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Article 2: ArchDaily and Representations of Domestic Architecturein the era of Digital Platforms

Bruno Cruz Petit is Fellow-Researcher at the Universidad Motolinía del Pedregal (Mexico) and a member of Sistema Nacional de Investigadores de México, Level 1. He has a degree in Political Science and Sociology from the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, a diploma from the Institut de Sciences Politiques in Paris, and a Master's and a Doctorate degree in Sociology from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México; he is also the author of the books *Breve historia social del interior doméstico* (Mexico, Ediciones Motolinía, 2011) and *Transformación en el espacio interior doméstico contemporáneo* (Ed. EAE, Spain-Germany, 2011). His research lines are focused on the relationship between space and society: urban and housing sociology, design theory, sustainability, and anthropology of the house. He currently teaches Anthropology of Design and Interior Design History and has written papers in national and international peer-reviewed journals, such as *Interiority, Home Cultures, Revista de Arquitectura de la Universidad Católica de Colombia, Vitruvius (Brazil), Ángulo Recto, Arte-individuo y sociedad* (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain).

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Article 3: Small Palm Oil Plantation as Political Arena: Environmental Narratives Among Workers and NGOs in Aceh, Indonesia

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Article 4: Lights, Action, Naughty Bits: A thematic analysis of New Zealanders' attitudes to *Naked Attraction*

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Angelique Nairn is a Senior Lecturer in the Public Relations Department within the School of Communication Studies for the Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. As a graduate of the Bachelor of Communication Studies, she went on to complete a BCS Honours (first class) and her PhD. Angelique is currently working on multiple research projects from explorations of morality in television programming, to how organisations encourage identification in their external communications, to the experiences of work among creative people.

Article 5: Face and Authority: Cultural Challenges of Teaching in China

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Editorial

If in the last issue, published about six months ago, I had timidly expressed the hope that by the time the publication of this issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies* had rolled around*,* things might have gone back to normal, by now, dear readers, we all know that I was sadly mistaken. On the contrary, one can easily argue that things have become much worse since then; COVID-19 is still with us, many people (arguably many more than necessary) have died from it, receding economies have brought hardship to millions and many freedoms thought inalienable have been curtailed, hopefully only temporarily so. Academia is one of the worst hit sectors, with students unable to travel, normal teaching services suspended and conference travel all but dead.

No matter how one looks at the present, it is clear that humanity will not be able to return to the old normal; it is too early to say, but many things have already changed. Online services have skyrocketed and will continue to do so, business travel and whole business models have been taken over by new forms of work organisation (e.g. home office), and Zoom, a video service barely know six months ago, has become a household name and an interface default.

While not being able to tackle issues at large, in the pages of the current issue of this journal, we can at least offer some travel-related sensations, as the topics therein allow one to circumnavigate the globe through the pages and topics to follow.

The issue opens with a short thematic focus on architecture beginning with Adeyemi Akande's *Manifestations of Orí (Head) in Traditional Yorùbá Architecture*. This text examines Yorùbá architecture and claims cogently that at least some of its features are situated in close proximity to Yorùbá spirituality and religion. Especially the form of the roof corresponds strikingly to the spiritual concept of Ori (head) in Yorùbá mythology. Thus, while Yorùbá spirituality might be in decline due to the young striving for more western ideals, they would do so at least under a spiritual and culturally determined traditional roof.

The second article, *ArchDaily and Representations of Domestic Architecture in the era of Digital Platforms* by Bruno Cruz Petit and Tomás Errazuriz Infante, examines today's leading architectural website, ArchDaily. Having originally been launched in Chile, it has now moved to New York and, as the authors argue, is globally influential. This influence, however, comes at a price. Local differences, visible when publications were still local, have been usurped by images pretending to suggest a global style, akin to what photographs on airbnb have done to interior decoration, suggesting and requesting a single style as "global". But the authors do not stop there: they claim that the website has also made global and disseminated a writing style full of clichés and grandiosity, bearing little or no correlation to the objects described; worse yet, as their research demonstrates, the objects are displayed devoid of functionality; humans play a decorative role if any at all, thereby perverting the original meaning of houses as shelters.

Giulia Zaninelli's *Small Palm Oil Plantation as Political Arena: Environmental Narratives Among Workers and NGOs in Aceh, Indonesia* tackles a different problem, although it does contain a strong global element as well: that is the world's unstoppable hunger for palm oil products. There have been many articles written on the issue of how palm oil plantations are impacting negatively on the environment in which they are placed. Zaninelli readily agrees to this fact, but her perspective is more on the social ramification these plantations have, and especially so on the indigenous populations of Banda Aceh, Sumatra. Having lived in several villages in the area, she has become a keen participant observer and reports on changes in

villages over the last 20 years or so. Her perspective does not privilege the villagers though, as many other articles do; she also questions some of the motives of the activist involved in the struggle against big palm oil companies. She does not accuse them of intentionally misunderstanding the situation; rather, she shows how their own background as oftentimes privileged students from urban middle-class families might lead them to misread what is actually going on in the villages. The article ends with an appeal to all concerned to work together rather than against each other to find solutions.

Moving far southeast from Indonesia, Justin Matthews and Angelique Nairn's discussion takes on nudity in New Zealand. Their *Lights, Action, Naughty Bits: A Thematic Analysis of New Zealanders' attitudes to "Naked Attraction"* analyses a number of New Zealand media and their interpretation of the reality show *Naked Attraction*, originally having aired on Britain's Channel 4 and then transplanted to New Zealand, among other places. They find that New Zealanders do indeed have a healthy attitude regarding nudity and readily proclaim this fact as well. While the show still remains a reality show, with all the drawbacks such a format includes, viewers found it "to be refreshing, especially because the show offered real people that were relatable and validated the self-concepts of many commenters."

Finally, Paweł Zygadło's *Face and Authority: Cultural Challenges of Teaching in China* takes us to China and gives a first-hand approach of teaching as a foreigner, a *Lao wai (老外)*, in China. Zygadło, who for many years has been teaching in Taiwanese and mainland China universities, analyses recent western theories of pedagogy and how these need to be re-examined in the face of Chinese cultural realities. These realities do not take away from their force, for instance regarding the teacher-student relationship, but tweak it in certain ways. Understanding these dynamics is beneficial for both the student and the teacher and allows for teachers to become more efficient in their teaching. Especially the concept of "face" plays an important role here, as Zygadło convincingly argues.

I wish you safe and instructive travels on the pages of this issue!

Holger Briel
Editor-in-Chief

Manifestations of *Orí* (Head) in Traditional Yorùbá Architecture

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Abstract

Yorùbá traditional architecture is not spontaneous. It is a product of a well-structured cultural and religious system. Every aspect from the choice of material, to the style of building, and even its construction system was designed with primary considerations for family, community and belief. Because architecture is an effective organ for the reflection of both cultural and religious thoughts, this study sought to query an inconspicuous but possible use of traditional Yorùbá architecture as a medium for the expression of *orí* ideology and worship in the early times. Relying principally on secondary data and new insights from the juxtaposing of information gathered from religious practises and local art and architecture, the study attempted to answer the question, "How is traditional Yorùbá architecture used as a medium to propagate the centrality of *orí*?" The study noted that there appears to be a metaphysical similarity in the presentation and meaning of *orí* (head) in traditional Yorùbá sculpture and *òrùlé* (roof) in Yorùbá architecture in a manner that ties them together. The conclusion is that the roof in Yorùbá architecture is indeed a metaphorical object for the assertion of the pre-eminence of *orí* among the Yorùbá.

Keywords: architecture, head, Ori, religion, roof, Yoruba

Introduction

In Yorùbá, *orí* means head. It is the central focus for the existential energy of Yorùbá life. *Orí* is also an *òrìsà* (deity) and it is the primal deity for the Yorùbá socio-spiritual compass. So central is the idea of *orí* to the Yorùbá that it is presented as a pivotal element in the creation of man, as stated in the Yorùbá myth of creation. Abimbola (1977), Idowu (1996) and Akande (2017) already recounted this myth, therefore, a repeat here will be unnecessary. It is important to note, however, that irrespective of an individual's devotional allegiance in early Yorùbá times, the veneration and reverence of *orí* transcends all cult worship and it is essential to life among the Yorùbá. But of what relevance is this knowledge to the study of architecture? How does this alleged centrality of the *orí* cult and worship influence the nature and character of Yorùbá traditional architecture?

Perhaps it is expedient to start by stating that in many traditional societies, architecture is a profound and tangible platform for the embodiment of the spiritual and cultural ideals of such a society. Seeing that Yorùbá indigenous architecture is more than spontaneous, and that certain aspects of its form visually proclaim key religious ideologies, scholarship – even if on a whim of curiosity alone – is obligated to query the dynamics and possible role of traditional Yorùbá architecture in the institutionalization of religion. While at a basic level, architecture is a conscious effort at creating functional as well as psychological spaces, certain signs point to the notion that in traditional Yorùbá setup, architecture does much more. This study will explore this notion by querying aspects of ratio and scale in Yorùbá architecture and how these modestly manifest *orí* ideology. The study will attempt to answer the question, "is traditional Yorùbá architecture used as a medium to propagate the centrality of *orí*?" The findings here will help shed further light on several unresolved questions that continue to impede a fuller understanding of the depth of traditional Yorùbá architecture.

Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature and has employed qualitative research methods for data gathering, interpretation and analysis. Data collection is focused mainly on desk research, visual observations and analysis of archival documents – mainly photographs. The study relied on online research resources and image banks, alongside physical library searches for the desk, and archival photographs research. This study had the assistance of a local culture custodian who provided contact with a sculptor and cult devotee for unstructured interview. Interactions with the individual was done in Yorùbá language. Some archive photographs from the Frobenius collection and the British National Archives online resource were used during the interviews as a mnemonic device.

Orí in Yorùbá Belief

To the Yorùbá people who inhabit a large portion of south-western Nigeria and the eastern part of the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), *orí* is supreme. It is an embodiment and a repository of all the supernatural energy from where the essence of Yorùbá spirituality and existence emanate. In Yorùbá belief, *orí* subsists both in the physical and ethereal worlds owning a principal place in both realms. It is an *òrìsà* (deity) and at the same time the house of *àse* (life force). Abiodun (1994) already dealt with the concept of *àse* at length. He explored the framework of Yorùbá aesthetics and set it in context of form, through which *àse* can be projected. In that light, Abiodun surmises that *orí* is the major and most pervasive symbol of *àse* in both human and spirit realms. Hence, *orí* is given utmost reverence. Ademuyela (2007)

notes that *orí* serves as the "umbilical cord" connecting man with God. According to the Yorùbá, no man exists without his *orí* and as will become clear later on in this paper, *orí,* just like the art of representing it, is in the very centre of the Yorùbá being – material and ethereal. The spiritual and metaphysical importance of *orí* is summed up in an *Ifa*[1] verse (*Odu Irete ofun*)

> You who prints chalk on the back of the crocodile
> Ifa divination of was cast for
> When *orí* set on a journey to *Apere*
> All the *orisa (deities)* were advised to offer sacrifice
> *orí* alone yielded and offered sacrifice
> *orí* sacrifice was good and well honoured
> Is *orí* not wiser than other deities?
> Only *orí* made it to *Apere*,
> No other *orisa* can save a man
> Other than one's *orí*
> *orí* is superior to all other *orisa*.

> Another verse from the *Ifá* poetry further affirms the significance of *orí* to the Yorùbá.
> *Orí*, cause and creator
> *orí -Apere,* the great companion who never deserts one
> *orí* the master of all
> It is *orí* we should praise
> The rest of the body comes to naught
> When *orí* is missing from the body
> What remains is incapable of carrying any load
> It is the *orí* which bears the load
> *Orí,* I pray you
> Do not desert me
> You *orí* are the lord of all things (Abiodun, 1994)

The above *Ifa* verse indicates the dominion of *orí* over all other deities in Yorùbá cosmology. No other deity can render the assistance needed by an individual in "life's perilous journey" without consensus of the individual's *orí*. As Adeleke (2011) states, all other *òrìsà* are themselves subject to their own *orí*. This means that the power of overlord given to *orí* by *Olodumare* (The Supreme God) is total. The *orí* is worshiped by a special group of priests, called the *Aw'orí* (The mystery of the head). Throughout Yorùbá land, the *Aw'orí* is known and enjoys the patronage of all. The worship of one's inner head (*orí inu*), which is essentially directed by the *Aw'orí* priests, is conducted through an altarpiece that contains the symbol of the inner (spiritual) head. This piece is called the *Ibori* or *Ile orí*. It is a conical object, usually made from leather and lavishly decorated with cowries (figure 1). It is believed that after divination and spiritual preparations, the *orí* deity of an individual who has commissioned the *Ibori* will reside in the object, hence the name *Ibori* (cover for the head) or *Ile orí* (house of the *orí*).

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[1] Ifa is a divination system and religion among the Yoruba people which uses a literary corpus called *odu ifa* to decipher, diagnose and proffer solutions to situations.

Figure 1: *Ile orí* (*Ibori*). Source: Hamill Gallery of Tribal Art.
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As earlier suggested, the Yorùbá accord *orí* full reverence in all things; in ritual worship, as well as in mundane activities**.** While this veneration and the related practices are originally based on traditional religious doctrine, certain aspects of the practise have found its way into other modern religious practices, like in Christianity. An example of this can be seen in the placing of both hands on the (outer) head when saying prayers; a practise rather alien to the Christian culture. The Yorùbá Christian finds it necessary to hold his/her physical (outer) head with both hands during Christian worship or supplication, to make pronouncements or declarations, seeing the head as a touch point or conduit of destiny. The declarations are mainly for protection, good fortune, and favour in the day's endeavour. This act is an extract from traditional practise. Despite the disregard many now have for these old practises, this author notes that some aspects of these traditions like the one mentioned above continue to be carried on by many. Further, head covering as practised in Yorùbá culture, must have a mention here. Lawal (2002) has discussed the issues of head styles for both genders, and the religious importance assigned to covering one's head. For a male Yoruba adult to be fully dressed, the cap (*Fìlà*) is a very vital part of the daily attire. The equivalent for the female is the head tie/dress (*Gèlè*). To be at a formal gathering without *fìlà* can be likened to being at a formal dinner in western society without a jacket or the traditional bow tie.

Yorùbá Kings, who are regarded as spirit-men, are themselves under obligation to keep their heads covered at all times. The king must wear at least a "lesser" crown called *Oríkògbófo* when not in state. The *Oríkògbófo* are small crown-like caps that cover the king's *orí* for less formal situations. Beier (1982) records that the *Oríkògbófo* are not sacred, and they are not

called *Adé* (crown). The royal crown maker, who is usually a devotee of the *orí* cult, is also responsible for the making of the *Oríkògbófo.* He is allowed to freely express his creativity in the making of *it,* as he is not bound to convention in this endeavour. The conical shape of the Yorùbá beaded crown further sheds light on the issue of head covering. The crowns are purposefully designed to serve as a dwelling for the king's head (see figure 2). In itself, the crown is a representation of the supremacy of the *orí* deity in abstraction. Thus, the traditionally preferred conical shape, for the Yorùbá beaded crown, is similar in physical form to the "shrine" or house of *orí*.

Figure 2: A Yorùbá beaded Crown. Note the conical shape which is most popular among Yoruba beaded crown. Source: Hamill Gallery of Tribal Art.
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Culturally, the Yorùbá believe that the well-being of the head is of great importance to one's success in life. In much earlier times, it was not uncommon to see a fully dressed adult with a head dress, but without footwear. Or, to see Yorùbá people covering only their heads in a downpour, not minding the rest of their bodies. For the Yorùbá, as already seen in the *Ifa* verse quoted earlier, if the head is well, then all is well. Ofuasia (2016) however disagrees. In his paper, he argues that the pre-natal existence of *orí* must not be taking for anything other than mythology. Using David Hume's epistemology, he asserts that the pre-eminence given to *orí* among the Yorùbá is flawed and *orí* should signify nothing other than the mere literary meaning of the word – a physical head. He concludes that any attempt to ascribe or link *orí* to any human

action or aspirations, inevitably leads to naïve optimism. It is unclear how Ofuasia (2016) reaches this conclusion about the idea of *orí* when he adjudges a purely Yorùbá thought within the construct of a western theory which he himself had evidently criticized in the early part of his work. The idea of Ajiboye, Folaranmi & Umou-Oke (2018) appears to be antithesis to that of Ofuasia (2016) as they insist that *orí* is a connection between the spiritual and physical, providing a locus for the expression of Yorùbá ideology which are practical and can be seen in everyday life. Ajiboye et al. (2018) conclude that *orí* remains central to the construction of aesthetics of daily life and the determination of destinies in Yoruba worldview. In a similar tone, Dias (2013) presents *orí* as a dual natured determinant of man's destiny. In one view, he argues that *orí* is responsible for predestination and this predestination is fixed and unchangeable, while in another, he alludes to the flexibility of destiny, calling it an open manuscript that may be subject to manipulations. Dias was however careful to note that Yorùbá thought on destiny is extraordinarily complex, resulting from a plurality of interpretations and influences.

The Art of Yorùbá Architecture

There exists the temptation to reduce the physical attributes of traditional African architecture to forms that primarily respond to and reflect the demands of the local environment only. Surely, a casual onlooker might find most aspects of the physicality of traditional African architecture rather simplistic and suggest that its philosophy for expression is seated in environmental determinism. This would amount to a colossal deflation of the real but often furtive value of traditional African architecture. Even when a functionalist assessment occasionally produces a reasonable appraisal of the architecture, from an Afrocentric standpoint, anything short of an inclusive assessment that reserves adequate considerations for the socio-sacred aspects of the host culture, is a deflation nonetheless. An understanding of African architecture requires a specific examination of the physical, technological, sociocultural, and economic contexts. It is also essential that one considers the process whereby a human, as a thinking, symbol-making animal, abstracts those realities into a meaningful and ultimately religious or symbolic schema of architectural philosophy (Prussin, 1974).

One of the major challenges of traditional African architecture has been the rigid and biased evaluation it received from the western world. Until quite recently, African architecture was not considered worthy of any form of recognition outside a detached description of its building techniques and material. Further, Prussin (1974) identified this illegitimate pedagogical approach employed by early western scholars as a key factor that handicapped the initial valuation of traditional African architecture. In her *Introduction to Indigenous African Architecture*, Prussin pointed out that, usually, the study of visual arts in the western world is traditionally divided into sculpture, drawing, painting and architecture. However, when the arts of Africa began to attract the world's attention at the turn of the 20th century, not only was the architecture of Africa divorced from the other visual arts, but was in turn robbed of its meaningful elements. While the visual arts of Africa gained prominence, the inverse was the case for African architecture. Despite this false start, African architecture has held its own, possibly because of its central role in the sociocultural milieu of the people and its indisputable status as a core platform for indigenous applied arts. Shah (2012) has suggested that in most traditional societies, architecture has persisted as one of the most profoundly important reflection of culture. This is true about traditional Yorùbá architecture. Not only does it respond to the local environmental dictates, it also, and perhaps most importantly, embodies the spiritual and cultural formation of the people's belief.

Art is an integral part of Yorùbá architecture. Contrary to popular opinion, the houses of royals or the elites are not the only ones that get special attention and ornamentation. A vast amount of structures belonging to people that can be classified as commoners also feature ample intricate ornamentation. Dmochowski (1990) confirms that the veranda posts, even in ordinary houses, were generally ornamented. In early Yorùbá society, the addition of ornamentation to a building was not a matter of affluence or elitism, it was considered to be culturally essential. Ornamentation and sculptural relief on available spaces was a responsibility and opportunity to use architecture as a platform for the continual visual rhetoric of mythology and traditional ideals. These actions must however not be mistaken for compulsion as this was far from the case. The culture encouraged ornamentation and the use of its spaces – wherever it is found, from textile to calabash surfaces – as a template for the enunciation of both personal and collective identity, but does not compel anyone. There was a general understanding that the use of symbolism, relief art on architecture, and ornamentation on woven clothing were an act of cultural assertion and self-discovery. However, in the Yorùbá country, one may find that plentiful and high-quality ornamentation are a function of affluence. In his pivotal work *Architecture without Architects*, Rudofsky (1964) asserts that great builders draw no lines between sculpture and architecture. With them, sculpture is not commissioned as an afterthought or budgetary dole. Neither is so-called landscaping. The three are inseparable. In line with this assertion, one may argue that early Yorùbá builders, and Yorùbá architectural sensibilities, can be ascribed to perceptiveness in craft and philosophy. Sculpture is primeval and has always been a key medium for the communication of certain ethics in ancient societies. It is also a major language and an integral element in traditional Yorùbá architecture. In some buildings, sculptural expressions were not limited to veranda posts alone, but are also to be seen on lintels, beams, ceiling boards, doors and even the large expanses of court walls were covered with geometric symbols, animal figures, human and mythological characters. Examples can be seen on the architectural surfaces of the palace and buildings of repute in Efon Alaye, Owo, Akure, Badagry and in common houses in Oyo.

