Special Issue Intersectionality

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Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Mariella Nocenzi

Università degli Studi di Roma "Sapienza"

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Mara Sanfelici[1]

Intersecting injustices: understanding oppression and privilege through the perspectives of parents facing poverty[2]

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the daily experience of mothers and fathers living in poverty, adopting an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw,1991). This approach offers useful analytical tools to highlight not only overlapping forms of oppression affecting parents, but also the complex relationship between individual agency and the wider cultural and structural processes, generating conditions of advantage or disadvantage at the material and symbolic levels.
The study is part of a larger national research involving parents, challenged by particular conditions (economic poverty, forced migration, highly conflictual divorce, sexual minorities) that expose them to different forms of social vulnerability (Fargion, 2023). The general goal is to analyse how these parents are "doing families" (Morgan, 2007), and how they relate to a dominant ideology in contemporary Western societies, identified as "intensive parenting" (Hays, 1996). This prevailing discourse holds that child-rearing should be centred on children's needs, and oriented by "methods that are informed by experts, labour-intensive and costly" (op. cit, 1996: 21). Within a decontextualized and deterministic view, parents are identified as solely responsible for managing risks and building opportunities for themselves and their children, thus as the only ones to blame in case of "failures" (Fargion, 2021). The pursuit of intensive parenting practices demands "middle-class circumstances and resources" (Fox, 2006: 243); therefore, relating to these dominant representations is particularly challenging for low-income parents that encounter daily barriers to accessing opportunities.
This study's findings contribute to enrich our knowledge about this phenomenon, valuing the perspective of mothers and fathers facing poverty. Their voices allow us to shed light on the impact in their daily lives of social divisions, especially those constructed in relation to the classic trilogy of gender, race and class.
The first section of this article is going to account for the theoretical assumptions that guided the study and, more specifically, the concepts of "oppression", "privilege" and "intersectionality". The second part discusses the study's results, looking at interlocking forms of oppressions and privileges, both at the level of the wider socio-cultural context and micro-level processes, showing how parents experience their social locations within hierarchies of domination and oppression (Pease, 2010).

2. Background

2.1. Poverty as a form of social oppression

In the theoretical and the empirical literature, poverty is defined in several ways (Gori, 2020; Morlicchio, 2012), with scholars referring to different paradigms used, more or less explicitly, to account for the roots and the consequences of this phenomenon (Krumer-Nevo, 2020).
This study is guided by the definition proposed by Lister (2013), who assumes that poverty is not only a condition of material deprivation and economic disadvantage, but also "a shameful social relation, corrosive of human dignity and flourishing, which is experienced in interactions with the wider society and in the way people in poverty are talked about and treated by politicians,

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officials, professionals, the media, and sometimes academics" (Lister, 2013, p. 112). This perspective highlights the importance of taking into account, both in the practice field and in empirical studies, the economic and socio-cultural processes involved in the construction of the phenomenon, as well as the different experiences of people struggling with it.

In line with this perspective, Fleurbaey (2007) identifies poverty as a form of social oppression, highlighting how societies in which people in poverty are forced to accept undignified living conditions are in fact willing to tolerate different forms of injustice that threaten human integrity and dignity. The author shows how the privileged conditions of some groups are grounded in the disadvantaged condition of others; privilege is the other side of the coin of social oppression, linked to cultural and structural factors, even more than the explicit intentions of individuals.

The definition of "social oppression" (Johnson, 2000) proposed in the Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology helps to understand this perspective, identifying oppression as "a relationship of dominance and subordination between categories of people in which one benefits from the systematic abuse, exploitation, and injustice toward the other" (Johnson, 2000, p. 293). This definition distinguishes social oppression from forms of oppressive behaviors of single individuals. From this point of view, all members belonging to a dominant group participate in the processes of social oppression, regardless of their individual behavior. A white-skinned man may not himself act in oppressive ways, yet he still benefits from the advantages attributed to men and white people by cultural and structural processes oppressing women and black-skinned individuals. The same can be said in relation to other social groups who benefit from positions of privilege, such as people in the wealthier countries of the Global North, and generally those who belong to the more affluent social classes.

Social oppression is reproduced through discourses that associate to a group or a social category qualities or characteristics that distinguish it as "better" (as regard to ability, merit, values) than another, justifying a sense of superiority and, likely, forms of discrimination or domination. Classism is an example of discrimination that results in oppression of social classes defined as "lower" and "inferior". Based on stereotypes and prejudices, people in poverty have often been attributed traits such as laziness, poor skills, a weak commitment to get out of a disadvantaged condition, a tendency to depend on others for the satisfaction of their needs, and sometimes dubious morality; these discourses have justified punitive or paternalistic welfare interventions, more recently disguised behind the pedagogical and moralizing rhetoric of activation (Busso et al., 2018).

