local miners' association. Other respondents also work on a voluntary basis. For example, one miner said that it was only possible to cope with the extensive work of the local association in Mettingen because so many miners who had taken early retirement were involved. Some of these miners in early retirement also earned a little extra from so-called 450 euro jobs. However, if they had larger supplementary earnings, they would lose their entitlement to early retirement.

In many parts of the world, of course, miners would be happy to have such problems. In addition, for many outsiders, early retirement along with subsidies to the mining industry can be a cause of social envy. Several miners have been heavily criticised for being highly subsidised and living in relatively good circumstances. A colliery employee, who originally worked at the Westfalen colliery in Ahlen, met an electrician there again after many years, who had later changed his profession:

> *This electrician had also received a severance payment from us and changed jobs. And after a long time, our paths crossed while I was out shopping, and because we knew each other from the colliery, I went up to him and asked: [...] "How's it going?" – "Quite well actually. What about you? Are you still down the pit?" – "Yes", I said, "I'm still at the colliery." – "So you're also one of those social scroungers!" (Interview 42 *1963).*

Such examples show that the socially responsible dismantling of the mining industry is always accompanied by conflicts, even in the local environment.

Relocations and the "Family Pit"

Starting in the year 2000, the expansion of the workforce was boosted by the relocation of numerous colleagues from the Ruhr area, and later also from the Saarland, to Ibbenbüren. The majority of the over 300 employees from the Ruhr area came from the Westfalen colliery in Ahlen, which ceased production in mid-2000. A manager from the personnel department in Ibbenbüren who was working in Ahlen at the time was involved in the preparation of the transfer:

> *Relocation planning started quite early. [...] We finally came up with a concept and, in three shifts, talked to every employee who was still there and recorded their wishes. In this way we prepared notes, with the names of the collieries who were to take them over [...] And then we again carried out surveys with all the workers for weeks, i.e. during the three-shift system, and discussed matters thoroughly with all the employees. They had to decide their order of preferences. Of course, many of them wanted to be transferred to the Ost colliery because it was only 15 kilometres away from the Westfalen colliery. The problem was that only about one hundred of the planned number could be transferred there, and we had over 2,000 employees left to deal with. And that's why it was so tricky. But we managed to smooth things out in our discussions by saying: "Even if you tick 'Ost', the probability of being transferred there is very low because the target figures say that only a hundred can be moved there, and more can be transferred*

> *to 'Prosper' and to Ibbenbüren." Yes, so our transfer programme really turned out quite well; the general level of satisfaction amongst the men was good (Interview 42 *1963).*

Whether those affected were really satisfied is another question. Here, the tendency to rate one's own actions as successful is unmistakable. In most cases the employees who were to be transferred from the Westfalen mine did not really have a choice.

The distance between Ahlen and Ibbenbüren is about one hundred kilometres. Most employees commute daily on the motorway and often form car pools. Only a few employees have second homes in Ibbenbüren and commute weekly. An employee from Ahlen defends the daily travel as follows:

> *The colleagues here at Ibbenbüren always said: "Why don't you move home?" That was very easy to say. I have my own home in Ahlen. My wife is working, the children have their friends in Ahlen, so moving was out of the question. And I tell you, I didn't want a weekend relationship either. I knew I'd be home in an hour or more to see my family every evening, and I can also enjoy my wife's company for four hours in the evening (Interview 42 *1963).*

In the first few years, the colliery also provided funding for commuting to Ibbenbüren:

> *At the beginning there were still bus connections, there were still factory buses to bring the people. There was still ticket money from the company, but in 2002/ 2003, savings measures were introduced, bus lines were cancelled along with the ticket money, a large number of car pools were created, and care was always taken to ensure that employees could work the same shifts to enable them to take part in car pools (Interview 42 *1963).*

By 2016, as a result of retirements, the number of employees from Ahlen had fallen from over 300 to around 40. From 2010, an even larger increase in the number of employees, approximately 750, came from the Saarland in the north-western part of Germany. The reason for the premature end of coal production at the Saar colliery was a rock burst in February 2008, which was felt in the region as an earthquake and also caused damage to buildings. After the rock burst, the prevailing mood of the general population rapidly turned against mining. Miners say that after that they sometimes had to go to work under police protection. It was also said on several occasions that in one place there was a baker who refused to hand out bread rolls to miners' children (Interview 5 *1960; Interview 43 *1963). And if they did not want their tires punctured, pit workers were well advised to remove mining symbols like mallets and irons from their cars (Interview 43 *1963). From February 2008, coal could only be mined under strict requirements. Production in the Saarland region ceased in mid-2012.

For the Ibbenbüren colliery, the premature end of mining in the Saar region may also have had advantages. Some respondents suspect that if the Saar mines had not been closed, the Ibbenbüren colliery would have been closed earlier and the workers in Ibbenbüren would have had to commute to the Saarland (Interview 51 *1960; Interview 94 *1962). The reason for this assumption is that RAG Aktiengesellschaft was forced to reduce coal production in accordance with the political agreements. One practical

advantage of the Saar closure for the Ibbenbüren colliery was that experts from the Saarland were able to replace their retired colleagues in some positions and fill gaps. Due to the forcible reduction of staff, there was a shortage of experts in some areas in Ibbenbüren (Interview 78 *1964; Interview 84 *1968).

Like the Ruhr area collieries and the Ibbenbüren colliery, the Saar mines were part of the RAG company, in which all remaining German coal mines have been gradually merged since 1968. Therefore, the relocation of the miners could be planned centrally. A senior member of the personnel department in Ibbenbüren remembers that employee discussions were held with all the affected Saarland miners in order to find a suitable job for them in Ibbenbüren.

> *One year before the employees were transferred, we went to the Saar colliery and held discussions with the employees who were to be transferred. I can remember the first batch; due to move on April 1st 2010. We went there in 2009 and talked to around a hundred employees, went to the Saar site with three employees from the human resources department, three operational staff and three works councils and talked to each individual employee in three groups for three days, wrote down their particular duties, noted everything and gave the people the feeling that with us they were in good hands (Interview 42 *1963).*

The head of human resources also remembers that apartments in Ibbenbüren were visited in the company of his Saarland colleagues:

> *The talks in the Saarland were followed by on-the-spot discussions here. We helped the employees find accommodation, we increased our housing office by three employees, we really did inspect the apartments with every employee and helped them find somewhere to live. Here, in the period from 2010 to 2013, we accommodated almost 750 Saarland employees within a radius of 15 kilometres (Interview 42 *1963).*

The colliery subsidised rents for the first two years so that the miners could meet the financial burden of a second home. In mastering the travel distance of about 500 kilometres each way, the colleagues from the Saarland paid a high price for continued employment. Only very few of the 750 Saarlanders have moved to Ibbenbüren permanently. One interviewee, who left the Saarland and bought a house near Ibbenbüren, knows of fewer than ten colleagues who, like him, have moved permanently. As a rule, the family, the wife's job in the Saarland and, last but not least, home ownership posed an obstacle to moving home. Just as in Ibbenbüren, the proportion of Saarland miners who live in their own houses is very high.

> *90 percent of the employees owned property there. This is not generally the case in the Ruhr area where many people lived on the colliery estates. And in the Saarland and here in Ibbenbüren, people own – I guess – 90 percent of the workers own their own property. [...] Of course they didn't sell their houses, there were very few who did. Many have a second home here and commute on weekends or go home to their wives every two weeks (Interview 42 *1963).*

As a rule, they go home every one or two weeks. One miner from the Saarland told us that he takes turns with his wife: every four weeks he goes back to the Saarland; his wife and daughter come to Ibbenbüren every four weeks. This way they can at least spend every other weekend together. Cars are used throughout, and the Saarlanders travel together in even greater proportions than the Ahleners.

> *We carpool. [...] I scarcely know of any people who drive alone, and I think that in the process, many of us have arranged the shifts there in such a way that we can travel home together on Fridays at noon after the early shift, or in the evening after the noon shift – it always depends on how the shifts are arranged – that the people can then always fill a car with four people, and then they can share and minimise the costs (Interview 44 *1969).*

Since it is a long way, they usually drove fast. It can be considered a success – and is indeed regarded as a success – that there have been no serious road accidents during the weekend trips back home to the Saarland. Nevertheless, the journey took quite a while, at least five hours per trip, and miners from Ibbenbüren asked their local colleagues to agree to the Saarlanders leaving the plant as early as possible on Fridays because they have to return back to work on Sunday night.

In order to reduce the stress of commuting, most miners from the Saarland were keen to retire as early as possible. One way of doing this was by using long-term accounts in which they can save up overtime. In 2016, there were no more than around two hundred and in mid-2018 there were only around forty colleagues from the Saarland in Ibbenbüren. The Saarlanders were mainly transferred to Ibbenbüren and not to the Ruhr area not only for operational reasons but also because of personal preferences: from their mentality, they felt closer to the people of Ibbenbüren than to the pit workers in the Ruhr (Interview 94 *1962). They also commented that their colleagues in the Ruhr were more indifferent to their workplace. This can be explained by the fact that many Ruhr miners had already been moved from one mine to another and that their personal sense of responsibility had suffered as a result:

> *In the Saarland there are always the same people at the mine. And there have been no additions from outside. And in the Ruhr area they have been constantly moved from one colliery to the next. So they no longer really care about what's around them but only think: "Yes, I can get through the last ten years, too" (Interview 95 *1978).*

Of course, there are also differences in mentality between the workers in Ibbenbüren and the Saarlanders. One Saarlander who moved to Ibbenbüren said that it is easier to start a conversation in the Saarland, while in Ibbenbüren people seem more distant at first sight:

> *But now, if you want my opinion, in the interpersonal area, it isn't as easy to establish contact as in the Saarland. The people there are quite simply different. More open. They're more approachable (Interview 43 *1963).*

The way in which the colliery is perceived has also changed in part with the influxes from the Ruhr area and the Saarland. A term frequently used in Ibbenbüren is "family pit". This expression has different meanings. For example, it is striking how many employees are related to each other. But it also indicates a family-like relationship between the workers, who all come from the small towns and villages around, and a great sense of belonging. This close relationship was very helpful in integrating new co-workers, as a native of Dortmund, who had previously worked at several mines, explains:

> *The integration at the mine worked very well for all the newcomers. It was also made easy because until [...] 1999 – when the first people arrived from the Westfalen colliery – the mine only employed local people who knew each other and had family ties. At the gate to the mine I once jokingly remarked that everyone's related here, they just have different names (Interview 41 *1961).*

Several interviewees say that the "family pit" relationships began to loosen after 2000. An administrative employee who came from the Ruhr area 15 years earlier reported:

> *I came here in 2001, when Ibbenbüren was still a family mine, when there were Ibbenbüreners, when there were workers who came from around Recke, from Hopsten, from Hörstel, from Mettingen, from Tecklenburg all the way to Lengerich. In other words, more than 90 percent of the workforce was actually from the region. And then with the first 300 from the "Westfalen" pit, the whole thing got mixed up, and I guess around 450 employees from the Ruhr had been transferred here by 2006/2007. They were followed in 2009/2010 by their colleagues from the Saarland, some 750 in all, and today it has to be said, we're a rather mixed bunch (Interview 42 *1963).*

In the Ruhr area fluctuation, the transfer of workers between the mines had been more frequent, whereas in Ibbenbüren there was only the one colliery. Nonetheless, several of those questioned still like to use the term "family pit".

Coal Mining and the Social Market Economy

Despite all their differences, miners from the Ruhr, Saarland and Ibbenbüren have one thing in common: they are proud of their work. Pride is also one of the findings of an employee survey carried out at the Ibbenbüren colliery in mid-2016 (Steinkohle 2016, no. 11: 6). It can also be seen in the interviews. It is their pride in their work, in the company and in how miners are dealing with the challenge of structural change. Indeed, structural change in the area of Ibbenbüren can in many respects be regarded as a success story – at least until now. This refers to how the mine has organised its rapid contraction, the redundancy plans for its employees, how the city and the region are absorbing the loss of this major economic factor, and also to the drainage work involved in long-term concepts for the environment.

During the last few decades, company culture in the German coal mining industry, and thus also in Ibbenbüren, has undergone a change in many respects. One change that miners experienced at the end of the 20th century affected the management culture. Un-

til around 1990, there was a tone of communication in large parts of the colliery operation that was often described by sentences like "The one who shouts the loudest is right". In reality, however, this was generally not a competition to see who could shout loudest but shouting at subordinates. Due to the general noise level in mining, there was a technical necessity for this shouting, but this was not the primary reason, because this shouting also shaped the communication style in the foremen's offices.
Ultimately, loud tones are the legacy of an unfortunate tradition in German coal mining. Indeed, such behaviour was condemned as mining militarism as early as the first few years of the 20th century (Briefs 1934: 121 f.). The distinctive system of command and obedience survived the watershed between and after the two World Wars. That said, since the 1960s, the system of co-determination in the coal and steel industries, along with the pressures to tackle structural change, has gradually led to a more cooperative social climate in the Ruhr area.

In Ibbenbüren, there was a highly perceptible change in management culture in the early 1990s. The then Operations Director took advantage of the fact that a number of senior executives could be retired and replaced them with people with a more balanced temperament and modern leadership qualities. Within a few years, a new working atmosphere and a much calmer tone had been established in large parts of the colliery. This also helped people to master the new technical challenges.

Modernisation also meant better prospects for the employment of women. In the German coal mining industry of the 19th and 20th centuries, it was unthinkable – with the exception of Upper Silesia – for women to work underground (Kroker et al. 1989; Ziegler 2013: 128). But by the end of the 20th century, a different legal view prevailed. Now the idea of protecting women from physically demanding and dangerous work was replaced by the idea of equality. In 1997, women in Ibbenbüren were allowed to work as miners (trainees) and as foremen to enable them to complete their training as mining assessors (Interview 95 *1978). All in all, however, opening up the mining profession to women came too late to bear fruit in the coal industry.

If structural change in the coal industry, especially in Ibbenbüren, can be regarded as a success story, there are several reasons for this: The economic conditions have been comparatively favourable. The unemployment rate in the Ibbenbüren coal region was 3.9 percent in 2014, compared to the state average in North Rhine-Westphalia of 8.2 percent (Manteuffel et al. 2016: 27 ff.). The proportion of industrial workers in the population is also high. Industrial employment is spread across a relatively large number of smaller firms. Unlike in many traditional industrial areas, it is not concentrated in just a few large companies and enterprises.

These comparatively favourable circumstances promote calm and considered actions. Local authorities have made the most of the opportunity to prepare the area and the population for structural change and have included this factor as far as possible in the plans for the colliery.

One condition for this success is the great dedication of the miners, who pay a high personal price for their continued economic existence, not least because they have to cover long distances. One political condition is the close cooperation between the trade union, the coal industry and the state, in the course of which the united enterprise Ruhrkohle AG, later known as the RAG company, emerged, a fact which created the base for overall planning activities. The success of structural change has also been pos-

sible because the laws of capitalism have been partially relativised by the state-supported creation of a unified company but above all by the financial support for social plans and long-term post-mining employment. Perhaps it can also be seen as an extreme form of social market economy or "Rhine Capitalism".[3] In this respect, the phasing out of coal production in Germany is a historic exception.

Since the late 20th century, the German coal industry has become a model industrial sector as a result of the change in management culture and tone, access for women, consistent attention to occupational safety for miners and growing sensitivity to the environment. It is particularly regrettable that these developments only occurred a short time before the closing of the last collieries and that only a very small proportion of miners have benefited from them. But such developments towards an "ideal" form of capitalism could probably only have taken place in an industry that had already been declared dead.

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3 The French economist Michel Albert defined the "Rhine" model of capitalism practiced in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, in contrast to the Anglo-American model (Albert 1991, cf. Spangenberg 2011).

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Abstract

In 2018, when the last German hard coal mines were closed down, the conditions were relatively favourable, especially in the coal region of Ibbenbüren in Northern Westphalia. This district is marked by small towns and medium-sized enterprises with a relatively low unemployment rate. On the one hand, the shutdown without greater lay-offs was enabled by the co-working of the trade union and the mining company. This, on the other hand, depended to a large extent on external influences, not least on state subsidies and the preceding integration of the German hard coal industry into a rescue company. Furthermore, the relatively smooth transition would not have been possible without the willingness of many miners of covering far distances to other locations. This article is based on narrative interviews conducted before the shutdown of 2018 with miners and other persons involved, focusing on their memories of mining in Ibbenbüren.

Winning or Losing?

German Pit Closure and the Ambiguities of Memory

Stefan Moitra

Introduction

Herbert Hötzel was born in 1923 in Lower Silesia. After serving as a soldier in the Second World War and following a short term as a prisoner of war, he ended up in the Ruhr valley and, amidst the severe post-war crisis of food and energy supply, became a coal miner in the winter of 1946. "After all those injustices that have happened, now you can do something good for the people", he remembers what he told himself back then. He started as a haulier at the Friedrich Thyssen Mine in Duisburg and later became an underground train driver. His memories of going underground for the first time are rather bleak:

> *You cannot actually describe it. I was always used to my freedom – and then down into the hole for the first time. And I was sent to the 9th level: it was 46 degrees hot, and as a non-miner this is damn difficult. But you have to start from somewhere, right? (Interview Hötzel).*[1]

Notwithstanding such difficulties, Hötzel's narrative is by and large shaped by a sense of pride in the work and industry he had been involved in. Even his memories of literally closing his very mine in 1976, as a member of the crew in charge of dismantling the underground works, is tinged with motives of pride and nostalgia. However, as a beneficiary of the first early retirement schemes to prevent sudden mass redundancies, Hötzel interprets the end of his working career as a gift. Instead of continuing mine work at a neighbouring pit, he decided to opt for his pension and immediately went on a hiking tour to the Harz Mountains with his wife. "Those were the years I received as a gift."

Hötzel's testimony embraces an array of discursive points of reference. There is the image of the miners' self-sacrifice after 1945, working under severest conditions in order to provide the basis for post-war survival and eventual reconstruction, a trope frequently employed before the backdrop of the "economic miracle". This is closely connected with a work ethic of endurance, masculine strength and productivity. Most crucially, in narrating the end of his working career, Hötzel combines a sense of crisis awareness regarding the long-term perspective of mine closure with feelings of both sadness and relief. He quotes the social worker who advised those who took early

1 This and all following quotes translated by the author.

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.04

retirement as early as 1976: "'It won't get any better, it will be even worse for the mining industry.' – As early as that!" Yet, the possibility to get out of the mine is felt as a liberation.

In this long-term experience, spanning the war and post-war period to the early 21st century, Hötzel's adult memories are certainly exceptional. However, with regard to his view on deindustrialisation, pit closure and early retirement, he articulates an ambiguity that somehow represents two sides of the same coin, yet is often painted over by an overriding master narrative of successful welfare-state crisis management. The Ruhr region in particular, along with a number of smaller West German coalfields, has been facing a prolonged process of industrial demise that has eventually taken six decades, from the first signs of crisis in 1958 to the closure of the last remaining coal mines in 2018 – the Prosper-Haniel colliery in Bottrop (Böse/Farrenkopf/Weindl 2018) and the Anthrazit Ibbenbüren colliery near Osnabrück (Gawehn 2018; Schürmann 2020). From the late 1950s, when the Ruhr industry alone employed well over half a million miners, both underground and aboveground, this number has shrunk to 3,400 in 2018; between 1970 and 2000, employment was reduced by roughly 50,000 per decade.[2]

There are two grand narratives connected to this process. Firstly, the Ruhr towns, as well as their counterparts in the Saar region and other coalfields, struggle with the consequences of industrial decline as a long-term structural transformation, forcing the old mass industries of coal and steel to be replaced by more modern patterns of production and work (Goch 2019). With hubs in higher education, research and new industries, parts of the Ruhr seem to be fairly successful in making this shift from the heavy industries of the past to the "knowledge society" of the future. Unemployment figures, however, still rank amongst the highest in Germany (Hüther/Südekum/Voigtländer 2019: 99, 124 ff.). In contrast to this image of mass unemployment as a consequence of deindustrialisation, the second grand narrative is closely tied to the "socially responsible", "socially compliant" way of handling the downsizing of the mining industry. Social responsibility – *Sozialverträglichkeit* – has been a central element to discursively frame the targets and viability of keeping up as many coal mines as possible while at the same time constantly shrinking the industry but avoiding uncontrolled redundancy. This was mainly set into practice in a system of direct and indirect state subsidies and in a scheme of early retirement that allowed underground workers who had mostly started their professional lives at the age of 14 to 16 to retire once they had reached 49 or 50. In their efforts to find consensual crisis solutions, *Sozialverträglichkeit* became a key semantic denominator for trade unionists, shop stewards, company executives as well as politicians to address an apparently obvious common goal. This was epitomised by a phrase attributed to Adolf Schmidt, the head of the Industrial Union of Mine and Energy Workers (IGBE) from 1969 to 1985, declaring the goal of social responsibility had to be "Niemand fällt ins Bergfreie!" – "Nobody falls into the void!", i.e. nobody will fall into unemployment.[3] Thus, in hindsight, the history of the German coal mining industry in the second half

2 For data see Huske (2006) and https://www.rag.de/unternehmen/mitarbeiter-und-fuehrung/zentrale-personalsteuerung/ (24.03.2019).

3 The term "bergfrei" initially refers to land that could potentially be mined but was as yet without concession to do so. In contrast to that, the phrase uses the term in the sense of an underground crevice which a miner might fall into.

of the 20th century can be described as a process from "key sector to decline" (Farrenkopf 2013), but at the same time it is a "success story" of socially responsible politics (Seidel 2013: 513 f.).

This article intends to throw a different light on this success story by considering the memories and oral history narratives of those who were actively part of the mining industry and its slow demise over the last five decades (and more), mainly workers' representatives on all levels of the industry as well as underground workers who witnessed the growing pressures which coal mining had to face and who themselves experienced early retirement.[4] In scrutinising these memory collectives, it is possible to identify a wider variety of experiences and narratives than is often assumed under the principle of consensual *Sozialverträglichkeit*. It turns out, rather, that below the semantics of consensus lies a history of constant negotiation to sustain the politics of mutual responsibility, and this ultimately plays out as a history of power relations between the workers, the trade union(s), the employers as well as regional and federal politics. Proclaiming consensus and reciprocality formed part of a moral economy of structural change and deindustrialisation (Phillips 2013; Phillips 2017; Strangleman 2017). And while the idea of *Sozialverträglichkeit* underscored a demand for crisis solutions that would benefit the interests of mine workers and their communities, it also implied a discursive regime of "economic necessity", of the assumed factuality of market forces that had to be re-balanced with the social responsibilities of both state and companies. For most workers' representatives and trade unionists this entailed a permanent cycle of re-negotiation which increasingly took on a defensive character. This was especially the case since the 1980s and 1990s, when a government more inclined to market-liberal ideas demanded a stronger willingness from workers and employees to change in order to hold on to the principles of social responsibility. On the shop-floor level, as we shall see, such increased pressure led to stronger ambiguities towards the challenges which had to be stomached.

Struggling for *Sozialverträglichkeit* in Trade Union Memories

Not just pit closure as such but the corporatist measures of finding ways to tackle the crisis have a history going back to the 1950s and 1960s. The primal scene in this context is the establishment of Ruhrkohle AG (RAG) in 1968/69. Starting in 1958, it became increasingly clear that West German hard coal faced severe competition from different sides. With regard to supplying the power industry, German lignite mining had always been a competitor. Since the late 1950s, however, cheaper imported hard coal from overseas, at the time mainly from the US, became a major factor in raising the pressure (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2006); and so did the introduction of fuel oil for heating and, slightly later on, of nuclear energy. A large part of mines in the Ruhr belonged to steel corporations that facilitated their steel works with their own combined coal reserves and which could now calculate whether or not keeping their mines remained economically feasible. The crisis had a more immediate impact on those companies which relied solely on mining and were among the first to close down pits

4 This article is based on life-story interviews conducted as part of "Menschen im Bergbau", an oral history project conducted by the Stiftung Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets in collaboration with Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum. Cf. Moitra/Nogueira/Adamski (2019) as well as the project website http://www.menschen-im-bergbau.de.

that did not seem productive/competitive any longer. After ten years of relatively passive tarrying, including different kinds of state compensation measures both for miners made redundant and for companies that closed seemingly unprofitable mines, the founding of RAG represented what came to be known as a "concerted action", a politically coordinated consensus that would see to all interests involved for the sake of planned economic prosperity (Abelshauser 1984; Lauschke 1984; Nonn 2001).

At the core of this consensus lay an idea of concentration, rationalisation and co-operation: Almost all of the Ruhr mining companies transferred their pits and coke plants into the new corporation to facilitate better planning of production – which included the closure of mines deemed uncompetitive. To avoid redundancies at the sites closing, younger miners were transferred to other shafts in the area while company-wide those who had reached their age were able to get into early retirement, co-financed to a large extent by the State and Federal Governments (Seidel 2013: 499 ff., 511). Finally, the role of workers' representation on the basis of the 1951 Co-Determination Act in the Mining, Iron and Steel Industries (*Montanmitbestimmung*) was underscored. Workers' representatives were offered co-directorial positions on all management boards of the new company down to all its subdivisions (labour directors) and single collieries (directors for personnel and social issues/PS directors), thus also strengthening the role of works councils, shop stewards and other forms of labour participation in both long-term planning and day-to-day business (Ranft 1988).

The trade union's role in this key act of restructuring the coal industry is preeminent in all interviews undertaken with workers and workers' representatives, in particular (unsurprisingly) in the narratives of IGBE officials from the generation that consciously witnessed the founding period of RAG. As the first step towards constructively tackling the economic crisis of mining, the establishment of this unified combine is not just narrated as the starting point for the long-term policy of social responsibility but also as a demonstration of the rational superiority of the trade union over the vested interests and market-liberal competitiveness of the companies. As Klaus Südhofer, a former deputy head of the IGBE, remembers:

> *[…] rather than being an instrument to secure mining for all eternity, the founding of Ruhrkohle was initially meant to be an instrument to prevent the mining companies and corporations – which were not just active in coal mining but included steel and what have you, chemical industries, real estates and hell knows what – to prevent those from killing each other. Because that's what had happened before the founding of Ruhrkohle (Interview Südhofer).*

Helmut Heith, a former regional division secretary, has a similar view. He points out that of the various emergency plans

> *none materialised. And then it was the IGBE who made up a plan from scratch for Ruhrkohle to be a unified corporation and tried to push it through. Our luck at the time was that we had a government willing to cooperate with us. [Karl] Schiller was Minister of Economy, [IGBE head] Adolf Schmidt was Helmut Schmidt's deputy whip in the Bundestag and had some influence, so we could win over some decisive politicians for our plan. And in the end, I always say we have been the main actors in the founding of Ruhrkohle as a unified*

> *combine. Not everyone agrees, but it doesn't really matter. What matters is that it was brought to life in the end (Interview Heith).*[5]

This emphasis on rational politics and decision-making is closely linked to the character of RAG as an agent for social security and responsible action. Slightly younger than Südhofer and Heith, Norbert Formanski, a long-term chairman of the works council at the Westerholt colliery in Herten, underlines this:

> *Shortly after I finished my apprenticeship, the first discussions about closures started. […] And after the establishment of Ruhrkohle, after 1969, when the trade unions and co-determination played a key role, the whole thing was channelled more effectively. […] We still had to reduce employment numbers, but Adolf Schmidt, our union chief, […] coined the term "We won't succeed in bringing a complete hold of mine closures. But we have to succeed in letting not a single miner fall into the void." He coined this term: no miner was to fall into the void, was to be left behind; no one was to be forced to go to the labour office and claim benefits. […] Those colleagues who have reached the age will go home with a good retirement scheme. And this was the principle which made the miners keep calm – despite the fact that jobs were effectively destroyed and that pits were closed down (Interview Formanski).*

Claiming the establishment of RAG as their very achievement while at the same time alleging the incapability of the coal companies to develop a constructive form of crisis management, such trade union testimonies fit well with what Knud Andresen has called "narratives of triumph" (Andresen 2014). In his work on steel and metal workers' trade unionists, he observes that his interviewees often frame their stories as ambiguous victories in which, despite all struggles and potential defeats, they turn out as winners. The IGBE officials' view of RAG is a case in point. However, with regard to later developments of sustaining what had been achieved, particularly in terms of social security measures for mine workers, the tone rather changes from triumph to a mode of tragic heroism.

Especially with the turn from a Social-Democratic/Liberal coalition to Helmut Kohl's Christian/Liberal government, recurring debates about accelerating the shrinkage of production and employment numbers triggered ongoing protests and at the same time forced trade unionists and workers' representatives to use all their skills and tactics of negotiation to keep the status quo as far as possible. Agreements between the government on the one hand and the mining company as well as the IGBE on the other were challenged and declared inefficient on a regular basis. Renegotiation talks were called in by the government every few years – in 1983, 1988, 1991, 1995 and 1997. (Seidel 2013; Farrenkopf et al. 2009: 422 ff.). This constant pressure forced the workers' representatives to actively participate in a politics they were actually opposed to but felt pressed to partake in to ensure as much as possible the commitment to a socially responsible shrinking.

5 Adolf Schmidt was actually elected as an MP in 1972. His predecessor as IGBE head, Walter Arendt, became Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in 1969, but was still in his trade union capacity when the plans for RAG were drawn up.