The material of choice for early Yorùbá buildings was earth mixed with clay (where available) and straw. These were kneaded into balls with the aid of water and attached on wooden frames in layers. The kneaded balls were carried to site by boys and girls and then thrown into frame structures that define the walls and finally patted down by masons. In the northern parts of the Yorùbá country, walls were built from between 3 and 6 metres high in layers of about 30 centimetres high and 30 to 60 centimetres thick (Dmochowski, 1990). The popular indigenous style of building in the early days was often the called the Wattle and Daub. The construction of most houses in the early Yorùbá country was essentially done through *òwè* – a community help system where every available able-bodied in the village is beckoned to assist with everything from clearing the land to unearthing mud and daubing (Amole and Folaranmi, 2017). Typically, Yorùbá houses follow a well-organized *agbo ile* (Family Compound) pattern design. The houses are in some ways a collection of several units fitted together in a cyclical, square or rectangular shape so that a courtyard is defined in the centre of the system. According to Amole & Folaranmi (2017), they are designed along this pattern especially with focus of family life and apart from the living quarters within a compound, other forms of architecture like the palace and shrines are also designed and built considering the society's social order.

In this study we are interested in another type of predefined order. One that can only be appreciated when we view the traditional Yorùbá building in section (see Figure 3). Here, we are confronted with the different elements of the structure and very clearly, certain aspects of the scale and ratio of the different elements becomes noticeable and peculiar. This peculiarity, however, is not entirely nouveau to those acquainted with the canons guiding traditional

Yorùbá sculpture. It is to this peculiarity that this research turns to for answers to the key hypothesis of this study.
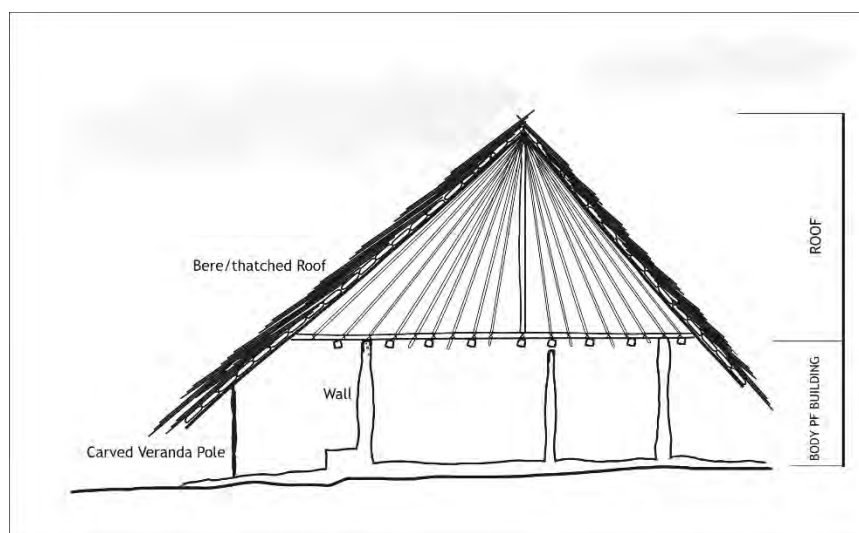

Figure 3: Section of a typical traditional Yoruba building. Note the scale of the roof compared to the rest of the building. The roof is almost two-third of the whole building. Sketch by author.

Discussion of Results

Physicality of *orí* ideology in Yorùbá architecture
It was William Buller Fagg, the British anthropologist, museum curator and African art historian, who first noticed the disproportionality in traditional Yorùbá sculpture and this significantly changed the way the works were seen and appraised. Fagg theorized that the ratio of the head to the rest of the body in Yorùbá sculpture is deliberately stylized in a manner that makes the head about a quarter – which is about 1:4 – of the whole size of an anthropomorphic piece. This fundamentally brought issues of African aesthetics in the appraisal of indigenous arts to the fore. Further to William Fagg's proclamation, another renowned anthropologist and expert on Nigerian arts, Frank Willett, later supported this theory of enlarged heads in Yorùbá sculpture. Willett (1967) stated that the Ife [Yorùbá] heads are really quite unlike the Greek/European traditional sculpture which is based on careful measurements and accurate proportion. The head [of the upper half figure of the *oni* (king) of Ife] was greatly exaggerated in size in relations to the rest of the body equalling about a quarter of the estimated over-all size as Fagg had earlier theorized from his analysis of the 1957 finds of Ita Yemoo. (See figure 4) This find is also known to have presented strong evidence to suggest local manufacture of the metal sculpture or, at best, its production by locals. Other Yorùbá arts researchers corroborated the theory of enlarged heads in Yorùbá figural sculpture. Lawal (1985) proposes that these head enlargements in Yorùbá sculpture were simply a manifestation of the religious ideology of the *orí* in Yorùbá ontology. Lawal notes that there are three modes of representation of the head in Yorùbá sculpture. These are: the naturalistic, which refers mainly to the physical/external head (*orí òde*), the stylized, which suggest the spiritual/inner head (*orí inù*), and the abstract, which symbolizes the primeval material (*òkè ìpòrí*) from which the inner head is made.

Figure 4: Brass Statue of an Oni of Ife. An example of Ife ancient sculptural Art showing the "African proportion" of approximately ratio 1:4. Source: https://jemolo.com/
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Beyond the Ife heads, the general corpus of anthropomorphic images of the Yorùbá in terra cotta or wood like the *Ère Ìbejì* (ibeji/twin sculpture) or Lamide Fakeye's works, follow the same proportion formula. In fact, in many cases, the head is much more prominent than the examples from Ife. Ratios of about 1:2 or 1:1 are plentiful. It is important to mention here, that a few scholars have expressed divergent views about the theory in question, however, none have in any way fully disagreed with Fagg's theory of the enlargement of the head. Blier (2012) argued that the details of this proportion theory slightly vary in Yorùbá sculptural art with the ratio ranging from 1:4 to 1:6 depending on a variety of indices. She concludes however with the fact that the act of exaggerating the *orí* in Yorùbá traditional sculpture is agreed upon by all.

This study will focus on the theory of head enlargement as a basis for its hypothesis that traditional Yorùbá architecture has a compelling similarity to Yorùbá anthropomorphic sculptures. Yorùbá sculpture places primacy on the head, and as such the head gets the largest share of size and time in contrast to the body of the sculpture. Just as European medieval or Renaissance art is characterised by a hierarchy of size, so do the Yorùbá artists enlarge the heads on figural works to show importance. Accordingly, and in line with the socio-sacred canons of Yorùbá art, the other parts of the body must remain physically and metaphysically ancillary to the head. As noted earlier, they believe the head is the "house" of the highest deity. Beyond the primacy accorded the head, the enlargement of the head is also a symbolic statement which speaks to the protective cover the individual gets from his/her *orí*. Thus, here *orí* is a cover and protection for the body/carrier as the roof is for the house. Much has been said here about the symbolic and sacred function of *orí* to the body/carrier. We will now explore the parallel of this ideology in traditional Yorùbá architecture. Our focus will be on the roof.

The organic thatched roof of the Yorùbá has been discussed as an iconic and innovative response of native Yorùbá architecture to the environment. Some of the earliest texts extol the scale of this capping element in context of the remainder of the spatial structure. In Ife, Frobenius exclaimed "oh, how often did I look with longing across the space which kept me from the beautiful high roofs of the great Yorùbá houses which were thatched with leaves" (Frobenius Institute, 2014). The leaves Leo Frobenius refers to could be any of these popular options – *Bere* grass (Anadelphia arrecta), *Ariba* (phrynium plant) or *Gbodogi* leave (sacrophyrynium specie). Aradeon (1996) notes that any of the aforementioned can be used as roofing material which is tied to the closely spaced natural wood purlins. The pitch of the roof is usually very high and deep and as a consequence provides a fast run-off for impacting rains.

In Samuel Johnson's seminal work, *The History of the Yorùbá,* we catch a glimpse of the socio-sacred importance of the roof (*Òrùlé*) in traditional Yorùbá architecture. Johnson (1921) presents *bere* in two major forms; as a building material and as a yearly royal ritual festival [in Oyo]. The festival – a multiple day event – sees different aspects of religious processes that include the worship of *Ogun* and a day of paying special tribute to the *bere* grass. Also, there is the "touching of the grass" which entails a procession by the king and the physical laying of hands on the *bere* grass with prayers said for the people and the Yorùbá nation for peace, protection and prosperity. In some ways, this is reminiscent of Yorùbá devotees laying hands on their heads to make supplications. Several court officials and foreign subordinates would customarily send bundles of the *bere* grass to their senior counterparts. Johnson writes "the whole of the Oyo Mesi (Oyo council of kingmakers) first send theirs to the king, the *Basorun* (War Chief) alone would send about 200 bundles, the subordinate chiefs send to the senior chiefs, everyone to his feudal lord, each man according to his rank." Later, the *bere* would be used to refurbish roofs and house coverings around the villages. What is pertinent here is that this sharing of roof covering material and the consequent ritual of repairing roofs of the houses in the village is tied to a central national ritual festival. One of only three such important festivals where the people will have access to "seeing" the king – their protector, cover and overlord. This puts both the act of roof refurbishment and the symbolic importance of the *bere* grass into perspective.

Orí and *Òrùlé*: A manifestation of the same ideology

Having interrogated historical and religious materials and through the analysis of images of *orí* paraphernalia and traditional Yorùbá architecture, this study posits that, there is a strong physical and metaphysical similarity between *orí* (both as a supernatural member of a body system and as a deity of reverence) and *òrùlé* (roof) in the architecture of the Yorùbá people. Like the *orí*, the roof in Yorùbá architecture is defined by a significant size in relations to the rest of the building. The ratio of the roof to the "body" of the building in Yorùbá architecture may sometimes reach an inverse of 2:1 where the roof ratio is twice the height of the house walls. This study argues that this is not coincidence. There appears to be a subliminal effort to use the roof as an alternate medium for the expression of *orí*. The grandiosity and overbearing size of roofs in early Yorùbá architecture is not exclusively a matter of function but also of the enunciation of certain spiritual ideology however subconscious. Granted that function - in respect of precipitation run-off and sun shading efficiency – is pertinent and obvious in the roof design preference, this study still argues that this as important as the idea of "head" exaggeration required to subtly proclaim *orí* philosophy in the local architecture, particularly in buildings of repute such as the palaces. This study also found pronounced exaggerations in the roof of some other Nigerian cultures like the Igbo, and the Nupe, but none matches the sheer size and ratio of the Yorùbá roofs as seen in the early 20th century photos of Yoruba architecture by German ethnographer Leo Frobenius. Also, there is no evidence whatsoever of

the significance of the overstated roofs in these other cultures other than an environmental response (Nsude, (1987); Lodson et al., (2018)).

It is evident that the philosophy of enlarging aspects of a system as a means of giving prominence to the spiritual importance or symbolism of the system is prevalent among the Yorùbá. While it is unclear if the early Yorùbá consciously transferred their idea of a socio-sacred representation of *orí* to their architecture or if it was merely intuitive, what is clear is that the idea was brilliantly manifested nonetheless. The obviously excessive grandeur of the Yorùbá roof, the activities surrounding its creation, maintenance and veneration validates the hypothesis that the roof in Yorùbá architecture is in fact a medium for the articulation of *orí* ideology.

During field research in January 2020 in Abeokuta, the author inquired from the renowned sculptor and cult devotee Baba Gbadamosi Taofeek whether these suppositions make any sense to him. Baba Gbadamosi said,

> We take two areas of the house system seriously, they are: the roof (both external and internal) and the doorways. If a major 'medicine' is to be made for a household for protection against a coming calamity, we will focus on preparing an assemblage that is to be place on (*òrulé*) or in (*àjà* – rafters) the roof. The roof represents a covering for the people who live in the house and anyone who seeks refuge in the protected abode. The doorway to us mainly represents the virginal opening so it must also be well protected otherwise the house will be compromised. *Abo ni lé* – the house is female. As we put things with *àse* (life force) on our women to protect them and their unborn (if pregnant), so we can put things on the roof of the house to protect it and its people.

He concludes that the most sacred ritual items of the Yorùbá are abstracted to roughly look conical in form. "Many potent assemblages laced with *àse* are tied on top to give a type of stylised conical form. The roofs of many *ile agbara* (shrines) are usually conical in shape. So I agree with what you are suggesting, because it makes (resonates) sense to me".

Thus, just like the care given to *Iborí* or *Ile orí* to worship one's *orí*, the occasional restoration of the *bere* grass on the Yorùbá roof system appears to be an allegorical form of worship of the roof element. As noted earlier, in the early days, the *oba* (king) is only seen annually on three occasions. These occasions are: the [ritual] festivals of *Ifa* (god of divination), *Ogun* (god of war/iron) and then the *Bere*. In many ways, the *Bere* celebrations, unbeknown to the people, simulates the spiritual interaction of the people with their *orí* in a bid to continue to access its protection and direction in life. The *Bere* ceremonies symbolises this in the context of architecture. The roof, which is the *orí* of architecture, is constantly appeased through a dedicated ceremony of adoration, reverence and care. This suggests that just as the sculptural (ritual) pieces provides a physical medium for the interaction and communication of human and god, so does architecture through the roof changing ceremony. The house unit in this case then becomes the physical piece through which the people, however subliminally, collectively communicate scheduled contrition to *orí*. One can conclude therefore that among the early Yorùbá the meaning and purpose derived from one is the same as the other, for as it is with sculpture, so it is with architecture. This would mean that architecture was regarded as art and a cultural element of identity. In fact, more than just tangible art, architecture can be regarded as a euphemistic anthropomorphic mass with the roof being the head of the system; the topmost segment of the structure which covers, protects and preserves the other elements. The rooms

or chambers of the building are the internal elements of the body. It is not a mere functional structure, based mainly on pragmatism, but on a specific socio-sacral ideology that successfully finds a voice through figurative art and, indeed, the architecture of the people.

It appears that by some subconscious transference of certain spiritual ideologies into other aspects of culture, the Yorùbá, possibly unintentionally, have structurally grafted their belief of the supremacy of *orí* unto architecture and they have continued to validate this position through the ritual of frequently changing the vegetal mass of the roof. While it would appear that the maintenance of the roof's organic mass is the reasonable thing to do in order to keep it efficient in covering and protecting the lower elements and the inhabitants of the house from precipitation, insects and so forth, there also seems to be a non-physical aspect to almost all traditional Yorùbá practice. Curiously, the Yorùbá view all organic matter as possessing a vital force (*àse*) that can be manipulated to regulate the quality of people's lives (Drewal, 1977). The replacement of the *bere* grass, in many ways, can then translate to the re-energising of the vital force necessary to keep the potency of the interaction between the people and *orí* alive through architecture.

Semiotics and Meaning in Yorùbá Architecture

Oftentimes, meaning springs from a religious base or a context in which their experiences are moulded. This is also the case in the external forms of architecture with its features communicate belief, culture and collective consciousness (George 2005).

Like most aspects of Yorùbá existence, conformity to socio-sacral codes and the expression of aesthetics play a vital role in the arts and lives of the people. The ideas of Yorùbá aesthetics are transmitted through distinctive physical characteristics in form, material and surface finishing. The contextual combination of the above creates a detailed character which in turn presents meaning. The interpretation and meaning of traditional architecture becomes essential even as the Yorùbá aspire to a future where the intermix of art, knowledge and religion will forge the foundations of a modern Yorùbá spatial order.

This study recommends that further philosophical discussions must be encouraged to engage the fabric of traditional architecture with the task to better understanding the fundamental content that truly gives meaning to the structure. Also, scholars of African architectural history need to see the importance and centrality of certain ideas behind the traditional architecture of the Yorùbá, and attempts must be made to reintegrating the new findings into main stream discussion and thinking of the future of architectural identity even as we continue to interplay technological advances with fundamental traditional ideological values. Why is this integration necessary? Shah (2012) answers, architecture in its purest sense is tangible manifestation interwoven with our lives to an extent matched only by our own biology. Architecture, Shah adds, is not manifest apart from us, it is us manifest.

Conclusion

In this study, an attempt was made at discussing the inconspicuous but highly likely use of traditional Yorùbá architecture as a medium for the expression of *orí* ideology and worship in the early times. The significant similarities between the character of *orí* paraphernalia, representation and worship and roofing architecture are such that they cannot be overlooked. This study found that while its meaning may be subliminal, the roof in Yorùbá architecture is indeed a metaphorical object for *orí* and the fundamental reverence given to *orí* is also accorded

to it, however involuntarily this might have happened. But as the dialogue with Gbadamosi Taofeek made clear, there is a distinct relationship between the two. A limitation of the study is that it presents an argument only for traditional architecture and does not discuss the possibility of this study's findings in the context of modern architectural expressions.

Since the Yorùbá see architecture as not only art but in fact a physical representation of an anthropomorphic system, more attention needs to be paid to the intelligent conversion of the main ideas behind this philosophy into modern expressions of architecture for Yorùbá consumption. Also, the call for an intellectual transmission of the core essence of Yorùbá architecture is so that the principal elements that make the framework of meaningful Yorùbá architecture is not lost to oblivion. The consequence of this would be undesirable – a future of culturally insensitive architecture.

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ArchDaily and Representations of Domestic Architecture
in the era of Digital Platforms

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Abstract

At present, *ArchDaily.com* is the most visited virtual architecture platform in the world. Aware of the importance acquired in the architectural practice, the site declares itself to be the main source from which architects feed on tools, information and inspiration to develop their projects. However, it is clear that its importance is not limited to its status as reference bank for professional practice. The accumulation of visual and textual representations contributes to the idea of "good architecture", in turn transforming this platform into an institution validating and legitimizing the understanding of the discipline, its scope and limitations, its protagonists and predominant methods applied. The following pages propose an analysis of the platform's content in its residential architecture section, an analysis that supports a critical reflection on its wider cultural effects.

Keywords: digital era, digital platform, project diffusion, residential architecture, space representation

Introduction

Since the development of digital technologies at the end of the last century, architecture has undergone numerous changes in the processes of design, construction and diffusion whose magnitude and scope have yet to be fully thought through, assimilated and evaluated by practitioners and scholars alike. Particularly striking is the rapid pace of growth in the diffusion of architectural practice on digital platforms and social networks.

As a first attempt to study this, we can consider the mass media 's effects on the diffusion and production of architecture as a cultural phenomenon. For this topic there already exists a consolidated literature, although, as B. Colomina (2010, p. 9) recalls in the prologue of the Spanish edition of his famous work *Privacy and Publicity*, "the relationship between architecture and the mass media was practically anathema in the eighties". This author, in the same prologue, warns that the arrival of the internet and social networks "have profoundly changed the way we work, analyze, interact, and play. Can we expect architecture to not be affected?" This research starts from this question and focuses on one of the most paradigmatic cases among digital platforms as vehicles for the promotion and diffusion of architecture: the case of ArchDaily.

Created in 2006 by Chileans David Assael and David Basulto under the name of "Plataforma de Arquitectura", ArchDaily was born as a site halfway between an informative blog and a digital magazine, with the idea of spreading knowledge about the architecture that was booming in Chile at that time (Morales, 2014). After verifying the success of the site, the founders renamed it ArchDaily, published it in English and relaunched it in New York. The business model was supported by the contribution of supplier companies that place information about their products on the materials tabs, information that complements publications about projects and which remain in an archive permanently available to the user.

