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Elizabeth L. Krause, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



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Elizabeth L. Krause

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Elizabeth L. Krause is associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She joined the faculty there in 2000. Her research interests include population politics, social memory, economic anthropology, and ethnographic writing. She has received support for her research from the following entities: Council for European Studies, U.S. Fulbright Program, National Science Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. In addition to publishing two books, Krause has published articles in the following peer-review journals: *American Anthropologist*, *American Ethnologist*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Human Organization*, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *Journal of Historical Anthropology*, and *Transforming Anthropology*.

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Eric Wolf's scholarship has had a powerful influence on my trajectory as an anthropologist, particularly because of his commitment to combining structural and symbolic aspects for grasping the interplay of culture and power. I once had the pleasure of meeting Wolf. It was on the occasion of the presentation of his last book, *Envisioning Power*, in December 1998. One of my dissertation committee members, historian Hermann Rebel, introduced the book to anthropologists gathered in Philadelphia at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association. I can't imagine a more elegant presentation as he described the work as "a mediation on the place of hegemonic cultural processes in historical anthropology" (Rebel 1999:149). Afterward, I found myself sitting at dinner with Wolf, his wife, Sydel Silverman, his editor, Stan Holwitz, and Rebel. I was a star-struck graduate student. When Wolf turned to ask me about my work, I froze up as though I was suddenly transformed into a person with neither history nor memory.

Having since recovered my ability to remember and to speak, I am honored to be here today. I am honored to have an opportunity to extend that abbreviated conversation and to provoke myself to ponder the challenges of making peasants the subjects of history. My latest project, *Unraveled*, took that challenge rather seriously (Krause 2009). Indeed, I see it as a daughter of Wolf's *Europe and the People without History*.

Today, my presentation has a threefold purpose. First, I describe how my work connects to Wolf's project and, in ways I did not anticipate, to carnival. I am convinced there are valid reasons to consider not only the ritual and performative aspects of carnival but also the behind-the-scenes aspects to grasp the totality of cultural practices and social relations. Second, given our context of carnival and the impulse to find unity across diverse contexts, I seek to reinvigorate Wolf's notion of culture as deeply integrated into global processes as well as his skepticism surrounding efforts to orchestrate coherence. Third, I describe challenges of making people without history into historical subjects.

<I. Connections. . . >

My new book tells the story of a person without history. Emilia Raugei was an agile girl in the 1920s who grew up weaving Florentine straw hats in a hidden peasant economy. She worked under a cantankerous sister-in-law whose communist father had abandoned her for the New World. She came of age in the shadows of a fascist regime that wanted babies. She and people like her might be considered protagonists of a quiet revolution. Yet such people have rarely been the sources or subjects of the stories told about the past. Emilia is not a hero in the conventional sense. Her story does not carry authority. Her story did not leave volumes in state archives. The only official trace of it appears in a household census. That one sheet of paper, n. 156, appears in the Foglio di Famiglia, the family registry, from the 1931 census for the local hamlet, province and municipality: Provincia di Firenze, Comune di Carmignano, Frazione di Comeana. In regal handwritten script, with loopy "Rs" beginning each of the same surnames, the sheet provides entries for eleven people.

When I look at this single household sheet there are several things that contradict the reality that I know existed in Emilio Raugei's household. The kinship is incorrect. "Ersilia" is listed as the mother of all seven children. In fact, she, Emilio's first wife, died from

influenza several years before Emilia was born in 1920. Emilia's mother was Giovanna Paolieri, and her relation to the head of household is listed merely as *convivente*—cohabitant. Perhaps the couple never married, but why was she not recorded as the mother of her own children? Another error appears in the listing of professions. Emilio is noted as *colono*, or sharecropper, which matched what Emilia told me. Giovanna appears as a *trecciaiola*, or straw weaver. The spaces are blank for the three remaining females, including Emilia, who would have been 11 years old in 1931 and would have had at least six years' experience weaving for a global economy. The blanks speak volumes to the systematic cover-up of hidden labor.