As a member of the executive board of Ruhrkohle in the capacity of a workers' representative, Wilhelm Beermann remembers the debates about the employment numbers that had to be cut in 1987:

> *12,000 employees had to be reduced in a socially responsible way. I mention this as it was my responsibility and I was directly concerned. […] And then during the meeting of the supervisory board – I still remember the numbers because I was so angry about it – I had to report that out of the planned 12,000 we had reached 11,806. And even that was criticised because we hadn't reached the full number! […] And I told them to contrast this with the public outcry for the Rheinhausen steel plant [which was closed down that year under heavy protest, S.M.] where 5,500 people were laid off. 5,500 was the average number for us every year – and always socially responsible. And this has to be noted: this was a great achievement of the people involved – a great achievement of the shop stewards and works councils who participated, a great achievement for the IGBE (Interview Beermann I).*

The scale of redundancy and the simultaneous insistence on social security measures make this both heroic and tragic at the same time. Giving in to redundancy, here, was a tragic necessity, entwined, however, with an ostensive pride in maintaining the previous consensus of social responsibility against the attacks mainly from the political sphere.

This constellation repeated itself in the following years, often paired with protests and campaigns spreading all over the coalfields. The most prevalent in the majority of interviews are the negotiations in 1997 when the Kohl government planned to reduce state subsidies to such a degree that out of the 85,000 miners still active in the German coalfields 60,000 would have been laid off by 2005. The established system of younger miners moving on to other collieries in case of pit closure and early retirements making way for these transfers would have been sharply overstretched. Threatened by such perspectives, a host of protest forms was enacted all over the Ruhr and the smaller coal regions. Most visibly, in February 1997, when the total scale of cuts was not already clear, 200,000 people formed a human chain spanning 100 kilometres from east to west throughout the Ruhr region. Following news of the full government plans, the protests raised sharper demands and culminated in 30,000 miners from the Ruhr and Saar regions occupying the government quarters in Bonn. The negotiations and protests resulted in an easing of the initial plans, yet seven more mines than had been decided just two years earlier were to close by 2005 (Moitra 2012: 232 ff.). Thus, the old *Sozialverträglichkeit* was rescued but not without increasing the pressure on the colliery workforces and not without leaving huge future gaps for employment in places where pits ceased operation.

Klaus Südhofer, who was part of the negotiation team of the IGBE, remembers the end of the talks after the tense weeks of protest:

> *And then came the hardest thing: going out and announcing the result. The managers did not do it. We did. But despite all hardship, in the end it was a success, nonetheless, because nobody fell into the void and got unemployed. And everything was set to be downsized in an orderly manner. But it was not*

> *nice. […] The response was not easy, but we said, "Well this is it. It could have been worse." – And it would have been worse! (Interview Südhofer).*

Again, there is a mode of tragic heroism at play, pointing out the trade unionists' role in taking the challenge to announce an outcome not ideal but ascertaining the minimum requirements of social security by avoiding sudden mass unemployment.

The flipside to this is a discourse of pragmatism when talking about the established procedures of managing closure, the transfer of workers and sending people into early retirement. While the memories of struggling for *Sozialverträglichkeit* are highly emotionalised by the trade unionists, their narratives of setting the according measures into motion implicate a thrust of unavoidable necessity vis-a-vis the workers they represented. In contrast to the high times of political negotiation, when trade union officials and workers' representatives acted as vocal mediators for the workers' interests, it was particularly the shop stewards and directors for personnel and social issues (PS directors) on the colliery levels who had to switch their perspective in the everyday business of staff reduction. They acted as the people most visibly responsible for implementing the decided measures. Yet, as far as these were perceived in a manner of 'normalcy', all sides were ready to accept them. As Wilhelm Beermann points out with respect to closures and its consequences: "Such decisions don't fall from the sky, and they are not taken from one minute to the next." Rather, the cooperative practice of all actors involved was supposed to create a certain transparency and trust.

> *If I close down a colliery or announce the closure at a time when it's not clear for the employees affected what the future will bring […], then fear and unease and "what will the family say?" will lead to a fiercer opposition than if it's done […] at a time when you already have an effective social and political instrument at hand (Interview Beermann II).*

It was the routines such instruments engendered which provided a structure for all sides involved to go along. For Peter Ermlich, former PS director at two collieries on the western fringe of the Ruhr, this was a factor in building up trust between the workers and those in charge of the transfer or retraining programmes.

> *If there is no trust, then no one will believe that I'm really sincere, I as the company, I as trade union, I as shop steward, I as member of the management board, as underground supervisor, I as a colleague. The whole thing is built on trust. I don't mean to say it was all sunshine and roses, but trying to convince people didn't exactly mean to pressure them either (Interview Ermlich).*

Thus, the trade unionists' and workers' representatives' pride in establishing the basic conditions for social responsibility from the start and struggling to keep them alive over five decades is closely interlinked with the converse memories of "convincing" workers, as Peter Ermlich phrases it, of the necessity of the related staff reduction programmes. The underlying tension this implies is stated openly by Faruk Özdemir, a shop steward from the Saar region, who had to co-organise the (comparatively ex-

ceptional) transfer of Saar miners to the Ibbenbüren colliery, 450 kilometres to the north:

> *You had to take responsibility for things basically not your fault. But in this moment, your colleague can't go see the PS director all the time to discuss his problems, but he could come see you every day. […] And basically, you were always reminded of what was happening around you, all the destitution and pain. Sadly (Interview Özdemir).*

"Nobody falls into the void" – Miners Coping with Staff Reduction and Early Retirement

While for the actors of co-determination the grand narrative of mining decline seems to be shaped by articulations of pride in keeping up *Sozialverträglichkeit*, there are considerable undercurrents, too, about the problems with executing staff reduction and dealing with pressures that early retirement and retraining programmes meant for many. Such moments of ambiguity become even more apparent when listening to the corresponding memory collectives of miners who were subjected to such measures. The ambivalence about retiring early is already present in Herbert Hötzel's narrative, quoted in the beginning, who experienced the process as early as the 1970s. Before and after Ruhrkohle was being established, with the first retirement schemes set into practice, many coal miners also sought employment elsewhere voluntarily, as Reinhold Adam, a former electrician and shop steward at the Nordstern mine in Gelsenkirchen, remembers:

> *Many left the mines, particularly the skilled craftsmen, to go to Leverkusen, to the Bayer plants, or to the Opel car factory that had been opened at a former mining site in Bochum in the early sixties. So there was a lack of skilled workers, particularly electricians – which is why I retrained, and after two years, in 1966, I became a mine electrician (Interview Adam).*

Paradoxically, at this stage, the crisis of the industry led to a new demand in labour which was even mirrored in the recruitment of migrant workers from southern Europe and further afield (Rieker 2003; Hunn 2005: 218 ff.; Seidel 2014: 39).

As many testimonies indicate, the pressure on workers and employees increased in the 1980s and 1990s. Even as a head supervisor, Manfred Reis from the town of Kamp-Lintfort remembers anxieties shared by colleagues across the colliery hierarchy:

> *Such existential fears were certainly present on all levels. It was not just the ordinary underground workers who were scared but everyone – supervisors, head supervisors, production managers, they were all afraid. Maybe they didn't or they were not supposed to show it openly, but they all had the same problems. And of course, you start talking to your family, like in our case, when you have to pay up your house, and you think: What happens when the pit closes? What happens next? Will you get a job with the kind of training you have? (Interview Reis).*

Worries such as these were grounded in the everyday experience most miners faced. Part of this, for instance, was the constant cycle of being forced to move to a new colliery once a pit was closed down. This was, on the one hand, a constructive manner of crisis management to avoid unemployment. On the other hand, however, the adjusting to new working environments every few years proved to be difficult for many. As a colliery director in Kamp-Lintfort, Karl-Heinz Stenmans had to organise several mergers between neighbouring pits while also integrating staff from other collieries from farther away. He remembers the changing mood when a "family pit" such as his, shaped by close-knit work communities, had to adjust to the new situation:

> *All this changed after merging with the Rheinland colliery. The teams were completely reshuffled, people did not know who they were supposed to know when they had to deal with each other – maybe this was reduced to just phoning or e-mail correspondence. […] The atmosphere changed, and it was difficult to catch up with it. In hindsight, it took three, four, five years. […] But then, in the meantime, the Hugo colliery, or Ewald/Hugo, in Gelsenkirchen was closed down and we got staff from Ewald/Hugo. Then we got personnel from Walsum. So, the reshuffling continued. […] In 2001, when we merged with the Niederberg colliery, 800 men entered our workforce at one go (Interview Stenmans).*

Problems arising from such fusions did not just concern potential individual problems, for instance, commuting longer distances, but "certainly the defending of positions" on all levels (Interview Stenmans). Thus, merging collieries and integrating personnel from closed pits into existing workforces also led to a heightened competition between old and new employees regarding the allocation of authority and responsibilities.

From the point of view of someone who was subjected to this process of merging collieries as a system of staff reduction, Stefan Ferdinand from Herten describes it as an experience of constant readjustment. He started training as a mine mechanic at the Schlägel & Eisen mine in 1980. Ten years on, his colliery merged with the Ewald mine to form Ewald/Schlägel & Eisen, just to merge again in 1997 into Ewald/Hugo. Two years later, one year before Ewald/Hugo was set to close down, Ferdinand was moved to the Prosper/Haniel shafts in Bottrop (and eventually left the mining industry). For him,

> *every merger was a catastrophe, mentally. The idea to change yet again and again. When you are used to your working life and you don't know what's going to happen, right? That's the problem. […] It was as if you lost your second home. It really felt good being at Schlägel, at Ewald a little less so, at Ewald/Hugo even lesser. But your original pit was, as I said, it was a piece of home, right, you grew up there (Interview Ferdinand).*

Prosper/Haniel, in contrast, was perceived as a "completely different pit" with "a completely different mentality":

> *I didn't really get friendly with anyone there. The camaraderie as I knew it didn't exist there. […] You didn't know anyone. You were there for a year, but somehow you couldn't warm up to anybody, you hardly spoke to the guys. They didn't seem to want it – which was totally incomprehensible for me. So it was a completely different mentality (Interview Ferdinand).*

Besides these experiences of adjusting to new working environments as a consequence of closure and of the subsequent moving of workforces, since the mid-1990s, miners also faced a greater pressure from their company to retrain and find employment outside the mining sector. For RAG, this was an outcome of the recent political negotiations and the government's unwillingness to keep up the previous levels of subsidising the industry. Qualified foremen and supervisors in particular were actively encouraged to look for jobs elsewhere, either in the form of official letters from the management "not enforcing but proposing" a change (Interview Ferdinand), or in formal interviews in which head supervisors informed their staff of the support programmes to be expected when they attempted to find a suitable position – half-jokingly called "get-lost-interviews" (Interview Kellermann). A key element was the so-called "trades' initiative" (*Handwerkerinitiative*) which gave miners the opportunity to undergo a trial phase of six months with a new employer, during which time RAG continued to pay the bulk of the wages. The ambiguity of such an endeavour, both in practice and in the ways in which it is remembered, might be taken as an indicator for the mode of urgency in which the coal industry sought to reduce employment numbers while at the same time avoiding actual unemployment. Firstly, and this is something anecdotally narrated by a number of interviewees, many potential employers seemed to take advantage of the situation and used the miners as cheap temporary employees.

> *I had two friends who went through this. One worked at a rail manufacturer – or they did fittings for rail carriages. And it was exactly like that. Work, work, work, even doing overtime, and this and that. And then on the last day, the day of days: "No, Christian, you don't really match." And it was like, three days later the next man from the colliery turned up. This was often the case (Interview Kellermann).*

According to Frank Taubert, a miner from Ahlen, the majority of those who tried it returned from the trades' initiative. However, even if the move to the new job did work out, fears of uncertainty abounded. One of Taubert's colleagues

> *started with a manufacturer for window profiles, and he is there to this day. And he made it through the trades' initiative. But many didn't. Many people I know of were unemployed for years, just kept their head above the water and struggled to exist. […] It's not easy starting in a new firm. Yes, a miner is a miner – he can do anything. But in the end, if the company is in trouble, say, if there is a lack of customer demand, then the best firm has to lay off people. And the one who came in last has to go first. That's the way it is (Interview Taubert).*

For the daily practice underground, in any case, the drain of experienced and skilled personnel, resulting from both the stronger incentives to leave and the ongoing early retirement policy, led to a loss of practical knowledge. As Reinhold Adam remembers:

> *The older ones go into early retirement and the younger ones go to the next mine. So what's the result? You get some sort of Olympic team underground – 32 years on average and all healthy and fit. And what's the consequence? At some point they realised there was a lack of experience. What are they doing differently? What are they doing wrong? Decades of experience were gone. And I sometimes have to think of [Minister] von der Leyen who once said, […] "The young run faster, but the old know a short cut." And that's just the way it was (Interview Adam).*

Thus, even though the accelerated process of shrinking the mining industry continued to follow the principle of social responsibility, the pressures resulting from it had an impact on the organisation of the shop floor as well as on the ways in which workers and employees perceived their changing work environments. In contrast to the semantic persuasiveness of *Sozialverträglichkeit*, which had to be struggled for time and again on the political level and engendered a unifying force among employees and their representatives, the practical enactment of workforce reduction, though framed as following social responsibility, entailed constant uncertainties for many miners with regard to their role, function and future in constantly transforming workplaces.

The call for mutual trust, as articulated by company officials and trade unionists, was somewhat discredited under these circumstances. Rather than trust, feelings of abandonment and being treated inappropriately took hold. This is illustrated in Jörg-Uwe Trappmann's description of going into early retirement. Having started his working life at the Minister Stein colliery in Dortmund in 1975, Trappmann ended his career at Prosper/Haniel in Bottrop in 2009. Contrary to his own feelings of the last shift as a decisive moment, he still seems disappointed with the way the pit management handled the occasion. While in the past even every work jubilee was appropriately "celebrated from high above", the reception now was "without emotion, even really cold, if you ask me".

> *At Prosper they brought some sandwiches and drinks, and after a quarter of an hour they said: "Well, it's nice you've been here – and now you better get going!" At least that is how I perceived it. I don't know whether it was meant like this, but it wasn't nice. It was shite (Interview Trappmann).*

Notwithstanding this official part, the closer circle of colleagues from his underground unit had a "proper farewell" for everyone retiring that year, which, in contrast, was "lovely, really great and emotional, to be honest". The established ties among colleagues and co-workers had remained intact, apparently, while there were visible ruptures in the relationship between the management, including the PS directors as workers' representatives, and the lower ranks of the colliery. The feeling of neglect and lacking recognition implied here corresponds with the reaction to measures of workforce reduction more generally, such as the policy of the "get-lost-interviews".

Rather than celebrating work and working lives, as Trappman mentions in the work jubilees, the current company strategy seemed to be solely concerned with getting rid of workers. The older principles of production and underground work, which had determined all relations in colliery life before, appeared to be obsolete.

Nonetheless, even beyond this crucial date of the last shift, the self-images of those retiring largely continued to be shaped by the experiences and moral economies of their working lives in the pit. There were certainly ambiguities as to the interpretation of retirement, between liberation and nostalgia as in Herbert Hötzel's memories; and more generally, such ambivalences are not unique to the mining industry (McIvor 2013: 266 ff.). But the particular values of underground work, such as efficiency, productivity, and a sense of camaraderie and solidarity, could be felt as a burden if there was too much time at hand in the new phase of life:

> *Well, I got myself a dog. And then you walk the dog. And then, you see, I was 52 […]. And then, on my way I ran into road workers or builders. And they are even older than yourself. And you're having a walk with your dog, you're having a walk while they have to sweat. So I felt ashamed. I feel ashamed. I really felt ashamed. As a young guy, at 52. Today they work at the age of 65, some even 70. But I was 52, right? […] Mostly I tried to hide when I encountered a group of fellows who were working while I was walking the dog. Somehow, somehow, I couldn't cope with this situation (Interview Volmerig).*

Reinhold Adam narrates this clashing between internalised work ethics and the apparent loss of a meaningful role in two steps, first humorously, as a clash between traditional gender roles:

> *Many wives said: "When my husband stays at home, I'll divorce him." So what was the problem? The old man had been working at the colliery for the last 35, 40 years. Now he's at home, and he starts to rationalise everything and tell his wife how thick she has to cut the cheese, how she has to do the shopping. And she used to be the boss before. So this was difficult (Interview Adam).*

This is followed by the bleaker observation that

> *many couldn't cope with the situation, psychologically. I know many who turned to alcohol or to gambling or suchlike things because they had nothing to kill their time with. Or they just kept looking out of the window (Interview Adam).*

Adam relinks this to the broader issue of defining *Sozialverträglichkeit* and social responsibility. With early retirement as a key instrument of the coal industry's long-term crisis management, he makes the crucial distinction that "it was not social security" that the miners benefited from, but "people were financially secured". This more critical view is echoed in many miners' narratives. In a broader perspective, however, the *Sozialverträglichkeit* model is absolved when compared with structural change and deindustrialisation elsewhere. Jörg-Uwe Trappmann – who himself sums up the

ambiguity of early retirement pointedly in remarking, "pension at 50 sounds great, but it was total crap" – brings in such a more comprehensive perspective:

> *In any case, this slow transformation was, in my opinion, better than the abrupt change as it happened in England. Everything would be dead here, there'd be nothing new then. Everything would be in ruins, I guess. You've seen it too in America, in the various steel towns. Whole cities have been destroyed. I think this socially coherent, responsible shrinking in the last 30, 40 years was a good thing. Whether it was financially okay, I don't know. But we have paid money for so much crap – I thought it was a justified investment into the Ruhr region. I think we have deserved it. […] I don't think everything would be still intact here had they acted otherwise (Interview Trappmann).*

Conclusion

Trappmann's remark about the ultimate social value of financing structural change over five decades addresses the heart of the tripartite attempt to manage the gradual contraction of the mining industry. In the thrust for consensus, the coal miners and their trade union, the RAG as the major remaining company as well as the regional and federal governments, all had to participate in and agree to the long-term politics of pit closure and staff reduction. In this context, the idea of *Sozialverträglichkeit* constituted a powerful discursive framework for all to set this shrinkage into practice as "a just investment". The stability of this constellation of interests, however, had to be re-strengthened in the course of changing political environments. The moral appeal which social responsibility entailed was put under threat once market-driven ideas took hold with the Christian-Liberal government in the 1980s and 90s. In the memory narratives of the mining trade unionists this is reflected as a change from triumph to tragic heroism. The establishment of Ruhrkohle/RAG is remembered as a monument to the constructive will of the trade union to come to an accord between economic forces and the workers' interests, an ability to solve an economic crisis against the seemingly irrational actions of the big coal and steel corporations. Yet in view of the faltering political will to further subsidise the industry, despite a pace of shrinking that was mutually agreed before, workers' participation and co-determination (*Mitbestimmung*), the legal recognition of which had been a major achievement of the post-war West German labour movement (Milert/Tschirbs 2012), effectively became instruments of accelerating industrial contraction. Securing a downsizing of collieries "in an orderly manner" while accepting heightened pressures on their workforces became a tragic burden for workers' representatives to carry.

Those carrying the consequences of such developments, the miners at the colliery level, show ambiguous reactions towards these forms of crisis management. Practical problems in adjusting to new work environments when they were moved to new pits but also feelings of being treated wrongly and unjustly neglected by the company – rather than by politics or the trade union – disclose different understandings of what was acceptable as socially responsible and fair. Here, as in the recollections of struggling with the imposition of early retirement, mine workers' memories reveal what Raymond Williams has called a "residual structure of feeling" within a lifeworld transforming (Williams 1977: 121 ff.). Notwithstanding the apparent inevitability of

the coal industry's shrinkage, the miners' self-positioning continued to be shaped by values and work ethics adopted in the old industrial framework. In this set of relations, however, they were increasingly marginalised, as both their industry and the work they were doing were in the process of becoming obsolete. In spite of such disruptions, Trappmann's last quote indicates a further moment of understanding the end of the mining industry. The dominant pillar of hegemonic memory, "Nobody falls into the void", remains intact even though it is interlinked with other, more negative narratives of collective experience. Or, using Klaus Südhofer's words: had it not been for the politics of *Sozialverträglichkeit*, it "could have been worse – and it would have been worse".

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Abstract

The history of the West German coal mining industry since the late 1950s can be seen as a story of industrial decline and at the same time as a success story for a corporatist politics of "social responsibility". The mining trade union together with the state and the companies all participated in sustaining a mode of shrinkage that allowed to avoid sudden mass unemployment and keep up a slow fading of the industry over six decades. This process, however, was a matter of constant re-negotiation. Calling on the principle of social responsibility constituted a crucial element in the moral economy of industrial decline. Yet the state's structural and financial support for the mining communities went along with changing work environments and increased pressures for the mine workers. This article juxtaposes the memories of shop stewards, trade union officials and other workers' representatives who had to negotiate such terms of industrial change with the narratives of mine workers and employees subjected to these measures. It asks for the extent to which the narratives and interpretations of mine closure overlap or differ for these two memory collectives.

The Trauma of a Non-Traumatic Decline

Narratives of Deindustrialisation in Asturian Mining: The HUNOSA Case

Irene Díaz Martínez

Introduction – Asturias as a Deindustrialised Region

Taking the case of the Hulleras del Norte Sociedad Anónima (HUNOSA), which comprised the state-owned mining industry in the Spanish region of Asturias, this article addresses the memory of deindustrialisation in Asturias in the last three decades. In doing so, I will use oral narratives compiled in three connected projects dedicated to industrial decline in Asturias (conducted 1994–1996), narratives of youth living conditions in the Asturian Coal Basins (2004–2006), and of work cultures, memory, and identity in the context of deindustrialisation (from 2013).[1]

To some extent, Asturias seems to be an exception from the stereotype of a deindustrialising region as mainly described in the English-language literature about the subject. Comparatively good living conditions, low crime rates, good educational levels, including a high ratio of university degrees, plus high, though questionable, investment into local and regional infrastructures seem to make Asturias stand out. Foreign – or even Spanish – visitors of Asturian towns and villages, especially in places where industry weighed heavily in the past, are often surprised by the tranquillity and leisurely atmosphere – Asturias has a high proportion of "chigres" (local taverns) – and by the exuberant nature. "Natural Paradise" has been a motto for decades to promote tourism in the region. Even when focusing on the Coal Basins more particularly ("Les Cuenques" in the Asturian language), this overall impression does not differ too much.[2] New residential blocks, boulevards, refurbishments, and/or the gentrification of historical city centres seem to chime with the steady restoration of industrial spaces now out of use.

In contrast to the tranquil surface, however, if anything has taken root in the collective imagery of the Asturian people, it is the deep crisis the whole region is suffering from. Facing high unemployment rates, lack of expectations for the youth, and

1 Oral testimonies are deposited in the Archivo de Fuentes Orales para la Historia Social de Asturias (AFOHSA), https://www.unioviedo.es/AFOHSA/ (22.07.2020).

2 Coal pits in Asturias concentrate around two river basins: in the inner western, the anthracite mining industry surrounds the Narcea River, and, in the centre of the region, the Central Coal Basin joins the rivers Nalón and Caudal as well as the cities of Langreo and Mieres. These towns, much more directly tied to both the mining and steel industries, were the places where the Asturian industrial take-off first took place and exerted a strong social, political, and economic influence up to the very end of the 20th century. The very notion of the Mining Basins (Les Cuenques) often centres on the Nalón and Caudal Valleys with Langreo and Mieres, but we should consider that there are around 20 mining towns in Asturias altogether.

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demographic change, this is as much a material crisis as it is one of values. The post-industrial condition is entangled with issues of identity as well as with the corruption and the exploitation of public funds which both leading political parties as well as the trade unions are embroiled in. Furthermore, there is an environmental aspect to the crisis as the long-term consequences of industrial activity are mirrored in high pollution ratios which affect soil, water, and atmosphere and increase the spread of several pollutant-related types of cancer.

These symptoms define the Asturias of the last few decades. The impact of the crisis and the decline of all industrial sectors that used to shape the Asturian economy, its identity, and its politics are undeniable, both on a statistical level and in regard to public perception, whether they are articulated by voices from below or from political authorities and social agents. The Coal Basin seems ridden by a "permanent crisis" (Lillo 1978) ravishing the region and by a sheer lack of hope for the future.

Measures to balance the social consequences of dismantling the coal industry, such as early retirement schemes and the promotion of investment into alternative industries, sought to minimise the social and economic impact of pit closures and tried to offer prospects for the future. In choosing the lesser evil in the face of an apparently inevitable process of deindustrialisation, political leaders as well as trade unionists frequently claim such instruments as signs for a successful policy of avoiding a more traumatic mode of change. Yet, this markedly contrasts with the more ambiguous memories of decline. Reactions vary from apathy to vindication of the past (and present) and materialise in cultural creations that address the loss of collective identities tied to work in the coalfields, even implying a fragile resignification of a regional identity as mining communities without miners.

Decline as Cultural Trauma

As a key to approach the impact of industrial decline in Asturias, the concept of cultural trauma provides a good framework of understanding. Following Ring et al., cultural trauma can be understood as a discursive response to a break in the social network that happens when profound changes shake the foundations of collective identity. The discourse that results from this process could be analysed as a struggle for meaning in which individual and collective actors try to define and make sense of a situation. A central aspect of cultural trauma is the collective attempt to identify the causes of suffering, of those responsible (and to blame them), and search for possible solutions. It also implies the constant working on discursive practices of memory and collective identity in a struggle to determine what is considered traumatic (Ring/Eyerman/Madigan 2017: 13 f.). From a slightly different angle, Jeffrey Alexander understands cultural trauma as a collective loss of identity. The traumatic experience threatens the community's sense of orientation and challenges the individuals' sense of who they are, where they come from and where they want to go. The deterioration of identity goes hand in hand with trauma (Alexander 2003: 85).

Along with the notion of cultural trauma, E.P. Thompson's concept of moral economy provides a further instrument to comprehend the memory narratives analysed in the following more fully. Conceived here as a mechanism to balance the functioning of the community and confront grievance or external pressure, the concept of moral economy is useful to explain the reactions of mining communities – in

Asturias as elsewhere – when they face the menace of disappearing (Strangleman 2017: 466 ff.). The particular moral economy of the Asturian coalfield was addressed, for instance, when the HUNOSA company talked of pit closure for the first time in 1991. A motto such as "if there's reconversionv, there will be revolution" (Piñeiro 2008: 348) directly alluded to the historical image of the miners' working-class radicalism and combativeness. More recently, the moral economy of the Coal Basin was underscored by the "Coal Women Collective". Their reinterpretation of the protest repertoires of miners was part of their campaigns and rallies that denounced how the end of mining would bring to a halt the lives of their families and would destroy all future perspectives for the Coal Basins (Sanz 2017: 92). One of the banners prominently used in their marches was revealing in its double meaning: "Closing pits without offering any alternative is violence"; this could be understood strictly in a sense of industrial struggle, but also as alluding to the threat of increased domestic violence in the context of pit closure and unemployment.

The sense of threat to a community's moral economy, to its heritage and construction of identity that seems to be in the very process of being fundamentally altered, is further entangled with what Raymond Williams has called the "structure of feeling". As David Byrne has pointed out, feelings that inform and build "ways of life", not just from the individual's but from a collective point of view, last for longer than industry itself and can function as an element of cohesion (Byrne 2002: 279 ff.). However, we also have to be cautious not to be trapped by "smokestack nostalgia" (Strangleman 2013: 23 ff.).

Following these conceptual considerations, the analysis of cultural trauma with regard to the coal mining communities of Asturias will have to identify some of the key elements so distinctive for the regional mining culture and follow the ways in which these are both enshrined in the past and obtain new meanings or are completely under threat in the context of decline. At the same time, the wider Asturian context has to be taken into account. As much as the regional mining communities struggle with the fundamental change of their livelihood, the political measures to soften the social consequences of pit closure contrast starkly with the rough modes of deindustrialisation applied to other sectors of industry within the region (Köhler 1996: 87 ff.). This is also a reminder that – although the discursive struggle with the trauma of industrial decline is crucial and the engagement with memories and oral testimonies provides a necessary and complementary look onto feelings of uncertainty, pessimism, or resignation – we should not forget the structural level and the material causes and consequences in the context of which the structural transformation of deindustrialisation has taken place. Thus, economic and social analysis cannot simply be replaced (La Capra 2003: 15).

HUNOSA: Much More Than Just a Company

HUNOSA has a history quite particular in the context in which it was established as a company as well as on its road towards closure. Established in 1967, the Hulleras del Norte Sociedad Anónima was primarily an instrument to avoid the collapsing of all private mining companies that had been set up since the 1940s in the wake of Francoist politics of economic autarchy (Piñeiro 1990: 19 ff.). State ownership provided a means of socialising economic losses while at the same time it was an attempt to buy

"social peace" and silence mining communities who were increasingly vocal in opposing the regime amidst the harshest repressive policies applied by the dictatorship. As a core of the coal-producing towns and villages, HUNOSA became the main economic, social, and even cultural engine in the entire area of the Coal Basins (Díaz 2013: 149 ff.). Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the company's founding act in 2017, the economist Juan Vázquez, born and raised in the Coal Basins and rector of the University of Oviedo from 2000 to 2008, wrote:

> *This place, this environment and this time allow me to think about the birth of HUNOSA (perhaps an unwanted pregnancy?). Its growth to maturity, its adult years and its slow demise have always been framed as the chronicle of a death foretold and a life miraculously stretched. I could confirm that by impregnating all tissues of economic, social and cultural life in the region, HUNOSA, much more than being a company, represented a way of living, a style, a mode of production and an image of Asturias that will remain for posterity and that won't be erased for a very long time (http://juanvazquez.es/, accessed 01.12.2016).*

The role assigned to the company, silently accepted in the Coal Basins, conditioned and set the pace for its phased and – in comparison – socially balanced mode of shrinking in terms of budget and workforce. Yet, the social impact which the company had and the broad social and cultural array it offered to the mining communities was hardly covered by these measures. The trade unions had made a fortress of working-class unionism out of the state-owned coal company, a characteristic that strengthened over time and presented a major point of reference for all mining communities in the Asturian coalfield. After the acceptance of Spain as a full member of the European Union in 1986, the role of the state as guarantor for the losses generated by the company was put at risk. Since then, every turn of the screw applied to the sector was met by campaigns which drew on the protest repertoires present in the collective memory about the working class revolution of 1934 and the great strikes of 1962 – icons of struggle that gave social legitimacy to the current protests and implicitly made reference to the moral debt owed to the miners on a national level, as Asturias had not only been the cradle of the working class movement in Spain but had also always generated wealth for the rest of the country (Erice 2013: 585 ff.).