The digital format allows for a global diffusion of information on projects and the possibility to search for them far more efficiently than monographs and paper magazines afforded previously. ArchDaily has become one of the main places which architects and students consult for referents and analogues of the works they are working on. In 2020 the platform received 13,6 million monthly visits, 190 million pageviews per month, reaching 3 million fans on Facebook and 183,000 followers on Twitter. The text entries and publications of projects, which are shown and ordered in thematic tabs, grew exponentially.

The digital circulation of architectural projects presents innovative points for discussion. This is then also a case of democratization of participation in the architectural market allowed by the new technologies, a phenomenon linked to a complex social reality marked by a high informative inflation. I. Levy (2014) points out the passage from scarcity to informative abundance as a distinctive feature of the culture of the digital age. Cimadomo et. al. (2018) take ArchDaily as an example to discuss the difficulty at obtaining a coherent narrative when constructing a history of recent architecture at a time when platforms show thousands of projects with different styles; this difficulty is also fueled by what Jarzombek (2002) and Ferrando (2017) have described as the post-critical character of current architectural practices, centered more on professional pragmatism than theoretical speculation.

Specifically, in this work we intend to analyze the form that acquires architectural representation through photography and texts, the two main media channels used in ArchDaily. The material presented here will allow us to talk, not so much about the consequences and use

of the platform, but above all, about the content which we think may be affected by the possibility of giving visibility to a number of projects that go beyond the capacity of traditional magazines. We will see how architecture is represented photographically and narrated with texts, cognizant of the fact that any representation contains a potential field of distortion (Cruz, 2016, p.1); in this case, an "embellishment" thanks to which the architect makes his/her proposal attractive with the use of selected images (mainly photographs), and texts that accompany them. This last aspect is not considered in the work of Cimadomo *et. al* (2018). The work presented here aims to detect and analyze common patterns in these photographs and texts. In particular, we will focus on domestic architecture, where the clash between representation for commercial purposes and the reality of an architecture centered on user's needs and nature preservation is more evident.

Residential Architecture and Photographic Representation

Architectural photography cannot be seen only as a way of documenting and leaving evidence, but as an important device in the production of the idea of architecture (Rattenbury, 2002, Serraino, 2007, Stetler, 2014). Beatriz Colomina (1994) argues that the magazines of the early twentieth century and the glamourous photographs published therein constituted a social construction, culturally based on the logic of mass media. Niedenthal (1993) describes that same period as marked by a democratized consumption of images, a new social form of reception of architecture. Whereas the photographs allowed for rapid diffusion and the dissemination of projects to all kinds of readers, in a society of spectacle and mass consumption, a large number of photographs weakly reflect the architecture, stripping it of its tactile, acoustic or kinetic dimension (Frampton, 1986, p.5). They are images intended to seduce, defined by Baudrillard (1981) as "the domain and strategy against the power of being and reality". Therefore, photography raises a debate on the potential gap between reality and representation, since the resource of representation - as both a tool for project work and for dissemination (with plans, artistically elaborated perspectives, models) – has been the occasion to increase the attractiveness of the proposals but also to misrepresent important spatial features.

H. Lefebvre (1991, p.39) saw very clearly the social implications of this fact and spoke of "spaces of representation", sets of images in which codes imposed by powers or alternative imaginaries can be found. This is where we could place the photographs. The texts would fall within the category that Lefebvre cradled as "representation of space" (maps, plans, designs and systems of intellectually elaborated signs such as texts), which are not in the hands of the inhabitants, but of experts, planners, urban planners and architects and are imposed on the physical space practiced and imagined by the population. From the foregoing one can infer a hypothesis by which the representations managed by these firms are aimed more at selling (appealing to the emotions achieved by the aesthetic impact) than reflecting the real housing possibilities of the proposed works.

Methodology

In order to have elements of discussion on the matters raised above, a content analysis of the platform was carried out with an approach to both images and texts of individual projects, limiting the study to the section on residential architecture published in 2018. For the images, a quantitative exploration of a number of parameters was conducted, which were then then addressed in a qualitative analysis, taking paradigmatic cases as reference where the phenomena pointed out in the quantitative exploration are most visible.

Furthermore, to complement the visual reading, a variety of texts, randomly selected among these projects, were analyzed. We chose a qualitative content analysis, in order to detect significant patterns. S. Krakauer (1952) defends the flexibility of this approach in spite of the intricacies of latent interpretations. In particular, a critical analysis of the texts is proposed here, understanding textual discourses as a social practice in which knowledge and power are conjugated (Foucault, 1980; Fairclough, 1989, 1995) It is interesting to see how collective narratives are filtered into individual discourses, with the use of implicit information, as well as detecting attempts to soften contradictions raised on top of the literal meaning conveyed by the words. Sperber and Wilson (2005) recommend an analysis going from the literal meaning of the proposition to the intention of the speaker (in this case the architectural firm) and the knowledge shared between issuer and receiver. The objective is to identify "argumentative repertoires" (Potter, Wetherell, 1988) and a lexicon associated with strategic placement of topics.

Below we present the results obtained from the analysis of the entries in the section Residential Architecture/Houses for the year 2018.

The Images

The photographed work – and specifically the photograph chosen for the cover page – is the one that will potentially initiate a journey of global scale through platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, being able to receive thousands of likes or reach the emails of the millions of subscribers. Hence, the cover image is fundamental. In all projects this image is a photograph, which indicates the predominance of this medium when it comes to highlighting works. Although the projects have planimetry, the vast majority of images displayed are professional photographs that meet the requirements of the web.

Among the cover images, exterior views of houses predominate; 77% of the 482 projects published in 2018 privilege a perspective that favors the understanding of the limits and the volumetry of the building. This tendency toward external views is effective from a communicative point of view, insofar as it presents generally univocal, distinguishable and memorable "architectural objects" capable of circulating and being massively consumed. The house has its initial presentation centered on photography, which favors its objectification and the enhancement of an iconic condition associated with its superficial form. The preferred frame for these exterior views is the front, which seeks the fit between the horizontal of the facade and the lower and upper frame of the photograph. Although most of the exterior images consider the context, their inclusion is always controlled and measured. A photographic capture at ground level makes it difficult to appreciate the surroundings of the house, accentuating the perception of isolation and its objectual condition.

In 21% of the exterior views, the house is cut against a twilight background, the "blue hour"– that moment of semi-penumbra and soft glowing light coming from the sun having moved below the horizon-combined with the artificial lighting coming from the house, allowing it to stand out from its context as a box containing clear and seductive light.

When analyzing the 23% of cover images that display an interior, the first thing that catches the attention is the overrepresentation of what could be considered the most public areas of the house. The living room, dining room and integrated kitchen, or the entrance hall and the distribution spaces are presented in almost 90% of all cases. A bedroom is rarely shown, even less often a bathroom, although these will probably be significant places for future life in these houses.

Paradoxically, human life has been marginalized in most of these domestic representations. In more than 80% of the exterior views and in 60% of the interiors analyzed, there are no human figures. The responsibility of transmitting an idea of interior habitability rests on the scant furniture carefully arranged on stage. When human beings do appear (usually men, followed by mixed scenes, women, and individuals whose gender is not recognizable), they are usually in a non-casual position, acquired for the photographic shoot. The figures do not intend to illustrate how the house is inhabited or the individuality of those residing in it, but rather serve as functional and aesthetic elements of image composition; providing an idea of scale and proportion, highlighting a specific area of the building, or offering dynamism to an otherwise static view. Quiet people with no apparent purpose abound; others are dedicated to contemplation, reading or idealized conversations. There are individuals taking a pause with no other purpose than remaining above the stairs and many others dedicated to contemplation. Lonely full-body individuals - like silhouettes - that cut a wall or the view to the outside are very common. Not only people, but traces of human life are equally absent. No dirt, no plates, forgotten things, packages or hanging bags, cables, extension cords or things left half done. Order, organization and cleanliness govern domestic space, giving rise to properly aligned chairs, carefully centered ornaments, radiant plants, crystal glass, carpets and smooth cushions correctly arranged and clear surfaces. The casual exists only in a deliberate way and to the extent that it works as a compositional contribution.
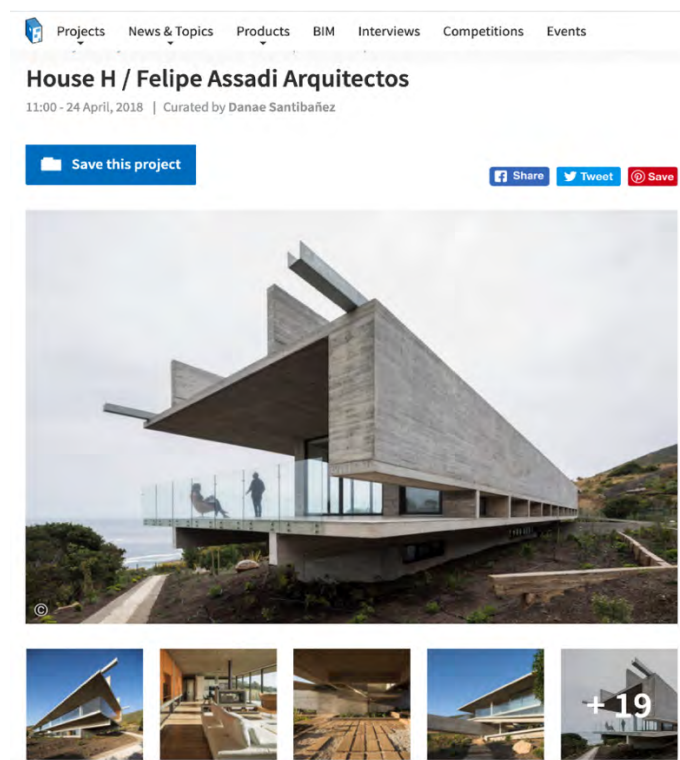
Figure 1: House H images. Source: archdaily.com/893225/house-h-felipe-assadi-arquitectos

An interesting photograph to analyze, selected by ArchDaily among the 50 most inspiring architecture photographs of 2018, is the "House H" by Felipe Assadi Arquitectos, photographed by Fernando Alda. Taking the vertex of the house as a vertical axis, the image replicates the classic format of the perspective with two vanishing points. The drama involved in the fugue of roof horizontals – farther from the photographic lens – contrasts with the peaceful horizontal line – placed at the same height of the lens – that runs through the entire image, unifying the horizon with the height and width and crossing the vertical axis at a right

angle. It is on this horizontal that the photographer places two people who, due to the focal distance, the absence of other elements (even the chair disappears) and the backlight effect, become true icons of the human figure: a man and a woman; one standing and the other sitting; silhouettes that scale, humanize and transform into architecture this geometric piece built in the middle of the landscape. Probably to a great extent thanks to this photograph, House H was voted by the ArchDaily readers second in the category Work of the Year 2019.

In another interior scene (Teph Inlet House in Chester, Canada (Figure 2)), a young woman is shown sitting in one of the armchairs in the living area, looking at a little girl on the floor next to her feet. Although described in a generic way, the scene seems quite "normal"; when observing the photograph the extreme attention and concern with which every detail of this scene has been mounted is evident. The woman and the girl are dressed identically. Both barefoot, both are wearing a plain black dress without sleeves that, on the one hand, highlights their figures thanks to the contrast with the pale tones of the floor, sky and furniture; and on the other, integrates the house by matching the black of the window frames that run around the perimeter. While this chromatic attunement may be special by itself, the strangest thing about the scene is that there is no trace of the presence of the little girl in the house. Besides the book she holds, which probably allowed her to stay still for the shoot, the environment is absolutely devoid of objects, dirt and clutter that the arrival of a child at home usually entails. Paradoxically, the only element apparently out of place is a blanket carefully placed on the sofa, an element sharing the same color palette.
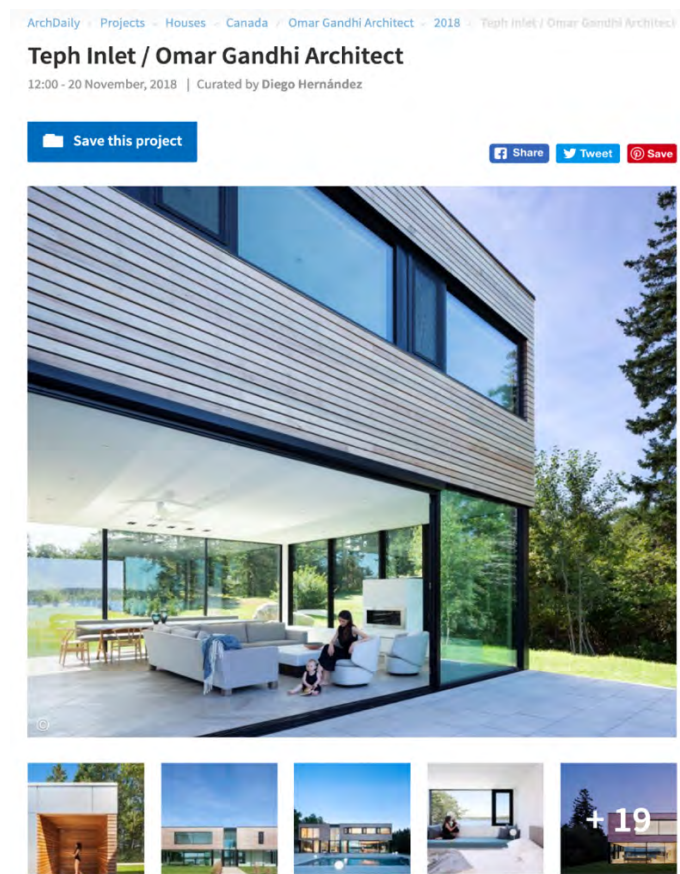

Figure 2: Teph Inlet House. Source: https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/920182/teph–inlet–omar–gandhi–architect

These two examples, qualitatively addressed in our description, confirm the general tendency that we presented at the beginning of this section. Projects opting for a reduction of the contained elements and presenting an unusual order are common and the rule. This may be due to the fact that these procedures highlight the spatial qualities of residential architecture. The readability and understanding of interior spatiality are facilitated by making visible the lines formed by the encounter between floors, walls and ceilings. A minimalistic style ensures this fluid reading of the height, width and depth of the enclosure and can appeal to the reader's desire for minimal and orderly life. If we think that objects are a structuring part of our daily lives (Gregson 2007; Miller 2010), their deliberate exclusion in these interiors can be interpreted as a lack of interest in the lives of current or potential users of these houses.

The Texts

For the review of the written content of projects published by ArchDaily in 2018, random samples were chosen of those houses that the portal considered to be the most outstanding of the year, which have been included in the publications with lines such as these: "The best architecture of 2018" and "The improvements of 2018 houses". The analysis was based on the descriptor text sent by the architect (for which the platform asks to have between 200 and 500 words) and which is published without any editing. This text always alternates with the images. The results are presented with the final thematic selection that emerge from an inductive type analysis that allows us to see recurring patterns.

The Presentation

It is common to find a beginning paragraph that summarizes the intentions of the project, general premises and the challenges met, generally emphasizing the benefits of the work with positive terms associated with widely accepted narratives in practice and architectural dissemination:

> This project is conceived as the refurbishment of a 1959 family house located in a traditional borough of this commune. The house was in good conditions and in its original state. Therefore, decisions that contributed to honor the house's history were made, both for its volume and the reuse of some of the materials. (Puerto de Palos House / jfs architect)[1]

In this example, the words "traditional", "original" and "respect" refer to the social value of tradition (from the pre-romantic and nineteenth-century recovery of the picturesque-popular) and to the possession of historical and scarce goods (originals, not replicas) from which an authenticity is to be derived and integrated into the project. This integration also has a connotation of sustainability, since the "reuse" of materials is framed within the ecological paradigm. Thus, in a few sentences, a maximum (or excess) of connotations coming from very different theoretical frameworks is condensed; that could appear pretentious if it were not for the fact that they are not explicit references but integrated in the connotation of the discourse.

> Rubielos de Mora, "the Gate of Aragon", is located in the southern area of the county of Gudar-Javalambre. When you visit it you understand why it was designated a place of historical and artistic interest in 1980, it received the Europa Nostra Award in 1983 and it was selected one of the "Most Beautiful Villages in Spain" in 2013. Vernacular

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[1] https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/909067/casa-puerto-de-palos-jfs-arquitecto

architecture in Rubielos displays eaves, iron things, woodwork and stonework, providing an old time picture frozen in time. That's why Rubielos de Mora will not let you remain unmoved, because the spirit of its poetry, carved in stone and forged in iron, will forever ask you to come back. (House in Rubielos de Mora / Ramón Esteve Studio)[2]

In the previous case, a laudatory mention of the site has been placed as an initial statement, which predisposes the reader to consider the quality of the documented work equally outstanding. The location serves as a letter of presentation of a project for which it is expected, that the reader, without much resistance, attributes similar praise. Intangible, poetic qualities are added to tangible qualities; for example, in the Spanish version, the word "duende" is used, which is the maximum inspiration to which a flamenco musician can aspire.

The aim of our intervention has been to open the housing in its entirety. Eliminating all the walls and the false ceilings, we have obtained a wide and fluid space that recovers the lordly aspect that had in his moment. (House in Palace / Ideo architecture)[3]

Above we read that, in a privileged context ("a palatial ensemble in the heart of Madrid built in the mid-eighteenth century"), the intervention follows canonical patterns in the contemporary trends of remodeling. Radical opening up of the space, transparency, luminosity are options that appear-without being questioned-as design guidelines according to the idea of fluid space. The fluidity of space has become a common metaphor of modern discourse that is taken up here as natural and self-evident. The fluid is presented as a positive counterpart to compartmentalized spaces, assuming that movement is preferable to stillness.

Language and Sophistication

In the following example, when describing the project's context, the use of adjectival constructions is forced to the point of attributing dreamlike qualities (perhaps reminiscent of Dalí's paintings) to a panoramic view, which is common to most of the houses located on the seashore. The language resorts to poetic abstraction drawing on generic statements that tell us about the inspiration that had given rise to the work, without pretending any scientific objectivity (using non-falsifiable statements, in Popperian terms). The praise of the project is reinforced with rhetorical figures as eliminated juxtaposition nexuses (asyndeton), personification, or metaphor ("the architect, with his house, sculpts the rock .."):

Bosc d'en Pep Ferrer is the traditional toponym of a large plot located next to the beach of Migjorn, on the south coast of the island of Formentera. This territory has a place that unleashes the desire to inhabit an oneiric view, where the horizon is only cut by the beautiful silhouette of the Pi des Català Tower, built in 1763. The project focuses on the duality between the telluric and the tectonic. The heavy and the light. The earth and the air. The handcrafted and the technological. Compression effort and traction resistance. The rock, which comes to the surface in the chosen place, has been carved as if it were a sculpture, offering a cavity reminiscent of the 'marès' stone quarries. A whole space materialized with a single stone. Monolithic. Megalithic. Stereotomic.[4]

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[2] https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/903797/casa-en-rubielos-de-mora-ramon-esteve-estudio
[3] archdaily.com/903743/house-in-palacio-ideo-arquitectura
[4] https://m-ar.net/bosc-den-pep-ferrer/

After the presentation, the text provides some technical descriptions and specific requirements of the clients are mentioned.

> The intervention offers a house for a family sensitive to the environment, which program is divided into three light modules built in dry construction systems and a cavity made by subtraction of material on the lower floor. (House in Formentera Island / Marià Castelló Martínez)[5]

Current users are only mentioned to indicate that they are a family sensitive to the environment. That is to say, customs, tastes, practices are not mentioned in a text that prefers to give ample space and reinforce the idea of sustainable legitimization in a project whose volumetric character stands out in the middle of a virgin enclave and, therefore, would be susceptible to criticism.

> The initial concept was to combine the ideas and the layout requested by the owners with the existing volume, the cladding and layout distribution conditions (...). The spatial concept for re-distributing the bedroom area is a symmetric scheme, with the lounge area as the body at the center and then bedrooms on both sides. (Puerto de Palos House / jfs architect).

The previous text mentions the owners but doesn't point out what their ideas and needs were, an area that is surely a determining factor when making final decisions about the architecture of an object. The text continues describing the house's second level, again with a density of language that denotes an intellectual sophistication ("the spatial concept") perhaps not necessary to describe the distribution of two resting areas, interspersed by a family room.

Sometimes ambiguity is played with, without concern for rigor or conceptual clarity. The cryptic, allusive, highly connotative language allows the exaltation of ambitious products.

