

AM



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RIVISTA DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI ANTROPOLOGIA MEDICA
FONDATA DA TULLIO SEPPILLI



In copertina

Ambainde TEMBINI (Donoban, Ondugu, Mali), accanto ai suoi feticci. Qui Ambainde è intento a preparare delle piccole strisce di cotone: dopo aver raccolto su di esse qualche goccia di sangue della paziente, le inchiederà su un albero-altare, “fissando” su quest’ultimo il male. (Foto: © Roberto Beneduce, 2008)



Il logo della Società italiana di antropologia medica, qui riprodotto, costituisce la elaborazione grafica di un ideogramma cinese molto antico che ha via via assunto il significato di “longevità”, risultato di una vita consapevolmente condotta lungo una ininterrotta via di armonia e di equilibrio.



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Editoriale

AM 52: Un numero “miscellaneo”

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Questo numero 52 di AM non ha sezioni monografiche e costituisce pertanto, come e forse più di altri, un carotaggio di ciò che la rivista è stata e intende essere: un periodico scientifico che pubblica scritti differenti orientati allo studio delle diverse culture del mondo contemporaneo e che hanno a che fare con questa fortunata branca specialistica dell'antropologia generale, l'antropologia medica. “Miscellaneo” è l'attributo che abbiamo dato, tradizionalmente, a questo fascicolo che raccoglie una varietà di temi e di autorialità, riconducibili, per diverse vie, all'antropologia medica italiana e internazionale, quella fondata, nel nostro Paese, da Tullio Seppilli nei primi anni Cinquanta del secolo scorso.

Piero Coppo, che purtroppo recentemente è venuto a mancare, è stato vicinissimo al nostro fondatore e a noi. Pertanto desidero manifestare la mia gratitudine a Laura Faranda, per avergli dedicato il saggio che apre questo numero “miscellaneo”, non tanto come dovuto ricordo, quanto per affermare il grande contributo che Coppo ci ha dato. Desidero ringraziare anche Roberto Beneduce il quale, proprio in omaggio alla memoria di Piero, ci offre una foto del proprio terreno dogon che abbiamo posto in copertina, e sono grato molto a Eduardo Menéndez, maestro dal Messico dell'antropologia medica mondiale, del quale pubblichiamo la relazione tenuta alla prima presentazione di AM a Roma, in presenza, tra gli altri, del Presidente SIAM, Alessandro Lupo, e della Presidente della Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli, Cristina Papa.

Ho definito l'antropologia medica una subdisciplina “fortunata” perché lo penso: siamo stati veramente fortunati a incontrare sulla nostra strada persone del calibro di Tullio Seppilli e non ci scorderemo mai di ricordare il fondatore italiano di questi studi, al quale va la nostra memoria collettiva.

Si prosegue poi con le ricerche di Corinna Guerzoni, sulle narrazioni della fertilità e le loro articolate eterocronie, di Niccolò Martini sull'eutanasia, un tema attuale e complesso, di Marcela Perdomo, sui rituali di possessione in Honduras, argomento che andrà ripreso prossimamente anche per l'Europa, di Silvia Stefani, sul cosa ne è ora dell'accoglienza "a bassa soglia", durante la pandemia a Torino, di Gioele Zisa che, fra antropologia medica e religiosa, ben approfondisce una questione hittita che nei primi anni Ottanta del secolo scorso, fu testata, comparativamente da Alfonso Maria di Nola, e infine del medico Paolo Zuppi, che ora mette insieme diversi operatori per affrontare la questione clinica del rapporto medico-paziente in una chiave pienamente interdisciplinare.

Presentiamo poi recensioni ampie e articolate: sono il nostro modo per affrontare, pluralisticamente, il dibattito in questa disciplina specialistica, che in questo caso volge l'attenzione sia al momento della pandemia contemporanea da Covid-19 sia all'antropologia psichiatrica.

Speriamo così, anche con questo numero "miscellaneo", di avere offerto un ampio ventaglio di temi e problemi.

A presto e... Buon Anno 2022!

Care in (Eastern) Germany *From Socialism to the Privatization of Social Welfare*

Marta Scaglioni
Università di Milano - Bicocca

Tatjana THELEN, *Care/Sorge. Konstruktion, Reproduktion und Auflösung bedeutsamer Bindungen*, transcript-Verlag, Bielefeld, 2014, 298 pp.

As one of the most influential anthropologists working on care, Tatjana Thelen makes a fundamental contribution with her *Care/Sorge. Konstruktion, Reproduktion und Auflösung bedeutsamer Bindungen* (*Care. Construction, Reproduction, and Dissolution of Meaningful Bond*¹, 2014).