The settling of the "coal question" in the form of a phased, socially cushioned contraction of the industry that would somewhat preserve the coal region without collieries and miners was to a large extent drawing on this historical debt. At the same time, the miners' readiness for mobilisation put direct pressure on the political actors, all amidst the context of Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy. Early retirement schemes and designated subsidies were meant to be tools aiming to secure a future for the Coal Basins. These different layers of understanding the downsizing of the coal industry culminated in the dramatic events of 1991 which did indeed become manifest in the collective memory as trauma unfolded – the underground occupation of the Barredo colliery by the main trade union leaders on Christmas Eve. This act of resistance did not end in victory, but resulted in the ambiguous Future Plan for HUNOSA, signed a few months later, which for the first time and without potential loopholes set the agenda for pit closure and major cuts in the workforce (SADEI

1990).[3] In an outstanding work on the mining section of the CCOO trade union, historian Ramon G. Piñeiro describes the 1991 protest as the end of an age: "The Barredo occupation and the subsequent mode of resignation in the face of the unavoidable put an end to a cycle that had begun with the 1934 revolution" (Piñeiro 2008: 448).

This article deals with the period that followed those 1991 events, the consequences of which can be felt until the very present. By 31st December 2018, all coal mines unable to keep up production without public subsidies were closed. For the Asturian coal industry this means that all three pits that HUNOSA still maintains were closed. Even if that does not imply the demise of HUNOSA itself, as the company has been developing a policy of diversification over the last 20 years, it has undoubtedly put an end to a tradition of almost two centuries of coal extraction in Asturias.

Due to the geological conditions that hampered the mechanisation of the pits and the mediocre quality of Asturian coal, these 200 years can be considered as a continued structural crisis with only short periods during which coal mining was profitable, primarily due to external and exceptional circumstances: During World War I, in which Spain remained neutral, coal prices rose, thus making Asturian coal a lucrative business. Asturian coal experienced a boom when the autarchy policy decreed by Franco reinforced the extraction of Spanish coal. The swan song for the Asturian coal mines came when the 1973 petrol crisis raised the global prices for energy, which caused even the young HUNOSA, which had only been established six years earlier, to make timid plans to adjust its production to the rising competitiveness of the sector (Santullano 1978). It is crucial to take the endemic nature of the Asturian coal industry's weak economic position into account in order to fully understand the ways in which firstly private entrepreneurs aimed to make profits from it and how then, in the context of the Francoist dictatorship, merely cosmetic operations were applied to maintain social stability in the region. This was how the private coal mines and, since 1967, HUNOSA itself were able to survive during the 1939–1975 period (Vázquez 1994: 561 ff.). Once democracy was regained, all governments, regardless of their ideology, continued boosting HUNOSA with public funding and plans to heighten the company's competitiveness, which all resulted in one failure after another. Oversized and mechanised too late, it was evident that the Asturian mines were not competitive or profitable when Spain entered the European Economic Union (Piñeiro 2008: 21 ff.). European regulations, then, urged the Spanish government to either find solutions for the domestic mining industry to function without state subsidies or to proceed with dissolving the industry along the lines previously set with regard to coal mining in France, Germany, and Belgium (Vázquez/del Rosal 1999: 219 ff.).

In the spring of 1992, and after harsh mobilisations, the "Future Plan for HUNOSA" was finally signed. This marked a turning point for the Asturian mining communities from a precarious hope for the future to resignation. However, this does not imply a lack of previous signals on the actual state of the industry's perspectives. Popular initiatives had already been addressing the critical position of the coal sector since the 1970s, when the steel industry as a crucial interlinking sector went into crisis. In a context of political prosecution and repression against civil freedoms, a cross-class alliance such as "Iniciativas del Valle del Nalón" managed to gather 3,000

3 The Plan de Empresa began in 1992 with the closure of the first 11 out of 23 coal pits that HUNOSA had at that time, with a parallel cut in workforce from a maximum of 26,294 in 1970 to 12,286 in 1993.

people in a public demonstration to protest against deindustrialisation. A call to mobilisation under the contemporary sports slogan "we count on you!" in 1970 or a massive demonstration held in Mieres in 1976 to protest against industrial dismantlement underscore the already prevalent regional fears of the threat of structural change. The same happened in 1987, when, at last in the context of democracy, a massive strike paralysed the whole coalfield and was supported all over the rest of Asturias. In 1991, more than 100,000 people took to the streets of Oviedo, the Asturian capital, demanding solutions to the crisis (Díaz/Vega 2013: 309 ff.).

Given these earlier protests against an impending process of industrial shrinking, the question arises why it is particularly the 1990s which are usually considered to be the "beginning of the end" for the mining industry itself as well as for the communities so closely connected with it. One reason might be seen in the accelerated pace of workforce reduction taking hold since then. At the same time, a serious generational shift took place, as the occupational tradition of mining, handed down from generation to generation – which almost seemed to be part of an irrefutable destiny – stopped. Closely connected with such images was the taunting of the beneficiaries of the early retirement programmes for miners. The traditional work culture that emanated from the mining industry did not anticipate early pensioners, who were soon accordingly berated as "loafers", "betrayers", "sell-outs", or other terms that linked the loss of work with shame, loss of respectability, or the loss of social acceptance by the community (García 2006: 63 ff.). "Unioners" became a contemptuous term to identify people belonging to trade unions and even to designate the unions themselves. This epithet is frequently used in reference to the "Plan de la Minería del Carbón para la Reestructuración de las Comarcas Mineras", commonly referred to as "Mining Funds". Established in 1998 to support the restructuring of the Coal Basins, it is particularly the active role of the trade unions in the Funds that triggers criticism, accusations of mismanagement and potential corruption, or denouncement of the unions as agents of nostalgia (Erice 2002: 413 ff.).

Narratives of Deindustrialisation

Particularly in the context of a broader wave of deindustrialisation in Asturias since the 1980s, the image of mining as a profession changed from being a somewhat "demonised" job to an occupation with a precarious chance of stability. As late as in the 1970s, being a miner was regarded as completely undesirable in the wider society. Yet, at the time of the economic crisis, being part of HUNOSA seemed to promise a relatively high degree of social security. The image of mine work as harsh, hazardous labour and as an unavoidable destiny overlapped with a sense of taking pride in one's work and with the feeling of belonging to a special community. At the same time, this very community was severely threatened by the new policies of industrial restructuring. In the process of staff reduction, large numbers of highly skilled miners, experienced in the routines of extracting coal hundreds of metres underground, ended their working career in early retirement when they were still at the height of their abilities and physical strength. New employees filled the gaps where necessary, but new criteria of hiring were followed which gave preference to people from mining families, particularly in cases in which fathers or other family members had died or otherwise suffered in underground work accidents. While such practices raised suspicions of

nepotism and cronyism, especially as the trade unions played a key role in suggesting who should join the company, a main criticism from the perspective of the miners regarded the changing meanings of mine work itself:

> *What we have feared as miners is a devalorisation of the human factor, and we feel demoralised as traditional values of work have ceased to be the key to enter the mine. The mythology of underground work properly done and accomplished, of the good collier, has vanished. What matters now is just having a good job as long as possible. […] HUNOSA is the only company that provides jobs in the '80s, '90s.*

While this testimony from 1994 underscores a change in work ethic (pride in one's work, tradition, continuity, destiny), a woman working underground in 2013 emphasised that solidarity as a key value for the mining communities eroded when the shrinkage of the coal industry and the deterioration of other industries in the area led to a rise of individualism:

> *I can't any longer find that feeling of solidarity, of collective effort. It is a total crisis of values. You do not feel supported by the rest. It is not a black and white question. You ask the people of the Coal Basins for support, but when they wanted to get a job [in the mining industry], they did not get it. And then you are asking those families, "Please support me because I do not want my company to close." Then that family will probably think, "Okay, you do not want the mine to shut down, but my son did not get a job there, just so yours could get it instead." That is when solidarity collapses.*

The mining industry has always shown a strong inner cohesion that went along with a seemingly natural mode of solidarity among workers, not just underground but also in the community at large. This sense of cohesion, however, is falling apart. In a context of crumbling employment structures and neoliberal policies, even the once vilified work underground comes to be a signifier of a past social security. For the new generation, this contrasts starkly with a current experience of far-reaching uncertainty, while the toll that has historically been paid to implement social security in the mining industry is forgotten, as an interview from 2005 implies:

> *It is not that we are looking to the past. We, as young people, focus on our families, our mothers and fathers. So if I tell you, "This person has a job in the mine and his working conditions are good regarding salary, working hours, and company agreements", you will not accept less than that. Because in the past, when you turned 18, you left school and headed for the mine – where collective agreements were in place from the very first day you started. But now you get to a company […] and they say, "We're going to hire you for six hours, but you're going to work for 10, and your salary says 500, but you're going to earn 120." And you say, "Oh, no, no." And they will say, "This guy is living in the past." […] Such things did not happen to your father at HUNOSA and you don't realise that these things unfortunately happen and many of us have to cope with them.*

While their social provisions and regulations (fair salary, collective agreements that were carefully observed, fixed holidays and vacation periods) earned coal miners the reputation of being "funcionarios"[4] in the past, this legacy of social surplus pinpoints the contradictions of the new market economy rules. This plays out particularly for the younger generation who are torn between the self-image of incapability and the public image depicting them as scroungers, unwilling to work and "living in the past". Accordingly, a young woman, interviewed in 2010, points out:

> *There are two problems when you want to find a job. […] One has to do with the maladjustments of the educational and training profiles of young people to the labour market. […] The other is psychological and also regards the generational question. My father retired when he was 54. […] 90% of the people you see nowadays who are taking a stroll on a sunny day are retired. And you think, "Man, that is nice, isn't it?" because they are just 54 and they are at home. Given their age, a high percentage of them should be doing the lion's share of the work. But they are not because they feel comfortable with their early retirement pensions. So it will be more difficult for me to find a job not because I am lazy […] but because I lack the vision, the sight. In a region like this, in which most people have a mirror to look at themselves in places like the Coal Basins, a working day from eight to four, and a full month of vacation, […] we are not used to fighting.*

This new positive view of mine work and its social achievements is tinged with moments of both nostalgia and resignation. It corresponds with the thoughts of an early-retired miner who, in 2008, emphasises his urge to pass on the old values to the next generation. Just as underground work in the colliery is organised as a constant chain, he wants to see the transmission of the past into the present not to be seen as a burden but as an element to foster unity and collective claims against the excesses of the free market and its policies of flexibility that border on exploitation:

> *I am proud of belonging to a family of miners. And now more than ever because, in some way, we are losing it. We are losing our power to act together as a collective. I feel proud of belonging to a collective that protests, that fights, and that is proud of what we are. If there's anything that disappoints me about Les Cuenques, it is that we did not manage to pass our values, our origins on to the new generations. We should not forget who we are and what we did to get here. I think the transmission of our history is broken because everybody said, "My son won't go to the mine because I had a tough time there." Yes, those were hard times, and the life of a miner wasn't worth a damn, but thanks to our struggles we reached a certain status. Among all workers, miners have a special position because they earned it with blood and sweat. And thus, in the last few years it was not that hard.*

4 In Spain, a "funcionario" is a person who works for public administrations (municipal, regional, or state). They gain their qualification through a public exam. Once obtained, their jobs last until retirement. There's a widespread degrading public perception about them that suspects they are lazy and enjoy too many advantages.

The miner community's awareness of being the main actor in achieving the social security measures in place forms a key of collective self-understanding. Thus, it would not have been an external logic of "outside" politics that is responsible but the miners themselves enacting their agency in creating the conditions both for better working conditions underground and for the modes of shrinking the industry. This includes the everyday exposure to injuries and accidents as well as readiness for industrial action. The testimony of an underground drill runner who joined HUNOSA in 1989 makes this clear:

> *You have to like working in the mine; you cannot go there as if it were a punishment. When I first entered the pit, the hewer told me, "Boy, look over there: On the other side there are cars, houses, drinks, all the fun you want – but first, you have to push hard. Moreover, I am going to give you another word of advice: From your first three wages, you must spend the first one to the last coin because maybe you will not live to spend the second. When you get to the second, save part of it in case we have a strike. And take good care of the third one because otherwise you will be nothing in this life." And he was so right.*

The promise of participating in consumer society and achieving a better standard of living, is always interlinked with the looming struggles to keep up the existing social stability – and also with the constant experience of work accidents and occupational disease. While the number of cases has actually decreased significantly over the last decades, work injuries and health issues remained a part of the mining families' routine.

The higher standard of living went along with better educational structures. However, the best-educated generation in Spanish history experiences a total lack of opportunities. They have been forced to either emigrate or to accept living in precarious work environments and to commence proper working careers in their thirties or even forties. In contrast, other youngsters who have not even completed the mandatory educational programs have found jobs in the mining industry and profit from the early retirement and social security measures (Köhler/Martin 2006). The first generational segment reached an educational level hardly possible for any other working class generation before. Yet, those who went into mining benefited from improvements in work safety, stable wages, and early retirement schemes while their generational peers were still commencing their professional careers:

> *Now, thanks to the pensioners and the early-retired miners, Asturias scrapes through, and the Coal Basins are even better off. So it's not us who should take the blame. […] What do people think? We, the early-retired, would have preferred working until our fifties, as it would have suited us, but what would have happened if we'd done so? There would have been no jobs for the rest of the people in the Basins. Sons of workers and young people without jobs? It was better for all, but, of course, people think it was just a problem of the miners.*

This statement of resignation echoes a widespread sentiment across the region. However, there is also a contrasting reading to this, namely the claim to a revaluation of the past and the demand for greater recognition:

> *This was a monoculture with the mine at its centre, and surrounding it there were retailers, truck drivers […]. The whole society lived on this, and just because that history was not passed on to today's or tomorrow's generations, there are now people who are against our early retirements, against our strikes. Nobody has told these people who are against us that Spain has always been warm thanks to the Asturian coal from our Coal Basins; and owing to that coal there was electricity, and because of that we gained our rights as workers. But nobody has told them that, and that is why people are against us.*

This quote is from a mining deputy who, after retiring early, has become heavily involved in industrial heritage activism and in the preservation of former industrial sites. His statement appeals to a moral economy that has lost its common ground. It describes a rift between the (former) miners and the wider community, not just nationally but even in Asturias itself, because of which the miners end up lacking the recognition and pride they once could take for granted. Drawing on a moral economy that has been lost, thus, is also tinged heavily with a nostalgic longing for the past.

At the heart of the interpretative conflict about the role of the miners is the question who benefited from the deindustrialisation process. This includes the ongoing accusations against the miners about continually being "funcionarios", even after the final closure of the pits; it also involves the accusations against the trade unions for allegedly compromising the future of the region. To a large extent, the measures of avoiding a traumatic experience of deindustrialisation in the Asturian coalfields, the early retirement schemes as well as the investment of public funding into the recovery of the industrial structures, were broadly accepted and endorsed as achievements of the miners' ability to mobilise. But they soon became the focus of bitter debates:

> *Some people, both politicians and trade unionists, were to blame for their selfishness because they did not want to spoil their public image. […] And sometimes you have to cut off an arm so the whole body won't get infected. […] Part of the negotiations for early retirements – and [I am] saying this as a grandson, son, nephew, and friend of early-retired miners – was that everybody looked after themselves. Those who were about to retire or who would in the future started calculating how much they were due to receive. The trade union leaders were followed by the miners with devotion. […] But in the crucial moments, the labour leaders' only concern was to keep their unions happy […] so they could earn good money and retain their share of power in the remains of the company. […] And the political leaders, what or of whom did they think? They thought about their people and figured, "Well, if we screw things up, at least some of our workers will have enough salary to maintain those who, like us, have accommodated to the situation."*

On the one hand, in a context of significant cuts in employment and massive factory closures, the early retirement schemes in mining have kept the consumption levels intact within the Coal Basins. On the other hand, the schemes are considered by some observers as being a "poisoned apple", as they compromised the legendary political and industrial combativeness of the coal miners and brought about the eventual end of the coal community at large.

> *I have something to say about the miners who leave the mines: they defended [the] coal [industry] quite well against a common enemy. It is remarkable that they have achieved a much better social standard than other industrial sectors. The mining issue still prevails in this country. We are bold and they fear us; however, this is falling apart because they realise that our mentality is changing.*

To overcome the effects of pit closures, the European Union introduced the Mining Funds, the ultimate goal of which was the recovery of the battered industry in the Coal Basins through investment in new technologies, IT, and education. Although the according management of billions of euros was a responsibility shared jointly by the city councils, the Asturian government, and the trade unions, it was particularly the latter who were most criticised. The handling of large sums of money by the trade unions has always aroused suspicion. Even when the primary purpose of the Mining Funds – i.e., the (post-)industrial recovery of the region – has not been achieved, investment into infrastructures and projects boosting environmental sustainability or the preservation of industrial heritage do stand as partial successes. Yet, the regional response oscillates between serious doubt and open refusal, the trade unions regarded as the main culprits for the controversial management of the situation. In stark contrast to trade unions in other regions facing deindustrialising struggles, the major unions in Asturias, CCOO and SOMA-UGT, have experienced an increase in their power and influence, almost reciprocal to the process of industrial dismantlement. Compared, for instance, with the British case, this is unprecedented. Yet, while the more militant conflict strategies, such as the British miners' strike, are often framed as an "honourable defeat", the Asturian coalfield's more moderated transition is widely accepted to be a "shameful victory" in which the trade unions act as agents of cronyism, nepotism, or corruption. There is a general agreement about perceiving their power as excessive and their political manoeuvres as obscure. Even the functioning early retirement measures, which could well be appreciated as one of their significant successes during the transformation process, have exerted an adverse effect on their credibility. While their past is characterised by social struggles and epic defeats, their present is tightly interlinked merely with the management of decline and with making bargains while accepting this decline.

> *Do you know what worries me? We were misled – early retirements were sweet, but every man stole what he could. The Coal Basins are torn apart, early retirements will finish in 12 years, and what will happen then? What will happen? Well, let them build a reservoir in Olloniego so they can drown us all in it.*

After securing extremely favourable social measures for all remaining coal miners and substantial funds for the economic recovery of the mining regions, trade unions have become a favourite target for all kinds of criticism and have fallen victim to a sinister smear campaign. They are accused of having allowed with their signature the gradual closure of mines and with that the vanishing of employment opportunities for the youth.

Some Conclusions

The first impression a visitor gets from Asturias and its Coal Basins would inevitably be focused on the regions' standard of living. Studies undertaken by SADEI point out that the Asturian per capita income levels are above the Spanish average and reveal that 50% of young adults have completed a university degree. Although the population has been decreasing constantly over the years, the overall purchasing power has continued to be stable; towns have not been left abandoned. Nevertheless, the Coal Basins have found themselves sunk in a deep crisis for several decades now. The social-political strategies to manage the process of industrial dismantlement, including the gradual, phased schedule of colliery closure and a similarly phased reduction of workforce numbers through early retirement, have not been enough to prevent frustration, uncertainty, and pessimism as the outcome of the process. What many inhabitants of Les Cuenques perceive as a collective trauma seems incomprehensible for people from the rest of Asturias: "What are they complaining about when they live so well?" is the sentence which frequently concludes arguments on the social and economic situation of the Coal Basins. Why, then, should we analyse industrial decline as cultural trauma? A possible answer could be found if we look at the complexities of the resignification process of the Coal Basins' mining identity:

> *This is coming to an end, but […] what will happen next? Will the wind blow over us, and that will be the end of our story? Without taking into consideration what we have? People from Les Cuenques lack self-esteem and are overcome by a feeling of resignation.*

Most of the social and political achievements in the coal region have relied on the strength of a vital working class movement, many of whose members are now positioned outside of the world of labour (through early retirement) while their very organisations have fallen into discredit as their role in keeping and improving those achievements is in peril. This situation generates a fracture in a community identity whose sense of being has always revolved around a particular working culture that combined class struggle with a strong inner cohesion. The binding elements of collective struggle have now given way to an ambivalent present that calls for a resignification of the past as well as the present. If, as Byrne points out, the structure of feelings inherited from the industrial past survives as a residual culture (i.e., non-dominant but persistent), this may contribute to analysing the post-industrial context from a critical point of view (Byrne 2002). This becomes specifically clear in an intergenerational comparison. While the testimonies of younger people are overwhelmingly tinged with elements of resignation and frustration, the narratives of the older generation echo the experiences of the past, evoking a nostalgia that draws on older sentiments of resistance and rebellion, such as "You cannot be from Turón without being a rebel", which refers to the role of the Turón mining valley during the 1934 revolution (Díaz 2017: 127 ff.; Vega 2017: 137 ff.). As Rubén Vega has noted:

> *Les Cuenques would be, in this respect, more similar to the [context] that Fentress and Wickham describe for Wales: If the miners remember the past struggle with such clarity, it is because they define themselves through it, and they*

have long had a clear perception of an essential antagonism between their communities and the employers and the state that deserves to be commemorated. In the particular Asturian case, we need to add to the memory of the great strikes the revolutionary experience of 1934, the harsh post-war repression and the guerrilla resistance under the dictatorship, which are strong memory sites. The importance of these legacies of the past in the collective identity makes more intense the concern for their dissolution (Vega 2018).

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Abstract

Based on interviews conducted in the 1990s, the early 2000s and, again, since 2013, this article discusses views on deindustrialisation in the Asturian coalfields. While the historical experience of the Asturian miners has been shaped by forms of workers' radicalism and their Anti-Francoist resistance, the conflicts around the shrinking of the coal industry have taken on a paradoxical outlook. On the one hand, the labour movement, and the trade unions in particular, have succeeded in securing measures to ease the transition into a post-industrial period. On the other hand, these measures are almost perceived as a "shameful victory". Some aspects of this antagonist perception will be addressed in the following. This concerns the emotional attachment to the experiences and social bonds linked to working in the now obsolete coal mining industry. At the same time, the instruments of social security to help the miners master the crisis lead to almost contentious constellations with a younger generation that is facing severe unemployment. Thus, the aim of preventing deindustrialization from becoming a cultural trauma is therefore a difficult task in practice.

A Post-Carbon Future?

Narratives of Change and Identity in the Latrobe Valley, Australia

Antoinette Holm and Erik Eklund

The Latrobe Valley Region – an Introduction

The Latrobe Valley contains substantial brown coal reserves, which have been developed in earnest from the early 1920s (Barton/Gloe/Holdgate 1993). A state-owned mining and electricity generation industry, administered by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) supplied the state's power needs and shaped the region's economic and urban development (Langmore 2013). The power stations Yallourn A (opened in 1924) and Yallourn B (1932) were constructed adjacent to the open-cut mine at Yallourn. There was further expansion in the post-1945 period when new open-cut mines and power stations were constructed east of Yallourn. The first major project of the post-1945 era was the Morwell open-pit mine (1955), and the adjacent Morwell Power Station and Briquette Factory (1959). Hazelwood Power Station, also fuelled by the Morwell mine (now often referred to as the Hazelwood mine), was opened in 1965, and reached full capacity in 1971. The final element of the Latrobe Valley power hub was the Loy Yang open-pit mine with the Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B power stations operating from 1989 and 1992, respectively. Meanwhile, expansion had continued at Yallourn, adding the power stations C, D, and E between 1954 and 1961. Between 1977 and 1980, gas-fired peaking stations were completed at Jeeralang. The Yallourn W station was completed in 1969. From 1993 to 1996, the three large brown coal mines and power stations – Yallourn, Hazelwood, and Loy Yang – were privatised (Loy Yang A and B sold separately); until recently, they supplied 85% of the state's power needs (Fletcher 2002). Between 1989 and 1990, the SECV employed 8,481 workers, but through privatisation and asset sales, the workforce had declined to less than half that number by 1994/1995 (Cameron/Gibson 2005: 274).

Hazelwood Power Station, an eight-turbine brown coal generator, was the centre of an ambitious programme of state-sponsored economic and community development from the late 1950s (Peake 2013; Eklund 2017). At its inception, it represented a world-class, innovative, and ambitious approach to power generation. Through decades of paternalist management and welfarist approaches to workers and communities, the identity of the station was firmly fixed in the public mind. The power station continues to be referred to as "Hazelwood" after its privatisation, and now, during decommissioning, its continuity is emphasised in the popular discourse, rather than the rupture of a serial resale of the station. Prior to decommissioning, Hazelwood's reputation had moved from being beloved (underpinning the local community's stability) to a more widespread demonisation. From 2004, it was widely known as Australia's "dirtiest"

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.06

power station, producing approximately 3% of the nation's total greenhouse emissions. This was the result of a very effective campaign led by WWF, and other environmental groups, which targeted Hazelwood.[1] Photographs of it were used to illustrate a broad range of media stories about climate change and carbon dioxide production.[2]

In the 1990s an abrupt and comprehensive programme privatised SECV assets including, the three brown coal mines along with the power stations, dramatically changing the social and economic landscape of the Latrobe Valley. These changes were accompanied by major local government amalgamations. The region now faces the further challenge of an economic transition for decommissioned coal-fired power generation in the context of climate change and climate change politics. Complex national and international debates have very little to do with regional experience. The region is variously portrayed as a hapless victim, totally dependent on employment from electricity generation, or emotionally and financially wedded to "dirty" power production. The impact of these debates is to effectively decentre the "blame" for climate change onto a place of production, and obscure city-based electricity demand. We are not the first locally resident scholars to observe (and live through) rapid change in the Latrobe Valley. Since the early 1990s, what Somerville and Tomaney call "the material and discursive production" of the Latrobe Valley has been observed and critiqued by scholars; firstly, in the immediate aftermath of the SEC's privatisation, and secondly, in the midst of the climate change talks in Rio and Copenhagen in 2008 and 2010. A common theme across these observations, and in ours offered below, is that the Latrobe Valley functions as a symbol with considerable rhetorical power that is harnessed by varying sides of the political debate (Cameron/Gibson 2005; Tomaney/Somerville 2010).

Dealing with Closure – Representations

On Thursday the 3rd of November 2016, Engie, the French company and majority shareholder of the Hazelwood power station and its adjacent mine, announced that the plant and mine would shut by the 31st of March 2017 (Engie Press Release 2016). There had been weeks of speculation about the closure, the Australian press featuring stories that ranged from a definite programme for closure to its opposite. The Federal and State Governments' publicly stated positions were firstly, that the decision rested with the company, and secondly, that coal-fired power stations remain a vital part of the Australian-wide energy infrastructure. The company's position was that the workers would be the first to know, and that no decision had been made yet. This remained Engie's public position until the 3rd of November, when workers were called to a 10 a.m. meeting; moments after the meeting finished, the public announcement was made. In fact, the French press had been reporting both that the plant would close and that the company had reached this decision the week before the meeting with the Australian workforce (Feitz 2016).

1 See, for example, http://www.replacehazelwood.org.au/ (11.10.2016).

2 See, for example, "Australia's Climate Change Authority says scientific predictions have led it to revise up the recommended carbon emissions reduction target", ABC News, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-27/smoke-rises-from-hazelwood-power-station-in-la-trobe-valley2c-/5288960?nw=0 (14.10.2016), which features a photo of Hazelwood. The Australian Financial Review's story ("Climate Change Authority backs emissions trading scheme") has a photo of Low Yang B, though it is not identified. See http://www.afr.com/business/energy/climate-change-authority-backs-emissions-trading-scheme-20160831-gr5hsu (12.10.2016).

The announced closure also appeared in the context of the *Hazelwood Mine Fire Commission Report* (December 2016), the last of a series of commission reports that looked into Victoria's worst recorded environmental disaster, a fire that burned in the Morwell/Hazelwood open-cut mine for 45 days from the 9th February 2014. The report recommended that "mine operators develop an integrated research plan that identifies common research areas and priorities for the next 10 years" (Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report: 113). One result of the Hazelwood closure along with the associated mine is that Engie is now working on an exit strategy, the endpoint of which is the sale of the cleared site, and a relatively swift mine rehabilitation schedule that includes the company's preferred option – a "full pit lake". Once the site is sold and/or handed back to new owners, Engie is free of obligation or liability – "any subsequent land use, once surrounding private land is sold and the lake transferred to a new entity, is a decision for the new owners and regulators in consultation with the community" (Engie Mine Rehabilitation 2018). The exit strategy includes, then, finite mine rehabilitation (16 years), site remediation (to deal with asbestos and other site contaminants) through demolition of the power station, associated stock sale (some items of which have already been found in online auctions), and a consequential return of the bond held by the State Government (Engie Mine Rehabilitation 2018).

The announcement of the closure, then, came as a shock to workers and the community in general. That State and Federal Governments were already appraised of the likelihood of a closure was suggested by the State Government website that was launched the day of the closure, the concurrent announcement of the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA) by the State Government, and the funding that both levels of government pledged to the Valley within hours of the stories about the workers "fearing for their futures" beginning to circulate.

On that first day, the media reports were a mix of celebratory ("the dirtiest coal mine closes") and what we have called victim narratives that emphasised, for example, "fear for the future", a narrative about life in the Valley without the income generated by power company employment. Figures used to support this story ranged between the official numbers of redundancies of 450 (250 of them staying on for five years for mine rehabilitation) and up to 1,000 affected workers, according to an extrapolation and estimate including sub-contractors and support industries.