> As for the architectural style, we have tried that the housing speaks to today language because we understand that any intervention in a historical building must answer to his time. Thus, we have used classic frames, but these frames do not come up to the ceiling, achieving this way to classic style and at the same time, contemporary. (House in Palace / Ideo architecture)

The previous paragraph alludes to the postmodern taste for the hybrid and justifies a restoration without restrictions regarding the preservation of the architectural heritage, even if it continues talking about "historical interior" and seeks to obtain symbolic benefits of both classical and the contemporary styles. It is understood that at a later point after its construction, partitions were added, but it is difficult to justify the union of the kitchen, the living room and the dining room as a "lordly" or classical practice.

Implicit Legitimization

The following text is an introductory-legitimating text about the connection and respect for the environment (which, in fact, as we can easily detect from the photograph, is already very urbanized), according to the author even positively "completed" not by a house but by a "spatial

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[5] https://www.archdaily.com/889088/house-in-formentera-island-maria-castello-martinez

composition". This last expression replaces euphemistically that of "building" or "property"–invasive in any terrain – and points to the designer's artistic capacity:

> The site is located in a typically developed area along the slopes of Kobe. The slope was scraped off, but the terrain still shows that character. Since the geographical condition has decided factors like wind direction, abundant sunlight, and vegetation, we thought it is important to conceive an architecture that receives and enjoys the natural environment such as daylighting and ventilation, and also give good effect to the ambience by making it a space composition close to the terrain. (House in Tarumi / Tomohiro Hata Architect and Associates)[6]

The concept that is coined to define the project mentioned below is summarized in the title "Little House", something that a critical analysis should not ignore, as the naming of houses is a questionable practice Here begins the presence of the architect as the author of a narrative that can be completely independent of the home's idea conceived by the users. Placing a title with or naming the construction is an act of unilateral power exertion that determines and defines a position, an aspiration.

> The Little House is nestled into a lush second growth forest on a north facing bluff overlooking Hood Canal with distant views to Dabob Bay. Designed to repurpose an existing foundation, the new building is just over 20m2. The simple form is abstracted against the forest – a stark exterior contrasting a warm bright interior.

In line with the hegemonic discourse of sustainability with which architects have to deal, it is pointed out that there was no work necessary to create the foundations of the house. In contrast, nothing is mentioned about the visual impact of the house on the landscape. On the contrary, its small size and its "simple" shape (although clearly perceptible in the landscape due to its geometry) stand out, "abstracted" from the forest.

When it comes to the owners, we are told about their attachment to the wild nature of the landscape, in which they wanted to locate a luxury property (which could affect that virgin aspect), that has been depicted as a "small refuge":

> The owners live full time in Houston, Texas, but have shared many summers with family at a nearby property outside Seabeck. They loved the wildness of the southern Channel and imagined a small retreat here of their own. Early design discussions focused on creating a compact, modern structure that was both simple and inexpensive to build. Intentionally restrained on an existing footprint (...).

Once again, the adjectives "simple" and "natural" are used. The vocabulary repetition is a tool that reinforces the main message: a house which has a minimal impact on its surroundings. A place where, by the way, there were already foundations, which supposedly legitimize the construction, although there is no mention of a previous house, whose demolition without replacing would have benefited the landscape.

A general analysis of the texts allows us to be aware of how the authors maximize their effect, compressing in a few words the technical, conceptual and artistic information. Far from being an obstacle to the launch of the architectural product, the format requires a density in the

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[6]https://www.archdaily.mx/mx/892392/casa-en-tarumi-tomohiro-hata-architect-and-associates

phrases that provides an interesting sophistication. The language gives each project an aura of intellectuality that turns out to be an ideal counterpoint to the seduction of images.

Since the architectural firms themselves are the text providers, there is of course no criticism to be found in the texts. They are, first of all, an instrument for the architectural legitimization of the projects, especially when from the photographs it could be deduced that they have been invasive in regard to the natural or urban environment. It also legitimates them socially. Following Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of the social and artistic strategies that generate distinction (1984), we can think ArchDaily's texts as highlighting the role that cultural capital plays in the design of the work (the architect's skills), which allows the transformation of economic capital (the client's capital, perhaps excessive for the sensibility of some readers) into symbolic capital.

The function of the texts is therefore not merely informative, but it seeks to draw the attention of potential readers, favoring their willingness to increase the number of likes, follow the firm, recommend it or even hire its services. The seduction, therefore, not only operates at the level of the images, but through a text that demonstrates not only the technical quality of the office, but its artistic capacity and conceptual vision to achieve an integrally successful work. The above explains the presence of a typology of statements that we find in all the publications studied; the descriptive-technical statements, the descriptive-poetic and the conceptual ones. It is an underlying trilogy because a combination of the three types of statements is common, either juxtaposed in the same sentence or with poetic adjectives that qualify the technical or conceptual resources. This mixture acts in favor of a concealed seduction strategy, similar to how, according to Bourdieu (1991), political discourse is characterized by a rhetoric of impartiality, producing statements presented as a result of consensus and common sense. The marketing discourse, like the ideological discourse, draws heavily on the connotation, the cliché and widely accepted social representations, without this being easily perceived, the presence of rhetorical figures are discrete and interspersed with elements of a technical and conceptual nature.

The general analysis of the texts also indicates that these, although coming from different offices and countries, repeat structural and content patterns, drawing on clichés and common places that refer to hegemonic discourses enjoying broad consensus in the architectural community. This could point to the existence of a universal discourse shared by people from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, but of a similar economic standing, related to a sort of global upper middle class that pretend to live a fake distinction based on cultural originality.

As regards the structure, the first paragraph is dedicated to the context (location, the environment characteristics, geographic constraints) and to the concept-guide-brief of the intervention, generally two points linked together, because, following the dominant paradigm, there is no room for architecture that does not integrate, dialogue or respect the environment. Each project follows an idea, challenge, theme or issue; for example, the modern interpretation of a historical space, the essential but updated cottage. Then, typically, the conditions of the program are presented and mention of the user's intentions are made, without extending the last point, either to preserve their identity and privacy or because the intention of the text is above all to highlight the architect's work. The texts continue detailing the characteristics of the distribution, materials, general morphology, with technical statements (sophisticated and sometimes deliberately dense) that alternate with the conceptual and poetic, hiding behind a technocratic façade rhetorical resources aimed at seduction effects and to make readers assimilate the three types of statements as part of the same message: the quality of the work.

Conclusions

Regarding the current and inescapable question about how platforms such as ArchDaily impact on the representation of culture in architecture, the interpretation of the material previously analyzed suggests that – at least at the content level – the traditional architecture magazine model is still present. In this model, photography is strengthened as a hegemonic element in the dissemination of projects. When adding, and contrasting, the analysis of images and texts, we note that in both cases the objectual condition of the architectural project is reinforced. The explanation about users and their needs occupy a secondary place; they are understood as context and origin of some requirements whose mention is made in a very punctual way, as if wanting to respect an intimate environment, but also to give prominence to the work of the office that is promoted in each project. The above discussion surprisingly coincides on many points with criticism of analog photography Kenneth Frampton had already made almost half a century ago. This coincidence points to the fact that, in the new media, there is not a rupture but an evolution in which issues already present in the previous mass culture are intensified. Most of its mechanisms continue to operate and present us with an architecture whose diffusion follows the logics of consumer objects, and in which, as occurs in the evolution of numerous cultural goods, it is not strange to see sacrifices in the quality of information for the benefit of ease of handling and access. The great difference lies in the scope that these media have today, the number of projects, news and interviews that the portal manages to accumulate, its continuous updating and the opening of the archives to navigation by the user. While architectural journals had clear limitations both in the amount of material generated and in the audiences reached, the traffic of data and people that ArchDaily exhibits on a daily basis and the visibility that this platform acquires on a planetary level as the main diffusion space and database for contemporary architecture is absolutely unprecedented. And yet, the abundance of information is also correlated to a standardization of the format, so that the presentation is more rigid and synthetic than in many print journals, the texts are often brief, as if the space available in traditional journals was compressed here to accommodate even more projects. By specifically analyzing the front-end photographs of houses in the residential architecture section, a series of coincidences of form and content are uncovered, with the existence of a shared language or an implicit agreement on how to represent residential architecture being evident. Surprisingly, although the ArchDaily portal brings together projects from all over the world, there are no major variations. A future line of inquiry could be to investigate the reasons for this homogeneity, which we believe proceed not only from the propagation of a general globalizing cultural wave, but also from features particular to architecture as a discipline. While in other academic fields there are still very marked national or regional intellectual traditions (for example, French anthropology as opposed to an Anglo-Saxon one), in architecture, since the Modern Movement (and the International Style, which prolonged it), the tradition in the expansion of discourses and global patterns had been achieved relatively early on. Users have, therefore, a longer and more consolidated path in the constitution of world references (magazines, Pritzker prizes) at the level of aesthetic and disciplinary discourse. The networks and digital magazines have had a path already well tread to reinforce this type of adhesion to similar aspirational architectures in different countries.

Another aspect that has been mentioned when describing digital culture is the opportunity for horizontal gain in the dissemination of works (Alsina, 2010). As is the case with Spotify, or even Netflix, platforms such as ArchDaily give visibility to works from a wide range of places and groups, something that, in past decades was limited to a disciplinary elite. The abundance of information and its concentration in a single institution, as the quasi-core of the described system, has consequences that require greater attention and will be the focus of future

investigations. This focus should also include an in-depth investigation into the interactive nature of the platforms. For now, we can point out that, in addition to a standardization and massification of a single structure of presentation of projects (given by their online format, the requirement of "professional" photographs and short texts unedited by the website), a key element in this line of study will be to see the mediatization of searches by filters and suggestions, in many cases placed with commercial criteria described by the criticism of platform capitalism (Cingolani, 2016). One might think that as ArchDaily legitimizes itself as an authority in the field of architecture, there is a danger that these conditions will be incorporated and naturalized as "normal". Similarly, the need for firms and architects to have visibility in this type of medium in order to disseminate their works and position their services on the platform is validated, although this implies resorting to strategies commonly associated with digital and multi-channel marketing, with messages adapted for all types of public that favor the repetition of socially accepted narratives.

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Figures

Figure 1: House H / Felipe Assadi Arquitectos, Zapallar, Chile. Photography by Fernando Alda. https://www.archdaily.com/893225/house-h-felipe-assadi-arquitectos

Figure 2: Teph Inlet / Omar Gandhi Architect, Chester, Canada. Photography by Ema Peter. https://www.archdaily.com/906222/teph-inlet-omar-gandhi-architect

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Small Palm Oil Plantation as Political Arena: Environmental Narratives Among Workers and NGOs in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

This contribution examines the different environmental visions surrounding small palm oil plantations in the province of Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia. How are natural resources conceptualized by small-scale owners, workers and local environmentalists? How is the small palm oil plantation a political space? Which narratives take place in/on small palm oil plantations? From one point of view, workers and small owners tend to read the small palm oil plantation as a place of possibilities for the future, and it is configured as a place in which individual and collective agencies are negotiated continuously. From another point of view, environmentalists and NGO activists describe workers through the stereotyped lens of ignorance, rebellion and project appropriation. In Aceh, environmental awareness is strongly shaped by class, age, residency and educational background. Starting from an analysis of Italian public discourses about palm oil in 2015/2016, the author spent 4 months, from August to November 2016 getting rid of an ethnographic research in the province of Aceh. Through observations, data collection, questionnaires, and structured and semi-structured interviews, the author was able to explore and illustrate the characteristics of small oil plantations as a political arena and the daily life of small-scale owners, workers and environmentalists.

Keywords: Aceh, environmentalism, rural Indonesia, small palm oil plantations workers

The Italian Background: Environmentalist and Health Narratives

Between 2015 and 2016[1] in Italy, public discourses were imbued with two main narratives about palm oil. If the environmental narrative focused its campaigns on deforestation caused by the increase of palm oil plantations, the health-conscious narrative focused on the alleged harmfulness of this oil for our organisms (La Pira, 2014). The debate was supported by a very large number of articles (Balboni, 2016; Moncalero, 2015), publications, scientific papers and mass-media inquiries. In Italy in the last months of 2015 and early 2016, that information moved towards a specific conclusion: palm oil is dangerous. It has been constructed narratively as a "public enemy" through the rhetoric of the market invasion which would eventually damage the traditional Mediterranean diet (Dongo, La Pira, 2015). Several NGOs involved in environmental protection continue to build awareness campaigns focused on a sense of individual responsibility. Images of a single isolated animal are addressed directly to the reader (as observed by Milton 2002), which emotionally affects the individual who feels responsible for the animal's protection. These campaigns appeal to a sense of abandonment, of loneliness, of an inability to defend themselves, of fear transmitted by the iconic images chosen to represent the campaign to the vast audience of readers, which acts to protect those who cannot protect themselves.

In the campaigns focused on palm oil plantations, such icons are used that can represent the real ecological situation in the plantations, while at the same time involving the reader in environmental protection actions. For example, in 2016, the NGO "The orangutan project" used the mechanism of the long-distance adoption of orangutans to continue to protect the areas of Indonesian forest where they are most at risk of extinction. The protection of biodiversity was the essential component of the environmental discourse of this NGO. This combined the adoption of orangutans with the protection of plants. One way that the supporter could contribute to the work of "The orangutan project" was to adopt some indigenous plants to the territories where the NGO was active, in order to protect the forest. In the palm oil plantations sector, environmental NGOs also intertwined another interesting theme: social justice. There were numerous articles reflecting on social exclusion, land exploitation, beatings and violent actions against local populations[2].The NGO "Survival International" has long been working with the indigenous peoples involved in the palm oil industry. There have been numerous investigations carried out by this organization. In 2016 "Survival International" exposed several human rights violations by PT Bahana Karya Semestra (BKS) against the Orang Rimba, on the island of Sumatra. In 2013, Bloomberg Business week published a report on a nine-month survey of palm oil plantation workers in Indonesia. From the words of several workers interviewed emerged a reality of labor exploitation and seizure of identification documents by the Malaysian company Kuala Lumpur Kepong Berhad[3]. The health discourse was intertwined with a strong criticism focused on the lack of transparency of large multinationals (Altervista 2016; Dongo, La Pira, 2016). It was argued that these companies sacrificed not only the rain forests, but lied to the citizen-consumer about the product, endangering their health. In Italy, the discussion about palm oil has also involved the Mediterranean diet and especially its use

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[1] I did my research from August to November 2016 and decided to work on this theme starting from an analysis of environmental narratives.

[2] Amnesty International. (2016). Il grande scandalo dell'olio di palma: violazione dei diritti umani dietro i marchi più noti. Index: ASA. 21/5184/2016.https://d21zrvtkxtd6ae.cloudfront.net/public/uploads/2016/11/29140605/The-great-palm-oil-scandal.pdf

[3] Survival International, https://www.survival.it/

of olive oil, or other vegetable fats not originating with the palm tree. These have become synonymous with health and tradition. The blog "Qui da noi, cooperative agricole"[4] published several articles that criticized palm oil and would save the "Bel Paese" (Grimaldi, 2016) and its Mediterranean/traditional diet from the invasion of this unhealthy fat. It is important to underline that although the food choices are the results of millennia of adjustments, opportunities and personal tastes, the Mediterranean diet was invented by Ancel Keys in the 1950s and since then the so-called traditional recipes have undergone enormous changes (Moro, 2014). The above are some of the recent main narratives against palm oil in Italian mass media discourses along with a focus on global deforestation caused in different parts of the world by palm oil plantations, including Indonesia[5].

Local Historical Insight: The Province of Aceh

Figure 1: Aceh province (http://bitly.ws/9s2Q Australian National University)

Since the time of the Dutch colonization, the territory of Aceh has been connected more with the Malaysian peninsula than with the island of Java and its capital Jakarta. The strategic position of this province, located between the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, had made it an important port for trade and commercial transitions, and also for cultural and religious meetings. Aceh, the gateway through which Islam expanded into Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia, is still defined today as the "Veranda of Mecca" (Reid, 1995; Reid & He, 2004). The rebellion against the Dutch settlers, which lasted from 1873 until 1914,

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[4] This blog was just one of the thousands that published articles against palm oil and the importance of the Mediterranean diet. I chose this one because it was one of the most active in sharing those articles.

[5] For many months this kind of information dissemination with its, reports, images, and environmental protection campaigns occupied the public discussion on social media and Italian national television.

undeniably marked the Acehnese identity. The theme of rebellion became a constant theme in Aceh, which, after resisting the Dutch colonists, faced a Japanese presence in the area. Between the 1950s and 1960s the rebellion expressed itself no longer through an internal-external dialectic, but through an internal-internal one; the control exerted by the capital, Jakarta, was no longer accepted in this remote area of Indonesia (Reid, 1979). In the second half of the 1970s, discontent, disappointment and distrust broke out in an armed conflict between the GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or Aceh Freedom Movement) and the Indonesian army. The armed conflict lasted 30 years, affecting more than 15,000 people and creating severe social unease. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, which took place in Helsinki in 2005, led to a relaxation in political and social relations (Ross, 2003). The key role played by Islam in defining identity in Aceh became more evident with the severe application of the Shari'a, the Koranic law, since 2005. According to Feener (2013), the adoption of the Shari'a in Aceh, was deeply connected with the historical events of this district, during which the religious establishment developed an instrumental vision of Islamic law, also taking advantage of the local desire to rebuild Aceh after the 2004 tsunami. In Aceh the palm oil industry involved many workers, although in this province there were few large plantations owned by corporations or multinationals. The intensive plantations were located in the territories bordering the province of North Sumatra, in particular in Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Singkil and Subulussalam. However, the palm oil plantations in other districts, such as Aceh Jaya, Aceh Besar or Lhokseumawe had a more domestic, family and smaller economic dimension. In Aceh, small palm oil plantations connect shopkeepers, who sell seeds and pesticides to the small farms, local workers involved in the planting and harvesting oil palms, agents from the cities where the product would then be processed, lorry drivers transporting the cargo for several kilometers to the mills, women cleaning the yards where sales would take place, workers in the companies where the oil is produced, housewives in the kitchens and many others. My research focused mainly on three districts of Aceh: Aceh Jaya, Aceh Besar, and Lhokseumawe. Over the months, however, I moved several times with shorter stays in different districts of Aceh, such as Sabang and Benar Meriah.

Research Among Small Palm Oil Plantations in Aceh: Recent Literature

From the 1970s the vast Indonesian archipelago has seen an increase of foreign and national investments related to the exploitation of various natural resources: precious wood, natural gas, oil and ample forests were replaced with oil palm plantations (McCarthy, 2006, 2010). In Indonesia there are traces of small agricultural areas cultivated with palm oil since 1400, however the sector boomed in the 20th century. Beginning with the 1970s, the palm oil sector became an important global market and this led to an increase of production that kept on rising even during the Asian economic crisis of 1997 (McCarthy, 2012).

During the months of research, I investigated how small palm oil plantations were socially and politically constructed by my interlocutors; I analyzed the differences that characterized the different areas of Aceh province. I worked on the hypothesis that although in Aceh there were no situations of extreme deforestation, some observers had a critical view of palm oil plantations.

Small palm oil plantations are highly performative places where hopes for the future, ambitions and personal concerns were combined with more collective interests. A small palm oil plantation is still relatively large as it can reach up to 50 ha.[6] These are typically family-run

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[6] Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. www.rspo.org

and the family is dependent on this agriculture for their livelihoods. They are usually less productive than commercial plantations, but they are active parts of the global supply chain (Vermeulen, Goad, 2006).

As pointed out by Escobar (2001), places are constructed by social, political and cultural structures and all of them together shape individuals, beings and environments. Places are characterized by openness and fluidity which connect them with other places as well with the rest of the world. These plantations were configured as arenas (Olivier De Sardan, 1995) of power in which local and global powers met and clashed. The individual careers and environmental visions that shaped this landscape were due to the interactions between these continuous flows. The social and political reality that was continuously produced within these places arose precisely from the friction (Tsing, 2004) between cultural (small palm oil plantation as an overall recognized status quo), economic (partial disengagement from petty trades, local and national investments), political (national rhetoric about *pembangunan*[7] based mostly on natural resources exploitation and particularly on palm oil plantation sector), social (small palm oil plantation as an investment for local economy and territorial control) and ideal flows (small palm oil plantation work as an option to become more independent from the family and be able to realize dreams and hopes): a small palm oil plantation, therefore, was not a simple economic production place, but became a social, political and cultural focal point (Casson, 2000; Li, 2014, 1999). It was a place where the friction produced by different policies, complex landscape readings, personal skills and disparate intentions of workers and owners clashed with a city-minded environmentalism which was focused more on the protection of already existing parks in Aceh.