Resorting to a Marxist framework (Production, Reproduction and Dissolution), her main argument considers care and care practices as key sites where society produces and reproduces itself (34) shaping “meaningful bonds”: kinship, work relations, and friendships. To make her point, Thelen analyses various forms of care in Eastern Germany, comparing the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) with today’s society, as this area is a privileged standpoint to inquire the «temporal, institutional, demographic, and gender-specific aspects of care» (p. 17). In Eastern Germany, in fact, accelerated social and historical changes made expectations and practices of care more explicit (*ibidem*). *Die Wende*, “the turn”, referring to the peaceful process which led to the reunification of Germany in October 1990, marked the shift from a pervasive socialist management of care to the neo-liberal privatization of social welfare (p. 49). The shift was historical, and, analysing it through the lenses of care, it risks being invested by moral judgements: a positive and genuine “before” and a consume-driven “after” characterized by insincere relationships. The Author strives to overcome these simplistic distinctions such as «warm familial care» against «care in cold state institutions», «formal/technical against informal/emotional or paid or unpaid care», «private and public», or «before (traditional) and after (modern)» (p. 15). An in-depth ethnographic research is the key to demolish prejudices and to observe social structures and their transformations from the bottom up: the Author spent three years, from 2003 to 2006, in a post-industrial and post-socialist city in the Eastern part of Germany,

which is anonymised throughout the text as “Seestadt”². The choice of the fieldwork rests upon solid elements: the former GDR showed peculiar characteristics which reverberated in today’s Seestadt. The GDR had in fact one of the highest female employment rates worldwide (p. 84), of which Eastern Germans (or, as they are colloquially known in Germany, *Ossis*, in contrast to *Wessis*, “the Westerners”) were very proud (p. 92), and a free, pervasive institutional care system. Thus, Eastern Germany in the 2000s offered the unique possibility of studying one of the most rapid transformation in social care issues worldwide.

In the first part of the book, *Einführung und Grundlegung* (Introduction and Foundation), Thelen lays the foundation for the definition of care and describes the context and the fieldwork. While defining care, the Author refers to the classic definition of Tronto (1993) as «species of activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our “world” so that we can live in it as well as possible» (p. 38) and quotes Tronto’s classic four-phased model «caring about, taking care of, care giving, and care receiving» (*ibidem*). Thelen declares herself unhappy with the English terminology and delves into the nuances of the German language, resorting to the theoretical distinction between *sorgen um*, for feelings and sentiments, and *sorgen für*, for concrete care practices (p. 23). However, she argues that the terms *Sorge* and care cannot overlap, as *Sorge* carries meanings of worries and concerns, rather than mother’s love and warm positive feelings. Regarding the research context, the study of the former GDR offers a unique possibility to deconstruct the gendered dimension of care. Before 1990, the socialist state struggled hard to promote female employment, putting it in overt and propagandist opposition to Western Germany, where the model of the male breadwinner often relegated women to unpaid domestic work. «From male bread winner to universal breadwinner» was the GDR motto (p. 82), and the state agenda was supported by the provision of official care for children, disabled, and elderly people. Most women went to work shortly after having given birth, and children were looked after (or disciplined) in public kindergartens. This particular conjuncture enabled the coexistence of high female employment and high fertility rates (p. 85), a bizarre concurrence to our Western European eyes. State institutions allowed the transfer of care from the private to the public sector, allowing women to have more children while working. Inevitably, the model had its downsides, since women were entitled to low alimony checks and widow’s pensions, pushing them to look for jobs, but at the same time making them rather vulnerable. The key argument in this first part of the book is that

care cannot be extricated from the state programs of social security, which influence in turn private practices and more intimate aspects of the social life, and that this was especially evident in the former GDR. Later on, being *die Wende* far from a merge, the Western social system was imposed onto the East, replacing the socialist system and triggering a rapid social change. Gender segregation in the job sector became similar to pre-1990 Western Germany, with men in the East taking over “women jobs” (bank officers, cooks, social workers), and women suddenly finding themselves excluded from certain professional domains (p. 87). This led to changes in the ideas of children care, moving it into the households. Social change was accompanied by a public discourse which carried moral connotations: while Eastern women before 1990 found it natural to delegate children care to external structures, this practice came to be publicly despised as dangerous for the psychological wellbeing of the infants (p. 95). The reciprocal construction of Eastern women as “bad mothers” and Western women as “lazy housewives” followed the German popular understanding well beyond the reunification. On the level of popular discourse, the model of the employed mother remained engrained in the mind-set of Eastern Germans for very long and was one of the (few) positive characteristic that *Ossis* used to describe themselves (p. 99).