By Friday the 4th November, the story was calling attention to questions about support packages, and a "good money after bad" narrative emerged, one radio announcer defining the Valley's population as welfare dependent, underpinned by narratives of entitlement and generational disempowerment (ABC Radio Melbourne/Faine 2018). While there are large areas of poverty in the Latrobe Valley, there are also pockets of wealth, and the redundancy payouts and superannuation for long-term power workers were significant. Moreover, the idea that poverty in the Latrobe Valley was directly linked to the economic conditions associated with privatisation or subsequent changes to subcontracting employment arrangements, was not canvassed.

Narratives of Closure

After the announcement, and in the immediate weeks that followed, a number of common themes can be discerned in the responses to closure. The rhetorical strategies to support the victim narratives are familiar, ranging from a fuzziness in the figures to a

lack of clarity about quite where or what exactly one is talking about. For example, when determining the massive and all-consuming damage that this loss of industry was going to have in the Latrobe Valley, media often reported the unemployment rate for Morwell alone – often stated as 20% – rather than for the region that includes Traralgon, Churchill, and Moe. The Latrobe Valley unemployment rate had peaked in December 2016 at 11.4%, and then actually dropped during 2017, despite the job losses at Hazelwood. There was, similarly, a lack of social or historical context, as well as a tendency for the Valley to be discussed as being isolated and geographically determined by heavy industry, and as being entirely confined to electricity generation. In fact, at the point of closure, the workforce in both mining and electricity generation had decreased substantially, and its largest employers had become health and education. The Latrobe Valley, then, was excised from its broader region, Gippsland, and its wider geographical and historical frame.

An almost constant emphasis upon electricity generation rather than usage allows the distancing of the residents and industries of the city, and causes regions outside of the Valley to be conveniently ignored, either as the producers of the demand for so-called cheap electricity, or the consumers of "dirty electricity". Thus, the Valley becomes the "Valley of despair", as it has been expressed – a geographically defined place, blackened and blighted by dirty industry and poverty, a place cripplingly dependent upon a monolithic, polluting industry. The age and image of the Hazelwood power station became emblematic of the outdated and redundant in a narrative of rural and regional primitivism versus city civilization. A 2012 survey of 300 Victorians from outside of the Latrobe Valley found that, where they did have knowledge of the Valley, their strongest associations with it were electricity generation, mining, and pollution (Ellis-Jones 2012). The Latrobe Valley was persistently cast as a cultural vacuum, a demonised "community", where the idea of community was narrowed to encompass only Hazelwood power station workers. It was implicitly a masculinised space too, as the focus was placed on industrial work rather than the home, with a continued focus on the decline of white male blue-collar jobs.

If the city experienced any sense of change between the 31st of March and the closure of Hazelwood on 1st of April 2017 it was most likely in the form of a sense of righteous endeavour – a reduction in greenhouse gasses – and a slightly higher electricity bill. For the people of the Latrobe Valley, the first effect was a reduction in pollution, a cost unacknowledged but one that was asked of this community in order to underwrite the cheap electricity production.

While the State Labor Government made a political investment by presenting itself as a friend of the Valley, the Federal Government (a conservative coalition government including the Liberal and National Parties) was playing a more intricate game. The Federal Government continued to play to their political base, which expresses doubt about climate change science, resentment towards structural adjustment funding for downsizing industries, and ongoing support for brown coal industries including power generation. Upon closure, the public face of the Federal Government was a firm commitment to the Valley, although funding commitments included the whole of the federal seat of Gippsland and not just the Latrobe Valley – this electorate is 33,182 km^2 in size, the Latrobe Valley sitting at its western edge (by way of comparison, the size of Bel-

gium is 30,528 km^2). The Australian Government had, however, ratified the Paris Climate Agreement, which came into force on the 4th of November 2016, the day after the announcement of the Hazelwood closure (UNFCC 2016).

The announcement, then, assisted the Federal Government to meet the goals of the Paris Accord with an immediate 3% reduction in Australia's greenhouse emissions. The link between the closure of Hazelwood and the needs of the Federal Government to deliver on its ratified targets, however, had been carefully obscured. The then Federal Minister for the Environment, Josh Frydenberg, in fact claimed publicly that the closure was the result of both the State Labor Government's policy and the inaction of previous federal Labor administrations. The minister had also met with company Chief Executive, Isabelle Kocher, and his French ministerial counterpart, Segolene Royale, in Paris in late October 2017 prior to the scheduled announcement. There was no sense of a unified State and Federal Government response to the closure, one that would go beyond party politics. The strongest indicators of this were the Victorian State Treasurer Tim Pallas' and Federal Minister Frydenberg's separate trips to Paris. Instead of being used to formulate a united governmental response, the experience of closure was utilised in an ongoing rhetorical battle in what is known as the politics of blame, and was a valuable face-saving option when senior Federal Government ministers attended an international climate meeting in Marrakesh, Morocco, on the 4th November (Frydenberg Press Release; Butler Press Release 2016; ABC News 2016). In fact, the ratification of the Paris Accord and the formal announcement of the Hazelwood closure strongly suggest that the timing was mostly about global and national climate change politics.

Remembering the Valley and Its Industries

Collective memory is forged in a dialectic between experience and representation (Ricoeur 2007: 9; Halbwachs 1992). People construct their memories around common narratives, and there is no denying the power of political and cultural renderings of the Valley. The rhetorical strategies and common themes outlined above were highly influential on the people and institutions of the Valley. Yet despite the power of these discourses to shape and define the meaning of the Valley and its representations, there are informal or vernacular renderings of the Valley's deindustrialising experience that stand in stark contrast to the "Valley as victim" narrative.

While the current closure narrative is overwhelmingly focused on the present challenges of closure, economic transition, and workforce retraining, locals perceive it as a continuation of a longer tradition of major setbacks to the regional economy. They intuitively evoke past disruptions. One local power station worker, Ron Bernardi, was interviewed on the day Engie announced the closure of the Hazelwood power station by March 2017. The report noted: "Responding to media suggestions the Valley will become 'ghost town' without Hazelwood, Ron said the closure news would be nothing like the power industry's privatization in the 1990s."

Bernardi's memories went back to the early 1990s, and focused on a specific incident of seeing the then Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, one of the key architects of privatisation, at Melbourne Airport:

> *To this day I dislike Jeff Kennett for what he did […] I saw him give an interview at the Tullamarine airport about the SEC being privatised and it took all of my energy to walk past him and not tell him off. He treated the Valley very badly (Bernardi, quoted in Whittaker/Plummer 2016).*

Some workers associated the Valley experience with other recent industrial and manufacturing redundancies throughout the state. Hazelwood Power Station's Denis Clough was quoted saying employees should have been given advance notice:

> *I've heard about Hazelwood closing for 20 years. It was inevitable. It was done in a pretty ordinary, pretty bad way by the company […] Ford, Holden, and all those people, they've had three years' notice. These blokes here have got five months (Clough, cited in Darroch, 2016)*

In this case, Clough is evoking knowledge of other closures, and criticising the company for the short notice. The fact that Victoria went through a number of major industry closures in manufacturing in the last five years shaped an immediate context that the company could not control. Moreover, with a State Labor Government in power, the political imperative was to be prepared, and to show support and solidarity with the Latrobe Valley. The other recent closures also allowed the political parties to prepare their own responses to developments in the Valley far more carefully. It was still critiqued, however, that a longer-term plan was not put in place since the decline of the brown coal electricity industry was seen as inevitable by many, including Hazelwood workers such as Clough. The public relations strategy of Engie was, by contrast, to deny the reality of the closure up until the last few hours. This local obfuscation created not insignificant financial problems and psychological strains for the workforce (Darroch 2016).

Furthermore, there is a vigorous though poorly resourced industry and community heritage movement which has attempted to preserve and interpret the Latrobe Valley's industrial past. Local activist Cheryl Wragg has been at the forefront, nominating both the Morwell and Hazelwood power stations for inclusion in the State Heritage Register. She was successful in the case of the Morwell station, but the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria recommended against the nomination of Hazelwood (Heritage Council Morwell Power Station 2017). Another significant locally-based heritage sentiment is represented by efforts to preserve the model workers' community of Yallourn, designed by the SEC and opened in the 1920s, but subsequently dismantled from the late 1960s onwards to make way for an extended open-cut mine. This decision was controversial, and Yallourn remains anchored in the minds of many former residents and others, achieved by regular annual social events and a website which seeks to imagine a virtual Yallourn.[3] An earlier project conducted in 1988 and sponsored by the Gippsland

3 See http://www.virtualyallourn.com/ (14.11.2016).

Trades and Labour Council sought to interview former residents and was self-confidently about contesting and correcting the SEC version of the town's history.[4] The myriad of social as well as technological efforts to preserve the memory of Yallourn, even if only in intangible form, is a powerful resistance to the modernist commands of the SEC which deemed the town surplus to requirements, and its humanised living space less important than the value of the coal that lay beneath it.

Additionally, the "Valley as victim" narrative also belies the social and geographical complexity of the Latrobe Valley. Although official representations suggest the opposite, not everyone works in or is reliant upon the power industry or the mining industry. In 2016, the Australian Census found that 4.2% (or 1,219) of the Latrobe Valley's workforce were in the "fossil fuel energy generation" sector, but 5.0% (1,477) were located in the "hospitals" sector, and 3.1% (907) worked in "supermarkets and grocery stores" (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). Located amongst and within stories of industrial life, and indeed deindustrialisation, are other stories from people who reside in nearby communities that have little or no relationship to the industry in question. One of the success stories of the Valley has been the agribusiness sector, including a growing organic food movement. This has seen the development of new industries and new kinds of positive representations of the Valley, as embodied in the Gippsland Food and Wine Trail.[5]

Furthermore, there is a diversity of household types in the region, even though the media presentation and government responses to closure often assume a single, male earner with a dependent family. In couple households in the region, both parents not working represented 24.7% (3,656) of all couple families, while the number for both parents being employed full-time was 15.2% (2,248); one parent working full-time and the other part-time represented 23.7% (3,516), and the percentage for one working full-time and the other not being in paid employment was 14.2% (2,107) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). These figures alone suggest that existing regional unemployment should be as important a policy priority as job losses from restructuring. The experiences of a diverse range of local residents also add depth and breadth to our understanding of the region's social history. A ground-breaking sociological study by Jerzy Zubrzyycki looked at migrant settlers to the Latrobe Valley in the early 1960s. This work built the foundation for later studies which explored the multicultural history of the Valley, often utilising oral history or memoir with a local or vernacular intent (Zubrzycki 1964; De Prada 1904; Mirboo North Primary School 1987).

The recent State Government response to the overall challenge of regional development and recent job losses, embodied in the LVA and its transition programmes, for example, has been strongly focused on power industry and construction jobs, which are usually dominated by male workers.[6] Andrew Coles, Peter Fairbrother, and others have analysed the gendered dimensions of these responses and found strong masculinist themes, which echoes the media focus on both male job losses and job creation in industries usually dominated by males (CPOW 2017).

4 See 'The Yallourn Story'. Transcripts are available in the Gippsland Regional Studies Collection at the Federation University Churchill campus. See CGSV 4438, 4129, 4137, 4396, 4139, 4134, 4136, 4132, 4131, 4133, 4130, and 4392. A detailed list is available on request.

5 See Gippsland Food and Wine Trail, http://www.visitvictoria.com/Regions/Gippsland/Food-and-wine/Gippsland-Food-and-Wine-Trail (10.11.2016).

6 See the Latrobe Valley Authority website, https://lva.vic.gov.au/ (24.07.2018).

After the 1990s round of restructuring the state-owned electricity operations, Jenny Cameron and Katherine Gibson noted how the focus on the region as an industrial problem with "needs" led to a development approach which sought to replace large-scale industries with more large-scale industries, effectively overlooking a communal economy with a "richness and depth of skills and capacities, dreams and passions of those who had been marginalised by the SEC's restructuring" (Cameron/Gibson 2005: 274-285). This way of constantly looking beyond the borders of the region for solutions is characteristic of a deficit approach to regional economy and society. This approach suggests there is no capacity for local or regional endogenous innovation or growth. Such an approach only serves to leave assets that are regionally present unacknowledged. Another industry in the Valley is the higher education sector, which has been present in Churchill since 1971 when the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education was established with a distance education and an on-campus programme. In 1990, this organisation became a part of Monash University, with approximately 400 staff and 7,000 students by 2013. In 2014, the campus was taken over by Federation University Australia. There are few higher education providers located in rural Victoria, and those that do exist are sited in major regional cities. It is a curiously repressed fact about the Latrobe Valley that it is, in reality, a hub for an important higher education provider, and the only university campus in the east in the state of Melbourne.

Heritage and History

As Ralph Samuel once noted, collective memory is contested, and the struggle over who controls this process of remembering and how it might be done has only just begun (Samuel 1994; Smith 2006: 297). The capacity of the Valley to hold onto structures that are rendered by decommissioning heritage is both contested and negated. Both decommissioned power stations, Morwell and Hazelwood, are in the process of demolition as we go to print. This applies despite Morwell Power Station having been granted State Heritage listing in February 2018. A change to the Heritage Act (2017) allows a minister to intervene in the heritage assessment process. Planning Minister Richard Wynne signalled his willingness to intervene if any submissions were received in response to Heritage Victoria's finding that Hazelwood did not meet heritage standards (Whittaker 2018). When submissions disputing the findings by Heritage Victoria's Executive Director, Steven Avery, were received, the minister made good on his promise and "called in" the matter, circumventing the prescribed process. He determined in late August 2018 that Hazelwood Power Station was not of heritage value, and that the company was under no obligation to keep anything (Wynne 2018). Engie announced that the company has settled on a preferred supplier for demolition, and the eight stacks were demolished on the 25 May, 2020.

The narratives around destroying the material heritage are familiar to those who work in the area of industrial heritage. They are a combination of an unworthy or toxic aesthetic, or an ongoing, inappropriate burden of community debt. At the point of writing, there is more money available for the demolition of both power stations through the closure and remediation funds attached to them (as well as the return of rehabilitation bonds) than there is proffered to support conservation. This is the case despite conservation potentially falling within the terms of required remediation, public interest and concern, and, of course, the historic profitability of the industry.

Even the production of a "social history" is managed by the State Government entities tasked with overseeing the rehabilitation of all three Latrobe Valley open-cut brown coal mines – the Latrobe Valley Regional Rehabilitation Strategy (LVRRS) and the Mine Rehabilitation Commissioner (LVMRC), both coming under the auspices of the Latrobe Valley Authority (LVA). The subsumption of what you might call both "community vernacular history" and "formal historical practices" within a State Government entity primarily concerned with engineering (and producing a "feasible" outcome for all three gargantuan open-cut mines) is troubling. Its location in "Land Use Planning", along with the commissioning of a third-party metropolitan consultancy to shape and produce the history, shows that the contest over what is recalled and how it is remembered is very real (Latrobe Valley Authority 2018; Whittaker 2018; Slater 2018; Latrobe Valley Social History, 2019).

Oral history is work that legitimates and records the experiences of individuals and uses respondents' testimony to inform an understanding of a whole community. As it is practised professionally, it is fundamental to "history from below", and it is an expansion of a historical record and understanding through the inclusion not simply of "stories" or narratives, but of testimony and description. The subjective, individual nature of the testimony is triangulated with other forms of historical material, creating a complex and layered historical record. The moment of transition from an industrial to a post-industrial era in the Latrobe Valley – defined discursively as the moment of closure of the Hazelwood power station – becomes a moment to collect memories and experiences in the form of oral testimony as the present (everyday industrial routine) becomes the past through decommissioning.

In the case of the Latrobe Valley "social history report", we have a commissioned history attempting to utilise the form of the vernacular. Our following comments focus on the State government's role in designing and framing the process. We do not criticise the consultants here since they were simply responding to the brief. As the language of social history is being mobilised, one finds that the process and output has more in common with public relations than oral history. Public relations practice is defined by a focus upon the intentionality of the author. All emphasis is placed on framing the message so that the intended message is received and "accepted". Thus, community engagement and public relations-style practices such as consultations and stakeholder meetings are the vehicles through which a social history project is turned into a social history.

In this case, the process is exclusive, prescribed, and tightly framed, and most interestingly, perhaps, it is confidential due to the principle of "commercial in confidence" having been evoked to limit the availability of drafts for the client (the State Government agencies and selected and approved attendees). Through that designed and enacted process, anecdotes offered by individuals at closed meetings – individuals selected as "representative" of both prescribed groups and the broader community – are recorded (if at all) as "community consultations", and then authorised as the experience of the individual (Latrobe Valley Social History 2019). In other words, the social and communal history is codified and mapped back onto the individual in a form of discursive containment.

There are clear signs that the idea of this history (given the legitimising name of a social history) is part of a series of governmental actions on behalf of securing a social

licence for a sequence of activities, and that it was, if not designed, at least enacted to mollify a community and shape narratives of the past in the interest of the present.

Now for a point concerning the social history itself, when one of the authors phoned the commissioned company to ask about the history and specifically its parameters, they were told it was commercial in confidence, and between the client (the governmental department) and the heritage organisation. Drafts produced by the commissioning body and provided to those groups and their representatives were marked confidential. In addition, the above-mentioned author sought information about a publication date, and whether draft copies were available.[7] No answer was provided, and the final document was published on the web in late 2019 (Latrobe Valley Social History, 2019).

The use of the historical and heritage knowledge of selected members of the community, who are typically providing their expertise on a voluntary basis, represents extractive meaning production in action. An advertisement was placed in the local papers, and participation in the social history project was decided through application. The strategic direction and intent of this social history venture was predetermined. The sampling of community members was purposive but without any transparency. Key issues which were subject to current government policy or concern, such as the heritage listing of the Morwell and Hazelwood power stations, were explicitly excluded from discussion. "Extractive meaning", then, in this case extends to knowledge appropriation; value-adding is used here as a means to divert income and reputational enhancement away from the Valley to city-based consultants. As such "extractive meaning" replicates an extractive industry discourse that devalues industrial heritage and culture, while allowing the tangible financial benefits (income and profit) to be removed first to the city, and secondly off-shore. Local communities are often not as homogenous as prevailing discourses maintain, nor as passive; so, in many senses, the battle for the control of social history has only just begun.

Conclusion

We are observing closure and the production of meaning and social memory as it is happening, and have been witness to its rhetorical and political demands. It is in this context, a literal as well as a rhetorical context, that the lived experiences of individuals, families, communities, and residents are being shaped and preserved. The capacity to capture, celebrate, or simply record the lived experience – consolidate the collective and individual memory – will depend upon money. We can only wait to see how much money will be set aside for a cultural endeavour in a place defined externally as devoid of culture. We can only wait to see how much money will be provided to produce what some would argue has all the appearances of a state sanctioned history. Similarly, it is an open question as to how much money will be available for anything more than "jobs" and the "relocation of industry" as the determinate image of the industrial Latrobe Valley dominates.

The overarching narratives are just that: they slide over the top of the Valley's complexity, providing useful tools for political or cultural representation, but are only loosely grounded in the Valley's reality. Just as the Valley's wealth and its generated power follow the highway and railway lines to the city of Melbourne, so too do the

7 E-mail to planning.implementation@delwp.vic.gov.au, 18.10.2018.

extractive meanings of the Latrobe Valley beat an inexorable path to outside interests and dance to the tune of outsiders and their agendas.

In early 2017, Hazelwood's eight chimneys marked the ongoing commitment to coal-fired electricity generation, the faded but persistent glory of the modernist endeavour, and an icon of human-induced climate change. They were a symbol of production even if uncertainty had pervaded their ongoing presence for almost twenty years. In mid-2018, after the actual closure the chimneys were the signs of impending change, change on an industrial scale. These chimneys and the wisps of brown coal smoke that formerly rose from their heights are nostalgic emblems of a past now gone. Their meaning has been changed within the very place itself, and for the people who live here. The smoke stacks are a little less threatening, and our view is tinged with a little more nostalgia, as we count down the months and the years away from that defining point in time, the closure. In the last two years we have been witnessing the demolition of the Morwell and Hazelwood power station chimneys altogether. How quickly these icons of the era of industrial electricity production have shifted from modernist symbols of progress to greenhouse pariahs to demolished absences in a deindustrialised landscape.

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Abstract

The Latrobe Valley, Australia, is a resource community in transition. The post-carbon future has yet to be realised, and the immediate future is one of economic uncertainty. A state and national economy was built upon energy production from brown coal (or lignite) since the early 1920s, but the realities of changing international and national markets and economies for coal-fired electricity are seeing its value diminish. The consequences of mining and power generation, of course, were left to be experienced by the residents of the Valley. The 2017 closure of Hazelwood Power Station and the Morwell or Hazelwood open-cut mine (as it has been called since the 2014 mine fire) proved to be the Valley's tipping point for a future without brown coal generation.

This article uses the case study of the Latrobe Valley to explore government and corporate renderings of the transition, and the closure of Hazelwood Power Station in particular. We introduce the concept of "extractive meaning" to understand and theorise the way that narratives are evoked by government and coal-related corporations that use the structures of collective memory and oral history, but that appear to be more akin to practices that seek to codify, confine, and strip popular and local experience of its meaning. Regional memory and oral history are blanketed under a powerful set of discourses. In this exploratory analysis, we contend that in this version of regional restructuring neo-liberalism is given full rein, history and heritage are in flux with strong Government and corporate direction to assist current policy priorities, even whilst dissonant elements of a vernacular interpretation of regional changes are still discernible.

Visualising Deindustrial Ruins in an Oral History Project: Sesto San Giovanni (Milan)

Roberta Garruccio

Introduction

In a special issue devoted to post-industrial oral history narratives, my contribution will focus on a photo gallery. Therefore, first of all, I have to explain why I am addressing the topic from this particular perspective. At the centre of interest is Sesto San Giovanni, a medium-sized city north of Milan that became the fifth largest industrial district in Italy after WWII, long recognised as "the factory city" or "the Italian Stalingrad". The photographs under consideration concentrate on the ruins of its big industries, built around the beginning of the 20th century and dismantled before that century drew to its close. The "part-time artist" Umberto Gillio,[1] who took the photos, is an amateur photographer who has devoted his time and skills to collaborate in an oral history project carried out between 2013 and 2015, a project in which I acted as a principal investigator together with two independent scholars, Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi. It was born from the idea to enhance the cultural memory of industry in Sesto, and intended the photo reportage to act as an important visual segment of the entire research. Umberto Gillio's shots were meant to directly connect the photographic representation of former industrial spaces in Sesto the way they are preserved today with the oral testimonies collected in a campaign of interviews.

Our research has been funded by the Lombardy region[2], and one of the main requirements of the call for proposals we applied to was the ability to reach out to a wider audience rather than to a strictly academic one, and to ensure the dissemination of results in order to solicit the interest of the general public outside the university setting. That is why our investigation was intended as a public history endeavor, covering three main research products: an oral history archive – we collected almost 50 in-depth interviews about the aftermath of the industrial shutdown in Sesto[3]; a documentary based

1 http://www.umbertogillio.com/ (Accessed 16.04.2020).

2 We have worked in partnership with a local foundation, Fondazione ISEC - Istituto per la storia dell'età contemporanea (https://www.fondazioneisec.it/), which also preserves the large archives of the local industrial concerns, the independent association AVoce. Etnografia e storia del lavoro, dell'impresa e del territorio (http://www.avoce.eu/avoce/en/1229-2/), and my department at the University of Milan, the Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication (http://eng.mediazione.unimi.it/ecm/home).

3 The interviews with former workers, union delegates, and managers from Falck Steelworks were realised using the life course model, and were audio and video recorded. The collection is now kept at the ISEC Foundation in Sesto.

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.07

on our interviews[4]; and the photo coverage of the structural change in Sesto, entrusted to Umberto Gillio. In this article, I will try to unearth the cultural meanings and hints implied in these images.

1. Where: Sesto San Giovanni

From the perspective of post-industrial narratives, Sesto San Giovanni is a peculiarly intriguing space for a number of reasons. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the significance of its manufacturing past: for almost the whole 20th century, Sesto has been the location of several big firms with their factories and mills in the steel and heavy industries. To appreciate the magnitude of what has occurred in Sesto in the last decades of the century, we need to keep in mind some crucial events in its history, which can merely be sketched here.

Figure 1: Falck Concordia plant viewed from Viale Italia, Falck area's main longitudinal axis, in Sesto San Giovanni (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

Industrialisation in Sesto starts in the early 20th century with the arrival of the major businesses of that time. Proximity to Milan, abundant water supply, good railway connections to Central Europe, and cheap property explain why several industrial concerns moved to Sesto in the wave of the Second Industrial Revolution: Breda in 1903 for railway engine manufacturing; Campari in 1904 for industrial beverages; Ercole Marelli in 1905 for power generating engines; Falck in 1906 for steelmaking; and Magneti Marelli in 1919 for magnetos and equipment for the automotive industry (Varini 2006; Tedeschi/Trezzi 2007).

4 The documentary, realised with the help of a professional filmmaker, Riccardo Apuzzo, is titled "Il polline e la ruggine" (Pollen and Rust), and is accessible on the ISEC Foundation YouTube channel, in Italian with English subtitles: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcF1GY0DBlY&vl=en (Accessed 16.04.2020).

Thus, Sesto San Giovanni developed into a genuine industrial hub rather than into a mere company town that caters for a single industry. During the economic boom after WWII, it became the fifth biggest industrial centre in Italy, while Falck grew to be the major private steel company in the country and the major employer in Sesto. In the 1960s, out of 35,000 people who had a job in the city's heavy industries 9,000 worked in the four big Falck plants that shone with particularly evocative names: Vittoria (Victory – for cold rolled steel processing), Vulcano (Volcano – for cast iron processing), Unione (Union, also called T3 – for steel and hot bar rolling), and Concordia (Concord, also called T5 – for plates, welded pipes, and bolts) (James 2006; Trezzi 2007).[5]

As important as it is, the history of Sesto's big factories barely covers a century. The succession of factory closures was swift: only a 10-year gap separates the bankruptcy of Ercole Marelli in 1984 from the closure of the last Falck steelmaking mill.[6] The demographic shifts in the city reflect this parabolic development: the population numbered less than 7,000 in 1901 and peaked at almost 100,000 at the end of the 1970s; today, the number has shrunk to 80,000 inhabitants. Having gone through what is undeniably a process of deindustrialisation, but one that has not developed into a full post-industrial transformation, Sesto is a far cry from the cool and well-manicured places which western urban marketing has often popularised. Sesto's deindustrialising process is rather an instance of those "uncertain transitions" which ethnography and other social sciences have increasingly put under scrutiny (Burawoy/Verdery 1999).

Even though at the beginning of the research, our interest was generically directed towards the shutting down of the mills and factories in the city of Sesto San Giovanni during the 1980s and 1990s, our focus progressively narrowed to a single case as the project developed: the Falck steelmaking company. Along with Breda, Falck was the biggest industrial firm in Sesto until the 1980s and the one which usually provides the lion's share of images in the representations of the city due to its sheer size and the visible traces it has left in the urban landscape. The area formerly occupied by the Falck steel mills, which covers 1,450 square metres, represents 20% of the town's territory and is at the heart of the largest real estate urban redevelopment project in Italy, which is one of the largest in Europe (Moro 2016).

5 During the post-war economic growth, the Unione plant became the biggest privately owned steel mill in Italy; its claw-shaped roof, rebuilt in the 1950s, is a landmark in Sesto. Today, the only accessible site is Concordia, visible from the east side of Viale Italia, the main street cutting through the Falck area, together with the Magazzini Generali (MA.GE), the warehouse where the bolt section was located.

6 The Falck group changed its core business towards renewable energies after that (https://www.falckrenewables.eu/?sc_lang=en) (Accessed: 16.04.2020).

Figure 2: Falck Concordia plant viewed from the outside (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

The regeneration path has not been smooth at all, and here I can only summarise the last stages. Sold by the Falck family at the beginning of the 2000s, after the plant dismantling, the area has indeed undergone several property transfers over the following two decades. In 2010, it was purchased by the Italian real estate firm Bizzi & Partners Development. Its fate has since been changed in compliance with a broader project called MilanoSesto – to stress that Milan is an unicum in Italy regarding its power to attract top international investors – as well as with regard to a masterplan designed by the Italian star architect Renzo Piano. MilanoSesto involves constructions on the Falck area with about 1.000.000 square metres intended for residential, business, and service use (gross buildable area). It includes the creation of a highly innovative hospital and a medical research centre; but it also envisages the protection and refunctionalisation of the imposing structures left from the Falck plants. These monumental industrial ruins – one of the main objects photographed by Umberto Gillio – are the only ones to have escaped the demolition, and the Town Council has long been seeking to have them recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (so far unsuccessfully). In 2016, the biggest Saudi real estate group, Fawaz Alhokair Group, was interested in building a large shopping centre (alongside a cinema and an entertainment area) in what remains of the former Concordia/T5 mill, bought a 50% stake in Bizzi & Partners, and put 20 million euros on the table to invest in the MilanoSesto project. Renzo Piano has since left the undertaking, but the firm has officially maintained that Renzo Piano's plan is not going to be changed. In 2019, while I am writing this article, the Falck area has been the object of a further agreement: 100% of the share capital of the MilanoSesto Development "newco", the business arm responsible for the MilanoSesto project, has been sold by Bizzi & Partners to Prelios Group (formerly Pirelli Real Estate), one of the leading European providers of alternative asset management and specialised real

estate services. In turn, Prelios Group is a key partner for Intesa Sanpaolo, the first Italian banking group for capitalisation, and Hines, one of the world's leading developers.