In February 2017, the provincial elections were held in the Acehnese territory and traveling from one village to another to meet my interlocutors and friends, I continually saw large billboards with the candidates' faces and a brief summary of their programs. Many candidates' programs involved the implementation of palm oil plantation areas as part of the wider developmental narrative (Balandier, 1970). This implementation was additionally embraced by the national government which described the palm oil industry as the only valid tool for fighting poverty, illiteracy and social marginalization.

Environmentalist NGOs and Nature Lovers' Groups in Aceh

The interlocutors I met were many but they were divided into two main groups: the first was composed of daily laborers and small-scale owners, while the second consisted of environmental NGOs and *nature lovers' groups* (according to Tsing's, (2004) nomenclature). In particular, with the second group I used the method of participant observation, collaborating in the activities that were carried out, while with the first group I carried out formal and informal interviews. The activities performed within the plantations were highly defined by gender ideologies and I found it difficult to spend time in the *kebun*[8]; mainly men worked inside small palm oil plantations while women often helped workers by collecting the orange-red small fruits scattered on the ground of warehouses.

The main environmental NGOs in the Acehnese territory had their office in the city of Banda Aceh, usually far from the villages where their projects took place or where environmental education projects were proposed. Banda Aceh also housed the headquarters of the main

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[7] "Development".
[8] "Agricultural space/Small garden"

universities in the province and the university population varied widely geographically. In this environment with young educated citizens, some associations of students passionate about the environment and nature were born. They were groups of *nature lovers* (Tsing, 2004) who, through their education, passion, residential situation and financial disposition, supported NGOs in their environmental educational activities. Both, environmental NGOs and these groups of *nature lovers,* behaved in a typical way towards the rural population, and especially towards farmers and small-scale owners involved in the palm oil plantation sector, doing so on the basis of descriptive negative stereotypes (Olivier De Sardan, 1995).

The use of stereotypes referring to small-scale owners as ignorant, backwards, rebellious characters and profiteers was common practice. The epistemological distance between NGOs/ *nature lovers' groups,* workers and small-scale owners could be better understood if the notion of environmentalism as a cultural product (Milton, 2002) is taken into consideration; in this specific case, the NGOs activists and *nature lovers' groups'* members were an active part of the local city culture, they studied at university (BA, MA, PhD), they had access to cultural technologies, they could move easily between districts, among islands and sometimes even abroad and they saw themselves (and they were seen by the others, especially in rural villages) as "successful persons" who had been able to build their careers on their passion for the environment protection practices which seldom affected them directly.

Milton (1996) also recalls that environmentalism can be understood as a type of cultural perspective, that is, a characteristic way of seeing the world and acting in it. Environmental awareness takes on meaning within the society to which one belongs; at times problematic relationship is thus established between the distinction of environmentalism as a cultural product and the actions through which one relates to the world as an environmentalist. The personal interpretation of what should be protected and how to place the protection of these resources is what makes the environmental movement interesting. As a cultural product, it makes use of the multiple visions of the world that individuals bring into play.

During a day-trip in September 2016 with the Barracuda group, a group of *nature lovers* (Tsing, 2004) that shared common scientific interests (biology and zoology mainly), a friend of mine, Noni, and I found ourselves surrounded by a fire set inside the natural park where we spent the day. Noni, who is a member of Barracuda, said to me, "I had heard of fires to make room for oil palm plantations, but until you're there, one meter from a tree on fire, you don't realize it. I am very angry, and sad. But above all, I feel angry, because I understand that the villagers are poor, but they shouldn't be like that, it's not fair"[9]. Noni's difficulty with the global comprehension of what was happening in that place had its roots inside the fixed, immovable and immutable substrate of the stereotypes widely used in the contemporary environmental narrative (Li, 2014). Some activists or nature lovers' groups' members used to describe the workers of small palm oil plantations with the stereotype of the "ignorant peasant" (Olivier De Sardan, 1995) who could not study (much) and who ignored the best way to cultivate one's own field and who needed somebody to teach him/her how to do it. Another stereotype is the one used by a friend of mine, Razi, who described small-scale owners as people who are "dishonest to their real aim in being involved in NGOs' projects"[10]. This point to a strong possibility that a small-scale owner would appropriate the NGOs' investments for different purposes unrelated to the vision or aim of the NGO.

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[9] Personal communication. September 2016. Aceh Besar.
[10] Personal communication, September 2016, Aceh Tamiang.

Despite the repeated use of narrative stereotypes, the people I met in Barracuda and other NGOs claimed that their actions were aimed at protecting nature, but also at improving the economic, social and cultural conditions of the villages (Tsing, 2004). Although some of them did not act sustainably or in an environmentally conscious manner during their daily lives, for example throwing waste on the street or burning it behind the house, due to the lack of an effective and efficient collection system, they defined themselves as convinced environmentalists, supporting recycling campaigns and aligning with the general lines of mainstream environmentalism (fight against plastic and microplastics, incentives to use public transport, abandonment of fossil fuels and more),highlighting in this way the complexity of facets present in this self-definition (Milton, 1996, 2002).

Mapala, Barracuda, Walhi and Haka better represented the phenomenon of environmentalism on the territory, and they were the groups with which I had many discussions, cited from memory in my field notes. While the first two, Mapala and Barracuda, were university student groups of which the members had scientific backgrounds (biology, zoology, economics, statistics), Walhi and Haka were local environmental NGOs who created the most impact in the regions. These organizations' members felt the need to protect the natural resources in the area. This made them feel proud as they saw these resources as being in danger because of a "lack of environmental consciousness"[11]. These environmental NGOs/*nature lovers' groups* were perceived by workers and small-scale owners as not having enough awareness of the villages' situations. Both Walhi and Haka explained the lack of a strong environmental awareness in Aceh through the idea that the people of Banda Aceh are more environmentally friendly due to the fact that the city was the place of technical progress par excellence, where there were industries, laboratories, universities, meeting places and so on. Instead, outside the city there were only rural villages, field crops and forest where technical progress seemed to be delayed. It was in the village that these NGOs interwove the environmental paradigm with that of education. It was necessary to educate people to respect the territory and natural resources. The rural world was described by these NGOs as having been built on traditionalism, submission to the dynamics of the global market, and rebellion and resistance (Scott, 1987) against top-down development projects which did not always meet the local necessities. McCarthy (2006) pointed out that environmental NGOs used the term '*adat*[12]' to refer to customary arrangements, which also included the management of natural resources. The mechanism of *adat* regulated the social, cultural, political, economic and territorial dynamics of a community. A single individual could act following his own interests, but always moving within the collective-frame defined by *adat*.

The people from NGOs or *nature lover groups* I met used to adapt the word "*adat*" in a very ambiguous way: on the one hand they used it to better explain the difficulties they had in meeting, talking and negotiating with the local population because of "their *adat*"[13]. On the other hand, they framed this concept according to the kind of campaign they wanted to carry out. It was also used as a budgetary discourse, so even if *adat* could be an obstacle in the field, at the same time it could be a catchphrase to attract funds from large investors. Local natural resources were also managed through the *adat* mechanism, though this did not imply that the real extension of agricultural places was clear, especially regarding very small *kebun*.

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[11] Personal communication, August 2016, Banda Aceh

[12] The "*adat*" is the consuetudinary law that regulates the relations among the villagers as well as the use of natural resources.

[13] Personal communication, August 2016, Aceh Besar.

As outlined during an interview with the NGO Haka[14] in the early days of October 2016 the total palm oil plantation areas managed by national companies in the territory of Aceh corresponded to about 165,000 hectares. In the rest of the Acehnese territory the oil palms were present to a lesser extent, distributed in small *kebun*. If the area of the agricultural place was less than 5 hectares, it was not necessary to make an official statement to the public administration. This meant that it was very difficult to map the total number of hectares involved in palm oil plantation cultivation systems. In fact, Pak Emnur, from Haka, pointed out that the small-scale owners of palm oil plantations were estimated to number around 800,000 in the province of Aceh[15].

Cultivating Small Palm Oil Plantations, Cultivating *Harapan* (hope) in Aceh

For small-scale owners and local workers, the plantation became a place where social roles in the community were (re)negotiated. The small-scale owner was recognized by local villagers. I met an individual who had invested his money well by following the strategy of the global markets. According to Pye (2012), palm oil was produced in the "friction" existing between different policies, complex landscape readings, personal skills and multiple intentions of workers and small-scale owners: this friction process also involved NGO members, political parties and university students.

The point of view of environmental NGOs and small-scale owners and workers converged on the idea of "feel special being Acehnese" and, in virtue of this vision, they believed that Aceh was excluded from those dynamics of intensive deforestation that were occurring in other parts of Sumatra. The interlocutors I met had shown that the management of local resources had not been eroded by alternative environmental awareness proposed by environmental NGOs, but rather had been strengthened by the abundance of such resources, considered to be limitless, inexhaustible and inalienable.

For many interlocutors, both the workers of the plantations, businesspeople and small farmers, Aceh Province was not developing its human resources in the best way. The main criticism was that school and university preparation did not train young people to invest in the local territories and that they were not able to develop a project through which they could apply for international funding or gain future job opportunities. In fact, many young people I met and interviewed had previously worked in other sectors or were looking for another job while they were harvesting oil palms or being agents. In Aceh the relationship between worker and small-scale owner was not so easy to define. There was a very complex set of dynamic of mutual dependence (Sinaga, 2013). Just as the worker needed a job, the owner needed the worker: the common goal being to earn, or to gain money fast.

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[14] Personal communication. October 2016. Banda Aceh
[15] Personal communication. October 2016. Banda Aceh

Figure 2: Mulia working on Pak Iqbal's small oil palm plantation. Aceh Jaya. 2016.
Photo by the author.

My first interview was with a 30-year-old man, Mulia, who worked for Pak Iqbal, a small-scale palm oil plantation owner in Aceh Jaya. Pak Iqbal taught for several years in a primary school; the salary was low and constantly late, so in 2010he decided to quit, when the palm oil boom allowed many people to enter this promising sector. Mulia and his 60-year-old father worked temporarily in Iqbal's plantation in order to earn enough money, and they were not involved in other economic enterprises. The work on the plantation represented the best economic chance for them at that particular time of their lives.

In the same month I met Zahrid, a young professional sales agent living closer to Pak Iqbal's plantation, who described his work as "temporary". Zahrid hoped to use his English degree to enter the palm oil processing industry in the city of Meulaboh. For Mulia and Zahrid, working in the small palm oil plantation was perceived as a temporary scenario in their lives. They had ambitions and aspirations bigger than the small palm oil plantations where they were working. At the same time, these ambitions and aspirations seemed to be very distant and difficult, if not impossible to reach. They remained a dream that had to be delayed in order to supply more immediate needs. In the "here and now" dimension, the place for the future is limited.

Another point of view about small palm oil plantations was given by Pak Hanafiah, the owner of a small palm plantation in the district of Lhokseumawe. He was not forced by the logic of the global market to invest in his plantations. This owner saw the possibility of increasing his economic income in a relatively simple and inexpensive way. The presence of small palm oil plantations in this district is barely visible; first of all, because these *kebun* were usually located close to the dwellings, and secondly, because they did not constitute the main income. In Lhokseumawe there were many job opportunities due to the presence of several industries and commercial activities such as oil and gas implants harbors, small-scale activities and petty

traders besides the important highway connecting Banda Aceh to Medan.

Ultimately, the small-scale owners and workers who lived close to local natural resources were not excluded from the dynamics of the global market (Hamilton-Hart, 2015; Sunderlin, 2000). This could be seen, for example, from the strategic differentiation that took place after the collapse of the price of rubber on the international market, which led many owners, who are often involved in many activities and petty trades, to quit their jobs and to invest or to convert their land into small palm oil plantations. Moreover, the farmers with whom I talked, both in Aceh Jaya and in Lhokseumawe, were very well aware of the price of palm oil on the international market.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the multiple social reading and power complexities that shaped small palm oil plantations co-structured by local and global politics, narratives, personal ambitions, hopes and dreams. These small plantations intertwined daily workers, owners, imams, village leaders, the police, the military and politicians into continuous negotiations of their social status. The plantations were inscribed with numerous fundamental meanings by farmers, workers, owners, and by environmental NGOs: a temporary solution for escaping economic difficulties, the investment of a lifetime, the only way for local economic development, a place for local political struggle or the inevitable loss of biodiversity and forest destruction. It is therefore not possible to refer to palm oil plantations exclusively as places of agricultural production: they were imbued with a "special territory with special people"[16] rational, which sufficiently explained the lack of concern for natural resource exploitation. Reality was more complex than the typically disseminated stereotypes of small-scale owners and workers by environmental NGOs who worked in the districts. The small palm oil plantation as a political arena was found to be decidedly constructed by environmental, developmental and economic narrative strategies which intertwined *adat*, international conservation/preservation concepts and a specific historical identity.

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[16] "In Aceh people think they are a little special because we have *sharia* and Islam spread through Indonesia from Aceh. People think they are more blessed and the territory is special because of history and resources". Fachrur Razi. September 2016. Lhokseumawe.

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Lights, Action, Naughty Bits: A Thematic Analysis of New Zealanders' Attitudes to *Naked Attraction*

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Abstract

The sexualisation of culture has generated much debate in western discourse around its effect on the normalisation of nudity and sexual activity. The reality television show *Naked Attraction* has increased the dialogue around this debate after its airing, originally in the UK, and then in international territories. The show has been applauded for profiling diverse people, whether that be concerning sexual orientation, body image, gender or ethnicity. However, it has also been accused of showcasing pornography. To explore where New Zealanders' attitudes were positioned on the show, we thematically analysed online comments from two local media entities and found that New Zealanders were positive on its nudity and approach to sexual discourse.

Keywords: body positivity, physical appearance, reality television, sexualisation, *Naked Attraction*

Introduction

Scholars have argued that the proliferation of media texts that applaud and condemn 'sexual revelation and exhibitionism' (McNair, 2002, p. ix) have contributed to a growing sexualisation of culture in the West (Gill, 2009). Such sexual content has been received positively as it has democratized sexual discourse (Attwood, 2006; Plummer, 2003), normalized nudity and sexual activity (McNair, 2002), and empowered women, in particular, to engage more in sexual fulfilment and self-revelation (Attwood, 2006, 2009; Cato & Carpentier, 2010; McNair, 2002). At the very least, it has broken down barriers around attitudes to sex and the body. However, not everyone in society has embraced or supported the sexualisation of culture, with the sexual content of media being condemned for breaching good taste and decency (Gill, 2009) and developing permissive sexual attitudes amongst predominantly impressionable youth (Coy, 2009; Morgan, 2011; Strasbuger, 2005; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). This debate between advocating sexual understandings versus public morals manifested itself in online discussions after the airing of the reality television programme *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) in New Zealand.

Naked Attraction is a United Kingdom produced show by Channel 4 and is sold as a reality television dating show with a twist. As the tagline for the show attests, the "daring dating series…starts where some good dates might end- naked" (Channel4.com, 2016). Essentially, six singles stand in coloured boxes, while their naked bodies are revealed from the bottom up for the judging pleasure of a "chooser". When two contestants remain, the chooser also strips naked and makes a final decision on whom they would like to go on a clothed date with. When the couple is brought back weeks later to discuss the date, more often than not, the audience learns that they had engaged in sexual intercourse (sometimes the same night as the date took place). In discussing the dates after the show, presenter Anna Richardson admitted to asking whether contestants had sex and hoped the show would evolve to eventually include an "extra slice" to explore the after show in more detail (Cain, 2018). The show has been referred to as a "meat market" (Viner, 2016, para 29) for emphasising casual sex.

The show has been applauded for profiling diverse people, whether that be in relation to sexual orientation, body image, gender or ethnicity (McConnell, 2018a; Taylor, 2017; Westbrook, 2017). In New Zealand, the first season was screened in 2017 and averaged 174,700 viewers weekly (stuff.co.nz, 2018). It rated highly among the 18-49 year old demographic (the target audience for the show), but as of July 2018, upwards of 536 complaints had been received by the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) (The New Zealand Herald, 2018b). Many levelled accusations at the show and Television New Zealand (TVNZ) for showcasing pornography (The New Zealand Herald, 2018a). Those objecting to the broadcast of *Naked Attraction* were unhappy with the time slot of the show (9:30 pm on Friday), while others believed the show was distasteful and undermined traditional values around sex, nudity and relationships (The New Zealand Herald, 2018a, 2018b).

The controversy around the show, including an upwards of 500 complaints to the BSA, suggested that initial reactions to its broadcast were prone to condemnation, which was somewhat unexpected given that research into the sexual behaviours of New Zealander's has revealed a perchance towards multiple sexual partners (Pstuka, Connor, Cousins & Kypri, 2012), sexual experiences in adolescence (de Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, Woertman & Meeus, 2011) and practices of casual sex for the sake of it (Farvid & Braun, 2016). Additionally, New Zealand has typified progressive sexual attitudes decriminalising sex work in 2003 despite countries around the world continuing to penalise such behaviour (Armstrong, 2017), and in

2013 New Zealand was amongst the early adopters by legalising same-sex marriage (Nguyen, 2015). Because generally, New Zealanders have appeared to embrace sexual constructs, the complaints about the show suggested that more research was needed to explore the attitudes of New Zealanders towards *Naked Attraction*. Particular attention was given to online, and specifically, social media platforms because of their potential to encapsulate public opinion and typify some of the elements conducive to a public sphere (Chaffe & Metzger, 2001).

We chose to analyse the social media responses of New Zealanders to *Naked Attraction* (2016-present), because in many ways, as a young country, New Zealand's national identity, culture and values are still very much under development (King, 2003). New Zealand has been commended for its egalitarianism (Crothers, 2008) and liberal democratic values (Sibley, Hoverd & Liu, 2011), but more research is needed into how New Zealanders perceive certain issues, such as sexually explicit media content. With its intensely deregulated media market, much of the media content broadcast to New Zealand audiences originates overseas (Bell, 1995; Horrocks, 2004), and therefore, understanding how locals respond to such content may offer insights into how such content contributes to the formation of New Zealanders' ideals and ways of being. Understanding how New Zealander's might be responding to the sexualisation of culture is also advantageous given much of the scholarship in the field has centred on British, European or American contexts (Attwood, 2006, 2009; Cato & Carpentier, 2010; Gill, 2009; McNair, 2002; Plummer, 1995). Accordingly, attention needs to be given to the impact of the sexualisation of culture on Australasian countries that may share cultural contexts with other Western societies, but which, nevertheless, possess their own distinctive identities.

Naked Attraction screened in New Zealand on the channel TVNZ 2. According to research conducted by New Zealand on Air (NZoA), linear television continues to remain popular amongst those in the 45+ age range, yet TVNZ 2 tends to appeal to audiences comprised of homemakers, young singles and solo parents. That is, 25% of the target audience for programming on TVNZ 2 will be aged between 15-24, while the channel features in the top ten media consumption platforms for both Māori and Pacific Island people (NZoA, 2018). More specifically, *Naked Attraction* was being watched by over 5550,000 people aged between 18-49 when it began screening again in 2018 (TVNZ, 2018). Furthermore, the show rated highly amongst men, coming in at the third-highest rating streaming show on TVNZ Demand (Brooks, 2019). As of January 2018, FaceBook usage in New Zealand was highest amongst 25-34 year olds at 850,000 users, followed by 18-24 year olds (670,000 users) and 35-44 year olds (600,000) (Hughes, 2019). Therefore the same groups of television viewers likely to be exposed to the show *Naked Attraction*, are amongst those accessing FaceBook. Such statistics suggest that the New Zealanders watching the show, and later commenting online about their views of the show, are diverse and variously representative of the wider New Zealand population. It is against such a backdrop that we feel comfortable suggesting that these views on the show reflect what could be considered a snapshot of the perceptions of a range of New Zealanders.