In effect, these blanks are my inspiration. They are the empty spaces of history. They need filling in. They hold clues to the cultural roots of declining fertility, which has been constructed as a menacing conundrum. . . .

Unraveled exposes the cultural roots beneath the profound yet quiet revolution from large to small families. My description of Emilia Raugei as without history is intended only in the most ironic of senses. It echoes the conviction of Wolf's classic *Europe and the People without History* to demonstrate the uneven historical connections that

link humble peasants to forces that extend well beyond their not-so small worlds. The chapters in *Unraveled* amplify silenced memories and link local and global forces that caused people to embrace a momentous shift in family-making.

<II. peasant cultures and global processes, or the political economy of carnival>

As my ethnography of fertility decline unfolded in the Province of Prato, and my networks of local historians and organic intellectuals enlarged, I came across a video recording of a "sold" peasant woman. Her story struck me as remarkable yet obscure. She had been coerced into working as a wet nurse after being spooked during carnival time and subsequently giving birth to a stillborn. The eerie story seemed highly unusual—an outlier in historical narratives related to transformations in peasant cultural practices. Ongoing research, however, revealed other stories that suggested the significance of peasant women in lubricating global economies with their bodily substances.

<II.a. Carnival and a "sold" woman>

In two separate interviews in 1991 for the video/oral history project of Carmignano, Iolanda recounted her

experience as a "sold woman." Iolanda was born June 6, 1906. She became a wet nurse in 1932 after losing her first born.¹

"I also took one, poor thing, because my first child was stillborn, and you know why she came out dead? Because before there weren't the masks, they would go to the doors come February, in that way. They would warble, make trilling sounds, so you'd hear they were there, understand?"

"One evening, like every evening, we were gathered together, all of us. And I was sitting—like I was there, the first one. Instead of trilling, they knocked at the door."

"Who'll go open it?" someone asked. Iolanda went. "I saw two dressed up in the white cloak of death... I was so frightened. And from that fear it boiled my blood and the creature died on me at eight months."

Twenty days later, she gave birth. She recalled that the midwife took the baby and went to light a candle to the Madonna.

"What's wrong?" Iolanda remembered asking, frightened and confused. "What does the baby have?"

"The baby was born dead," the midwife responded. "She's missing all her nails."

Iolanda was shocked and overcome with fear. The baby, Iolanda recalled, was buried outside the cemetery; it had not been baptized so, she was told, was forbidden from being

buried in a grave on consecrated land. The details—that she never was allowed to see the baby and that it was never baptized—raise suspicions about the midwife's account.

In any case, after the death of her firstborn, Iolanda's mother-in-law pressured her to work as a wet nurse.

"To make a long story short, there was this man, Paolo, that lived here. His wife was ahead of me [in weeks of gestation] and she had hers a month and a half after I gave birth to the dead baby girl. So they start to say, even my mother-in-law was saying, 'What?' she says, 'you have a little milk. What,' she says, 'if you send it away then if you have another child who knows if it will come back.' Lots of things, you know how it goes. We used to listen to everybody, and so I took the child."

Iolanda admitted that she was easily coerced into becoming a wet nurse. She described her generation of women as subordinate to the senior members of the household. They did not question authority. Women accepted their place in the hierarchy like a station in life even when it meant agreeing to their own exploitation.

While Iolanda waited for her neighbor's child to be born, she nursed her niece's baby. Its mother did not have much milk. A month and a half later, the neighbor's baby was

born and she began her work as a wet nurse. Shortly thereafter she learned of her reputation as a sold woman.

The wealthy man whose baby she nursed scolded her when she went into the fields because of a belief that physical labor made women sweat and could make the baby sweat. "You have a pension and I pay you," he'd say, "You're a sold woman." As the oral historian asked her whether the money she earned was important to the household, whether it made a big difference, she responded: "The difference was this: that when he paid me each month my mother-in-law took it." Iolanda never saw a lira in the thirteen months she nursed the child. "It seems like a song, but it's actually a true story." And when the child had to go back to its mother, the separation was painful. Women of her generation were subordinate to the senior members of the household and accepted their place in the hierarchy. Years later, she laughed and described herself as *grulla*, or stupid.