Figure 3: Concordia is currently the only former Falck plant accessible with prior authorisation (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

One of the youngest among our interviewees, born in Sesto in 1985 as the son of a Falck worker, was 10 years old when the steel production ended. In his interview in 2015, he remembered in a sceptical mood:

> *Since elementary school, here in Sesto, teachers had asked us to dream up projects for the former Falck areas. They asked us to design our own projects, to imagine a future for the Falck areas. We were little kids, I mean, boys and girls, six or seven years old. […] Now I am 30 and the area is still empty (Alberto Rubino, employed at the Best Western Falck Village Hotel in Sesto San Giovanni, interviewed by Roberta Garruccio and Sara Roncaglia, Sesto San Giovanni, 20 June 2015).*

The person who took responsibility for the dismantling of the last Falck mills and for the utilisation of scrap metal expressed himself similarly during the interview:

> *The end came on 1 January 1995. It's now 2015: 20 years have passed and no decision has been made [about the Falck area]. Every year another excuse − first, there was a new mayor, then the property changed ownership, and they repeated over and over: "Let's launch a big competition, reach all the great architects in the world, and let's see what they come up with!" Finally, Renzo*

> *Piano came forward with the medical research project, the City of Health (Biagio Dragoni, former employee at Falck, interviewed by Roberta Garruccio and Sara Roncaglia, Sesto San Giovanni, 16 January 2015).*

Sesto has been waiting for the redevelopment of the Falck area for more than 20 years – and it still is.[7]

2. Who and How: Defining the Gaze

Though our first encounter with Umberto Gillio was accidental, its result was not accidental at all. As mentioned above, the photographs taken by Gillio are the outcome of a collaboration with the author in a broader research project. We conceptualised the photos to be an important visual component, not just a mere appendix, of the whole investigation, an integral part of our research project, based on our shared belief that combining oral testimonies and visual records can open up a way to document the complex responses to the economic change which has occurred since the end of the 20th century (Modell/Brodsky 1998; Freund/Thomson 2011).

One of the questions in our interviews on Sesto's recent history, for instance, concerned the spaces and transformations of the specific areas chosen by Umberto Gillio to be the subjects of his pictures: spaces of work, but also spaces bordering living quarters (because it is worth pointing out how deindustrialised spaces are still part of someone's everyday life), and places of a lingering affective bond, places to which meaning and the idea of home has been attached (Mah 2012). These industrial remains are waiting for a radical transformation with regard to their function and purpose; amidst this legacy, the imposing structures of the Unione and Concordia plants – along the Falck area's main axis, the Viale Italia – outshine the others.

The fact that Umberto Gillio is not a professional photographer offers a first key to read his images in an era which has been defined as "the golden age of industrial ruination" (Edensor 2005). Gillio's pictures have actually been taken in the context of brief urban explorations, and it is precisely in the context of urban exploration that the bulk of photographs of industrial ruins is produced today. His photos could easily fit into the category of "vernacular photography", an expression referring to images taken by ordinary people in everyday contexts; these "vernacular" pictures exist outside the networks of cultural legitimisation (Edensor et al. 2009) and do not necessarily need a qualitative approval. In other words, as researchers we were not primarily interested in the aesthetic value of Gillio's photos – which is not to say that his work does not deserve any praise; I personally like it for its rigour and the choice to avoid any embellishment. Rather, what we were interested in was the language which Gillio employs to "package the world", to use a phrase by Susan Sontag (Sontag 2004). Even more revealing was the fact that Gillio's photography – the specific stylistic choices he made in his own shots (composition, balance, camera angles, focal points, leading lines, light, contrasts,

7 Other areas in Sesto have already been subjected to urban regeneration: Breda Aviation has been absorbed into a public park (Parco Nord); the area where Ercole Marelli once stood has now become a business quarter; the Falck Vulcano plant has provided the site for a shopping mall; the Magazzini Generali Falck building on Viale Italia has been turned into a co-working space for small creative firms.

etc.) and the selection and the sequence he offered – ends up joining a large international network of similar vernacular images which contribute to construct, layer by layer, a strong visual trope of representing the deindustrialisation process.

Figure 4: Falck Concordia inside view (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

3. Why: Contextualising the Images

There is a deliberate tension between Gillio's photographs and the interviews we have conducted about the deindustrialisation process in Sesto. The metaphor "tension" allows us to underline the differences in sense-making and in "temperature" and the unifying forces between two poles: the landscapes devoid of people which are represented in the photographs, on the one hand, and the fullness of the life histories we have collected, on the other. Furthermore, there is a grandiloquent narrative, on the one hand, of those who can profit from the structural change and the move to the new, which includes gentrified housing and attractive opportunities and services:

> *MilanoSesto is a fundamental starting point for a project that represents a new chapter in the transformation of the great city of Milan into one of Europe's most advanced and important metropolises (Prelios Group: agreement signed with Intesa Sanpaolo and Bizzi & Partners for the development of MilanoSesto, 7 May 2019).*[8]

And on the other hand, there is the bewildered gaze of those who can only stare at brownfields and environments of decay (Brown 2015):

8 http://prelios.com/en/news/prelios-group-agreement-signed-intesa-sanpaolo-and-bizzipartners-milanosesto-development (Accessed 16.04.2020).

> *Seeing Sesto in the '60s was scary because the city was one huge smokestack: Breda, Falck, Magneti Marelli were all there. Today, for me at least, Sesto is no more than a dormitory town 'cause there's nothing left. It's better only because you breathe a little better* (*Vittorio Tresoldi, former crane operator at Falck, interviewed by Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi, Sesto San Giovanni, 9 June 2015).*

In this sense, we see Gillio's photographs as both a research tool and a way of generating historical writing, and we want them to be read in conjunction with the interviews and not as standalones (Dobraszczyk 2017). The following intense statement of a female Falck worker is an evocative example:

> *When I thought about it, I sometimes said to myself: "Good lord, how can you shut down such a big thing? Maybe one plant will close […] But metal sheets will always be needed after all." I could not imagine they would close the Concordia plant, the last one left. I mean, you can't imagine it will be gone next year, it's unthinkable. But it happened (Silvana Rovelli, former Falck employee, interviewed by Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi, Sesto San Giovanni, 2 April 2015).*

It is precisely because the meanings and the cultural effects of deindustrialisation are slowly unfolding that they remain enclosed in similar words and images that have become so pervasive in verbal expressions of deindustrialisation. They form what the American scholar Dolores Hayden calls a "moral landscape" (Hayden 1997) in which "moral" is the major plank in the narrative: the loss of personal relationships, the bitterness and sometimes grudge connected with the choice and timing of layoffs, the awareness that something precious has been "wasted", the tropes of the lost importance of material production and of "making stuff". These words and images also describe a sort of "slow-motion war, […] the sensation of watching something die, not loss like a massive destruction, but a loss like something insidious, deep, pervasive" (Brown 2015: 148).

Figure 5: Falck Concordia inside view (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

There is indeed a long history of collaboration between photographers, scholars, and intellectuals interested in social transformations, at least since Walker Evans and James Agee's pioneering book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* published in 1941. Evans as a photographer and Agee as a writer had travelled rural Alabama in the late 1930s to document the impoverishment of American sharecroppers in the midst of the economic and cultural landscape of the Great Depression. Their book's impact remains so strong that it has been compared to novels by Faulkner and Steinbeck. And their introductory words are still meaningful and inspiring for those following their example: "The photographs are not illustrative here. They, and the text, are co-equal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative" (Agee/Evans 1941, xi).[9]

While the field of deindustrialisation studies has experienced a cultural turn over the last two decades, a more particular "photographic turn" has emerged in the oral history of deindustrialisation, one that has produced new readings and understandings of structural change. The connection between photography and oral history has stimulated fresh collaborations that helped to re-evaluate the post-industrial legacy. Thus, rather than depicting industrial rubble as a decontextualised self-reference, as a major strand in professional photography does, the cooperation between photography and oral history turns the rubble and ruins into a memento of workers that over decades made these spaces into a social sphere and who have abruptly fallen "out of the picture" (Stoler 2013).

9 Another inspiring collaborative work, somewhat in the footsteps of Agee and Evans, is Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson's 1985 book *Journey to Nowhere*, which aims to keep track, through testimonies and images, of the 1980s as the most difficult decade for the American economy since the Great Depression.

There are several instances of this trend from the US (Frish/Rogovin 1993 on Buffalo, NY; Modell/Brodsky 1998 on Homestead, NY; Bamberger/Davidson 1998 on Mebane, NY). Historians and photographers who decide to work together are well aware of the fact that images need stories to create meanings, but also represent and construct the world they portray: "We tell stories about images, whether silently to ourselves as we view a picture and speculate on what happened before the depiction of a scene, or out loud to others. But the opposite is also true: we tell narratives through images" (Freund/ Thomson 2011: 5).

One of the most influential recent collaborations has been the work of Canadian historian Steven High and photographer David W. Lewis, whose journey across the North American Rust Belt exemplarily showcases the complex relationship between oral history, photography, and qualitative analysis, while also raising important questions: "These strategies force us to move beyond either nostalgia or populist criticism, and lead into the heart of a dilemma which is, in so many ways, an imaginative as much as an historical challenge: how to think about and respond to, and understand these profound changes […] The question on everyone's lips was 'why?' Why did the company pick and leave? Why did it depart the way it did? Why didn't the government or the union do more? […] What did the economic change mean to those most directly affected?" (High/Lewis 2007: 3, 13).

Figure 6: Falck Concordia ruination (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

Umberto Gillio's photographs ask the same question – "why?" – raised in almost all the interviews with workers involved in plant closures around the world; but photographs are mute, they tend to tell very little of what has actually happened; it is words that invest photography with meaning. Oral history and photography then need to work together to make sense of and answer these questions: What does economic change

mean for those who are paying its price? How do people and places change after plant closures? What becomes of an industrial city after the plants have left? Photography and oral history in combination may mutually highlight the multiple narratives ascribed to the images and the in-between gaps which both images and narratives conceal (Freund/Thomson 2011).

One of the people we interviewed in 2015 commented on the redevelopment plans for Sesto's unused areas:

> *[Comes along] this Renzo [Piano], the star architect, who wants to build Lego skyscrapers, 30 floors, here in Sesto. Well, I ask myself: Who the heck is going to come here and decide to live here?!? Rich Arabs?!? Is there any attraction here?!? Beaches?!? Mountains?!? […] Let us be realistic: nobody is going to come here unless there's working industry (Silvana Rovelli, former Falck employee, interviewed by Sara Roncaglia and Sara Zanisi, Sesto San Giovanni, 2 April 2015).*

As mentioned, however, the "rich Arabs", evoked as characters of the most absurd scenario, had come eventually when the Fawaz Alhokair Group purchased the Falck area, before handing it over to the next international investors, Prelios and Hines, even though Sesto's proximity to Milan rather than the old industry played a role here. If Milan is still a relatively small city in terms of urban residents (1,300,000), the so-called "metropolitan city", which also includes Sesto, is not: Greater Milan has more than four million inhabitants and is the third largest metropolitan area in Europe (after London and Paris, and if we do not include the polycentric Ruhr region). It is an area where the per capita income is almost twice the Italian average and unemployment is half the national rate, and where one Italian super rich person out of two lives (54% of the 0,01% top earners and 42% of the 0,1% top earners), according to the XVIII National Social Security Institute Annual Report 2018 (INPS 2019). Thus, proximity to Milan is the single factor that most affects the way Sesto relates to its industrial heritage today. "If distance has died, location has not", as the *Economist* remarked in a special issue on "Space and the City" in 2011. From outside, Sesto San Giovanni's current central feature seems to be its closeness to Milan, but at the same time such a reframing makes the city far less "readable" for its very inhabitants whose orientation continues to be formed by the industrial past, because the forces that erased the industry changed the city almost beyond recognition. As elsewhere, the deindustrialised urban landscape is "somewhat unpredictable in this shifting age, a site of sensation and opacity, [but, and even more so] this unpredictability does not reduce the ruins' rhetorical and material force" (Irving 2015: 141).

Figure 7: Compressed air and methane gas system (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

Just as abandonment and derelict spaces have become a powerful cultural motif in western societies, the photographic representation of deindustrial space has become a new photographic genre at an almost global level. As such it ends up saying less about the specific places depicted and more about the effects of globalisation (High/Lewis 2007; High 2013a; Strangleman 2013). The photographic practice in Sesto, which has produced impressive pictures in recent years, has to be seen in this context – from well-known photographers (Gianni Berengo Gardin 1996, see Gabriele Basilico's work in Corrias 2011) to talented amateurs (Aurelio Spinelli 2009) to ordinary people who practice photography as a hobby. Since the Falck area – invisible and inaccessible for more than twenty years after the shutdown – has become a destination for controlled urban explorations in the form of guided tours, photo safaris, and photo contests proposed by the municipality, this kind of practice has generated a huge production of images that are distributed on websites, social networks, and in self-produced digital books.

4. What: Nature, Art, and Industrial Remains

In the current iconography of former industrial areas, we hardly ever see people, and Gillio's pictures are not an exception. In accordance with this iconographic canon, there is not the slightest trace of human presence in Gillio's photographs. His pictures could be defined as "architectural still-lifes" (Sontag 2004: 27).

Although they are devoid of people, there is a wide range of things we see in these images: the imposing skeletons of relinquished plants, the few remains of electrification structures, water towers, empty tanks, hangars, parking lots, broken and boarded windows, closed gates, locked doors, and rusty signs that (to the amusement of some observers) have lost their authoritative power but continue to inform about rules and regulations and recall a former sense of hierarchy and work discipline (Edensor 2005).

Gillio's photos signify places and locales that have an arduous and buzzing history of men and women but which are now empty, silent, and desolate, a landscape in transition that is, itself, set to disappear (Apel 2015). The pictures' assumed emptiness, however, points to another product of change that literally grows from the industrial ruins and demands interpretation: a new kind of industrial nature, a new public art, unprecedented ruins of modernity.

Figure 8: Rusty production signs, still imparting instructions and orders (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

4.1 Weeds?

The transformation of abandoned industrial sites often turns them into a playground of sorts, dangerous and attractive at the same time (High/Lewis 2007). There may be two potential readings of this tendency. On the one hand, it can be understood as a move attempting to hide the industrial past and therefore conceal the "authenticity" of a particular place of production. On the other hand, it may be seen as an element that actually emphasises this past, but at the same time nurtures the possibility of commodification by tourism and urban exploration before gentrification takes over.

Umberto Gillio's photographs portray the encounter between industrial remains and nature – "happenstance plants", shrubs and trees, grown in small wild woods, or just weeds, sprouting without human planning and being generally "out of place". This overgrowing nature seems to be on the boundary between representing a threat and suggesting an opportunity. We can hardly think of anything more banal, more negligible, more undeserving of scholarly study than these ubiquitous plants springing up at the edges of urban places. Recalling that "weeds thrive on radical changes, not stability", the environmental historian Zachary Falck has recently pointed out that the "dis-

turbance dynamics" connected with weeds "are important to study because these dynamics rework land across the globe". As "ruderal plants", weeds are "adapted to settle or survive in disturbed places and drastically transformed spaces", ultimately representing the most "recurring markers of and participants in times and places of change" (Falck 2010: 6 f.). They document both change and persistence on different chronological levels; they occupy landscapes associated with decay, multiply in times of transformation, but have coexisted with cities and urbanisation from times predating the onset of industry. Usually, this "fortuitous flora" is referred to in connection with its clash with economy and society as an indicator of decline, as though it appeared all of a sudden where it had never been before or where it had not grown for a long time. This perspective, however, conceals the persistence of weeds, their long coexistence with human landscapes, and ignores the fact that what has changed through time is mostly the way we deal with this kind of vegetation and the way city people experience the surrounding spaces undergoing transformation (Falck 2010). Mapping the way and chronology of the city's spontaneous vegetation – as Gillio's photographs do – reminds us how even such expressions of "industrial nature" (Storm 2014) are part and parcel of Sesto San Giovanni's history, which contribute to the understanding of its present landscape.

Figure 9: Water tower (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

Weeds pinpoint the continuous dialectical relationship between nature and history, a theme central to Romanticism. However, neither the backward "return to nature", which the new deindustrialisation photography sometimes seems romantically to suggest, nor its dual idea of palingenesis, or more generally of a story with an open ending, are "outside time". The abandoning of places is followed by a particularly strong

growth of neophytes and "ruderal plants". Former industrial spaces are the very "disturbed environments" where they thrive – and the former Falck industrial estate is undoubtedly disturbed by many factors after a century of steel production, including the severe contamination with oils and heavy metals and with a high concentration of nitrogen. This environment stimulates a flora with particular characteristics: fast growth, a speedy life cycle, and a massive production of seeds and dispersion of pollen, sometimes particularly allergenic. The photography of former industrial spaces almost always presents to us the contrast between decayed buildings and thriving vegetation, the ruins of the old industrial civilisation and a "new wilderness", suspended between stillness and redemption (Kowarik/Körner 2005). In this encounter, a sort of restructuring of the order is at work, making itself less obvious, less predictable in the order of things, feebler and stranger (Edensor 2005).

Figure 10: Overgrowing woods and weeds in the Falck area (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

4.2 Graffiti and Street Art

The pictures taken by Umberto Gillio feature another dominant motif: graffiti and street art in Sesto, which share their apparent spontaneous character with the weeds' unruliness. Uncontrolled, both integrate themselves into the urban, post-industrial realm, occupying, rearranging, and reusing space. An essay on graffiti and public order in Italy suggests that "contemporary mural writing is the expression of a different point of view in contrast with an urban environment that seems self-consistent and compelling in its forms, even though it is itself subject to contingency, the result of historical evolution that might have taken different directions" (Dal Lago/Giordano 2016: 42). Graffiti and street art belong to the diverse expressions of urban youth culture that have been shaped by industrial decay in many contexts of the developed world, often in a clash between urban decorum and free expression, or between defence of private property and visual

protest (De Innocentis 2017; Dal Lago/Giordano 2018; Mania et. al. 2018). As an art form they present a common denominator of deindustrialised landscapes; through their creative interpretation, they bring back a lost visibility to abandoned spaces, thus claiming a specific form of "alternative beauty" (Storm 2014). Graffiti functions both as a generator of creativity in the public post-industrial space and as a form of empowerment for the generation excluded from the social framework that an active industry used to offer. Graffiti and street art are also interpreted as a way to reclaim the street for self-expression, a form of rebellion against gentrification and culture-led redevelopment of former industrial areas (High/Lewis 2007). Media scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser, however, suggests that "the idea of 'activating people as a market' is a key to the branding of street art, an aesthetic practice that often plays upon a dichotomy between the authentic and the commercial, the real and the manipulative". She concludes that "street art emerges instead as a hybrid form that cannot be seen neither exclusively as a marker of urban decay, nor as a form of youth rebellion, or a mere form of cultural renewal" (Banet-Weiser 2012: 100 ff.).

Umberto Gillio's photographs remind us that Sesto San Giovanni is no exception even with respect to street art. Our larger research, however, warned that the practice of writing on walls needs to be contextualised. In Sesto and in the Falck area all this translated into the city council's decision to officially involve street artists (who, in some cases, are the children of former industrial workers and in other cases those of the new wave of migrants) in a number of redevelopment projects and consequently to authorise and legalise their contribution. After 2010, the walls lining many deindustrialised areas across the city, running the length of many kilometres of their main avenues, have become a large canvas for public art and an integral part of the new representation of the city. It is not coincidental that we find writers and graffiti from Sesto placed at the core of a short noir novel set in the Falck area. The protagonist, Mister Luini, is an engineer and "expert in mural art" who, with his sceptical partner Gino, wants to record all the graffiti tags of the city and describe each specimen in a dedicated form:

> *Non-iconic mural of great size; spray technique; polychrome lettering; grey and red dominant colours; well spread; edges neatly defined; doesn't damage private property; doesn't cover advertisements; overview … – he stepped backwards: – … good and elegant, no obscene or blasphemous content. I'd thumb it up. What do you think, Gino? […] Graffiti are becoming more and more important in our times, you must accept it, Gino. So, let's create a new code for [the author, named] Dash: "Number 646". Let's take a picture of the mural, and put it into our catalogue (Musati 2010: 84).*

Figure 11: Street art on Viale Italia. The Unione plant in the background, with its pincer-shaped roof, rebuilt in the 1950s and still visible, is a Falck landmark (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

4.3 Ruins

> *When history piles up wreckage upon wreckage, ruins evoke not only the buildings from which they hail but also a transhistorical iconography of decay and catastrophe, a vast visual archive of ruination. In the era of global media coverage and round the clock exposure to visual data, ruins have become ubiquitous (Hell/Schönle 2010: 1).*

Thus opens a rich collected volume on the cultural history of the ruins of modernity, and ruins are one of the most central elements in Umberto Gillio's pictures.

The proliferation of images dedicated to industrial ruins has triggered a new debate; being actually not new in itself but new in the era of industrial retreat, this debate still relies on the great critics of photography as its conceptual object: Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Susan Sontag. Some have attacked what seems to be a trend towards aestheticism, exoticism, and fetishisation of the ruins of industrial decay as "ruin porn" (Stoler 2013; High 2013a; Strangleman 2013; Lyons 2018). Following Walter Benjamin, cultural historians know, however, that the aestheticisation of ruins ends up being unavoidable and irresistible, and that it does not necessarily subsume all cultural and historical connotations which they signify in their fundamental ambiguity. A ruin is a ruin precisely because it seems to have lost its function and meaning in the present. This ambiguity reflects the complex political-ethical balancing act inherent both to the heritagisation of industry as a process and to the ensuing heritage industry. Both are open to a wide range of uses, contradictory statements and sensibilities, alternative perspectives (progressive or reactionary nostalgia, pride or shame,

etc.), political sterilisation, instrumentalisation, and commodification. It is this "breakdown of meaning" that fosters competing memories and "an intensive compensatory discursive activity" (Hell/Schönle 2010). And it is for the semantic instability which characterises them that deindustrial ruins and ruination are open to so many different renditions (Steinmetz 2010; Huyssen 2010) which have become pervasive over the last 15 years, prompting the representation of urban decay in different media, formats, and genres in a global network of ruin imagery.

It is therefore difficult to deny the allure of industrial ruins, and it is even more difficult to counter the impression that those in Sesto San Giovanni also conjure up fascination mixed with bewilderment. Fascination is invoked, on the one hand, for the remains in their monumental grandiosity. A quote by Giovanni Falck from his inauguration speech at the electric steel plant, Concordia, in 1964 has become part of public memory and storytelling in Sesto: "It is with great emotion that today we open this new cathedral of labour, with a furnace 49 metres high, the same as in Milan Cathedral" (Musati 2010: 82). Bewilderment is provoked, on the other hand, at the sheer force deployed by financial capital, when it withdraws from industrial investment. The recognition of this ambivalence, of this sense of disproportion but also of solitude and silence that often surround industrial ruins, has started the conversation between ruin imagery and the aesthetic of the "sublime" or "deindustrial sublime" (High/Lewis 2007; Apel 2015). The expression loosens its ties here to high and elite culture, however, and has rather been adopted as the "working-class sublime" by the oral historian Alessandro Portelli in his work on the closure of the Terni steel plant by the German multinational ThyssenKrupp:

> *The factory seemed to lose its place as the primary subject of the town's conversation. So, while past generations had grown up hearing about the factory and knew what to expect when they started working there, the newer generations may have been more educated but knew much less of what awaited them beyond the factory gates. So the old sense of surprise, of wonder and amazement returned. [The factory appeared] as something awesome, a bit mysterious, frightful and beautiful: a city of fire, of epic size, in which huge machines move fantastic objects between iron and fire, and where fear, beauty and wonder weave into a modern form of what Romantic poets and philosophers, from Kant to Blake, called "the sublime" (Portelli 2014: 374).*

5. Conclusion

With this contribution I intended to elaborate on a few points: firstly, I wanted to briefly call attention to the reasons why Sesto San Giovanni is a relevant place to study with regard to structural change and post-industrial narratives. Secondly, I aimed at defining the nature of the visual documentation we gathered during our oral history project and its connection to the oral testimonies we recorded in Sesto. Thirdly, I intended to describe the context in which this evidence has been conceived and collected. Finally, I attempted some suggestions to understand the fascination these images exert, and what contemporary viewers can perceive from them as part of something "becoming a genre".

Figure 12: Graffiti on Viale Italia by a young female artist of Philippine origins, dedicated to a youth from Sesto who tragically died (Photo: U. Gillio 2015)

While the "corporate wasteland" described by High and Lewis is object to the increasingly frequent practise of organised urban exploration, whose photographic and narrative knowledge the web and visual social media are helping to spread (High/Lewis 2007), the reproduction and circulation of ruin imagery – abandoned factories, derelict hotels, libraries, schools, churches, business buildings, etc. – has recently trickled through to the most diverse media, from fiction to graphic novels, music videos and video games, film, TV series, documentaries, advertising, art exhibitions, and coffee-table books (Linkon 2018). Deindustrialised imagery, in particular, connects with a dystopian element which, not by chance, has been noticed and often exploited by photographers, admen, and video and film makers who have taken inspiration from the locales of deindustrialisation in their construction of post-apocalyptic landscapes – which leads us to the somewhat disturbing idea that we ourselves live in the future ruins of our present (Dillon 2011):

> *In ruins, history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay (Walter Benjamin: The Origin of the German Tragic Drama, quoted in Lyons 2018: 3).*

As a result, not only the photography of post-industrial areas arising from this kind of flow has become an iconographic genre in its own right, dictating a new aesthetic of

deindustrialisation, but, moreover, these media formats and converging cultural containers have made deindustrialisation rapidly visible to globalised culture (Hell/Schönle 2010: 4). That is why investigating these aesthetics falls in line with the exploration of the cultural and political meanings of economic change and with questioning the perceptions and representations of such a change (Irving 2015). As Dora Apel, a visual culture scholar, has written recently: "[Industrial ruin imagery] speaks to the overarching fears and anxieties of our era" (Apel 2015: 3). Before uttering a judgement, she adds, we must try to understand the reason behind the new powerful fascination that they conjure up in the different visual formats of the world around us, and how the beauty of these industrial ruins counterbalances the insecurity and anxiety that goes hand in hand with industrial decline. As Kate Brown, an academic historian, has further commented, "rust belt places are visible voyeuristically as porn, aesthetically as beauty, and economically as an opportunity, but the violence that created these ruins usually goes unacknowledged" (Brown 2015: 148). We must also try not to forget them.

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Abstract

My contribution focuses on a photo collection dedicated to Sesto San Giovanni, a medium-sized city north of Milan that became the fifth largest industrial district in Italy after WWII. Built around the beginning of the 20th century, its heavy industries were dismantled before that century drew to its close. Closely connected to a campaign of interviews conducted by historians and social anthropologists, the images under consideration aim to relate the photographic representation of former industrial spaces in Sesto as they are today to the oral testimonies and memories gathered between 2013 and 2015. The article elaborates on several points: it briefly sketches the reasons why Sesto San Giovanni is a relevant place to study structural change and deindustrialisation; defines the nature of the visual documentation we gathered during our oral history project; describes the context where this evidence has been conceived and collected; and attempts some suggestions to understand where the fascination that emanates from these images lies, and what contemporary viewers can perceive from them as part of a large deindustrial ruin imagery, something becoming a "global genre".

“Guest Workers” in Mining

Historicising the Industrial Past in the Ruhr region from the Bottom Up?

Katarzyna Nogueira

Introduction

For more than 150 years, the Ruhr valley has been shaped significantly by immigration. Since the mid-19th century, millions of young job-seeking men were drawn to the increasingly industrialising region. During the first wave, they came from the neighbouring and rural areas nearby, later from further afield, both from inside and outside the wider German territories. People from the eastern provinces of the German Empire, from East and West Prussia as well as the provinces of Posen and Silesia soon became the biggest group of “foreign” workers in the Ruhr region (Peter-Schildgen 2007; Schade/Osses 2007). More than 60 percent of these so-called “Ruhrpolen” (Ruhr Poles) worked in the local mining industry before the beginning of the First World War (Oltmer 2013: 27). After the re-emergence of the Polish state in 1918, about two-thirds of the “Ruhrpolen” either returned or moved on to the coalfields of France and Belgium. The second migration wave into the Ruhr region started after the end of the Second World War.[1] More than 13 million refugees and expellees left the former eastern territories of Germany, many of whom ended up in the Ruhr region, usually after first settling in rural areas in Bavaria and northern (West) Germany (Kift 2011; Seidel 2019). By 1960, more than one-third of all expellees lived in North Rhine-Westphalia, with the mining and steel industries as typical fields of employment. At this point, the refugees constituted a crucial “part of the solution to the state’s labour market problem”[2] in the immediate post-war era (Kift 2011: 137). The third and latest wave of labour migration into the Ruhr mining industry, which will be the focus here, started in the 1950s. In the booming post-war economy, the West German government negotiated several recruitment agreements with countries in southern and south-eastern Europe as well as with two North African countries to fill the demand for cheap labour. The first agreement was signed between Germany and Italy in 1955, followed by others with Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, and Yugoslavia. The recruited labourers were called “Gastarbeiter” (guest workers). Additional and special agreements also led to the (temporary) immigration of a smaller number of workers from South Korea (Pölking 2014) and Japan (Kataoka et al. 2012). This third immigration wave came at a time when the decline of the mining industry was about to start, caused by cheaper

1 A different kind of labour migration regards the forced labour of prisoners of war and, especially, of civilian workers from all over German-occupied Europe during the war. By 1944, more than 40 percent of the Ruhr mining workforce, around 163,000 people, were forced labourers (Seidel 2010).