Sex and Reality Television

The sexualisation of culture
According to Attwood (2006, p. 77), the sexualisation of culture entails a:

…preoccupation with sexual values, practices and identities; the shift to more permissive sexual attitudes; the proliferation of sexual texts; the emergence of new forms of sexual experiences; the apparent breakdown of rules, categories and regulations designed to keep the obscene at bay…fondness for scandals, controversies and panics around sex.

In essence, the latter part of the 20th Century has seen a growing interest and concern with the number of texts and the depictions of sex found in the mainstream media, particularly as the messages disseminated have normalized and democratized the ways in which gender, sex and sexual behaviour are discussed (Attwood, 2006; McNair, 2002). In fact, McNair (1996, p. 23, 2002) has argued that the increasing prevalence of media texts that promote revelation, exhibitionism and voyeurism have produced what he terms "pornographication." That is, sexually explicit content previously exclusive to the realm of pornography, has become commonplace in mainstream television programmes, movies and magazines to name a few (Attwood, 2006; McNair, 2002; Plummer, 2003). Therefore, the sexualisation of culture has continued to support the adage "sex sells," with the commodification of sex and relatedly, the naked body, used as part of a broader commercial agenda (Attwood, 2006).

Of particular concern are the effects of the sexualisation on wider society. Not unexpectedly, the accessibility of the previously restricted explicit and private sexual content has generated concern and shock (Attwood, 2006), with factions of society considering the content a 'breach of public morals' (Gill, 2009, p. 140). Accordingly, those opposed to the sexualisation of culture have become increasingly concerned about the impacts to children and adolescents of exposure to nudity and sex, especially as the media has become what Coy (2009, p. 374) and Levin and Kilbourne (2008) refer to as a "super peer." This term refers to the scenario whereby parents and educational institutions are reluctant to impart information pertaining to sexual activity, leading young people to gain much of their understanding about relationships, dating, appearance and sex from the media content they consume (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Coy, 2009; Zurbiggen & Morgan, 2006). Therefore, detractors believe that the impressionable youth may adopt negative sexual attitudes and behaviours that can impact the frequency, timing and safety in which sexual activity is engaged (Zurbiggen & Morgan, 2006). Those concerned with the sexualisation of culture, then, object to the messages of the media texts on the grounds that they undermine traditional values by advocating looser relationship ties and promoting sex as a means of personal fulfilment instead of its reproductive capacity (Bauman, 1991).

Although the sexualisation of culture can be construed as "profane and debased" (Gill, 2009: 140), the media content has contributed to the democratising of sex and nudity, and in some cases, has celebrated sex as a means of liberation and autonomy (Gill, 2009). New meanings are developed around sex that advocate individual need and self-revelation that considers all genders (Attwood, 2006, 2009; Cato & Carpentier, 2010; Gill, 2009; McNair, 2002; Plummer, 1995). However, as liberating as the sexualisation of culture may appear, it is not entirely progressive (Coy & Garner, 2012; Levy, 2005). According to Papadopoulos (2010), the media content that encourages personal agency in pursuit of sexual desires inevitably perpetuates and maintains the heteronormative standards of beauty and sexual need that have for years dictated what males and females should conform to in order to fit societal expectations. For example, Coy (2009, p. 373) argues that the sexualized culture still requires that women are projected as 'available and objectified,' while Gill (2009, p. 143) found that women were still expected to be "young, white, heterosexual and conventionally attractive" and "men had to appear as toned and young to embody the 'idealized and eroticized aesthetic'." In other words, the apparent liberation that was considered a marker of the sexualisation of culture continues to limit the range of sexual identities that genders can occupy (Coy, 2009) and has recommodified the body as knowingly objectified (Gill, 2009).

Reality television, sex and the naked body
Despite the conjecture around the effects of the sexualisation of culture, media texts that explore sex and nudity continue to proliferate. One such media genre that centres on issues of sexuality

is the reality television dating program (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). Generally speaking, reality television is considered "real" and "authentic" (Trottier, 2006, p. 259). It incorporates regular people, interacting in unscripted situations primarily for the entertainment of viewers (Anderson & Ferris, 2016; Nabi, Biely, Morgan & Stitt, 2003). Although reality television has been accused of being contrived (Nabi, et al. 2003), its elements of apparent realness can make the content more persuasive and influential than that found in fiction drama and comedy, and can therefore potentially distort viewers perspectives on nudity and sexual activity (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). For example, Zurbriggen and Morgan (2006, p. 2) argue that reality television dating programmes 'are often derived from gender stereotypical concepts of sexuality and dating, which suggests not only that the programs are sexually oriented, but that they provide constricting and often negative messages about dating and relationships.' Thus, analysing the views of New Zealanders to the show *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) might offer some insight into the media effects of the show, especially as motivations for viewing and higher rates of exposure to reality television have been found to endorse gender stereotypes, maintain permissive sexual attitudes (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Giaccardi, Ward, Seabrook, Manago & Lippman, 2016; Press, 2013; Seabrook, Ward, Cortina, Giaccardi & Lippman, 2016) and reinforce 'traditional and adversarial attitudes' to relationships (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006, p. 11).

The potential for viewers to be affected by the content of reality television is heightened because not only is the genre considered one of the more realistic offerings on television (Giaccardi, et al., 2016; Press, 2013; Seabrook, Ward, Cortina, Giaccardi & Lippman, 2016; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006), but it satisfies audiences voyeuristic tendencies (Baruh, 2010; Lundy, Ruth & Park, 2008). According to Rodosthenous (2012), voyeurism allows individuals to watch the bodies of others engaged in private activities for their own pleasure. In the case of a show such as *Naked Attraction*, the viewers are afforded the opportunity to gaze upon the unknowing subject, inevitably constructing asymmetrical power relationships where the naked person is objectified to meet the needs of the clothed and observing audience (Baruh, 2010; Cover, 2003). These naked participants then become spectacles that can be degraded and humiliated for audience pleasure because the audience bestows value by judging participants as deficient or worthy (Frith, Raisborough & Klein, 2014). In essence, the watching of reality television programmes such as *Naked Attraction*, which are "privacy invasive" (Baruh, 2010: 204), gives audiences the opportunity to live through the experiences of others vicariously, for their own entertainment but also to draw comparisons to themselves. Such comparisons can produce feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, at the expense of others (Baruh, 2010; Frith, et al. 2014; Lundy, et al. 2008), but can also reinforce socially ascribed standards of how to look naked. Therefore, we were keen to consider how audiences watching *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) and its naked bodies, reacted to the types of bodies on display.

Methodology

To address our research purpose, we applied thematic analysis to five online articles (from July 2016 to November 2018) from *Stuff.co.nz* (Awarau, 2018; McConnell, 2018a, McConnell, 2018b; Nixon, 2017; Stuff.co.nz, 2018) and the accompanying public comments. Articles from *The New Zealand Herald* were chosen because both the online and offline iterations of this print media have seen increased readership statistics with the Herald attracting over 459,000 readers per day (The New Zealand Herald, 2018c), and the company's FaceBook Page records an average of 1.82million visitors monthly. Accordingly, *The New Zealand Herald* continues to be a dominate media source. Similarly, *Stuff.co.nz* logs 2.1million website page views per month, making its website presence stronger that *The New Zealand Herald's* (Murphy, 2018). These

two "print" media are owned and operated by the two biggest media owners in New Zealand, NZME (The New Zealand Herald) and Fairfax Media (Stuff.co.nz) suggesting that their influence is potent within the New Zealand media landscape (Myllylahti, 2017), and as competitors, NZME and Fairfax Media continue to challenge one another through content and coverage of news. Given the positioning of these media entities we also thematically analysed the comments on the FaceBook Pages of both *The New Zealand Herald* (nzherald.co.nz, 2016, 2018a, 2018b) *and Stuff.co.nz* (Stuff, 2017a, 2017b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) where the articles were also displayed (eight FaceBook articles were analysed in total). In total, we analysed 2413 comments on the articles and FaceBook Pages.

We chose to use thematic analysis because of its flexibility and utility when analysing copious amounts of data (Alhojailan, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In uncovering patterns in the data, thematic analysis assists researchers in determining the meaning and relationships of themes to one another and to the wider project objectives (Alhojailan, 2012; Boyatzis, 1998). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be completed by following a six-step process. The first step is for the researchers to familiarize themselves with the data. To this end, working separately, both researchers initially read the articles and comments repeatedly to get a feel for the general understanding of the attitudes that presented. The second step requires the generating of particular codes. Boyatzis (1998, p. 63) describes codes as 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon.' To establish our codes, we entered the raw data into the software programme NiVivo and read and categorized the data according to attitudes that were expressed repeatedly and with passion. The third step involves searching for themes and entails collating and combining the data to establish themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth step entails refining the themes, and it is at this point, that both researchers came together to consider the themes we had developed and whether they could be sufficiently supported by the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fifth step requires the naming of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and led to the formation of our four key themes: *Body Positivity, Let's talk about sex, Don't judge a book by its cover,* and *Freedom of choice*[1] The final step is the development of the written report (Braun & Clarke, 2006)[2].

Results

Early observations of the data signalled that the majority of people commenting on the show held favourable views towards its content and reinstatement (76% were in favour of the show, and 24% were against). That is, the majority of social media commenters tended to support the continuation of the show and were not opposed to it being broadcast on free-to-air public television channel TVNZ 2. What was interesting, however, was how social media commenters (referred to as commenters from now on) justified their support or opposition to the show. These

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[1] In total, we found six themes including *Sextainment* and *Trash Television.* These additional themes are discussed in Matthews (2021, forthcoming).

[2] In writing up our data analysis, we opted to italicize comments to identify the views of the audience easily. We also chose to exclude emojis and the names of commenters. Where emojis were used, we were able to gain further insight into how strongly commenters felt about their views, but while they were coded, they have been excluded from the write-up of the data so as to avoid disrupting the flow and clarity of the discussion. Although our analysis is of a public forum, names have been removed so as not to focus on who is commenting, but on what is being said.

justifications form the basis of our four themes: *Body Positivity, Let's talk about sex, Don't judge a book by its cover,* and *Freedom of choice.*

Theme 1: Body Positivity

The first of these themes, *Body Positivity*, was comprised of comments that applauded the show for celebrating the human body and particularly its differences. For supporters, *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) was unlike other media offerings that tend to objectify the human form and emphasize particular "ideal features" (Flynn, Park, Morin & Stana, 2015; Gill, 2009; Hatoum & Belle, 2004). That is, for many of those commenting the show was considered refreshing because it attempted to challenge prevailing stereotypes about what people should look like, and whether intentionally or unintentionally, promoted a "body positive" message that was relatable and unique. For example, it was not uncommon to read that the show was "*a great program for empowering bodies of all types*" or that it was "*good to have a show that portrays everyday bodies instead of constant Hollywood types.*" Generally speaking, these responses are atypical when considering media representations of the body (Flynn, et al., 2015; Gill, 2009; Hatoum & Belle, 2004).

More often than not, images of unrealistic, unobtainable, and at times, unhealthy bodies are proliferated through mass media channels, constructing beauty standards that can generate negative consequences for members of society regardless of gender or sex (Flynn, et al., 2015; Gill, 2009; Hatoum & Belle, 2004). Constructions of men as toned, young, lean and muscular, and women as sexualized, young, attractive, thin or low in fat with large breasts (Flynn, et al., 2015; Gill, 2009; Hatoum & Belle, 2004) can be internalized by consumers. In comparing themselves to the media representations, these consumers ultimately experience a shortfall or normative discontent (Coy, 2009) that can produce feelings of dissatisfaction and demoralisation (Hatoum & Belle, 2004). In some circumstances, the unrealistic media representations of the body can lead men and women to obsessively engage in practices that induce "ideal" bodies such as dieting, plastic surgery, intense gym workouts (Featherstone, 2010; Nabi & Kablusek, 2014) and steroid use (Melki, Hitti, Oghia & Mufarrij, 2014; Nabi & Kablusek, 2014), and in extreme cases, can lead to depression and eating disorders (Morry & Staska, 2001; van den Berg, Paxton, Keery, Wall, Guo & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). Thus, the approach in Naked to offer a range of "*shapes and sizes*" and to address people's "*imperfections*" made the show appealing given the prevalence of Hollywood bodies generally on offer.

At the very least, *Naked Attraction* was able to facilitate body positivity discussions that promoted inclusivity and prosocial attitudes amongst those commenting (Sastre, 2014; Pearl, Puhl & Brownell, 2012). In essence, those inclined to see the bodies present in *Naked Attraction* as positive came to appreciate their own unique characteristics, feel beautiful and confident, overlook potential flaws and interpret media information in a self-protective manner (Wood-Barcalow, Tylka & Augustus-Horvath, 2010). For example, one commenter spoke of how the show "*makes it easier for some people to feel a bit more at ease in their bodies,*" while another referred to her own personal reaction to the show stating "*as a woman with body confidence issues, this program makes me feel more comfortable with myself*" and yet another related that "*It's nice to see normal, human bodies. Def made me feel better about myself.*" Such responses to the content suggest that for some, *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) could correct or mediate the influence of other media representations on offer by broadening understandings of beauty (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015) and, in some situations, can contribute positively to audience members' self-esteem and satisfaction with their appearance (Wood-Barcalow, et al., 2010).

Admittedly, not all of those privy to the content of the show "brought into" the body positivity message. In fact, accusations were levelled at the show by commenters who felt the show continued to project ideal standards with slight deviations from the usual media representations of the body. For example, one man claimed that "*The only message I get from this is give up now*" because his body did not match any of those he observed on the show. Another commenter remarked, "*I bet an overweight person is never on the show and we all know why. The only thing shown are slim bodies with no hair as if it's 2005.*" Yet another felt that the show did not celebrate diverse bodies but rather "*pits diverse bodies against each other, and generally, the ones that are closer to our perceptions of what is attractive win and the others lose. If anything, it perpetuates our stereotyping of body image.*"

These observations are in keeping with scholarship in the field which argues that those people chosen to participate in reality television programmes veer more towards the "ideal" instead of 'real' bodies regularly observed within society (Flynn, et al. 2015). Sastre (2014) has argued that even media content that appears to challenge convention inevitably creates new expectations around what constitutes a 'normal body' therefore true change is not completely forthcoming or wholly beneficial to everyone. At a cursory glance, *Naked Attraction* offers some differences in body standards, but the bodies of contestants on the show generally only slightly diverge from the official mainstream ideals. Contestants still tend to have thin or slim physiques, perky breasts, lean and muscular bodies, well-groomed body hair and an overall tidy appearance, suggesting that producers are still choosing people to appear on the show that fit a certain established aesthetic.

Theme 2: Let's talk about sex
The second theme included references to genitalia, porn and sex talk (both positive and negative). Accordingly, this theme has been referred to as *Let's talk about sex,* and while it includes jokes about sex and nudity, it also captures one of the reasons commenters opposed the content of the show. For these people, the depiction of genitalia and sex talk throughout the show *presented Naked Attraction* as being akin to pornography. Such a finding was not entirely unexpected given that the original complaints to the Broadcasting Standards Authority branded the show as explicit and in breach of good taste and decency (The New Zealand Herald, 2018a, 2018b). Our objective was not to determine whether the commenters on the FaceBook pages or the online newspaper websites were right in their perception that the show was soft-core porn, because as Justice Potter Stewart indicated when he tried to explain what porn was back in 1964 'I know it when I see it' (as cited in Grue, 2016 p. 841). In essence, definitions of porn are subjective and contested (Attwood, 2002; Peckham, 1969) and although porn is loosely perceived as 'the presentation in verbal or visual signs of human sexual organs in a condition of stimulation' (Peckham, 1969, pp. 46–47), a consistent agreement is not forthcoming. Rather, what was of interest to us was what the discussion of the show revealed about New Zealanders' attitudes towards the show and its perceived sexual content.

What was emphasized on the social media pages and article comment sections was the concern that exposure to such content, specifically by the youth of New Zealand, would have far-reaching implications. This being that the show would adversely impact on young people's sexual identity development and expectations about sexual behaviour. For example, one commenter signalled that a show such as *Naked Attraction* might account for "*why they're [youth] sending naked pics of themselves*". Another spoke of how the show advocated casual sex because the pairings of contestants '*most likely leads to one off flings.*' Such a perception of *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) is in line with Bauman's (2003, p. xi) assessment of how sexual relationships are depicted in the media claiming that they are constructed as easy to enter and

leave or "*light and loose.*" Essentially, the recurring theme of commenters was that "*the show could negatively effect [sic] young people that watch it.*"

These, and other commenters like them, were perhaps right to be perturbed by the sexual nature of the show and its impacts on young audiences. Sexual socialisation or 'the process by which knowledge, attitudes, and values about sexuality are acquired' (Ward, 2003, p. 348) is increasingly falling to the purview of the mainstream media (Bond & Drogos, 2014; Coy, 2009; Zurbiggen & Morgan, 2006) because parents and schools are reluctant to engage adolescents in discussions of dating, intimacy, and sex (Ward, 2003). Additionally, the mass media has embraced what McNair (2002) refers to as a striptease culture, commodifying and inadvertently endorsing the obscene and nude typical of porn culture. In other words, the act of having a show such as *Naked Attraction* (2016-present) on New Zealand television contributes to an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of sex. Commenters pointed out that much of what is depicted on the show sells sex to audiences as opposed to offering a realistic and holistic account of sexual relationships that diverge from the recurring trope of 'men are seen as sex driven, women are seen as sex objects and dating is perceived as a game' (Zurbiggen & Morgan, 2006, p. 3). *Naked Attraction* (2016-present), much like other shows discussing matters of a sexual nature then, provided guides or instructions for ideal gender roles and how to gain sexual gratification (Zurbiggen & Morgan, 2006; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2011), that members of New Zealand society were sternly and vocally against. For example, a commenter stated that "*values that diminish by the second when we allow such programs to screen*" or were worried about "*What has become of the human race? What a sad mess we are in when it comes to this,*" were perhaps unaware that youth were found to consider sexually explicit content on reality television as extreme and unrealistic (van Oosten, Peter & Vandenbosch, 2017).

Theme 3: Don't judge a book by its cover
The third of our themes, we referred to as "*Don't judge a book by its cover.*" Some commenters perceived the show advocated an unhealthy message: judging people on their physical appearance. Those commenting were oftentimes appalled and indignant that physical attraction was being advocated in preference to personality and intellectual compatibility. For example, the message was deemed offensive and problematic because it suggested: "*Human beings are only worth getting to know based on what they look like naked.*" In fact, the premise of the show, selecting a date based upon naked attraction alone, was considered "*very shallow*" and could prove problematic because people were "*shamed because they aren't hot.*" Others remarked that they disliked the show because it was, "*shallow people choosing possible mates based on body image. It's what's on the inside that counts*" and it supported "*gawking at the various body parts of the body in order to decide if they want to go on a date with them…as if that is the most important quality of a person, is not sending out a positive message.*"

As the above commenters suggest, for some, physical attraction is but one of a number of qualities that produces attachment and chemistry between prospective couples (Lewandowski Jr., Aron & Gee, 2007; Poulsen, Holman, Busby & Carroll 2012). According to Luo and Zhang (2009), attraction is a product of shared characteristics and those in other dating situations, such as people on speed dates, actually were far less focussed on physical attributes and more on determining whether the person on the date held similar beliefs, perspectives on life, and thoughts on relationships. Those objecting to the message of *Naked Attraction* seemed to see the show as problematic for establishing inappropriate and unrealistic dating standards and expectations because the show fixated on one part of the potential dates rather than seeing the suitors as whole people.

Although some commenters were strongly opposed to the message of the show, finding a mate based on physical attraction, others were supportive of *judging a book by its cover,* and in some instances, engaged in their own judging of the bodies on the show. For example, one commenter referred to how human beings are "*constantly deciding whether or not we find people attractive anyway, what's wrong with people choosing to get a bit of publicity and get judged on purpose?*" Another commenter echoed these same sentiments indicating that "*You judge people no matter what they're doing. Who cares?*" while yet another asserted that "*There has to be a physical attraction first I say otherwise moving on!!!! That's not shallow that's honest!!!! At least u [sic] know what your [sic] getting.*" The belief that people judge potential partners, particularly on physical attraction, has been scientifically proven (Lewandowski, et al., 2007). The evolutionary perspective has posited that human beings assess one another on physical attractiveness in response to biological imperatives. Men specifically, place a premium on the looks of their potential mates (Jonason, 2009; Poulsen, et al., 2012), although research has also suggested women value physical attraction (Luo & Zhang, 2009; Pines, 1998). Essentially, those commenting on the show acknowledge it is permissible and human nature to judge a person on their appearance, suggesting that the message may not be as detrimental or inappropriate in contemporary society.