<II.b. *Wet and hidden economies*>

Iolanda's story opens up several lines of inquiry. The first has to do with making sense of Iolanda's narrative. I do not wish to imply that Iolanda's analysis is not valid. From the contemporary vantage point in which women now live, in a context of threatened patriarchy as opposed to fully

pumped patriarchy, her laughter makes perfect sense. But there's more to be said. Wolf's approach to structural power guides us to expand Iolanda's conclusion, i.e., that she was simply *grulla*. My research in central Italy suggests that regional economies were founded on subjects who were sandwiched between capitalist, kin-ordered, and tributary modes of production.

This turn of phrase--that subjects were sandwiched among three articulating modes of production--draws upon a clever analytical move on Wolf's part. He was arguing against anthropologists in three different camps: 1) those who viewed "the facts of kinship as an outgrowth of human biology"; 2) those who focused on kinship as a cultural domain consisting of "symbolic constructs of descent and affinity"; and 3) those who conceived of kinship as a metaphor for expressing economic, social, and political relations (Wolf 1982:90). Wolf shifted the terms of the debate. He moved kinship into the realm of political economy. The implication: "Kinship can then be understood as a way of committing social labor to the transformation of nature through appeals to filiation and marriage, and to consanguinity and affinity. Put simply, through kinship social labor is 'locked up,' or 'embedded,' in particular relations between people. This labor can be

mobilized only through access to people, such access being defined symbolically" (Wolf 1982:91).

I would have been inclined to leave Iolanda's story in the category of obscure outliers were it not for my encounters with other similar memories and archival data that suggested the existence of a "wet" and hidden economy. This economy, which used kinship networks to mobilize labor, concerned relations among straw weavers and wet nurses as well as international mercantilists. Add to that state bureaucrats who doled out wet nurse subsidies to the poor women deemed without sufficient milk.

We've been talking quite a bit the past couple of days about fertility in the context of carnival. I'd like to change things up and point to the broader political economic context at least as it played out in my field site. Giving birth back then was not just about giving birth. It was also about the negotiation of labor and capital accumulation. Giving birth affected possibilities for the accumulation of capital, not only in terms of labor for the farm or the count, but in terms of a potential "wet" resource for a struggling household. In fact, as Iolanda's story and others' demonstrate, the work of giving birth could translate into paid labor. Women in central Italy brought capital and cash into the household through several types of work:

agricultural labor, weaving, and wet nursing. To be a paid wet nurse, one had to first give birth to her own child as a way to stimulate milk production. The woman's milk could then be "sold." It became a commodity.

I intend the term "wet" to draw attention to the way in which bodily substances saturated economic activity in the environs of Florence. Submersed beneath all of that "dry" mercantile activity of straw was a "wet" movement in lactating women. The dominant economy would have withered had it not been for the wet aspect that kept things flowing. The weavers would not have been able to keep weaving if it weren't for the wet nurses, their milk, and the subsidies. The hidden traffic in milk moistened—even lubricated—the economy and kept it "flexible." Here, flexible meant that labor was cheap and available on demand. This equilibrium, however, ultimately could not be sustained. Women's milk forged and broke social relations and left its mark. A resonance of trauma resulted from this traffic in human substances.

There is a second line of inquiry. Today's carnivals unfold in a particular context vis-à-vis fertility. In Italy, and throughout much of Europe, fertility has declined to levels that concern demographers and policymakers. What new meanings do such festivals acquire in a cultural context in

which fertility is super low and super politicized? It seems to me that the symbols may be archaic but the meanings are continuously contested and in flux. I must attribute these sorts of provocations in no small measure to Wolf for he offers a methodology for merging the material with the symbolic; he dares us to investigate how symbols get deployed and to what end.