2 All citations were translated by the author.

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.08

sources of energy and strong competition from overseas. Nevertheless, this development led to a new and temporary demand for workers in general and mine workers in particular. About fourteen million people came to the Federal Republic as so-called "guest workers". What was planned to be a form of temporary labour migration became a permanent relocation for about three million "guest workers" and their families (Seidel 2014: 39). After foreign recruitment officially ceased in 1973, caused by the worldwide economic regression, Turkish "guest workers" became the largest group of migrants in the Ruhr area, most of whom worked in the hard coal industry. Today, there are more than 2.8 million people of Turkish descent living in Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt 2015: 128 ff.), still representing one of the largest groups of people with a migration background in the country.

Without immigration, neither the Ruhr region nor its heavy industry would have existed the way both are known to us today. The importance of migration for the mining industry seems beyond question; yet, it might be asked what place the history and experiences of migration occupy in the self-image of the Ruhr today. After the decline of mining and steel, industrial heritage has become essential for the new narration of the region (Berger/Golombek/Wicke 2018: 74). During the 1970s, initiatives "from below" started to advocate both the preservation of the tangible industrial heritage and a stronger appreciation of the lifeworlds, experiences and memory of the region's working-class communities and their culture. This process led, for instance, to the very first classification of an industrial building as a historical monument, the machine hall of the Zollern Colliery in Dortmund (Parent 2013). Cultural institutions, museums, and even trade unions and companies became key players for the memorialisation of the industrial past and the representation of regional identity. Industrial heritage was and still is a success story (Berger/Golombek/Wicke 2018). However, "an almost ghostly unanimity" characterises the stories that are told in the context of industrial heritage (Berger 2019: 512 f.). This homogenisation of narratives leads to the celebration of certain memories while others remain blind spots. Narrating labour migration as a success story, for instance, tends to neglect its more problematic aspects. One example of this standardisation of narratives can be seen in the accentuation of an all-encompassing camaraderie underground. According to this narrative, everybody was the same underground, notwithstanding where someone came from; miners needed to be able to rely on each other as every mistake, no matter how small, potentially entailed deadly consequences for all. While this narrative underscores the integrative power of the underground workplace, it nonetheless seems to contrast markedly with a public – and historical – discourse that emphasises the alleged difficulties and shortcomings of migration and "integration" in the Ruhr area (Berger 2019: 514).

Oral History, or rather: various forms of using oral testimonies and memory narrations, have been an integral part of recovering and representing the Ruhr's industrial history. As both historical movement and method, oral history initially emerged as a tool of counterhistory, a politicised form of historiography from the bottom up. In the Ruhr region as elsewhere, the "history from below" movement sought to reset the focus on new historical subjects (e.g. women, workers, and migrants) and perspectives (e.g. everyday life). After the decline of the mining industry, local history workshops, academic historians, filmmakers, and museum practitioners began to construe miners and mining communities as historical subjects. Accordingly, personal narrations played an increasingly important role, not only as a source of research but also as an instrument

for public historical representation. Prominent academic projects, such as LUSIR (Niethammer 1983a; Niethammer 1983b; Niethammer/Plato 1985), about the life stories and social culture in the Ruhr region between 1930 and 1960, helped both develop methodical tools and establish them into academic historical practice. So what started as a movement from the bottom up became part of academic historiography and historical methodology. Today, personal narrations seem to be essential for public historical representations (Sabrow/Frei 2012) about the regional past, and "oral history", the use of the "Zeitzeuge"[3], developed into a term that includes different concepts, functions, and methodological approaches – in academia and museums as well as in documentaries, television, websites, or bottom-up initiatives. Using the case of the Ruhr area, this article deals with the functions of public oral history narrations about the region's mining past by particularly addressing the question of how the work and life stories of Turkish "guest workers" have been represented in the wider regional historical culture. To what extent did they become narrative agents in the region's historiography, from a democratic and participatory "history from below" to an increasingly institutionalised approach in public history? Four selected case studies will serve as examples to discuss the varied functions of personal narrations and oral history in this context.

Blind Spots in Historiography

The surge in histories of the everyday in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which set a new focus on the everyday life of mine workers and their families, also brought about experimental forms in counter-historiography. New projects used interviews and personal testimonies as a source to approach the personal and collective experiences of ordinary people. This applies, for instance, to the field of documentary literature, as the following example will show. In 1975, the German Academic Exchange Programme (DAAD) invited the Turkish novelist and author Füruzan Selçuk to stay and work in West Berlin for two years. Having been active as a writer since 1956 and usually only using her first name, it was Füruzan's first time visiting the Federal Republic. As an author interested in contemporary issues of the family and the working class, she decided to research the experiences of Turkish migrant workers in Germany. After conducting interviews with teachers and their German and Turkish pupils in West Berlin, she went to the Ruhr where she visited the local mining towns and workers' estates to record interviews with the Turkish "guest workers". The lives and problems of the "Almancılar"[4] was a popular topic in Turkey in the 1970s, but letting them speak for themselves was a new approach. The first results of Füruzan's interview project were published in Turkish newspapers such as Milliyet, followed by a book published in Turkish in 1977. With this documentation Füruzan wanted to show "how her countrymen really do live here" (Kuper 1985: 1). Her project was also connected to the goal of creating an alternative and more realistic image of Germany, a counter-narrative to the idealised image predominant in Turkey since the 19th century (Kuper 1985: 151). In this context,

3 The concept of the Zeitzeuge (witness of contemporary history) implicates a delimitation from academic oral history. The Zeitzeuge of the mining era is a public figure and part of (historical) representations predominantly in museums and the media.

4 "Almancılar" is a Turkish, slightly disparaging term for Turks living in Germany also used by many interviewees.

Turkish mine workers could describe "a completely new nature, a completely new character of Germany than hitherto assumed". But more crucially, it was also meant to be a "commitment to the workers and the working class" (Kuper 1985: 152) in general. The project initially aimed at a Turkish audience. Eight years later, in 1985, a much shorter and recomposed German translation was published with a focus on those original chapters, which "would be particularly instructive for exploring the German image" within the stories told (Kuper 1985: 153). The idea for this reissue came from Turkish students in Istanbul who rediscovered the book during their German studies class with the editor, Rosemarie Kuper:

> *The majority of the students agreed that the book should be translated [into German] to break the isolation between Germans and Turks. In Germany, they [the students] suffered from the fact that nobody knows anything about the other. Füruzan's book seemed to be particularly suited to counteract this deficiency (Kuper 1985: 155).*

The book, entitled *Lodging in the Land of the Rich – How a Turkish Writer Sees the Life of Her Countrymen in Germany*, implies three perspectives: in the first place, the perspective of the Turkish miners in the Ruhr. The literal quotations from the interviews Füruzan conducted with them are juxtaposed with the author's observations, thoughts and reactions. The text is permeated by her reflections about the discrepancy "between the ideas [of Germany] she brought with her and what she found instead" (Kuper 1985: 153). In the end, the recompilation of the original book is, of course, also influenced by the students' intentions and choices. Unfortunately, there is a lack of information about the extent to which the interviews were shortened or adjusted, both for the original book and the subsequent German version. Here, the stories of the Turkish miners concentrate on the experienced contradictions between "the almost blind veneration for Germany […] [and] the actual living and working conditions" (Kuper 1985: 1). The Turkish miners are talking about their motives for migration and the experiences they made in the new country. But the interviews are almost continuously dealing with stories of struggle, of cultural difference, exclusion, social and economic disadvantages as well as of anxiety about the future while also discussing the economic and social problems back in Turkey. These narratives are furthermore interlinked with articulations of gratitude for finally being heard. During Füruzan's visit of a group of Turkish miners in a workers' hostel, one of them says: "Come on friends, tell her what you have experienced! Let us hear what troubles you! Someone came here who will listen to you! No radio, you shouldn't listen to the radio. This time, the radio is listening to you for once!" (Kuper 1985: 118). Another interviewee says: "We are happy that you came to us. So far, nobody asked how we are […]. It is good for all of us to be able to speak out" (Kuper 1985: 66). Füruzan describes the same aspect in the chapter *The Almancılar in Germany*, reflecting the difficulties of approaching the interviewees: "It is no surprise that they initially couldn't believe that someone would be interested in them" (Kuper 1985: 66). Even though her work was not conceptualised as an outright oral history as such, her project is most akin to later oral history projects from below in terms of content, objectives, and partly also in methodology. At the same time, it is an example of early projects trying to write history from below by pointing the spotlight of historiography on new actors and topics.

Almost ten years after Füruzan's interviews, the first major – though non-academic – oral history project was initiated from inside the Ruhr: the so-called *Hochlarmarker Lesebuch*, funded by the municipality of Recklinghausen, on the northern fringe of the Ruhr region. An increased budget for the local culture department in Hochlarmark, a mining district of Recklinghausen, opened up the opportunity to start a course at an adult education center on the local history of Hochlarmark, which eventually led to an exhibition and the according publication, the *Lesebuch*. The course entitled "Do You Remember? People from Hochlarmark Narrate the Past" ran from 1978 to 1981. A group of Hochlarmarkers met once a week to discuss their common past, have conversations about their lives, conduct interviews and group talks as well as to share pictures and historical documents about the history of Hochlarmark. What seems to be a common approach today was new to the participants in 1978. This resulted in thorough discussions about the roles of the participants as both historical actors and at the same time as authors of their history. The eight men and eight women, between 44 and 78 years old, had never perceived themselves as historical subjects nor as people whose personal stories would matter. Instead, they expected someone else to tell them the story of their hometown during their very first meeting. The project managers described this situation as follows: "According to their ideas, history was represented in the local buildings, city squares, and streets. Besides, it was represented by the dignitaries of Hochlarmark, by the pastor, the teacher, the mine inspector, and long-established families" (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 317 f.). Seeing the first part of the interview-documentary "The Life Story of the Miner Alphons S." (Goldmann 1980) during the beginning of the project helped them to understand the historicity of (their own) life stories and that "different personal experiences [can express] common living conditions" (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 317 f.). With the working title "It Wasn't All about Coal" the project aimed to document and recover regional and local history from a distinct "from below" perspective by collecting memories, stories and other kinds of source material to weave together a collective history of Hochlarmark. The results were used in schools, in the field of trade union education as well as in adult education and cultural work. In 1979, the participants also worked on an exhibition that was shown in the local community centre, the *Fritz-Husemann-Haus*, and in part also at the 90th anniversary celebrations of the Industrial Union of Mine and Energy Workers (IGBE) in Dortmund.

Based on this joint preparatory work, a book was published in 1981, the *Hochlarmarker Lesebuch*. Just as the exhibition, the publication deals with the history of Recklinghausen-Hochlarmark since the creation of the city district in the course of industrialisation up to the closure of the Recklinghausen colliery in 1974, including the years that followed this incisive moment. Throughout these almost one hundred years of local history, coal mining had been the most determining economic and power factor in the region and had also been decisive for the rapid growth of the city district (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 13). While in 1880 the population of Hochlarmark was still around 320 inhabitants, it increased to 2,755 by 1900 and up to 6,530 by 1914. This development would not have been possible without immigration, especially from the surrounding areas as well as from Silesia or East Prussia, an aspect also reflected in the book. It is, for instance, mentioned in a short collage-like compilation of memory-snippets entitled "Where Did the Mining Families Come From? People from

Hochlarmark Remember the Origins of their Parents and Grandparents" (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 21 ff.). On the following pages, the book keeps devoting itself to this topic. In the last chapter, arriving in the 1980s, the problems Hochlamark is facing after the decline of the mining industry are discussed, such as mine decommissioning, the privatisation of company housing, or the long-term environmental problems stemming from the industry. But the chapter *Hochlarmark Today* also addresses "guest workers". In an interview, a works-council chairman and member of the town council talks about the problems Hochlarmark is facing in the 1980s:

> *Our problems are not small in terms of population composition because we have a lot of foreigners here – most of them are Turkish people –, mainly living in "Neue Heimat" [miners' settlement]. People live together in a small space; and this means that life there isn't always very peaceful. This is not so much because of the existing tolerance or intolerance of the different population groups themselves. To a large extent, it is simply due to the difference in generation between the residents. Those who moved to "Neue Heimat" in the 1950s have now reached an age where they want to have some peace and quiet. And now younger Turkish families with many children are moving in. Of course, that annoys the elderly enormously (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 284).*

He further explains that due to these problems, German residents would feel the need to leave their homes. As a consequence, new Turkish families move into the vacant apartments, which are, anyway, too small for "families with so many children". Attempts to have younger German families unrelated to mining move in – as "young people are not that sensitive to child noise" – have failed so far (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 284). Later in the interview, he discusses the problems of integration, going beyond his argument that these problems would mainly be caused by the difference in generation. Instead, they also imply factors such as culture, language, or the peculiarities of the social structures within the community:

> *The Turkish people are not the first population group to come to Hochlarmark […]. Because of the war and what happened after the war, a large number of people came to us […]. But they were people who spoke our language and who, in terms of denomination, had the same ties as the people from here originally. It's different for the Turkish people (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 288 f.).*

Following this somewhat official, distanced, and supposedly objective view on current migration, the book features four excerpts of interviews with Turkish people, two miners, and two housewives to provide a perspective from the other side of things. Just as in the preceding chapters, the problems in everyday life dominate in the narratives. "We are different from the Germans and the Germans are different from us", declares a Turkish miner, describing his difficulties in connecting to the Germans (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 302). The interview excerpts are furthermore dealing with prejudices on the part of the Germans, with exclusions and disputes as well as with the hardships related to making a living while trying to save money to send back home. Even though their Turkish interviewees represent an important change of perspective,

their mode of narrating mirrors the "German" view in predominantly problematising the difficulties of living together on both sides. Here, neither the need for the recruitment of workers from abroad nor any kind of positive aspects are further discussed. A Turkish woman describes this situation as follows: "The Turks did the cheap and difficult work that the Germans no longer wanted to do. But anyway, now they simply say: 'Turks out!' I cannot understand that" (Hochlarmarker Geschichts-Arbeitskreis 1981: 303).

Becoming Part of a Success Story

While the narratives in the two previous examples, Füruzan's documentary and the grassroots project in Recklinghausen-Hochlarmark, focused predominantly on the existing problems between German and Turkish miners from different points of view, more recent interview projects following a bottom-up approach display a slight change in perspective. "Glückauf in Deutschland" is an oral history project that started in 2012 at the Verein für Internationale Freundschaften Dortmund e.V. (Association for International Friendships), founded by immigrants in Dortmund. A central part of the association's activities concerns story-telling and reflecting the past. Small groups of former "guest workers" started to tell each other about their experiences. Soon a group of nine Turkish miners began to collect documents, photographs and each other's life stories. They all came to Germany in 1964 as part of a larger group of 76 young boys scheduled to start their training in the coal mines of the Ruhr area and to escape the lack of prospects in Turkey. In 2015, their work and research resulted in a traveling exhibition and a book, both developed by the interviewees themselves. Projects like this still show traces of historiography from below comparable to the interview practices of the 1960s and 1970s. Similar to these earlier projects, "Glückauf in Deutschland" tries to make the migrant workers subjects of historiography by letting them speak for themselves. In the book, this results in a compilation of informative texts about the history of German immigration accompanied by brief biographical texts about the interviewees and short quotes from their life story interviews. Yet, in contrast to the time of Füruzan's documentary book, the history and contemporary repercussions of labour migration was a much-discussed topic in 2015, even though in public discourse it was frequently framed as one of social/cultural difference and a supposed unwillingness to "integrate". Thus, "Glückauf in Deutschland" neither put a new topic on the agenda as such nor was the addressing of problematic aspects of migration particularly new; however, the personal experiences and perspectives which the individual testimonies conveyed give the book a different angle, as the editors point out:

> *The history and the personal stories of labour migration in the wake of the economic upswing in West Germany have already been told from different perspectives […]. But the immigrants have mostly been seen as a problem. In those stories, those who immigrated for work and those who followed hardly appear as individuals […]. They are rarely presented as individual personalities who have contributed to the development of German society. Again and again, there is a lack of differentiation and a lack of appreciation (Waltz 2015: 8).*

Even though the stories also deal with the difficulties of the interviewees' lives in Germany, their stories are rather addressing their power of endurance while "not giving up" as well as "seizing the opportunity" to build a life (Waltz 2015: 43). This motif of personal success, based on overcoming difficulties and struggle, runs through almost all narrations presented in the book. Recep Çirkoğlu for instance always dreamed of becoming an engineer: "Recep accepted this challenge of standing on his own two feet, of not giving up. His motto was: Do not rest, fight instead and follow God's will. Studying became his greatest challenge." Even later in his life "the challenges didn't end" (Waltz 2015: 43). Recep Çirkoğlu, who was born in Kastamonu in 1949, started his work career at the *Zeche Erin* in Castrop-Rauxel. In 1974, he finally became an engineer. And indeed, all life stories presented here are life stories of successful careers in mining: "All those portrayed here found their roadway to success. They all became technicians, engineers, or foremen. They all fought for respect and dignity at work" (Waltz 2015: 8). In essence, it is about receiving "public recognition within the framework of urban memory culture" (Waltz 2015: 10). It is about becoming part of the industrial heritage's grand narrative. The editors describe their motives for the project as follows:

> *The project "Glückauf in Deutschland" wants to bear witness to the strength and potential of migrants, to their contribution to the social development of the Federal Republic since the 1960s and to the recognition they experienced since the beginning of their departure from home and their immigration to Germany (Waltz 2015: 6).*

But not all of those who came in 1964 were successful. Some dropped out of the training programmes, others went back to Turkey or simply couldn't work their way up in the mines like the interviewees who were part of this project. Nevertheless, their life stories are intended to also represent "the stories of the 1,000 young people that came to the Ruhr area between 1964 and 1973" (Waltz 2015: 9). Of course, these Turkish miners, whose specific stories are not told here, also contributed to the German economy and society. Without any doubt, their stories are worth to be told as well. But experience shows that it is easier to speak about struggles already overcome than to talk publicly about problems that might still be part of one's life, stories that might not fit into such dominant and identity-creating regional narratives. In this respect, there still remains a lot to do in making the struggles of migrant workers visible and allowing them to become part and parcel of public representation and industrial heritage.

Blind Spots of Industrial Heritage Narratives?

There are still some blind spots with regard to the Ruhr's migration history; and there are (public) history projects trying to make them visible. Not all of these are stories of adjustment and eventual success. There are, for instance, still problematic and difficult aspects of regional migration history that remain largely blocked out from dominant regional narratives. During the process of German reunification, debates about democracy and power arose. It was also a time of controversial debates about immigration to Germany, highly dominated by xenophobia and serious assaults on the living quarters

of immigrants and asylum seekers. For many immigrants, racism, in all its forms, was part of a daily reality too often neglected, though it is still present today.

A very recent group that uses research, networking, and interviews as a tool to "fight to ensure that the perspective of those affected by racist violence is incorporated into the collective memory" (Interkultur Ruhr 2019), the "Initiative Duisburg 1984" was founded in 2018.[5] It aims to bring the long-forgotten case of an arson attack on a residential building in Duisburg on 26th August 1984 back into the public consciousness. Seven members of a steel worker's family, who hailed from Adana in Turkey, died in the fire.[6] Twenty-three other people present in the house were injured. The case was closed in 1996 when an alleged pyromaniac woman was identified as the perpetrator. Any contextualisation with the atmosphere of xenophobia that was already prevalent in the Ruhr in the 1980s, at the height of the deindustrial crisis, was neglected. Despite existing evidence, a racist and right-wing motivation for the attack was not pursued. Rather, the incident, as well as the victims' names, were forgotten until rediscovered accidentally by the "Documentation Center and Museum on Migration in Germany" (Domid e.V.) in Cologne. Since its foundation, the "Initiative Duisburg 1984" is striving for a "dignified form of recognition and memory culture". Therefore, they create "places of listening" and public events for discussion, like the event "'Racism was not mentioned'. Racism, Right-Wing Violence, and Self-Organised Recognition", which took place in June 2019 in cooperation with local actors and networks ("Initiative Duisburg 1984" 2019). In August 2019, a commemoration ceremony took place in Duisburg. One result of this event was a podcast that focuses on the voices and perspectives of the "survivors and victims of the arson attack who have not been listened to so far" ("Initiative Duisburg 1984" 2019). By public organisations like these, by doing research and interviews as well as by connecting with family members and neighbours, the initiative does not only aim to bring this incident back into the public memory but also "to investigate racism as a motive" ("Initiative Duisburg 1984" 2019). On their website they say:

> *We write our own history! Violence, racism and exclusion are part of this history. We finally want to talk about racism and migrant life in the 1980s. There is no language and visibility for this dark field ("Initiative Duisburg 1984" 2019).*

Tragic blind spots like this are also part of the Ruhr region's industrial history. Nonetheless, narrations about racism and right-wing attacks seldom appear in industrial heritage narratives. By writing their own history and by creating room for listening, the initiative introduces narratives of regional (industrial) history that run contrary to common and dominant narrations of the Ruhr region's industrial past as represented in the established forms of industrial heritage. Examples like this show us that (industrial)

5 The initiative is funded by VBRG e.V., the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation NRW, the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, the NRW State Office for the Performing Arts, the GLS Treuhand, the NRW Kultursekretariat, the Amadeu Antonio Foundation as well as the city of Duisburg.

6 Their names: Döndü Satir (40), Zeliah Turhan (18), Rasim Turhan (15) as well as their newborn baby Tarık, Çiğdem Satır (7), Ümit Satır (5), and Songül Satır (4).

heritage can also be difficult, dissonant and uncomfortable, serving rather as a "Mahnmal" (memorial as a warning) than a "Denkmal" (memorial as commemoration). Over the past decades, former "guest workers" have increasingly become agents of their own stories, initiating projects to make themselves visible. While initiatives like the "Hochlarmarker Lesebuch" rather reduced them to being part of a problem, Füruzan's project "Logis im Land der Reichen" put their stories and struggles into the centre of attention. This way of challenging dominant narratives changed with "Glückauf in Deutschland", where problems and struggles of the past are narrated as part of the collective success stories in the present. The "Initiative Duisburg 1984", finally, shows that implementing difficult or dark heritage into industrial heritage narratives can scrutinise common memory collectives and diversify heritage meanings towards multivocal and controversial representations.

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Abstract

Over the past five to six decades, oral history has become a complex and diverse tool, not only for uncovering and analysing individual and collective patterns of memory but also to inscribe them into public historical narratives. In the wake of the decline of the mining industry in the Ruhr region, local history workshops, academic historians, filmmakers, and museum practitioners began to construe miners and mining communities as historical subjects from the bottom up. Throughout this time, personal narrations played an increasingly important role as both a source of research and a tool for public historical representations. Using the case study of the Ruhr area, this article deals with the functions of public oral history narrations about the region's mining past. It will particularly address the question of how the work and life stories of Turkish immigrant labourers, officially labelled as "guest workers", have been represented in regional historical culture. To what extent did they become narrative agents in the Ruhr's historiography, from a democratic and participatory "history from below" to an increasingly institutionalised approach in public history?

“We Are in the Museum Now”

Narrating and Representing Dock Work

Janine Schemmer

Dock work underwent a major shift since the implementation of the container and its consequences like automation and logistics. Since the 1960s, global developments have had a major impact on work structures and organisational patterns of workers and employees. This development engendered generational conflicts through structural transformations, job losses and hierarchical labour disputes. Furthermore, the changing character of dock work altered ideas and concepts of masculinity connected to the profession, challenging a traditional sense of male workers’ pride and evoking existential issues.

Although transformations in ports follow global logics and are subject to similar processes, the history of each workplace and its actors is always linked to a local context. While, in some former port cities, dock work merely plays a marginal role today, others have been able to maintain their status as an important reloading point. Hamburg is particularly suited to an analysis of this technical transformation as the port still plays a major role in the city’s economy and public image (cf. Rodenstein 2008). Moreover, inhabitants and dock workers alike identify with the place up to the present day.

As complex spaces of work and cultural encounters, ports are natural candidates not only for an analysis of spatial transformations, of changes in employment patterns and work cultures. Since the disappearance of former working practices and the historicising of port areas took place as a simultaneous process (cf. Berking/Schwenk 2011), harbours and docks are good examples regarding the challenges of historic representations and the museumification of labour. After losing its status as a freeport zone in 2003, various enterprises, such as advertising agencies, entertainment industries and the wider creative sector, began to settle in and around the *Speicherstadt*, the central part of the former port area. This district today is re-enacted as a cultural event space. Right next to it the so-called *HafenCity* is emerging, a huge restructuring project. Characteristic features of the old port and its related patterns of work maintain their presence in the form of warehouses and historical cranes and function as the backdrop for this development. Andreas Reckwitz describes this process as “self-culturalisation” (Reckwitz 2009: 2) and explains the transformation of Western urbanity since the 1970s with the creation of culture-orientated creative cities. He points out that this phenomenon is not only a discursive one, but also influences and changes social practices and the materiality of the architecture of a city, of residential or entertainment areas or business districts. The *HafenCity* is only one expression of this transformed materiality. Besides, various former docks have been filled up in order to store containers there, and container terminals and new working areas have been located outside the centre in the

 https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v31i2.09

western and southern part of the city. Besides an increasing event culture, Reckwitz also observes a trend of museumification, a development that occurred in Hamburg as a parallel process to the rising mechanisation of labour. Since the 1980s, various old ships have been converted to museums and are now part of the maritime heritage ensemble and the city's public image. One institution that documents and represents this transformation process as well as the historic occupational traditions is the *Hafenmuseum* (Harbour Museum). As last witnesses of the old port and as protagonists and active part of the transformation, a group of unionised men raised the idea of a museum in the mid-1980s. It eventually opened its doors in 2005 as a branch of the *Museum der Arbeit* (Museum of Work).

While the global success story of the container and the revolutionary changes it brought about in the logistics sector are well known and researched (e.g. Levinson 2006), my research focuses on the perceptions of those who observed and experienced these transformations and on the socio-cultural and spatial implications the changes entailed (Schemmer 2018).[1] In this article, I will report some of my central findings. When working in the Harbour Museum as a student, I established first contacts with some future interview partners, while I got to know the others in different contexts. Overall, I collected 25 interviews with former Hamburg dock workers, with the term referring to protagonists occupied in the wide range of cargo handling. As narratives always represent a retrospective view on an experience and "stories are told from their end" (Lehmann 2007: 284), the narratives I gathered, along with some interviewees' present engagement in the museum and other heritage sites, predominantly reflect their current views on the harbour complex and its changes.[2] Considering a narrative a cultural practice means to look closely at the processuality that constitutes meaning in retrospect, and to identify the different functions of retrospective narratives (cf. Bendix 1996: 170). My interest lies in the perceptions and self-positioning of former dockers, discursive patterns of their narrations, and the meaning they attribute to their former workplace in relation to present developments. In the following, I will outline central topics brought up by the interviewees regarding the transformation of the port, in particular with respect to the mechanisation of dock work and the social and spatial changes this process triggered. As the place where these memories are located and publicly negotiated today is the Harbour Museum, I will first turn to this institution.

Moving Display Cases – Negotiating Dock Work

The Harbour Museum is situated in *Schuppen 50*, one of the last historic, heritage-protected quay sheds built between 1908 and 1912. Notwithstanding its historic setting, the shed is located within the contemporary working port, close to the container terminals. This proximity makes the museum an interesting place for research as it marks an intersection between work related memories of the former dockers and the transformations the port has visibly undergone over the last decades. Although the municipality

1 It must be noted that most protagonists in my study have internalised the port's history and firmly identify with it until today. As my analysis focuses specifically on cargo handling, where women were not employed, I rarely interviewed female protagonists. In addition, the voices of those who are not part of this narrative community for various reasons, such as the countless workers who lost their jobs or just worked in the port briefly, must be left out.

2 All cited quotes are translated from German into English by the author.

runs the museum, there are only few permanent employees and it is mostly based on voluntary work. Apart from the directorate, the main protagonists on site are volunteers and former dock workers, shipbuilding workers and seamen.

Outside the building, museum ships and old cranes are aligned along the quay. Inside, the hall seems more like a storage than a museum. There are many shelves filled with objects like tea chests, coffee bags and other goods, along with different working devices, demonstrating the former work routines. Besides, the exhibition also tells the story of the container as the principle motor of modern port infrastructure. The museum follows a hands-on approach, encouraging the visitors to touch and interact with the exhibited objects in order to literally grasp and comprehend the technological transformation. Rather than explicitly addressing the social dimensions of dock work, the museum's focus primarily lies on the material culture of traditional dock work and on related professional skills. Some volunteers are still busy collecting objects that are being displayed in the exhibition and to some extent they also co-design the way in which the exhibits are presented. Since only few text panels contextualise working tools and objects, the volunteers' memories and assessments constitute a key feature of the exhibition.

Such co-curatorial attempts, however, can lead to moments of competition between "professional" curators and varying groups of voluntary workers. In particular, this can be noted by looking at a number of display cases, which formed a central part of the exhibition concept in the first years of the museum. The handling and design of these cases exemplifies the symbolic value of objects for the manifestation and representation of former professional positions and hierarchies (cf. Korff 1999: 278). The museum management and the volunteers planned and equipped their content in close cooperation. Inside the display cases, formerly established work structures are explained. During the first few months of my work at the museum, I noticed that the arrangement of these display cases in the showroom changed on a regular, often even daily basis. The display cases sometimes literally migrated to other places and positions within the exhibition, as different actors felt responsible for their organisation. Each of them belonged to various occupational groups: some working on land, some on ships, some working in the processes of cargo handling, processing or control. Thus, the heterogeneous protagonists had different perspectives with regard to the occupational context which they saw represented in the composition and location of the display cases. After being moved by the former workers and employees, they were often pushed back to their initial positions by the museum management. This movement illustrates the manifold perspectives on the organisation of work and the contradictory views of volunteers, for whom the showcases were symbolic of their former heterogeneous occupations and hierarchical functions.