Theme 4: Freedom of choice
The final theme we identified was *Freedom of choice.* Under this theme, we grouped comments that asserted either a social responsibility or consumer sovereignty agenda. We observed what was akin to a clash of ideologies. On the one hand, there were commenters who felt the Broadcasting Standards Authority was wrong to allow *Naked Attraction* on television and that the show was a breach of public interests. On the other hand, there were commenters that felt that as consumers, they should be permitted access to content that met their individual wants and needs, regardless of whether that content was sexual in nature. According to McGregor (2003), these positions regularly dictate the content of television programming, so it is unsurprising that they were observed in response to the controversial show.

Those acting as what Hill and Zwaga (2001, p. 159) refer to as "moral custodians" are less tolerant of "bad language, the portrayal of sex and nudity, privacy and fairness, discrimination and violence." These people believe they are acting altruistically by putting the needs of society ahead of their own preferences (Sunstein, 2006), and in the case of *Naked Attraction*, they appeared concerned primarily for the types of messages young people were exposed to if watching the show. Across the sample, commenters remarked on how it was "*broadcast at a time when children may be watching,*" and that people should not let their children watch it because the show was "*porn- nothing more obvious*" and advocated casual sex. The reactions of these commenters seem to embody the third-person effect, where people believe the content of media programmes is worse for others than it is for them, so opt to complain to protect and prevent potential ill effects (Gunther, 1995; Gunther & Hwa, 1996). As captured in the quotes from these commenters, "*it's about morals and values that diminish by the second when we allow such programs to screen*' and '*ignoring the sickness in society doesn't make it go away. So changing the channel won't help here.*" To this way of thinking, *Naked Attraction* could have far-reaching impacts justifying audience rejection of the show.

Of the comments found across the FaceBook Pages and websites for the articles, the most popular position held was "*If you don't like it, change the channel.*" This was followed closely by "*turn it off if you don't like it,*" and people have "*nothing better to do so complain.*" These frequent and often passionately expressed views seemed to embody the consumer sovereignty argument. According to Sunstein (2006, p. 203), the objective is that people should be permitted

"unrestricted consumer choices," with intervention considered authoritarian and opposed to democratic ideals. As Pauwels and Bauwens (2007) assert, people, want to be able to have power over the content they choose to consume even if they are looking to fulfil personal rather than societal needs.

Discussion: Stripping it Back

The purpose of this research was to thematically analyse New Zealanders' attitudes towards the television show *Naked Attraction* (2016-present). In exploring the online comments of social media commenters to the *Stuff.co.nz website*, and the *Stuff.co.nz* and *The New Zealand Herald FaceBook Pages*, we determined that a greater proportion wanted to see the show retained on New Zealand broadcast television than those supporting moves to ban the content outright. The justifications offered by those supporting and condemning the show were conceptualized as four themes: *Body Positivity, Let's talk about sex, Don't judge a book by its cover,* and *Freedom of choice*. Outlines and explanations for the themes have been offered above, so we turn now to what these themes might reveal about New Zealand audiences and why the show invoked such stringent public support.

In essence, the themes and responses of the participants were not entirely unexpected. Research has documented that the New Zealand people have a liberal and open view of sex, sexuality and relationships as a part of their national identity. As Braun (2008, p. 1819) found, New Zealanders have poor sexual health statistics because they hold firm to the "she'll be right" adage or take a "laid back" approach to sexual attitudes, behaviours and issues. In other words, they are unconcerned and unworried about nudity and sexual encounters. Additionally, Beres and Farvid (2010) found that women negotiated the often-gendered discourses around sex, by pursuing personal desires, indicating a move towards women taking control of their sexual understandings and experiences. In fact, New Zealand women were found to perceive casual sex as 'something good, fun, and enjoyable' (Farvid, Braun & Rowney, 2016, p. 549) provided it was limited and did not develop into a 'negative sexual reputation' (Farvid, et al., 2016, p. 556). Although our study is not about sex per se, these liberal, and proactive attitudes, particularly by those who appear to be cisgender women, may account for the predominantly positive responses to the show *Naked Attraction*, which itself is a dating show that produces sexual relationships.

The majority of the comments supported the continuation of the show and objected to it being banned because it was part of their consumer right to be able to view the show, it was entertaining, and, generally speaking, it had a body positive message. The increasing sexualisation of content (Attwood, 2006; McNair, 2002), particularly on broadcast television, could account for the ready acceptance and support of the show. From a cultivation analysis perspective, heavy exposure to media depictions, in this case, sex, nudity and intimacy, cannot only normalize such content but over time, can desensitize audiences to its prevalence (Gerbner, 1970; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, et al., 1980). Writing on *Naked Attraction*, Smith (2019) refers to how UK television has offered nudity and implicit sex on television, and to this end, *Naked Attraction* is a show that treats contestants as social subjects and their nakedness as a part of redefining the broadcast space. The views of cultivation analysis scholars and Smith (2019) would account for why some audience members were less perturbed by the explicit nudity and sexual innuendos typical of *Naked Attraction* (2016-present). However, cultivation analysis writers would contend that such media content leads to the degradation of society, as opposed to its liberation (Gerbner, 1970; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, et al., 1980).

Scholars writing on reality television argue that audiences are ideologically manipulated into holding positive views towards voyeurism and surveillance of others (Andrejevic, 2006; Troitter, 2006). The proliferation of reality television shows that engage with dating, intimacy and sexual relationships have paved the way for a show such as *Naked Attraction* (2016-present), by making spectacles and the covert observation of others a validated and appropriate form of entertainment (Calvert, 2004; Hill, 2007; Mast, 2016; Mendible, 2004). Such conditioning might explain why the majority of audiences were pro *Naked Attraction*. There are those that take pleasure from the misfortunes of others and ultimately contribute to a reduction in contestants self-respect, and there are those who object to watching the shows out of empathy and concern for those participating. That is, reality television shows practice the humiliation of participants for audience pleasure and in so doing, polarizes audiences (Calvert, 2004; Hill, 2007; Mast, 2016; Mendible, 2004). Nevertheless, those watching and enjoying the show could be doing so for ironic reasons, because they are cultural omnivores (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014, p. 43) or out of a genuine enjoyment of the show (Hall, 2006). Viewers can 'enjoy getting a peek into others' lives, and the 'self-awareness they acquire through viewing' (Nabi, et al., 2003, p. 322), which may also feedback into the body positivity responses commenters had in relation to *Naked Attraction*.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, those New Zealanders' commenting enjoyed, supported and were positive about the show *Naked Attraction* (2016-present). The majority of those commenting on the show were not perturbed by the nakedness. Instead, they found it to be refreshing, especially because the show offered real people that were relatable and validated the self-concepts of many commenters. At the very least, those advocating for the continuation of the show were entertained and not offended by the nudity, sexual messages and diversity on offer. Admittedly, there were those concerned about how the nakedness and sexual innuendo might impact on young audiences, and there were those appalled by the show, but for the most part, they were in the minority. Therefore, we conclude that some New Zealanders are open to a show such as *Naked Attraction*, and favour independent choice and liberal ideas, over censorship and conservatism.

Although our research offers an exploration of how New Zealanders' viewed the show *Naked Attraction* (2016-present), the findings are not without their limitations. We chose to analyse the comments that accompanied media articles exploring the controversy around the show. In some cases, those articles read more as opinion pieces and could have undermined the impartiality of those choosing to comment on the show. Furthermore, the responses of commenters may have been biased or a product of the "bandwagon effect," which could skew and undermine the findings of this research. Finally, although statistics indicate that those exposed to the content and interacting online generally fit a demographic profile, New Zealanders are not homogenous. Therefore, the findings of this research are a snapshot, rather than indicative of the views of all New Zealanders. In response to the limitations of this research, future research might look to interview and survey New Zealanders about their attitudes to *Naked Attraction*, or could be broadened to consider their attitudes to media representations of dating shows and sex. Finally, with a shift to a body positivity movement, it might also be worthwhile to explore how other television shows and media offerings might be assisting in changing attitudes to the body in Western society.

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Face and Authority: Cultural Challenges of Teaching in China

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Abstract

This article is meant as a reflection on the applicability of modern educational theories in a society in which embracing modernity does not necessarily imply the denial of traditional values. The theoretical divagations based on a comparison of arguments currently relevant in the western world regarding education and the historically dominant socio-ethical values in China will be followed by a short analysis of specific instances demonstrating the persistent nature of the latter. As there are undeniable advantages of the modern approach to education, the rift between western and Chinese views on the educational model is still quite apparent. The text will demonstrate the main points of divergence and will try to outline another possible approach towards modern education in a Chinese context.

Keywords: China, Chinese culture, Chinese education Chinese values, face, source of knowledge

Modern Theories of Education

The development of education in the late 20th and early 21st century has been marked by the shift from content-oriented and teacher-centred theories to the development-oriented and student-centred methods. Abandoning the "traditional" distinction between the "one who knows" (teacher) and the "one who wants to know" (student), modern pedagogical theories assert that the needs and predispositions of students are central to the entire educational endeavour. The first "modern" theories in this sense were rooted in the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and then later emerged in the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey (1859-1952) termed "progressivism" which championed functional psychology and was a tireless proponent of democracy and civil society. He argued that learning is a social and interactive process and as such, cannot be reduced to a simple "proper knowledge transfer" (1900). Dewey, on the one hand, emphasised the quality of the teachers and the content taught, on the other, the environment and the necessity of recognising individual students' needs. Unfortunately, according to Dewey himself, many of his followers tried to minimise the role of the former and over-relied on the latter (1902). To a large degree, Dewey was further developing Rousseau's ideas presented in Emile, or On Education (1762). His statement that a child is "immature and superficial" who must be "mature[ed] and deepened" (1902, p. 13) resembles Rousseau's idea that "nature" can and should be "socialised" (civilised), and that this is the role of education. Progressivism that appeals to Dewey's principles and following Rousseau accepts the possibility and value of science and culture but emphasises the process and students' active involvement. In other words, education should be more of a comprehensive knowledge gaining process, through experiment and problem solving and less of knowledge giving – transferring well-established data from the "knower" to the "knowing one". The main argument here is the conviction that such an approach allows for better utilisation of teaching resources and nurtures otherwise often lost talents of individual students.

Further development of educational philosophy led to an even more radical shift. Constructivism, for instance, added another idea whose origin can be traced back to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). In the Critique of Pure Reason (1781), Kant denied the validity of the question about existence or non-existence of the ultimate nature of reality (noumenon). Constructivists concluded from this that there is no objective knowledge, independent from the knower (Phillipis, 2009, p.7). Such an approach, along with all of its mutations, became very attractive to modern scholars and educators. However, as attractive as it is, it begs the question about the nature of the knowing subject and the existence of an independent world outside of individual cognition. As Phillips quite interestingly put it:

> Perhaps everyone in a classroom (teacher and each of the individual students) inhabits a world constructed by themselves, with no genuine contact possible with the worlds of others...
>
> (Phillips, 2009, 7)

Undeniably, the awareness of individual differences in the way individuals perceive, cognise and evaluate objects is beneficial for the process and advancement of education. However, a radically constructivist approach makes learning a dream that cannot reach anything lying outside an individual's consciousness.

Inspired by Dewey's philosophy, and heavily influenced by Marxism, Theodore Brameld (1904-1987) advanced another theory that he called "reconstructionism". Like Dewey, he recognised the social nature of knowledge and championed it's "transforming power". In a

very Marxist sense, he believed that education should focus on critical thinking and lead to "social change". In other words, education should serve two primary purposes: on the one hand, it "transmits the culture", on the other, it should if necessary "modify the culture" (Brameld, 1965, p. 75). As innocent as such assertions look, in Brameld's project, they mean nothing less than an acceptance of general principles of constructivism and an attempt towards employing education for the realisation of politically determined goals. Education being a bearer of a particular culture (ideology), can and might need to be used for reconstruction, or even replacement of one culture (ideology) by another, once such a change, due to socio-historical conditions is deemed necessary. Championed by Brameld, critical thinking can hardly be dismissed as an essential element of contemporary education. However, employing education as a mean for social change turns a teacher into a social/political activist entangled in socio-political ideology. What started as a student-centred endeavour could then easily become a means for political agitation, somehow missing the student focus, not to mention the appreciation of content/knowledge itself.

Another philosophical approach that has had a significant impact on education in the 20th century West was Critical Theory. The very first principle of Critical Theory is the assertion that humans live in a state of enslavement (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244) and the main obstacle preventing human liberation is ideology (Geuss, 1981). Critical Theory is then interested in the 'liberation' of a human being from the domination of external (economy) and internal (ideology) factors enslaving humans and their potential. It is a call for transcending the bonds of traditional thought and social relations. During its reign in the 20th century, it can be perceived as going hand-in-hand with the cultural movement of high modernism. However, for main theorist of the second wave of critical theorists, Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), modernity itself descending from the 18th-century Enlightenment also marks a move from the liberation of Enlightenment toward new form(s) of enslavement. He proposes a "critical knowledge" that should be "self-reflection"- and "emancipation-oriented" (Outhwaite, 1988). Here, critical knowledge seems to be a process of never-ending re-assessment of cognition and its object. As much as this approach is attractive and insightful, in its post-modern guise, it can lead to the emergence of the politicisation of basically every socio-philosophical problem and a final rejection of the possibility of objective representation of the researched object. As constructivism doubted the existence of an independent object, postmodern critical theory is overwhelmed by a never-ending denunciation of "oppressive social constructs".

Critical Theory found its way into modern education through the work of Paulo Freire (1921-1997). The hardship of life that he experienced from his early years on led him to the conclusion that the social conditions, such as poverty and hunger, are the main factors causing the backwardness of particular groups of people (Freire, 1996). In his seminal work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1968), he championed quite a few revolutionary ideas that had a profound influence on modern education models. With the emphasis on the distinction oppressor-oppressed, he saw education as a mean for allowing the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity and overturn oppressive conditions. However, the latter need to find a will to participate in the process and constantly re-examine their thoughts and living conditions. It directly led to another assertion, that pedagogy cannot be divorced from politics and as such education is, on the one hand, a conscience of politics, and on another, a method of political agitation.

In his quest for the improvement of the human condition, Freire advanced two ideas, the critique of the "banking model of education" and "the culture of silence". The first one is a further development of the ideas coined by Rousseau and later on advanced by Dewey. Freire

opposed the idea that a student is an empty vessel that must be "filled" with a teacher's knowledge. Instead, he believed that education is a process of inquiry through which the world is being constantly "reinvented". For those who saw the lack of involvement from the oppressed in the process of their liberation, Freire presented "the culture of silence" as the answer. "The culture of silence" is the state of passive acceptance of the state of affairs, a negative self-image of the oppressed. Freire's educational model, standing in the stark opposition to the "education as banking" and meant as a remedy for the necessary condition of its existence, "the culture of silence", so far has had an enormous influence on pedagogy in many countries around the globe. As the value of his efforts towards overcoming poverty and social inequality through education can hardly be denied, the whole system is a product of specific conditions and a firm rejection of "education as banking" as it puts the value, and the existence of, an objective, transferable knowledge into question. Indeed, it does not have to affect the consistency of the entire model. But what if the way to "liberation" leads not through inquiry and comprehensive development but through the acquisition of solid (technical) knowledge that he perceived as "education as banking"? What if the most efficient way of realising Freire's, and earlier Dewey's and even Rousseau's, postulates show the way through an at least conditional acceptance of an independent, objective corpus of knowledge and methods revolving around the teacher as a knower? More importantly, what if due to cultural conditioning of the students, the aims set up by modern educators cannot be achieved through the application of their methods? It would not be an overstatement to assert that specific arrangements, being beneficial in one socio-cultural setting, might bring about less promising results, or even become counterproductive under another set of culturally determined values (Hwang, 1987, p. 968). For these reasons, some axiological scrutiny of a culturally-specific learning environment seems to be a necessary task before calling for their application.

Education and Authority – The Chinese Example

We can assert with a high dose of accuracy that every society needs commonly recognised rules of social behaviour that, being modified in time, perpetuate and often display a certain sense of stability. Awareness of these rules, habits and values and their roots seems to be indispensable for the success of an educational endeavour in any given socio-cultural environment. As has been quite well established (Cheng, 1986; Zhai, 1995; St. André, 2013; Kinnison, 2017), the sources of a specific Chinese corpus of rules, habits and values should be looked for in the philosophical and socio-political systems of the past. In the Chinese case, Confucianism, Legalism and Daoism, often accompanied by Buddhism, are the ones to be examined. Especially the first one, due to its historical 'endurance' and profundity of impact, will be of primary concern in this section.

For almost two millennia, Confucian values were the driving force behind basically everything related to the socio-ethical and political existence of the Chinese people (Pohl, 2016). Starting from the times of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (133 B.C. to 89 A.D.), in its various mutations Confucianism was not only official doctrine of the state but the ideology that was binding the state, the family and the individual together. The iconoclasts of the May 4th Movement (1919) called for the "Demolition of Confucius' shop" as the sine qua non condition for the modernisation of China (Lin, 1979). Almost sixty years later, Mao Zedong still felt that launching an anti-Confucian campaign was an indispensable part of his project of making the "new Chinese". (Gregor and Chang, 1979). As they are nurtured for centuries, values rarely disappear overnight, and it would therefore not be an overstatement to claim that they might still have a firm grip on the psyche of many Chinese. Recent re-appraisals of "Chinese values" (e.g. Gow, 2016) seem only to confirm such an assertion. There are quite a few notions derived

from the Confucian ethical and political thought that has determined the Chinese worldview. One import one is the appreciation of education itself. As the excerpt from the Analects states: "With education, there is no distinction between classes or races of men" (you jiao wu lei 有教無類). In these four characters, we find the definition of Confucius's socio-political plan and the role education should play in it. They contains two important messages. First, the socio-political organisation is based on hierarchy, delineated positions and ascribed life-styles. Second, the only genuinely sufficient condition allowing for an upwards movement in the socio-political structure should be education. In short, social and political distinctions are something natural, but education is the means allowing for going beyond or somewhat above them. As such, it is a tool that can upgrade one's position in the social structure. In Liji (禮記), another classic of Confucianism, we find further justification for the nearly cultic appreciation of learning. Education, literally "the process of teaching-learning", plays two other significant roles. As it states, "should one want to build a country (strong) and make people virtues, education is a mean of the foremost importance (and applicability)" (jianguo junmin, jiaoxue wei xian, 建國君民，教學為先). If education is of such importance, the inevitable question is, how did Confucians understand education? The central notion is the one used in Liji and contains two characters, jiao (教) and xue (學). To better understand their meaning, and also the psychological impact of these two, that is, that being intertwined represents two different ideas, Wang and Zheng (2015, 344–353) employed linguistic analysis as their method of enquiry. As they noticed, how the notion is often being presented, is influenced by the western understanding of education, that is not necessarily compatible with its culturally determined and locally internalised meaning. (2015, p. 345). They then first put aside the contemporary term, jiaoyu (教育)–nurturing by teaching, and focus on the above mentioned jiao, xue and xi (習), that is a part of the notion of xuexi (學習)–learning, studying. Starting with a detailed analysis of the character and its history Wang and Zheng claim that jiao, usually rendered as "teaching", is nothing less but "to transform or enlight" (someone who does not possess the necessary knowledge by someone who does). Their inquiry leads them to the conclusion that jiao presupposes an action of someone who is in possession of knowledge towards the transformation of someone who is not, through the necessary means of instruction. As promising as it might look to modern scholars, it emphasises two things, that are not necessarily in line with most of the ideas championed by modern educational theories. (Wang and Zheng, 2015, p. 347) First is the emphasis on the "knowing one" as an essential element of the entire process; second is the effectiveness of the applied method that should be designed by the "knowing one", with little if any input from the "unenlightened one". The relation here is a hierarchical, functional and ethical one, the "one that knows" has a moral and practical obligation to make the one who does not, enlightened (Wang and Zheng, 2015, 348). However, one could argue, wherever there is teaching there must be learning, a fact that presupposes, at least to a degree, an active involvement of the one who is supposed to be enlightened.