<III. Challenges and a scaffold>

Traditions such as carnival not only have histories but make histories, too. Yet traditions themselves can function as a mask as they invite spectacle and reproduce fixed notions of culture. They may serve to cover up uneven power relations. They may serve to deploy symbols in particular ways.

In the introduction to his comparison of three state societies--the Kwakiutl, the Aztecs, and Nazi Germany--Wolf profoundly expressed a central problematic of the culture concept: "Culture is not a shared stock of cultural content. Any coherence that it may possess must be the outcome of social processes through which people are organized into convergent action or into which they organize themselves" (Wolf 1999:66). So whereas for Ruth Benedict the Kwakiutl potlatch was a manifestation of the Dionysian personality,

for Wolf the phenomenal increase in excessive ceremonial gift giving resulted from population decimation, incorporation into the Canadian colonial state and the capitalist market, and subsequently the emergence of a new elite class. His eye for a relational anthropology urged cultural investigators to use a critical lens that focused on "how power in social relationships works to draw cultural and linguistic forms into coherence." He then posed a challenge: "[W]e must try to identify the instrumental, organizational, or ideological means that maintain custom or underwrite the search for coherence.... Wherever possible we should try to identify the social agents who install and defend institutions and who organize coherence, for whom and against whom. And if culture was conceived originally as an entity with fixed boundaries marking off insiders against outsiders, we need to ask who set these borders and who now guards the ramparts" (Wolf 1999:67).

Simply put, Wolf's observations beg us to ask, Who is organizing cultural coherence for whom? And if it's being organized *for* someone, who is it against? Who gets invited? Who gets left out? Who gets to wear the masks? Who gets to watch? What histories of inclusion and exclusion do such enactments provoke? And why and when does it matter?

To conclude, one challenge in making little people into the subjects of history is that their views and practices often constitute subjugated knowledges. In other words, this version of knowledge may be disorderly and hence easily discounted. A great deal of such perspectives may not mesh well with dominant narratives. Emancipating history requires keen skills of drawing out the relevance, of being able to tack back and forth between the local and the global. Emancipating history, when breathing new life into hidden or forgotten figurations, requires keen attention to issues of multiple levels of translation for readers to "get" it. The creation of historical subjects may even require new strategies of interpretation and collaboration. Wolf urged us to embrace flexible rather than static concepts. His work invites relational approaches—ones that profoundly shape what it means to live a life.

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ABSTRACT

While conducting research on fertility decline and its historical and contemporary meanings, I came across a video recording of a "sold" peasant woman. Her story struck me as remarkable yet obscure. She had been coerced into working as a wet nurse after being spooked during carnival time and subsequently giving birth to a stillborn. The eerie story seemed highly unusual—an outlier in historical narratives related to transformations in peasant cultural practices. Ongoing research, however, revealed other stories that suggested the significance of peasant women in lubricating global economies with their bodily substances. This paper has two purposes. First, it expands Eric Wolf's notion of peasant culture not only as deeply integrated into global processes but also as a necessity for the very continuance of transnational markets. I intend the term "wet" to draw attention to the way in which bodily substances, i.e., milk, saturated economic activity in the environs of Florence and Prato. Submersed beneath the "dry" mercantile activity of straw hat production was a "wet" movement in lactating women. Second, this paper explores the challenging process of making peasants the subjects of history. Researchers may encounter jarring tales that do not fit easily into their categories. The tales may challenge the academic writer in terms of whether and how to represent them and their tellers. In addition, peasants' interpretations of events may or may not fit into prevailing explanations. How do we deal with these multiple levels of dissonance? I take seriously the Wolf-inspired task of identifying how individual stories are deeply connected to global histories and structures. Toward this end, I offer a scaffolding that builds on the conundrum of combining erudite with subjugated knowledge's and argues for resonant voice as one solution to the challenge of addressing the ongoing problem of integrating the "people without history" into the stories that get told, transcribed, translated, and retold.

¹ Thanks are due to Giovanni Contini, oral and visual historian, and the Comune di Carmignano, for granting access to these video recordings.