This animated practice of exhibiting dock work does not only demonstrate a certain wilfulness, self-esteem and *Eigensinn* (Lüdtke 1993) among the actors, but also emphasises ongoing processes of negotiation in presenting histories and the various occupations. Markus Tauschek states that "logics of competition [...] are embedded in the self-interpretations of subjects" (Tauschek 2013: 12). The movement of museum cases and objects can be interpreted as an expression of the conflicts among the occupational groups who felt represented in an inappropriate way or location. The volunteers negotiate their own past; however, former hierarchies continue to be expressed and are played out in contested representations.

Professional hierarchies, depending on individual careers and services for certain companies, continue to consolidate status and habitus. The analysis of both the volunteer narratives and the museum's exhibition practices illustrate that "work defines status" (Eckert 2010: 170). Anton Ermer, for example, a former authorised representative, continues to demonstrate his superiority against a former representative of the work council when he describes his role in a company takeover: "they went bankrupt then, although Mr. A. does not want to admit that [...] we called the shots, we were the managers" (Ermer 2010: 13). He demonstrates the right decision he took back then by emphasising his position. Until today, he continues to discuss the successes and mistakes of past business transactions with the former workers' representative, whom he mentions and who, like Ermer, is involved in the museum, always holding on to the old hierarchical matrix. Even if they cooperate for the museum today, interact as colleagues and show great respect for each other, the competition over interpretations of past actions continues and occurs, above all, between different professional groups and members of different companies.

In this light, the moving of display cases and the way knowledge is communicated in the museum can be understood as a performative "act of presentation" (Löffler 1999: 76). According to Ina-Maria Greverus, performance means not only considering the contents of the narrative, but also incorporating the context of what has been said:

> *Performance is the staging of a situation of interaction and communication in which a cultural text is produced. In order to understand this text, everyone involved must be able to co-create and read it – this does not exclude that the text is interpreted in different ways (Greverus 1997: 89).*

Analysing the various, and partly conflicting, narratives further exemplifies the particular connection between taking action and speaking.

Silent Revolution? Technical and Social Transformations

In May 1987, an article titled "The Silent Revolution" was printed in the local newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt*. It appeared within the context of the 798th port anniversary, which is celebrated extensively each year. The author explained the contemporary development of containerisation to the broad public. Whereas, in earlier days, the port would seem more crowded to spectators, the author of the article assured the worried reader that despite container and computer, there were still a lot of jobs in the port; only their profile had changed and more workers that are qualified were needed. Finally, he concluded: "Grandpa's port is dead. But the port is alive." With this statement, the author stressed the continuous success of the Hamburg port as a reloading point in contrast, for example, to the decline of the shipbuilding industry at that time. Although the number of workers decreased immensely over the years (in 1968, there were around 15,000 people; in 1978, around 13,000; and in 1994, around 6,000), dock work and the port itself continued to be an important part of Hamburg's economy, both in terms of employment and tourism.

The silent revolution as described in the aforementioned article also emerges in the narrations. My interview partners vividly talk about changes in work procedures and workspaces and the development from teamwork to more individualistic and isolated

workflows. In general, they do not describe these transformations as sudden ruptures but as slow processes. For decades, there had been a coexistence of self-learned practical work knowledge (cf. Hörning 2004) and containerised movement of goods and corresponding parallel work practices, which may be one of the reasons why technological changes are not described as biographical ruptures. Paul Wonner, born in 1950, started working as a stevedore, soon qualified for operating a container gantry, and told me: "We laughed about the container and said, 'that box will never establish itself'. As there were always ships with general cargo, we dismissed the idea that the container would push us aside" (2010: 17). There is a parallel between this statement and contemporary reports of port magazines in which the entrepreneurs tried to appease the workers, and promoted a more comfortable manner of working with the container. Headlines like "Don't be afraid of the container" (GHB 1967: 3) were meant to placate the workers.

The unexpected rise of the container is a common narrative pattern. Although many interviewees commented that they did not think of the container as a particular threat, a closer look at the professional biographies indicates that the protagonists confronted the changes by additional qualification or occupational reorientation as more and more private firms had to close down from the late 1970s onwards. In April 1980, Kai Reuter, born in 1941, for instance, who had been working as a bargeman for 20 years, applied for the position of a ship's master with the river police, as he was pessimistic about the future development of his occupation. But not all of the men perceived and confronted the transformation immediately. Walter Widmann, a former instructor in the traditional occupation of winchman, summed up the situation: "I was vain, I never thought they could remove me from my position!" (2010: 56). He worked for 25 years until his job was terminated in 1994. When the company he worked for decided to keep him busy with custodial activities, a doctor attested him to be unsuitable for the occupation and he received an early pension. After the end of his career, Widmann soon engaged himself voluntarily in the senior groups of the union, his former company, and finally in the museum.

Furthermore, the current estimation and evaluation of the transformation through technical and technological devices like containers and computers varies vastly. While interviewees who belong to the younger generation and intentionally decided to work in the container section from the late 1970s onwards express a clear interest in working with technical equipment, older ones take a negative attitude towards engaging with modern technology in general. This generational gap is not surprising, but it is interesting which aspects of this frame of mind and development are narrated, how they are illustrated, and what is being left out.

Erwin Meier, born in 1949, initially learned the profession bargeman and started as a casual employee in the port. Economic reasons motivated him to acquire technical skills:

> *At that time, I was working on the Burchardkai terminal, where I saw the van carriers. The workers there told me about their income. And then I said, "Boy, you can do this, too!" [...] Now I am allowed to operate everything that moves. (Meier 2010: 19 f.).*

Of course, next to the prospect of an increased income, the technological interest also arose from the fact that young workers still had a career ahead of them.[3] Besides, the container was a new device evoking curiosity, and working with it was uncomplicated in comparison to the transport of tree trunks, for example, as another interviewee states. Ulli Amling, also born in 1949, expressed his great interest in containers. He started to work in the port in the late 1970s as a mechanic. After a few months, he had the possibility to choose which sector he would like to work in and decided on the container section where he saw the future of dock work.

Peter Kramer was born in 1937. In 1951, he began working as a tallyman, a traditional trade that later completely lost its importance. As a tallyman, he was responsible for cargo control and quality. At the very beginning of the interview, he mentions two main themes, which are characteristic throughout his narrative: the interaction and the social aspects of his everyday work routine. He constantly underlines good relations with different colleagues, a fact that ensured his professional standing throughout the transformation process:

> *I got through rather well because I was in great demand by different companies. I never really had problems. […] One colleague always told me: "You are a popular man." Well, for all those years. People knew each other. And everyone knew what the other was able or not able to do. Therefore, I actually never had problems. (Kramer 2010: 1).*

By emphasising twice right in the beginning of our talk that he did not encounter obstacles, he aroused my curiosity and I expected a narrative of loss. Instead, he focused on his professional continuity, which his social networks enabled him. Tallyman was a highly regarded profession. Practical working skills obtained through experience are an important feature in his narrative. Kramer explained he would rather rely on his own mathematical abilities than on a calculator. Through the narrative juxtaposition of body techniques and machine technology, several narrators regain their power to act, which got lost in many operational fields. In the 1990s, the profession became less important through the increasing technology and the subsequent reorganisation and qualification. Kramer explains very clearly:

> *I guess there are no tallymen anymore working for the labour pool. The category doesn't exist anymore because nobody needs them anymore. You have to be able to drive van carriers. You have to drive the container bridge. Those are the people they need nowadays (Kramer 2010: 82 f.).*

Throughout the interview, he constantly relates to recent developments but never connects them to his personal career. Although Kramer experienced the gradual loss of meaning of his profession, he describes his working life as fulfilled as he worked as a tallyman for nearly 40 years. However, he experienced an immense personal disappointment that implicitly colours his narrative when he mentions that in his last working years as a tallyman in the 1990s, he could no longer find work on a regular basis as

3 Here one can add that operators of the gantry crane rank first on the salary scale, cf. Unternehmensverband Hafen Hamburg 1980: 30.

most tallymen tasks had been automated. Nevertheless, he states positively: "I enjoyed having more spare time" (Kramer 2010: 31). In the end, he agreed to an early retirement. He avoids explaining the end of his career in detail, which is a typical feature with many elderly interview partners, who merely mention an accident or another significant incident but avoid outlining it further. Retirement often remains a blank space in the narrations. Today, Peter Kramer is involved as a volunteer on a museum steam ship.

As the example of Kramer shows, attitudes, positions and attributions of meaning correlate closely with negotiation processes of social relationships and networks which are a central narrative pattern about the port as a social space. This social space can be described as a space of action characterised by individual skills and cooperative relations. Overall, the narratives concerning personal careers in the transformation process focus on professional continuity but at the same time reveal major ambivalences (cf. Passerini 1996: 22 f.). The structural changes caused hierarchical shifts and led to a modified, "technical" image of the docker. While they brought along empowerment for the younger, they meant disempowerment for many older protagonists. The interviews reveal a clear "generational bond" of technical interest and understanding (Schröder 2000: 6). Thus, technological transformation strongly influenced dock workers' identifications. Still, most of the interviewees benefited from the structural and professional transformation, which led to better social and financial circumstances for many protagonists and improved their working and living conditions.[4]

Atmosphere and Emotion – Disappearing Practices, People and Places

Narratives about experiences of loss can mainly be identified on an atmospheric and emotional level. In this context, atmospheres can be described as moods, which are expressed both through specific practices and their modifications as well as through the sensually perceived environment in which these practices were carried out. In the narrations, the interviewees especially emphasise the physical and affective effects of work (cf. Schouten 2005: 13). Narratives about atmosphere deal with practices and objects, places and people. It is striking that the interviewees address visual, haptic and olfactory sensory organs in order to describe their former work and its spatial environment. Often, atmospheric attributions relate to perceptions of time and the rhythm of work, as well as to space and spatial mobility, all of which underwent a deep change.

In this context, Ulrich Schwoch stresses the sensual, tangible dimension of traditional fields of activity and work through the direct and constant contact with the goods. Born in 1938, Schwoch worked as a self-employed confectioner in Hamburg for a few years. When one of his colleagues was not able to continue in the confectionary due to health problems and began working on the docks, the two men talked about the better wages the port offered for people who were willing to work hard. In the end, Schwoch decided to leave the bakery. However, money was not the only reason for the occupational change, as he describes dock work as a desire he had felt for a long time:

> *I had always been interested in the port, and I always had the Speicherstadt in mind. My father was a sailor, and afterwards he became a confectioner. And I*

4 A social history study on this development is yet to be accomplished.

> *wanted to become a sailor too. But as I was married, I couldn't go to sea anymore (Schwoch 2010: 11).*

So he began a vocational re-training in 1970, soon qualified for a higher position in product control (*Vormann*) and worked for a company in the *Speicherstadt*. At the beginning of the interview, we looked at a photo album he had made in 1979 on the occasion of the 75th jubilee of his company. It includes numerous pictures he took, showing his workplace in the *Speicherstadt* and his colleagues at work: secretaries in the office (incidentally, some of the few women mentioned throughout most interviews), traditional and modern devices for cargo handling, damaged goods and their treatment. He labelled all pictures with affectionate rhymes he wrote himself about the work they illustrate. He explains in detail all the different movements and processes that were part of his job and emphasises the feeling and instinct you needed to have, the "Fingerspitzengefühl". In between, he always playfully deviates and includes entertaining stories of exotic animals and unexpected items, like a severed hand that was found between the goods. He talks a lot about social contacts and the atmosphere of the workplace and presents his former work routine through sensual perceptions. This does not only demonstrate his ongoing passion for his former work but also his aim to use several well-known images about the workplace in order to capture the listener's attention even more.

The cultural production of this atmosphere and established images can be retraced by looking at local media reports of the past 60 years. In numerous articles, imaginaries of the port and its workers have been reproduced and imaginations created. One early example is the *Hafenkonzert*, the port concert, a local radio show that exists since 1929 and that has been broadcast live from the port and from the ships for many years. The reporters focused on the port, the cargo, the sailors and evoked a romantic wanderlust. Many interviewees told me about this programme. Also local politicians repeatedly emphasised the particularity of working in the port and created a colourful image of the workplace by highlighting its singularity.

While a changing sensual experience is certainly connected to the decline of manual work as well as to the disappearance of actual goods, hidden in the container, many interviewees also refer to the altered topography of the port and the changes of its shape. They implicitly or explicitly refer to the disappearance of important former points of reference. Considering the negotiations of the port as a working environment, a strong reference to its spatial qualities emerges (cf. Göbel/Prinz 2015: 35). Spatial changes are an important category for the workers' self-understanding, who often locate important parts of their narratives in the traditional workspace. Many descriptions address the filling of the old docks and the construction of container terminals, some of them fully automated. The spatial dimension is explicitly formulated or reflected in only a few narrations but has a clear impact on subjective experiences. Formerly working on the docks, on ships, on company sites or on container terminals, many narrators describe the experience of the landscape and the environment in open spaces and in the open air as central to their work experience. Thus, they positively distinguish their workplace from indoor activities. As a result, the port is experienced as a free and open space in the truest sense of the word. The descriptions of goods, of their quality and the required skills to handle them properly point to a significant sense of materiality. The narratives in this context focus on the physical and sensory knowledge and experience, referring

to times when workers still perceived and felt the goods and experienced specific and different working environments.

Furthermore, many interviewees state that the topographic materiality of their professional environment has fundamentally changed since many new workplaces are literally not accessible anymore. On the one hand, this is due to safety regulations designed to prevent accidents on container terminals. On the other hand, the September 11 attacks completely changed the port and brought along an enormous increase in security measures, as one interviewee pointed out:

> *They built fences all around the terminals, there is a lot of security staff and you can only enter the area with certain badges. […] Then you get access because we have the badges needed to enter the terminals where we work. But in earlier days you were free to move around; you could come very close to the ships and watch the work processes. You can't do this anymore. The terminals are really under observation, day and night (Amling 2010: 50).*

Another interview partner's wife complained that you cannot even leave the bus anymore when visiting a container terminal. She expressed her anger about the fact that even former workers are no longer granted access and cannot move around freely in their former working spaces, which today are being perceived as an inapproachable "technosphere" (Erlach 2000: 2).

Whose Heritage? A Provisional Conclusion

In 2015, The Harbour Museum staged the play "Tallymann and Schutenschubser. A Life in the Harbour", organised in cooperation with the Hamburg Ohnsorg Theater, which is known throughout Germany for its performances in Low German vernacular. The protagonists of the play were some of the museum's volunteers, who shared their memories about their traditional professions. Narratives about the shift from unit loads and general cargo to container port were to be experienced in a particularly impressive way. The museum literally became a performative space in which port histories were not only demonstrated and explained but enacted.

The biographies were dramaturgically closely linked with the city's post-war development until the 1970s. The musical framing of the play with an accordion, symbolically connected with past maritime imaginary worlds, provided the perfect soundscape. The play concluded with the statement of a former ships outfitter: "Now the ships are in the museum. And we are here, too." In this quote, the museum manifests itself as a local expression of global transformations of work, transportation, and commerce.

As already became clear in many interviews I conducted, the play manifested that individual as well as collective representations of dock workers are closely interwoven with the development of their local surroundings. Besides, the performance confirmed that the museum became an important part of the event space mentioned in the beginning of the present article. This staging demonstrates that heritage literally "can be a theatre of memory where active, complex and nuanced representations of working-class life have contemporary resonance" (Smith/Shackel/Campbell 2011: 3). However, it is important to keep in mind that only those who succeeded in the port are taking part in this process in Hamburg. Furthermore, many of those representing the transformation

mainly focus on individual careers and structural developments. The involvement in museum projects as well as in my empirical study demonstrates a self-understanding of an "individual relevance as a source" (Götz 2001: 21). Many protagonists are conscious producers of their own history. Important topics that are not (yet) part of the dominant memory discourse of dock work and dock culture such as strikes, colleagues who lost their jobs, women and migrant workers are mentioned at best, but rarely expanded. Still, the museum offers a space in which the actors can use their agencies within the processes of urban development and self-culturalisation of the city. As observers and active protagonists of the change, it is important for the volunteers and interview partners to have a voice in this process.

And yet, the Harbour Museum is far more than a nostalgic place of remembrance for a few. In their work on site, the volunteers also explain problematic developments and draw connections to the way in which dock work is currently organised. The museum is a symbolic space of action for the former workers and employees, where they have the opportunity to pass on their knowledge and find satisfaction in a field of activity from which they are effectively retired (cf. Jannelli 2012: 83). Many interviewees refer to the museum as an important social anchor, as a reference point where their former professions gain recognition and where they have the opportunity to represent and re-experience part of their own histories. Furthermore, both the interview narratives and the exhibition show that loss of tradition and belief in progress are not negotiated in contrast or interpreted simply as either positive or negative. On the contrary, many interviewees explicate the interdependencies and shed light on the complexities of the transformations reflecting in their own biographies, and focus on the processuality and dynamics of these changes. Thus, stories about technical change go beyond mere narrations about individual working lives but are part of a wider negotiation of the history of dock work. And the Harbour Museum is one place where this process is currently visible.

Different kinds of economic and political processes generate different kinds of memories. This becomes apparent not only by looking at the transformation of work structures and spaces but also by analysing the formation of memory and the representation of work. The ways in which such representational debates are played out are again under review today, as new plans for the Harbour Museum are in the pipeline. In November 2015, the Budget Committee of the German Bundestag approved 120 million euros for the planning and construction of a new German Harbour Museum in Hamburg. Thus, issues of content and images, of tangible and intangible heritage are raised anew. This also involves the future role of former dock workers as active voices, at a time when experts from various disciplines are increasingly becoming involved in the reconstruction and re-telling of the port's history. Existing perspectives, positions and scopes of action are currently being explored afresh. Thomas Overdick (2010) names three challenges for maritime museums that matter in this context: first, finding new ways to tell old stories to a new audience; second, connecting the past with the present in order to emphasise the relevance of a topic; and third, telling new, unheard stories. City museums can play an important role in current debates on social transformations and future urban development. Therefore, it would be important to take up polyphonic perspectives, mirror the complex developments in ports, and point out the diverse working conditions and the technical as well as social realities and their political

and cultural influences. It will be interesting to follow this process and its dynamics in the years to come.

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INTERVIEWS

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Abstract

Global developments like the introduction of the container since the 1960s strongly influenced work structures and spaces of action for dock workers. This article looks at the experiences of these workers and their positioning within this process. It presents some central findings of my PhD dissertation, an empirical study analysing the narrations of former Hamburg dock workers about spatial and socio-cultural transformations.

Only a few years after the arrival of the container in Hamburg, skilled professions replaced traditional ones in order to secure container handling. These structural transformations led to better social and financial conditions of those able to continue their work and resulted in changed self-images of those pursuing a career. Besides the technical transformation, a parallel process of musealisation of dock work took place, documenting these developments. The involvement and commitment of former workers in the *Harbour Museum* further indicate a shift in the economic and cultural capital of some protagonists.

Old Tales and New Stories

Working with Oral History at LWL-Industrial Museum Henrichshütte Hattingen

Olaf Schmidt-Rutsch

In 1989, only two years after blowing out the blast furnaces, Henrichshütte Ironworks was incorporated into the LWL-Industrial Museum, Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage. Since that time, oral history has been formative in developing the site into a museum of life and work in the shadows of the blast furnaces. Interviews did not only have an important impact on the permanent exhibition from the beginning, they also offered a wide range of perspectives for future research. Apart from covering the stories of work, they also addressed the individual and collective ways of coming to terms with the story of industrial decline and structural change, from the point in time when the loss of work was a fresh experience to a more distanced, post-industrial narrative. From this perspective, the oral history material related to the Henrichshütte – and the general interview archive of all sites at the decentralised LWL-Industrial Museum – might offer a wide field of further future interdisciplinary and transnational research.

The LWL-Industrial Museum

The deep structural transformation in Western European heavy industries after 1945 gave rise to a new idea of industrial heritage. Exploring the remains of the industrial age, with its forgotten mills, closed mines and cold ironworks, was no longer restricted to a classic history of technology as a narrative of engineers, innovation and company history. Rather, the story of the common worker and daily work and life did not only come into researchers' focus, but established a new kind of museums, which paid attention to the objects of the industrial era. The history of the LWL-Industriemuseum, Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage, reflects this development and exemplifies the importance of oral history for the museum's approach to social history.

In the Ruhr area, the increasingly severe coal crisis of the 1960s resulted in a deep regional change. The widespread demolition of mines in the industrial heartland of Western Germany became a major economic issue and social challenge. Vanishing pitheads left open spaces not only in the urban landscape. It became rather obvious that these mere technical constructions had an enormous significance as social reference points for the people, their work, biography and identity. The same effect could be recognised in the whole state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The Westphalia-Lippe regional authority (Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe/LWL) responded to this

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issue in 1979. A new industrial museum, the first of its kind in Germany, was established to preserve outstanding buildings as authentic places within their historical and social contexts. The political decision resulted in a decentralised museum with currently eight sites, covering six industrial branches.[1] One important stipulation of the political appointment was the order to document the everyday life and work of people in the industrial age (LWL 1979: 36). Following the classic task of museums to collect, preserve, interpret, and display items of cultural and historic value, it became obvious that oral history offered a significant approach to this task. Without doubt, this approach was certainly influenced by a popular research focus on local and working-class history which was very vivid in the Ruhr area at the time and was to a certain extent organised by non-professionals.[2] Nevertheless, one characteristic of the approach taken by the museum was that the interviews of the formative period were strongly connected with a special place. Thus, the interests of local history groups were combined with the professional perspectives of the founding generation of the museum staff, which was largely unfamiliar with the formative parameters of industrial work, not to speak of social differences between the researchers and the subjects of research. Nevertheless, the approach turns out to be successful: Former workers explained the function not only of artefacts but of the future heritage sites. Interviews often explained and illustrated daily work in authentic spaces and offered a key stimulus to sketch the future use of the now derelict industrial site. In addition, the shared memories provided the researchers with an idea of life and work in a fading branch of industrial work. Consequently, the stories did not only have an important influence on the concept employed by the museum, but formed a solid foundation for an oral history archive of work in the industrial age, which today consists of approximately 1,600 interviews (Kift/Schmidt-Rutsch 2015: 291).

From Decline to Museum: Henrichshütte Ironworks

In 1987, Henrichshütte Ironworks in Hattingen, part of the Thyssen company, faced an existential blow. Founded in 1854, the plant had developed a highly specialised integrated production that combined iron and steel making, casting, rolling and forging – producing, amongst other items, components for nuclear power plants and space exploration. The decision to close the rolling mill and blow out the blast furnaces caused the loss of almost 3,000 jobs and took away the former advantage of the combined production process, making clear that the remaining parts of the works could hardly be operated profitably in the future. Understandably, the decision to abandon major parts of the Henrichshütte caused ambitious protests not only among workers and their families but also among great parts of the Hattingen community who feared that the closure of the works would bring the general prosperity and future of the city to a near end. The widespread protests culminated in 5,000 people forming a human

1 Besides Henrichshütte Ironworks, the LWL-Industriemuseum consists of three former coal mines: the Nachtigall mine in Witten, Hannover colliery in Bochum and Zollern colliery in Dortmund; the Henrichenburg ship-lift in Waltrop, the Gernheim Glassworks in Petershagen, the Brickworks in Lage and the Bocholt Textile Factory.

2 However, oral history also took root academically in the Ruhr region around 1980, particularly with the LUSIR project (Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet, 1930–1960), conducted at the University of Essen and the FernUniversität in Hagen.

chain around the iron works to symbolically protect the jobs under threat. Nevertheless, on 18 December 1987, blast furnace No. 3 was tapped the last time. This marked both the end of 134 years of iron smelting in the Ruhr valley and the beginning of the phase-out of the Henrichshütte which lasted until 2004, when the forge, the last operational part of the former integrated iron and steel works, was finally closed.

The unstoppable decline of Hattingen's main employer caused wide-felt resignation. Hence, the idea to integrate a part of the works into the LWL-Industriemuseum found few positive reactions with the people who just unsuccessfully had struggled for their jobs. Nevertheless, in 1989 the LWL parliament decided to take over blast furnace No. 3, its surrounding buildings and equipment as a future museum of iron and steel, closing a large gap in the documentation of work in the heavy industries. As the other parts of the works were demolished and vanished, blast furnace No. 3, dating back to 1939, became a museum landmark. The adjacent blast furnace No. 2 was deconstructed and transported to China at just the same time. In the end, the plot of the new museum covered just 2 percent of the space that had been covered by the original works (Laube 2017: 111 f.).

What was left turned out to be a large but cold and silent technical aggregate with its immense mass of steel and puzzling structures of railways, pipes and rope-belts, an industrial ensemble that was by no means self-explanatory. Pure documentation, limited to function and production numbers, seemed insufficient to make the old works an interesting place for future visitors. Nor did it become an attractive site for the people of Hattingen, many of whom had lost their jobs just a few months earlier. The first step to create a more acceptable, participatory space was to open the former "forbidden city" to a wide range of activities – from jumble sale to concert. These activities brought workers back to the site who had sworn never to enter the ironworks again after they had lost their jobs. Talking with these women and men about their lives and work developed a growing understanding on both sides. Whereas the workers began to accept the approach followed by the museum, which intended to take their stories seriously as an important part of the future narrative, the museum staff in turn developed an understanding of what operating a blast furnace meant and what impact this work had had on the workers and their families. After a more or less difficult and sometimes painful process of returning to their past place of employment, former workers supported the new museum with their experience and knowledge and formed a reliable nucleus for further development. When they started to give guided tours, this marked an important step towards a participative museum.

Early interview projects were closely linked to practical endeavours, first and foremost discussing and understanding work at the blast furnace. The interviews were mainly conducted by the two-person museum team and a number of student volunteers who tape-recorded and transcribed the oral testimonies, from single interviews and field recordings at former work stations explaining the technology and processes to recordings of larger group meetings. Within a short time, the group of interviewees was extended to persons who had worked at other parts of the ironworks, such as the steel plant, rolling mill, foundry and forge, covering the basic processes of the pro-

duction on the one hand, discovering the several layers of the complex connection between people and their work on the other.[3]

The next step was to implement these stories into a more permanent construction. In 2000, the museum opened on a regular scheme. Visitors could discover the works on three trails with different approaches to the story of iron and steel. Each of the trails can be discovered independently or on guided tours. Apart from a children's trail and an ecological trail, the "path of iron" opens the major path to the blast furnace and its story. It starts with the sampling of the ore and follows the material to the transportation belts and railway tracks, down through the bunkers and up to the furnace top ball, then following the smelting process down to the tapping spout. Taking this tour, the guests encounter the faces and stories of people who worked at the several stations involved in this process of iron smelting. In doing so, the exhibition connects the impressive and very dominant large-scale industrial equipment with the individual narrations of work, thus giving the process of iron making a "human face" (cf. Minner/Molkenthin 2000). After nearly 20 years in operation, it is obvious that these individual stories about every day's work, heat and sweat, danger and fascination stuck in the memories of the visitors much more strongly than the recollection of production numbers. The importance of blast furnace No. 3 as an 80-year-old industrial monument seems to be diminished in the workers' stories about their daily experience of working in front of the tap hole or of the darkness of the bunkers, making the material flow and keeping the whole thing running. As a positive result, the message of the site hopefully turns from a narration of technological progress into a narration of daily work, from a success story of raising production numbers to a story of a permanent change in working conditions and, finally, individual expectations.

Remembering the Decline

Without doubt, the story of the struggle for jobs in 1987 is and will continue to be one of the major narratives of the Henrichshütte Ironworks. Ten years after the struggle for the mill, the museum published the book *Ende der Stahlzeit* (The End of the Steel Age), which contained written statements of people who were involved in these events on opposite sides (König et al. 1997: 6 f.). The book still offers an amazing spectrum of perspectives and memories, juxtaposing for instance the stories of a blast furnace worker or of a woman who was active in the local support group with the statements of managers and of Walter Scheel, the former German Federal President, who acted as the neutral member of Thyssen Steel's supervisory board at the time and whose vote was decisive in the closure of the Henrichshütte.

In 2010, the temporary exhibition *Helden – Von der Sehnsucht nach dem Besonderen* (Heroes – The Longing for the Extraordinary) dedicated one section to the workers' struggle (cf. Hubert 2010), which was mainly based on film interviews and included a worker, a woman of the local support group, a photographer, a trade union official, a works council chairman and a manager. The connection of the still vivid narrative of 1987 with a strong popular motif of heroism was discussed at length, not least because the interviewees involved had never assumed a heroic role for them-

3 A good example for interviews that derived from artistic practice within the former working compound is the use of the Hattingen forge by artist Richard Serra. Several interviews covered the employees' perspective on working in that kind of art projects.

selves. While the exhibition questioned such attributions, it constituted a first experimental step to introduce the struggle to save the ironworks as a museum topic in its own right.