Indeed, the process of "knowledge transfer" can hardly be so one-dimensional. The significance of another factor, xue (learning) for the realisation of the fundamental objectives of jiao cannot be overemphasised. Learning, understood as the process of acquiring knowledge, if not as a discovering one's potential, is a process that requires some involvement from the learner and as such it determines the way teaching is being delivered. In other words, there exists some dialectical and organic interdependency between both parties involved. At least, modern scholars would like to see it that way. For Confucian philosophy, which played the roles of state ideology, religion and ethical framework for Chinese society for hundreds of year, xue (learning) contains a very different meaning. Xue is not to be an active force in the process. Learning in a Confucian sense is to attain desired results, as xue is being characterised by the notion of xiao,(效) effectiveness. Xue is not to experiment and look for "hidden potential" in

the student, but to follow a pattern, to imitate "the enlightened one". The "hidden potential", so cherished by modern educational experts, does exist for Confucians but cannot be discovered by an unenlightened one. Learning then is the bringing about of a desired effect by the "knowing on" who is responsible for the design, delivery and the examination of the effects, with the one who learns to be a passive receiver of the desired content (Wang and Zheng, 2015, p. 348).

One should not, of course, forget about the well-known quote from the Analects that states: "Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous" (xue er bu si gang, si er bu xue dai 學而不思綱，思而不學殆). This verse is often presented (i.e. Rošker, 2016) as an argument in the discussion about the role of a critical approach in Confucian thought. Unfortunately, many scholars miss the point of this verse by focusing on its first half, neglecting the negative connotations of the second part. It asserts the necessity of putting learning as a guardian that restricts thinking (si, 思) which otherwise leads to dire consequences. However, there is another critical notion that presents a traditional understanding of education in a bit of a different manner. The character xi affords more room for an individual's intervention and what we would call 'discovering and developing' one's potential. As its first entry in regards to this character in the Grand Chinese Dictionary (漢語大字典) reads, xi is literally a "young bird learning to fly", it is used as a compound for many repeatable activities that lead to attaining the state of 'being able to do, or to know what is doable, or knowable.' In a way, its meaning is similar to xue, following a certain pattern of doing things, learning from the ones who already know it. But, on the other hand, what is being learnt is something that is in a latent state and must be discovered or worked out through practice and experience. And this brings us closer to the main principles of a more western, modern education.

Xuexi, learning, xi does not nullify the necessity of following the example and imitating those who know. It instead indicates the necessity of repentition of the correct pattern. Moreover, the Confucian emphasis on the association of learning with its practical application, mostly in the field of morality and behavioural etiquette, makes the very subject of learning an element of the bigger picture. There is not much room left for knowledge for its own sake, not to mention for the learner as an independent individual not serving a higher purpose. Learning is the mastering of the six, practical but also morally validated arts of the ancients[1] (Schwartz, 1985, pp. 86–99). A learner is worth anything only if his/her efforts are directed towards spreading moral values, which can be achieved through following the example of the ancient sages. There is a hidden potential in a learner, but the potential is valuable only if it is being brought to a desired form of fruition. Those who attain this level of "desired fruition" are those whom Confucius and his followers call junzi (君子), gentlemen. Those being products of education and moral realisation are almost substantially different from xiaoren (小人), petty men. They are second only to shengren (聖人), ancient sages who attained 'enlightenment' without being taught by anyone else. Education, understood the way expounded above, is thus not only a way towards exceeding social boundaries, but in post-ancient times the only means for realising a moral ideal. Knowledge is not just an element among others but a morally valorised quest and as such unnegotiable objectivity. Society should reflect that objectivity through properly established social relations. Confucian society is everything but "democratic", in a sense that everyone, regardless of his/her status, has equal rights. Confucian society is a society of "moral meritocracy". Those who know occupy a higher position, enjoying certain privileges, but at the same time, are responsible for the intellectual and moral elevation of others. Understanding

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[1] Six Arts（六藝）included: Rituals(禮), Music(樂), Archery(射), Charioteering(禦), Writing(書) and Mathematics(數).

and realisation of social stratification understood in this way is Confucius's very first postulate, zhengming (正名), the rectification of names. Since there is not much of the divine involved, this proper learning and realisation of social relations is what makes humans human. By no means can education then be a student led, since this would distort the entire structure and would make the realisation of a traditional moral quest impossible.

Authority and Face (Social Positioning and Social Roles)

As I tried to clarify, education in the Confucian context is not just "knowledge transfer", and it is even less the development of one's intellectual potential. It is a way to realise socio-moral ideals, and as such a sacred rite that, as any quasi-religious activity, cannot be arbitrarily altered. This is not to say that it cannot be modified at all. However, modification is acceptable only if it is being presented as an even more accurate display of a holy rite. The appropriateness of the ritual can only be assured by the officiant who is recognised as the bearer of relevant authority. As education is a means of determining the boundaries of social stratification, there exists another notion that derives from, and embodies, the Confucian model of social stratification based on (recognition of) moral achievement, literally translated as face (臉) (Kinnison, 2016, pp. 34–36).

The notion of face has been widely discussed in literature (Hu, 1944; Ho, 1976; Cheng, 1986; Hwang, 1987; Chang and Holt, 1994; Zhai, 1995; Zuo, 1997; Jia, 1997; St. André, 2013; Kinnison, 2017). Despite its apparent easy applicability, researchers are far from any consensus about what face is and if there are one or rather two different notions that only English renders as a single word (Hu, 1944; Ho, 1976). It is also debatable whether face pertains to the social or psychological dimension of human existence (Ho, 1976; Zhai, 1995; Zuo, 1997). There is also ongoing discussion about whether face is a universal or only a local phenomenon (St. André, 2013, pp. 77–81). To have a better grasp of the notion and how it applies to education, I will first put aside theoretical conceptualisations and discuss three actual cases that illustrate quite explicitly how face applies in a more-or-less classroom situation.

The first one is an exposition of the notion of face as a "collective perception" of the roles of an educator and a learner and happened to me when I was a PhD student. During a class, L., a distinguished professor of Chinese literature, proposed a particular solution to the philosophical problem that had appeared in the text we were analysing. As all other classmates, who were local Chinese, expressed their satisfaction with the professor's idea, it seemed to me that what he had proposed was not very well thought through. I was then not shy to express my doubts about the proposed solution, pointing out some flaws in the argument. Once I had dared to speak in a non-affirmative tone, my classmates froze. Consternation mixed with disgust could be seen on their faces, and they held their breath waiting for the professor's reaction. After a minute, the professor admitted that his solution did not help much solving the problem that the text was posing. People around the table seemed to be, on the one hand, relieved, on the other, surprised with the teacher's reaction. The consternation lasted until the end of the class since everyone seemed not to know what to say and how to behave. Everyone had been delighted with the teacher's idea, and now the teacher had himself admitted that it was not a perfect solution. Everything had been in the right order until I had ruined the balance. Interestingly enough, as the professor never expressed any resentment, my nevertheless classmates distanced themselves from me, being less friendly all the way until the end of the semester. I could not understand their behaviour until another similar situation happened a few months later.

As a passionate practitioner of martial arts, I developed close relationships with instructors in my school and was allowed to practise with them apart from the regular group class. As they recognised my background and commitment to the art, I used to discuss with them applications of specific techniques. Once, when practising in a group, I openly expressed my dissatisfaction with the instructor's presentation of a technique. Similar to my school experience, the instructor himself was very open to suggestions, and we eventually figured out what had not worked that day. However, after class, one of the senior students came to me asking about my "understanding of Chinese culture". He went on at length about his and other students' dissatisfaction with my "errant behaviour". "We are here to learn from the teachers, not to correct them!", he exclaimed. After my comment that instructors might also make mistakes and progress also required a critical approach, he replied, "It is not like we do not see their mistakes. They might be wrong from time to time, but you are not in a position to point it out. It is not your job, and it hurts not only their position but also ours (other students), especially the ones who are senior to you. You shall not do it again!" he expressed categorically with some others standing behind him and nodding their heads. It became quite evident to me that at stake was not just the teacher's position and his recognition by the students, but the students' perception of their position and the obligations they should fulfil. Collective harmony and individual socio-moral identity (a certain position that is expected to be performed in a certain way) had been disrupted (Zhai, 1995, pp. 238–239).

It then appeared to me that in the first example, everyone was doing what one was supposed to do, that is, the teacher provided a solution and students recognised it as a plausible one. It was not appropriate to object or question the professor's view. Denouncing it as not plausible was a challenge to the whole socio-morally sanctioned structure. That is why the ones who were most dissatisfied were my fellow students who suddenly had the structure they felt very comfortable with shaken up. Not only were the teacher's social position and the level of social obligations fulfilment put under pressure (Hu, 1944), but the students' self-perception as those fulfilling their obligations were openly questioned. Before the next class, being equipped with some previous experience and driven by pure curiosity, I went to that senior student and apologised for my lack of understanding with a solemn promise of being more considerate about others' feelings. Surprisingly, this did the trick, and soon I was accepted back into the pack. I just had to remember to keep my debates with other teachers about techniques private, letting my fellow students save their face as students.

The third situation that can shed some light on the importance of face, understood as behaving in an expected manner, happened during one of the Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings that I attended on behalf of my department at a university workplace of mine. During the meeting, one of the First Year students came up with a project of establishing a student society that would provide certain services to the university community. As much as he tried to be detailed in his presentation, for the mostly foreign staff in attendance, the conclusion was that the student wanted to start a new club and the whole thing was about having more opportunities for socialising. The student was not entirely satisfied with this conclusion and, in a very polite and deferent manner, tried to explain his project again. As the chair of the committee was not yet well versed in formal Chinese modes of communication, he kept insisting that if the student wanted a new society for socialising, he needed to apply to a relevant committee. The student kept trying to explain that that was not the sole purpose of his project. Then, it came to my mind that since students at the university needed to do a work placement in order to graduate, he might be proposing something like that for the students. After my question to that effect, the student was relieved and said: "That is precisely what I wish to do." What is interesting here is the fact that the student came up with a very interesting project but, as a junior student

accustomed to a Chinese educational style where the initiative is to be found more on the teacher's side, he did not dare to make his request directly to the chair of the committee. As a result, despite the student's quite good English language proficiency, the chair could not understand his real intentions. Only by having his intentions spelt out by another teacher, was he able to finally confirm the purpose of his endeavour without fear of being disrespectful to/hurting someone's face and disrupting a for him unwritten agreement.

Authority, Face and Communication in Classroom Settings

Summarising the three stories above[2], it is clear that a particular pattern of interaction between a teacher and a student, originating in Confucian socio-ethical ideals (Cheng, 1985; Kinnison, 2017, pp. 34–36), is being perpetuated despite changing socio-economic and even political realities. It might surprise many that despite the declared intention to "modernise" and "become a global citizen", not to mention Communism and the Cultural Revolution, the dynamic of the interaction between students and their teachers is not without a resemblance to the past. For the ones believing in the "universality of the modernising process", the way students may approach their instructors is everything but a display of "globalisation of social values". For instance, one of the main problems that many educators, especially western ones, are facing in China, is the passiveness of students and their lack of involvement in discussions and debates. It may come across as a great surprise to those who grew up in the western tradition to have students being present but unwilling to participate actively in classroom activities, especially as individuals. There is also an observable tendency towards awaiting "a proper answer", something that in the humanities and social sciences can be a source of great frustration for many western educators, many whom believe in dialogic reason. It leads many to quite negative conclusions such as, "Chinese students lack critical thinking skills", "Chinese students are not creative", "All they know is just copying", and so on. As from a certain point of view such claims could be classified as "biased" or "stereotyping", from the practitioner's perspective, they are not entirely false. However, what matters, especially from a Chinese perspective, is not the ideological debate, but the effectiveness of education. And this cannot be easily achieved without a proper understanding of the nature and origins of these obstacles. For instance, what appears as seeming plagiarism might not have to be a result of academic dishonesty. It can rather be the result of a conviction that published research, is "authoritative" and such should be, and is expected to be, replicated. I believe it is worth considering the structure and application of some culturally determined factors in education that might be crucial for the effectiveness of the entire endeavour.

From the examples above, we might learn that the teacher's authority as "the one who knows" is an integral part of the perception of the process of education. It denotes one's status but also one's obligations. The authority of the teacher is pre-assumed, by both the teacher and the student, a reality that might not and should not be arbitrarily altered. It is directly related to the crucial for the Chinese culture notion of face (Ho, 1976). I will now return to the conceptualisation of face, that I put on hold above.

Hu Hsien-Chin advanced the first and still influential theory of face in 1944 in which she proposed the distinction of social (mianzi) and moral face (lian). As Hu clarifies, the former is "a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation" and the latter "is the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation". (Hu, 1944: 45.) Regardless

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[2] Due to the limited scope of this paper, an analysis of further similar instances is not possible. May it suffice to say that these were not isolated cases, and numerous instances of similar behaviours have been observed and reported in literature (i.e. Zhai 1995; Zuo 1997; Wang and Zheng 2015).

of further criticism of this distinction (Ho, 1976), Hu's conceptualisation explicitly and systematically expounds the social origin and the psycho-moral effects of this notion. It is clear from her analysis that the essential terms for the conceptualisation of face are "prestige" and "respect". As much as Hu's analysis laid foundations for further investigations of the concept of face, David Ho (1976), drawing heavily on Hu's argument, opposed too close identification of face with notions of "prestige", "honour" or "dignity". He emphasised that despite similarities between the notion of face and "a standard of behaviour", "a personal variability", "status", "dignity" or "honour", face is something more than any of these terms separately.

> Face is the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social net-work and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct (…) (p. 686).

Ho's approach is important for two reasons. First, it points to the social nature of the notion and its importance "in the maintenance of social structure" (St. André, 2013, p. 76). Second, it connects individual and social features by indirectly pointing to personal identity as a result of the interplay of social forces. This aspect of Ho's theory is rarely noticed, but later developments of theories emphasised this relation between the face and identity. Thus, Helen Spencer-Oatey has presented the most "holistic" view in this respect:

> I propose that in cognitive terms, face and identity are similar in that both relate to the notion of 'self'-image (including individual, relational and collective construals of self), and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes. However, face is only associated with attributes that are affectively sensitive to the claimant. It is associated with positively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge (explicitly or implicitly), and with negatively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others NOT to ascribe to him/her.
>
> Furthermore, I propose that interactionally, face threat/loss/gain will only be perceived when there is a mismatch between an attribute claimed (or denied, in the case of negatively evaluated traits) and an attribute perceived as being ascribed by others. (2007, p. 644)

As such, face is not only a "surface", a tool used in the game of social relations and interpersonal communication but a factor that touches upon the very core of any interaction between socialised individuals, personal and socially assumed identity. Face is based on claimed/ascribed social position and authority. Authority is the factor that determines the success of the educational efforts which are equal in meaning to a religious ritual. Students are then getting used to the situation in which they are "being taught" instead of "learn" early on because it is the staff's role (face) to teach and student's role to be the recipient of this teaching. On the other hand, students as students also assume a specific role. They are all learners, as such equal, and disruption of such arrangements is a disruption of interpersonal identity. As a consequence, students who stand out or do not keep up with others, lose their own or harm their classmates' face (position, authority but also moral standing), and they need to re-establish the balance. It can be a source of massive stress and lead to errant behaviour or/and further withdrawal. Even more importantly, since face is endowed in social relations and a part of power-games (Hwang, 1987; 2005), losing or gaining face is not an individual but a collective business. As long as one plays according to the commonly accepted rules and wins,

then the face of the group is being enhanced. If one plays according to the rules but fails, it hurts the group's face, but the failure can be redeemed. However, if one wins playing against the rules, not to mention losing, s/he does damage to the shared perception of the power balance, and even the winner might expect exclusion from the group (Zhai, 1995, pp. 243–244).

As a result, there exists the fear of demonstrating lack of abilities to confirm one's assumed and ascribed self-image by others, to use Spencer-Oatey's terminology. However, not following the established pattern might be perceived as a challenged to the face, the authority of those who administer the "proper knowledge" and those who accept them as such. That is precisely the reason why my classmates were more upset with my critical comments about the teacher's solutions that the teacher himself. In a way, it is reminiscent of what Freire calls a "culture of silence" since there is a well-internalised conviction that no one should stick out and those who do should be punished. The silence and passiveness at first resemble and fit Freire's postulates quite well. The problem starts when we find out that those remaining silent do not come from the non-privileged class, and by no means, they have ever experienced the hardship of life he did. Moreover, we might soon find out that the same individuals are quite outspoken when they are being allowed to work in groups when the responsibilities are shared between all members. The gains are then somehow shared, the more substantial portion might even go to the best performing one, reducing the resentful feelings of others of the same face. Losses, on the other hand, are not individual but group ones, that significantly reduce the fear of failure and allows for performance improvement. As a result, we might find that Chinese students do not lack creativity or are inevitably inclined towards copying well-established patterns. As mentioned above, there is quite a different socio-cultural set up at work that still recognises the importance of authority and that builds self-esteem from this socially shared self-image called face that determines the nature of class dynamics. This self-image is certainly socially-constructed, and the face/authority as independent objectivity cannot be easily and clearly assessed (Lu, 1934). However, and that is where many modern theorists fail, socially-constructed does not equal less valid or being imbued with less factual influence. Students who are experiencing the western educational model for the first time, and their instructors alike, seem to be particularly prone to be affected by the discrepancy in the perception and application of educational models. What seems to be crucial is the recognition of constraints on both sides. As students are required by their teachers to embrace the modern/western teaching style, teachers on their behalf should be more aware that the way toward the realisation of their goals might lead through the (conditional) suspension of their anti-authoritarian principles.

"Respectability", however, is inevitably entangled with "responsibility" and is socially sanctioned. It seems to be a self-perpetuating pattern, and only recognition of this reality can bring about more desirable results. Even the most "modern" teacher must then recognise the fact that s/he is supposed to be an "authoritative knowledge administrator". As a result, at least in the initial stage of the process, the teacher might have no choice but to assume such a role, and by the power of his/her authority direct students beyond the limits of the "cultures of authority" (Pye, 1985). Otherwise, the situation in which students misread the "relaxed teacher", believing that s/he would not give a serious exam and are gravely disappointed afterwards when the exam was difficult, will become a common occurrence.

Conclusion

For any educational endeavour, attaining specific results is one of the primary goals. It indeed encounters numerous obstacles and as such is a process of constant re-assessment and re-adjustment. A particular subject, the students, and a particular learning environment determine

methods applied and their efficiency. In this paper, I tried to point out that modern/western education is based on theories that are an outcome of the development of particular (western) philosophical and social principles. Despite their undeniable merits, they represent a specific approach to an individual and society and pertain to a particular socio-symbolic reality. Socio-symbolic realities are socially-constructed. As such, it is subject to change and continuous modifications. However, any socio-symbolic reality arises under specific circumstances and is a result of the appreciation of particular values.

Consequently, a socio-symbolic reality, even if modified repeatedly, conveys a particular set of values perpetuating specific attitudes and behaviours. And even if their display can be affected by a changing socio-economic and political environment, certain tendencies remain. For education, it is crucial to recognise the cultural reality of the teaching and learning environment. Progressivism, constructivism, reconstructivism and Critical Theory all have their significant contribution in many fields, including the development of educational philosophies. However, given that they emerged as a protest or at least a reaction to the shortcomings of education understood as "transfer of knowledge", they cannot be taken as the ultimate answer to the challenges of teaching and learning. Notably, in a culturally specific environment, even the realisation of their main objectives can be significantly affected by the unsuitability of the methods applied. As I tried to argue, Chinese society, as based on an appeal to authority, its display and appreciation, is no less democratic and creative than any other. However, to become aware thereof, it might be necessary at times to go against modern educational principles and accept the role of an "authoritative source of knowledge". For the realisation of pre-assumed objectives, it might be necessary to adjust methods the way that would allow for minimal face loss and maximum face enhancement of all parties involved. To overcome authoritarian bias, in an authoritarian society, it might be necessary not only to recognise the authority, the face of others, but also to assume the prescribed role of authority. In other words, to overcome the constraints of "authoritarian" education, it seems to be necessary to accept and enhance the role of authority and behave according to the requirements of the face attached to it. At least at the initial stage of immersion into western-style education, such a "localisation" seems to be a necessary and useful adjustment.

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