The second part, *Praktiken “privater” Sorge: Care, Politik, Wirtschaft* (Practices of “private” Care: Care, Politics, Economics) enters the description of care practices in detail, arguing that they create kinship relations and underlie political meanings at the same time. Care appears once again as a process that responds to socially recognized needs while amounting to a political mechanism. The movement from public to private is exemplified by a chapter on German care relations across the border before *die Wende* (*Care über die deutsch-deutsche Grenze*) and one on “Caring Grandparents” (*Sorgende Großeltern*). The “othering” process which invested “bad Eastern mothers” used to permeate also the relations between Western and Eastern citizens before 1990. The establishment and maintenance of West-East relations is a meaningful example of the political connotations reproduced by forms of care. Germans on both sides of the wall became involved in the sending of packets, both in order to help relatives and to perpetuate a sort of charity (*Wessis* to *Ossis* mainly). Sending packets to the East intertwined private care with institutional practices, since they were sustained and encouraged by *Paketkampagnen*, Western governmental campaigns to help «our (poor) brothers and sisters of the Eastern zone» (p. 111). Packets helped constructing oneself and the “other” as alternatively consumistic, in need,

arrogant, charitable. The sending of goods from the West to the East shows how also in the West forms of care had strong political connotations, even under a non-dictatorial regime. The goods were often remarkably symbols of capitalism, and underpinned an ethnocentric and superiority sentiment, creating in turn guilt and inferiority feelings in the receivers, who were unable to reciprocate in the same way. After *die Wende*, many *Ossis* were able to unveil the cheap and prepared nature of many packets, overcoming the construction of difference, even if the purpose of this form of care was that of forging unity and solidarity among Germans. In the second chapter, grandparents exemplify the shift occurring in the East from public to private care. After 1990, the retrenchment of state-organized activities for children, the introduction of the Western early pension system (*Frühverrentung*), and later motherhoods contributed to the “invention of grandparenthood” (p. 137), while, before 1990, grandparents’ care of children was an exception rather than the norm (p. 156).

In the third part, *Praktiken öffentlicher Sorge: Care, Arbeit, Identität* (Practices of public Care: Care, Work, Identity), Thelen delves into the transformations of care that occurred at the workplaces (*Care am Arbeitsplatz*), for elderly people (*Von der Veteranen- zur Seniorenbetreuung*), and in the Elisencafe, a Church-related activity which acts as epicentre for volunteer-based community services. Apart from being places where intimate relations were established, companies in the former GDR provided welfare to their workers, acting as vectors of state policies (p. 169). The Author deconstructs the reciprocal prejudicial representations of work relations of *Ossis* and *Wessis*: the first as inauthentic and instrumental, the latter as disposable. As an example, company care for elderly people under socialism was far from the Western representation of socialist care as cold, traditional, and formal, as it organized rituals (parties, awards) for former workers leaning on emotional as well as hierarchical sentiments. In the last chapter, care is portrayed as a form of resistance: women who gravitated around the Elisencafe before 1990 fought for their religious beliefs, which comprised the dedication of a longer time to maternity and children raising. In such a state-organized and verticalist society, distancing oneself from the hegemonic practices was a way to affirm one’s identity, often at high costs. As the workplace was a pivotal element of social and economic life under socialism, stay-at-home mothers were excluded from company welfare, social insurance, holiday programs. Once again, pre-1990 companies and workplaces acted as «key elements of communication and care relations» (p. 228).

In conclusion, Thelen offers an insightful portrait of care constructs under socialism, comparing them with today's Eastern and yesterday's Western practices and ideas. At the centre of her analysis are various types of relations, or "meaningful bonds". Kinship, for example, created ties on the two sides of the border but not always, however, led to care. Nonetheless, care practically constructs and reproduces kinship relations (kinning, doing kinship) (p. 19). Care is thus the basis for social organization and reproduction, emerges as a response to socially recognized needs, and is underpinned by political and institutional structures. Having a privileged point of view from within the German society, even if clearly aware of her positioning as *Wessi*, the Author has the possibility of deconstructing hegemonic constructions related to gender and age. As a German, Thelen declares herself unsatisfied with the academic English-speaking terminology regarding care. Various German words could be used to refer to care but the Author considers them to be an imprecise replacement. *Sorge* would be care, in the above-mentioned variants of *sorgen um* and *sorgen für*, while *Pflege* is instead more connected to curing someone, and to the relative practices. On another level, children care can be defined in German as *Kinderbetreuung*, where the verb *betreuen* refers to custody, tutoring (A Phd supervisor is a *Betreuer*, for instance). Aware of the difficulties of translating theoretical concepts and applying them to different contexts, it results arduous to understand the unconventional choice of drafting such a seminal book in German. As imprecise as the translation of the German word *Sorge* into care might be, the Author relies heavily on the word care throughout the text, making it difficult to understand why the text had to be in German. The main unfortunate result of this choice is the small audience this book can reach. It is indeed a pity that the book has such a limited scope, being the former GDR one of the most interesting and at the same time underresearched area where care can be inquired and conceptualized for further use.

Note

⁽¹⁾ All attempts at translating German have been carried out by the review's author.

⁽²⁾ Seestadt means "sea city" in German: this probably implies that the city is Rostock. Prof. Sjaak van der Geest (2018) corroborates this hypothesis.

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