The 30th anniversary of blowing out the blast furnaces in 2009 somewhat presented a "back to the roots" moment. On the one hand, the Henrichshütte as a museum seemed to be a success story. It acts as the main agent of the plant's history with a wide range of exhibitions and events, attracting up to 100,000 visitors each year. On the other hand, the limited personnel resources and tight schedules had a negative impact on long-term projects like the oral history archive. At the same time, the group of potential interviewees keeps shrinking. Facing this fact and following the anniversary, the *Förderverein Industriemuseum Henrichshütte*, which was formed as an association of the museum's supporters in 1990 (Senger 2013: 38), launched a special project to highlight further the perspectives of those who were the actual subjects of the Henrichshütte social milieu when the plant was active. In cooperation with photographer Astrid Kirschey, the supporters intended to recreate the human chain of 1987, using large-scale photographs. The project was accompanied by open interviews, carried out by members of the supporter group (Böhm et al. 2017: 10 f.). While the questionnaire was developed in cooperation with museum staff, the implementation was solely in the hands of volunteers. Within two years, 100 persons, who had worked in various capacities and workshops in the Henrichshütte, were interviewed and filmed. These interviews show the complexity and hierarchy of an industrial plant with the exception of top management but spanning all occupation groups from engineers, supervisors or union activists to the cleaners or the apprentices, who lost their job just after finishing their training. Without doubt, the fact that the interviewers belonged to the same peer group created a special interview situation. For the participants, the questionnaire offered a red thread to hold things together. Major points of interest were family background, career development up to the relevant position, work and leisure time, etc. Confronted with the reasons for closure, interviewees still had problems with accepting the rationale behind it, often paired with pride in the job and a belief in the former efficiency of the works. Nevertheless, 30 years on, most of the edge and anger has disappeared.

The project of *100 Hüttenleben* (100 Steelworks Lifes) proved to be very successful. In combination with the exhibition – portraits of the interviewees form a human chain at the entry of the museum – it developed an enormous effect not only in the perception of the museum or the commemoration of the 1987 events. It also shaped the work and position of the supporters' association which had established a quarterly meeting of the former workers and is still recruiting future interview partners, developing these interviews into broader field research. This certainly needs some professional back-office work from the museum staff, but it expands the knowledge about life and work at the Henrichshütte enormously. Consequently, the persisting engagement of volunteers will be an important contribution to the *Erinnerungsarchiv Industriearbeit* (Memory Archive of Industrial Work), the archive of industrial memories of the LWL-Industriemuseum.

"Erinnerungsarchiv Industriearbeit" – Chances and Perspectives

Although oral history was formative for the development of the LWL-Industriemuseum in general, it always has been only one aspect of day-to-day business. Preservation and revitalisation of the sites and their establishment as locations for exhibitions, education and events always required the majority of resources.

Since 1979, the interviews have mostly been used within the narrow limitations of developing the museum's sites and exhibitions. Rethinking the value of these sources began when it became obvious that the chosen media of the formative years, compact cassettes and MiniDiscs, reached the end of their technical life span. At that point, the danger of a loss of data – and an important part of the museum's identity – was becoming imminent. Transferring the interviews into the digital age in the first step meant collecting them from the eight sites and centralising the archive in Dortmund. The next step was the use of a digitalisation program to transfer the material to broadcast wave-archive files and MP3 working copies and develop a durable archive storage. During this process, every interview receives a permanent shelf mark and documentation in the interview database, containing core information about interviewer and interviewee, branch, date, etc. Whereas a solid ground for data security has been established, the reworking of content and form of approximately 1,600 interviews will be a challenge for years to come. The wide regional coverage of different industrial branches supports a widespread narrative of the coming and going of work in the industrial ages with a focus on the individual experiences and emotions of the people involved. For example, the archive offers a wide variety of information on searching and finding work, moving homes, losing jobs, of protest, resignation and hope.

To come back to the museum's original task to document the history of people in the industrial age, it is evident that its work is not only limited to the history of the place. It acts also as a forum for social and cultural discussion and thus has to be open to recent developments. This orientation will change the narrative of the museum and the use of interviews in the future. Without doubt, the combination of historic interviews with new presentation media like apps or augmented reality has to be discussed from the museum's point of view, striking a balance between historic source and modern edutainment. Oral history as a museum media should not be trapped in retrospective, lest an authentic place of work is turned into a place for folkloristic events (Schmidt-Rutsch 2018: 143). To be a valuable part of social discussion, the museum has to focus on structural and global change, ecology and innovation, using transnational and global perspectives on changes in labour. This orientation is closer to visitors' daily experiences than the pure re-creation of an industrial past long gone.

Obviously, the interview archive contains so much more. It can be supportive to research questions far beyond the original context. Interviews of Dortmund miners, for instance, were recently used for research on regional dialects. Since the archive as a whole, not just at Henrichshütte, has a history of nearly forty years, linguists ask for the extent to which idioms and dictions have changed over this period. Thus, the oral history archive can be developed into a wide variety of directions, from linguistics to documenting the process of de-industrialisation. With respect to the post-industrial conscience, this has most recently happened with the 2018 exhibition *RevierGestalten* which has used inter-generational interviews to trace the meanings and concepts of industrial heritage for different generations of the region (cf. Flieshart/Golombek

2018). This setting possibly shows a distinguishing feature of the *Erinnerungsarchiv Industriearbeit* (Memory Archive of Industrial Work): It is constantly evolving through both research interests and a special kind of valuation. It is not the worst idea to check and rethink the museum's narratives from time to time to keep in touch with visitors' interests and experiences. Undoubtedly, it will be an important task to prepare and open the *Erinnerungsarchiv Industriearbeit* to a wider research community in the future. In light of its origins, it will certainly differ from research-generated projects in many respects, but it is important in its variety.

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Abstract

From the beginning, oral history was formative for developing the former Henrichshütte Ironworks in Hattingen into a museum. Part of the LWL-Industriemuseum/ Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage, the Henrichshütte's museal practice always aimed at people's life and work experience rather than aspects of pure technology. Taking the example of Henrichshütte, this article describes several aspects of work with oral history within the LWL-Industriemuseum as a whole, from

exhibition concepts to volunteer work, and discusses the development towards an archive of work in the industrial age, covering six branches and around 1,600 interviews.

The Importance of Oral History in (Industrial) Heritagisation

Melinda Harlov-Csortán

Introduction

Oral history includes both the subjective interpretation of the past (Gyáni 2000: 131) and the methodology that records, documents, and analyses that interpretation. The former, a personal understanding, experience, and/or memory of a past event, enriches the "official narrative", the historical aspect, and provides the investigation with an individual, interpersonal, and human-focused aspect (Thompson 1978: 6). Among others, its two major advantages are the participatory and plurality aspects of the narrative creation. However, especially due to their co-creation feature, oral history projects, like other types of research, can be influenced by the researcher's personality and opinion, and the general ideology of the time when the research is conducted (High 2014). Oral history should never be taken as an objective account as it evidently offers a personal interpretation which might throw light upon multiple layers and understandings of the same event. A typical period to showcase the implications of oral history is the Cold War era, when due to top-down oppressive political systems in Central and Eastern Europe it was impossible to criticise the working conditions of the industrial labour. After the political change in Hungary, for instance, the interpretation almost reversed the former viewpoint when the whole period was described as completely negative and harmful (Alabán 2017). Such mainstream interpretations can affect the personal perspectives as well.

Despite its potentially biased and subjective narration, this methodology is especially of value when the research period needs to be investigated as the authenticity or trustworthiness of the available written or material traces might be questionable. This is usually the case with research projects that focus on periods that have been re-evaluated over time. The establishment of the Oral History Archive within the Hungarian 1956 Institute in the 1980s is a case in point. At the time of its foundation, written material about the revolution of 1956 was not yet available, so the only form of sources available for researchers were oral history testimonies (Kozák 1995). Hanák and Kövér both emphasise the "still" and "already" aspects of oral history examples which show that the interviewees' memory is still vivid and they are already capable to talk about the given past (Hanák/Kövér 1995: 94).

Oral history was the type of research through which underrepresented social communities and their interpretations and memories were able to enter the academic debate. For instance, the female narratives of the industrial culture could be researched and discussed with the help of oral history (such as biographical interviews) throughout different continents. Not only new perspectives could be analysed, but also a research focus formed around how contemporary ideology – such as Catholi-

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cism (Arango 1993) or Socialism (Schüle 2001) – defined the possible choices and roles female members of this social unit could fulfil.

Interestingly, many scholars point to the challenges the new technical possibilities (like audio-video recording, online access to interviews conducted ba others) put on oral history as a methodology. These challenges include both theoretical questions – even before the introduction of the new European data protection regulations – and actual realisation threats. Oral historians, especially those dealing with traumatic experiences, unquestionably play a significant role in forming narratives of a given recent event (Sommer/Quinlan 2002). In such cases that are swayed by emotions, the adaptation of new technologies which can document numerous aspects instantly as well as provide multiple methods for modification retrospectively can threaten the ultimate requirement of objectivity (Sloan/Cave 2014). Similarly, while new technologies make oral history research projects more accessible to a wider audience, they also complicate the process of protecting (anonymising) the sources (Larson/Boys 2014) or analysing the represented narrations. The same media can either strive for objectivity or allude to subjectivity (for instance, by using sarcasm or overemphasised emotions) of the narration, the distinction of which cannot be decided without background information of the given case. This was the case in numerous Hungarian movies such as *Falfúrók* (1985) about the political change criticising Socialism by sarcastically depicting industrial workers' everyday life. Those movies were directed in a documentary-like style with non-professional actors and seemingly strong sociological messages. Accordingly, this kind of movies could be interpreted in opposing ways. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of an oral history project, it is important to incorporate other sources with which the researched question is compared and contrasted. Oral history alone cannot provide suitable and professional data (Szabolcs 2001: 46).

One of the most common cultural practices of remembering the past is to heritagise it. The terms "heritage" or "patrimony" have incorporated diverse meanings, forms, and effects in different countries and areas of life over the last five decades (Larsen/Logan 2018). A very complex and often overlapping typology of heritage forms has been established during this period, yet without having been commonly adapted internationally (Fejérdy 2011). Such variety shows the richness of this process, but also challenges its adaptability. For instance, we differentiate "heritage industry" and "industrial heritage". The former refers to the process and apparatus through which (industrial) heritage can be commodified and instrumentalised in order to become an "opportunity space" (Günay 2014: 98) in the post-industrial area. Looking at heritage as a source of economic benefit, besides its identity-forming role, is important not only to protect the heritage that has been revitalised (as this process might lead to Disneyfication, gentrification, and other forms of transforming the authentic values and past), but also to investigate the social practices that capture history at different levels (Walsh 1992). Among others, two outstanding UNESCO World Heritage Council representatives, Ron van Oers and Francesco Bandarin, called for a stronger connection between socio-economic development and conservation strategies in order to sustain what they define as the Historic Urban Landscape (Bandarin/van Oers 2012).

At the same time, industrial heritage is defined by The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH) in its *Nizhny Tagil Charter*

for the Industrial Heritage (2003) as follows: "Industrial heritage consists of the remains of industrial culture which are of historical, technological, social, architectural or scientific value." The Charter continues by explaining the significance and features of these values and says: "These values are intrinsic to the site itself, its fabric, components, machinery, and setting, in the industrial landscape, in written documentation, and also in the intangible records of industry contained in human memories and customs" (TICCIH 2003). Here, it is again important to differentiate intangible heritage as a category from intangible records mentioned in the official text. As early as March 2001, a working definition of the intangible heritage was formulated, which was endorsed two years later at the 32nd Session of UNESCO'S General Conference in Paris (UNESCO 2001; UNESCO 2016) – it is an interesting coincidence that both categories, intangible heritage and industrial heritage, were defined by international experts and hence institutionalised in the same year. According to UNESCO'S definition, intangible cultural heritage

> *means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO 2003).*

Accordingly, intangible cultural heritage can be realised in "oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship" (UNESCO 2003). The goal of the convention was to provide tools and structures for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage by raising awareness, ensuring respect, and promoting cooperation. It categorised intangible cultural heritage cases that urgently need protection, those that can be part of a representative list and those that are evaluated as being well-protected.

The definition of industrial heritage incorporates orally transmitted aspects of industrial life as one aspect of the totality of industrial heritage besides material objects, locations, and sites. Oral history interviews and narratives about the social practices of industrial communities are a crucial part of researching, preserving, and interpreting the industrial heritage especially in our contemporary post-industrial and participatory-focused world. This can be seen in recent industrial heritage research projects (Shackel/Roller 2013: 2 ff.), museums[1], and even in education. For instance, the Michigan Technological University has had a course on industrial heritage for more than ten years as a core course and now as an SS 5501 course in their curriculum on Industrial Communities in the MS Program in Industrial Archaeology (Martin 2008: 83; MS Program 2018). This paper discusses key aspects which oral history both as

1 For instance, the Workshops Rail Museum in Queensland, Australia named intangible heritage aspects as its number one "key areas of industrial heritage that are in urgent need of protecting", and hence focused on oral histories, among others (Mate 2017: 19).

source and methodology can have in the management, establishment, maintenance, research, and interpretation of industrial heritage in our contemporary deindustrialised world.

Oral History Is Heritage

Since the early 2000s, people themselves through their practice and knowledge have become heritage. Intangible cultural heritage as a category is one example to acknowledge this new aspect, which is similar to the notion of the "spirit of the place/genius loci". The latter notion connects intangible values and sites and was declared in 2008 in the *Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place* by ICOMOS (ICOMOS 2008). ICOMOS is the non-governmental international network of experts for the conservation and protection of cultural heritage places, as well as one of three advisory boards of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. Hence, even one of the leading professional units focusing especially on architectural and archaeological heritage acknowledges and emphasises the importance of the human aspect as part of heritage.

However, the scientific recognition of the "common people" and their "everyday lives" has no long history, and this is particularly the case with industrial culture (Eriksen 1989: 279). Nor did the social expectations on non-intellectual units of the community such as people working in agricultural and industrial segments appreciate the importance to remember and value their biographical data or lifestyle (Klaniczay 1990). One can point to many triggering effects that lead to the acknowledgement of oral history as a kind of heritage in these areas. An example of this is the elimination of the tangible aspects of the given past (Walczak 2005: 311 ff.). This can happen either by forced transformation – as was the case with the top-down alteration of Hungary in the previous political system from a mainly agricultural state to heavy industry – or a "natural" process such as the replacement of former production tools, methods, and even locations with modern technology. In these cases, personal interpretations, knowledge, and some remaining segments of the practices can serve as heritage, i.e. elements of the past that are adopted or still applied in our contemporary world.

Oral history can also serve as heritage when the tangible and intangible aspects of a location cannot be compared with each other, for instance, when the community has changed (Robertson 1991). The 20th century, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, has experienced numerous community transformations, and, in those instances, the tangible apparatus of a settlement, for example, has a different history than the local community. The "new" community might have no time or possibility to establish "their unique" built surroundings and formulate a different understanding and usage of the existing physical sphere that can be investigated and researched mainly through their oral history testimonies. Thus, historical changes themselves or the associated social transformations that might not happen on the physical level can be analysed by means of oral history (Thompson 2000: 2). For example, in Hungary each industrial segment was encouraged to compile its own reminiscences and contemporary values in the mid-1950s (Közlöny 1954). The textile industry, among others, accomplished that task, from which a significant national collection was then formed. Unfortunately, as the industry and its actors ran out of business and budget in the

context of the political change, the exhibition shrank and lost its location. In the capital, an extensive textile factory used to operate, of whose original structure almost nothing remains, or has been modified to an extreme extend, which has eliminated its authenticity. After many unsuccessful attempts, the remaining part of the above-mentioned collection was moved to the premises of the former textile factory in a newly built architecture. As neither the building nor the collection could accurately and authentically represent the formerly existing Hungarian textile industry, the members of the newly formed museum conducted a series research and numerous oral history interviews with the former employees to enrich and increase the value of the new institution. Due to the time frame of these oral history investigations and the age of the interviewees, those materials represent the deindustrialisation period and complete the otherwise small remnants of an important aspect of Hungarian industrial heritage (Martos/Jankó 2014).

Oral history testimonies are a kind of verbal self-identification, and accordingly can assume the roles of identity enforcement and protection (Vértesi 2004: 164), which are clearly among the functions cultural heritage exercises as well. As Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO, stated on the 18th General Assembly of the World Heritage Convention in 2011: "World Heritage is a building block for peace and sustainable development. It is a source of identity and dignity for local communities, a wellspring of knowledge and strength to be shared" (UNESCO 2013: 20). The notion that heritage can be the source of identity is also expressed in the fact that the cultural values of the heritage examples can be classified, among others, as identity values, just as their social values enforce the establishment of the social and cultural identity (Feilden/Jokilehto 1998: 18, 20).

Both cultural heritage and oral history are understood as examples that connect the past with the present. The role of cultural heritage is basically defined as follows: heritage is "the past used for both present and potential future purposes" (CHCFE 2015: 36). This notion, which was explicitly at the centre of heritage management, is still relevant today and is being implemented continuously. Even today, conferences and publications dealing with the forming ideology of what, by whom, for whom, and how should be bestowed, which alludes to all three time phases – past, present, and future – have open questions.[2] Because oral history testimonies are realised in the present, they are also influenced by it. For example, a contemporary identity or viewpoint might influence the narrative of the past (Gyáni 2000: 131). Many oral history researchers point out that even if interviewees on many occasions tend to adjust their narratives to the grand narrative, especially in the case of significant historical events (Niethammer 2002: 108), the individual voice can always be decoded with the help, for instance, of the analysis of the expressions and tonalities used during the testimony (Kisantal/Szeberényi 2003). The core notion of UNESCO World Heritage is also that connection between the universal and the personal or community-owned past. UNESCO'S World Heritage List tends to enumerate all those examples that are not only part of the given communities' past and value system but also play important roles in universal humanity: "World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located" (UNESCO 2018).

2 For instance, the session titled "The Past in the Present: Mediating Cultural Heritage" at a recent conference at the University of Toronto (University of Toronto 2017).

Oral History as a Tool in Heritagisation

Oral history as a methodology has been adapted by many disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, and ethnography. Ethnographers used to collect, document, and analyse the traditions, celebrations, songs, and tales of the rural society. Moreover, written versions of the biographical interviews appeared at a very early stage, consciously directing the interviewees to create a first personal, singular narrative (for instance, Hoppál et. al. 1974). Other disciplines frequently used research more on the macro-level and questionnaire-based investigations to analyse the connection between economic processes and their social implications (see Héthy/Makó 1972). In these cases, it was usually the perceptions of the community rather than the personal experience that were emphasised. Initially, historians used oral history mainly as a methodology for memoir-recording, especially when such testimony could be adapted as a witness narrative to an important historical event (Bódy 2000). In such cases, the personal narratives again served as a justification or opposing point of view to the grand narrative (Kovács 1992: 89). More recent approaches focus on the possibility of oral history to express and research the coexistence of multiple narratives (Kovács/Melegh 2000), or, among others, on looking at the emotional and psychological influences of the research objective (Botond 1991: 97 f.).

All these adaptations serve multiple goals of cultural heritage management. For instance, participatory action and representation of the practitioners/interviewees and/or the whole community are important requirements for the acceptance of a nominated intangible cultural heritage (Thorell 2013). Storytelling and re-enactment as heritage interpretation tools based on oral history research findings are widely and successfully used throughout the world (for instance, see Zotica/Malaescu 2015). Similarly, the experiential aspect and the representation power for the community through multiple narratives are also key factors in both the nomination procedure and the interpretation of a heritage site (Brugman 2008; Mathieu 2002). This is especially crucial when through heritagisation (that involves physical conservation as well as interpretation) the complexity of the represented past is threatened. For example, with the aestheticization of an industrial or noble location, the hardship of the working community could be still represented via oral history without mentioning the flourishing number and types of heritage values that should be equally acknowledged and presented by suitable methodology (Hawke 2012). For example, at the Massa Museum in Miskolc-Felsőhámor, Hungary, or at the Hungarian Open Air Museum in Szentendre, Hungary, where former industrial (iron metallurgy) and agricultural lifestyles are the subjects of interpretation, the guides, who have all worked before in the respective fields, and the possibility of participation (trying out certain methodologies) are the key attractions for visitors to come to these otherwise not easily accessible locations.

Like in academia, where multiple disciplines are using the methodology (Kopijn 1998), oral history should be adapted even more effectively in diverse fields of heritage management. Besides protecting the defined heritage value when, for instance, tangible heritage is difficult to understand (Holtorf 2010), oral history can play a role in empowering the community and ensuring sustainability and mutual understanding (Landorf 2009). Oral history as a methodology can document personal opinions and emotions that can contribute to the uniqueness of the given heritage, which is not just

the prerequisite for the nomination process but also essential in the heritagisation and management processes. Some of the selection criteria discussed in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention are clearly alluding to the need of uniqueness such as "to represent a masterpiece", "to be [an] exceptional example", "to contain the most important and significant" (UNESCO 2017: 25 f.). Oral heritage methodology, while documenting individual interpretations, also provides insights into the entire community and their values. Such interconnectedness of the personal experience and the corresponding community is an envisaged role for the heritage examples in forms of community engagement and cohesion (Waterton/Watson 2011). Similarly, the more personally the represented past is explained, the more it stays in the individual's memory (Vértesi 2004: 170), which can be seen as a sustainable protection methodology and an effective justification of the heritage's significance (Howard 2003). Moreover, through the common or connective human experience, both mutual understanding and accessibility of a given heritage is increased (Avellino 2016).

Both heritage and oral history are experiential, and heading towards digitalisation in our contemporary world (Saou-Dufrene 2014). Both can be seen as an interpretation or narrative creating process which is connected to the historical past. However, none of them can be identified as each other's one-to-one representation, because oral history documents the human experience of the historical past (Vansina 1984), while heritage is "what people make of their history to make themselves feel good", as David Lowenthal, one of the key patrons of heritage studies, expressed in one of his talks (Clout 2018). Similarly close but slightly different is the connection between memory and oral history, and memory and heritage, as oral history methodology recalls memory (Samuel 1994), while heritage practice often creates memory (Benton 2010). All these connecting aims, roles, and practices clearly show the numerous possibilities oral history both as "product" and methodology can have in heritage management processes. Especially in the case of industrial heritage examples where the tangible elements are more subject to elimination or alteration, oral history can have a crucial role in heritagisation. An outstanding example of that is realised by the colleagues of the German Mining Museum in Bochum, who are collecting and digitalising oral history testimonies by representatives of the vanishing mining society in the Ruhr Area (Stiftung Geschichte des Ruhrgebiets/Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum 2018).

Conclusion

This paper aimed to highlight the connection between heritage management and oral history. Even though at the beginning, the discourse and processes regarding heritage were mostly material-based, realised mainly by architects and monument protectionists, oral history used to go unnoticed in the role of providing information and access to the human experience, knowledge, and practices. Oral history both as data and methodology has numerous wide-ranging potential for heritage studies and practices. It can ensure the authenticity requirement of the nomination process and has the potential to unite bottom-up and top-down processes. By better connecting, for instance, the local community and the group of experts, the highly controversial UNESCO World Heritage supremacy of Outstanding Universal Value can be overcome. Simi-

larly, by enforcing the participatory action of the "heritage owners" in the heritagisation process, community regeneration and identity building can be supporting as well, which is an especially crucial task when, for instance, such values are threatened, as is the case in the deindustrialisation of a mining town. One of the most appreciated outcomes of adapting oral history methodology to any field (theoretical investigations and practical projects alike) is its capability to polarise and multiply the narratives, and accordingly to point to possibly new outcomes and aspects. Emphasising the oral and human aspect, oral heritage can decrease the distance between intangible and tangible heritage, as well as the represented past and contemporary issues. The latter also contributes to the accessibility and validity of heritage examples.

Despite the various junctures, there are many threats or possible difficulties in the adaptation of oral history to heritage management. Oral history testimonies might be influenced by numerous circumstances and actors, and as they are created retrospectively in a certain way, they could be emotionally biased. Oral history can be the subject of beautifying the past or accusing other participants, and hence serving contemporary propagandistic goals. However, it can draw attention to connections and networks useful for researchers and combine personal and communal memories. By this means, oral history can promote mutual understanding and identity and settlement reinforcement, which are some of the most crucial tasks, among others, for industrial heritage sites in the age of deindustrialisation.

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Abstract

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee and its professional institutions, the international body of cultural and natural heritage, emphasise the importance of the human aspect, the individuals and groups who are involved in the heritage context: the authentic owner/practitioner; the contemporary local or inheritor; the professional, who understands; the policy maker, who protects, etc. Accordingly, in the heritagisation process, oral memories and interactions play defining roles on many levels. They can justify the heritage management process as well as construct what should be valued. This paper looks at this complex status and the roles oral history examples can have in the research and management process. The paper focuses on the intangible aspect within the category of industrial heritage as the specialised committee of UNESCO'S World Heritage Council defines and categorises it. Accordingly, it presents an international perspective, although heavily European-centred, as many critics have already expressed. The time frame focuses on the one and a half decades after 2003, when TICCIH, the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage defined its objective; however, previous practices and research examples are mentioned as well. The paper is based on the comparative and textual analysis of theoretical texts (of oral history research), general guidelines (such as charters of the international

heritage organisations), and case studies. The aim of the paper is not to provide a chronological overview of the overlaps between industrial and intangible heritage management in the European discourse but to point out the effective realisation of incorporating oral history into (industrial) heritage studies.

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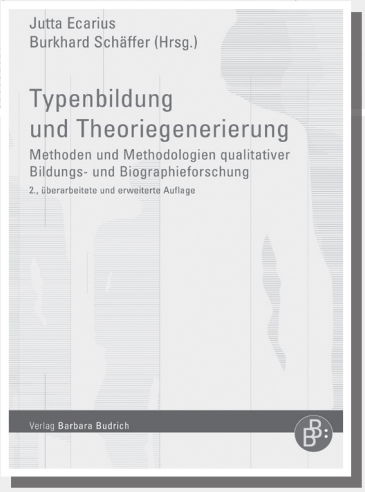

Jutta Ecarius
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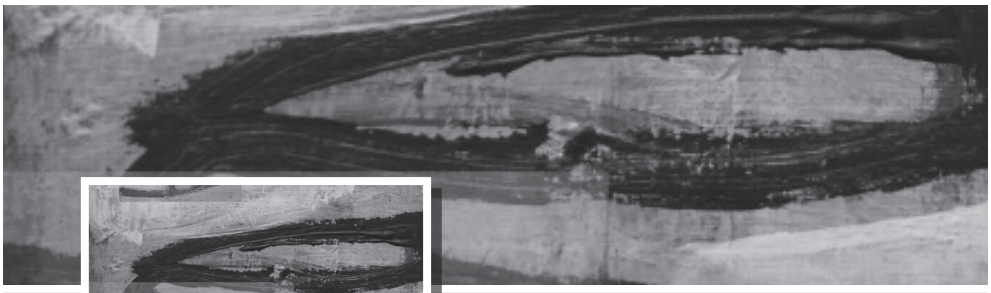
Forschung – hier die qualitative Bildungs- und Biographieforschung – ist nur so gut wie ihre Werkzeuge. Die Autor*innen formulieren Gütekriterien, Standards und Maßstäbe für die Bewertung qualitativer Forschung und ebnen den Weg zu einer empirisch fundierten Typenbildung. Ein wegweisendes Werk für die qualitative Forschung. Diese zweite, überarbeitete und erweiterte Auflage enthält neue Beiträge zur rekonstruktiven Forschung sowie zur Methodentriangulation.



Sven Thiersch (Hrsg.)

Qualitiative Längsschnittforschung

Bestimmungen, Forschungspraxis und Reflexionen

2020 • 430 Seiten • Kart. • 34,90 € (D) • 35,90 € (A)
ISBN 978-3-8474-2179-5 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1207-6

Obwohl in den letzten Jahren immer mehr qualitative Studien auch in einem Längsschnittdesign durchgeführt werden, stellen sie in der empirischen Sozial- und Bildungsforschung nach wie vor eine Ausnahme dar. Das Buch bietet eine erste systematische und differenzierte Zusammenführung der unterschiedlichen theoretischen und methodischen Perspektiven sowie forschungspraktischen Erfahrungen bei der Umsetzung von qualitativen Längsschnittstudien. Erkenntnispotentiale und offene Fragen zentraler Ansätze und Ergebnisse aus ausgewählten Forschungsfeldern werden diskutiert und reflektiert.

Constance Engelfried (Hrsg.)

Das Narrativ des Anderen kennenlernen

Wirkungsforschung in einem deutsch-jordanischen Jugendbegegnungsprojekt

2020. 281 Seiten • Kart. • 36,00 € (D) • 37,10 € (A)
ISBN 978-3-8474-2352-2 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1541-1

Vorgestellt wird ein internationales Praxisforschungsprojekt, bei welchem im Rahmen eines qualitativen Zugangs die Frage nach den Wirkungen des deutsch-jordanischen Jugendbegegnungsprojekts „Wie lebst denn Du? – Das Narrativ des Anderen kennenlernen“ gestellt wurde. Präsentiert werden das konkrete Vorgehen, die Jugendbegegnungen in Bayern, Sachsen und Amman, das Forschungsverständnis, die theoretischen Implikationen und Grundannahmen sowie abschließend die Ergebnisse und Perspektiven, die sich abzeichnen.

Melanie Kubandt
Julia Schütz (Hrsg.)

Methoden und Methodologien in der erziehungswissen schaftlichen Geschlechterforschung

2020 • 290 Seiten • Kart. • 34,90 € (D) • 35,90 € (A)
ISBN 978-3-8474-2343-0 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1311-0

Der Band vereint unterschiedliche empirische Zugänge zu Geschlecht und stellt die Potenziale und Grenzen der Forschungsperspektiven zur Diskussion. Hierbei interessieren vor allem die Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Verknüpfung von Methodologie und Empirie im Hinblick auf die übergeordnete Fragestellung: Wie kann Geschlecht empirisch mithilfe welcher Methoden auf welchen Ebenen in den Blick genommen werden? Ein wesentliches Ziel dieses Bandes ist es, eine Konturierung spezifischer Zugänge zu Geschlecht herauszuarbeiten und gegen ein epistemologisches Primat einzelner Zugänge zu argumentieren.