When such representations and ideologies are, often unknowingly, assumed and reinforced through institutions and wider societal structures, social oppression become institutionalized, so embedded in taken-for-granted discourses and practices that does not even involve intentional forms of prejudice or discrimination (Johnson, 2000; Deutsch, 2006). Disproportionate rates of black-skinned people living in poverty in the North American penal welfare system and in juvenile services constitute examples of institutionalized racism and classism (Johnson, 2000; Kelly and Varghese, 2018). Forms of classism have been highlighted also in some studies on middle-class professionals' practices in welfare services (Krumer Nevo, 2020; Morris et al., 2018); these were found to be linked not only to practitioners' ethnocentric perspectives, but also to organizational cultures and structures orienting an emergency approach, focusing on micro level interventions, while obscuring the impact of contextual factors (Sanfelici and Gui, 2020). Unjust policies and practices toward population groups living in poverty stain the history of the welfare systems from their origins (Ioakimidis and Wyllie, 2022). Even today, anti-poverty policies seem insufficient to tackle the phenomenon as a global social issue, weakly addressing its structural causes, which would require questioning the broader socio-economic system and its assumptions, as the source of the reproduction of social inequalities (Towsend and Gordon, 2002).

The power of dominant groups is maintained also by introducing and imposing categories to interpret the reality, exploiting their greater influence in ways that are functional to preserve their own position of advantage. Forms of "epistemic oppression" refer to the dominance in the pro-

duction and transmission of knowledge by privileged groups, which is also reproduced in forms of "discursive injustice"; these affect "individuals in their ability to act on the world with words" (Bianchi, 2021, p. 19), within institutionalized social processes that inhibit the ability to interact and communicate with others, and to express one's feelings and views about social life (Young, 1995, p. 50). Forms of epistemic injustice suffered by the poorest people may have the effect to silence them, also to avoid more suffering and humiliation.

Forms of oppressions are enacted in interpersonal relationships too, when mainstream discourses justify oppressive behaviors as micro-aggressions enacted by individual members of the dominant groups. Examples include racist, classist or sexist jokes or stereotypes, harassment, threats, or physical violence acted against people in disadvantaged positions (e.g., violence against women or people of color). Harvey (1999) uses the concept of "civilized oppression" referring to forms of oppression that are normalized and perpetuated in ordinary daily life interactions. They are based on social norms, symbols and practices taken for granted, and used unknowingly by ordinary people, who are not aware of how their assumptions of superiority impact on the lives of others and do not understand themselves as having unearned privileges (Pease, 2010).

The dominant belief systems and attitudes can be internalized by members of disadvantaged groups, resulting in forms of "internalized oppression" (Baines, 2007) that impact on self-esteem, self-confidence, and not rarely lead to shame or social withdrawal.

2.2. Understanding oppression through the prism of intersectionality

The intersectionality perspective is useful to guide the analysis of the complex interplay of socially constructed categories (social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, ability, age) and the ways in which, in relation to them, forms of social oppression and domination are reproduced or contested. These categories operate "not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (Collins, 2015, p.2). Crenshaw (1991) focuses on three interlocked dimensions on which to orient the analysis. The concept of "structural intersectionality" is useful to highlight the socio-structural elements underlying conditions of disadvantage, helping to shift the focus from the analysis of individual deficits to that of systemic issues that generate inequality. The "political" dimension of intersectionality unveils how groups experiencing multiple forms of oppression compete in politicized contexts, oriented by more powerful discourses, that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas, in which their perspective is neglected. Crenshaw points out how human rights movements that focused their action on one social category (e.g., gender) have often excluded those voices with less power (for example, the diverse experience of non-white, non-middle-class women). The historical lack of "political intersectionality" has led to the formulation and implementation of policies incapable of identifying the reciprocal linkages of forms of oppression that affect more marginalized groups; the risk is that laws, social policies, and practices, even unintentionally, contribute in perpetuating forms of social exclusion. The concept of "representational intersectionality" guides the analysis of how disadvantaged groups are positioned in public discourses. Stereotypes and prejudices perpetuate and justify forms of marginalization. An example is offered by the expression "welfare queen" referring to black-skinned women in poverty, stigmatized as dependent on forms of public assistance. Moreover, the debates over representations have elided the intersection of social categories in producing dominant narratives; for example, the contemporary critiques of racist or sexist representations have long excluded the experience of women of colour (Crenshaw,1991).

The intersectionality prism allows one to focus at the micro and macro level simultaneously. At the macro level, dominant discourses, contextual social processes, institutional practices, and power relations that influence the distribution of material resources and symbolic capital are analyzed, focusing the attention also to policy levels dynamics. At the micro level, an intersectional

analysis focuses on the multiple and interconnected aspects of identity and the resulting social positions of advantage or disadvantage constructed and reproduced in interpersonal relationships.
On the one hand, this perspective sheds light on how the groups impacted by forms of disadvantage and oppression are not homogeneous; for example, not all parents facing poverty experience it in the same way, nor is it possible to identify a direct relationship between economic deprivation and parenting styles. The social categories in which one is positioned or positions her/himself are experienced differently; in some cases, this positioning is the result of coercion, which can involve either submissive reactions or resistance (Marchetti, 2013, p. 138). On the other hand, the intersectionality lens is useful to recognize the intersections of processes that generate and maintain complex forms of structural vulnerability that systematically affect people in poverty, despite their differences.

3. Method

In this research, intersectionality was used as a powerful analytical lens to explore the experience of parents facing poverty, analyzing intersecting forms of oppression that impact in their daily life. More specifically, this study assumed a constructivist approach to intersectionality (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016), with the aim to highlight the dynamic interplay of individual agency and structural constraints. Social categories are not understood as the mechanical effect of reified social differences, but as "constantly constructed, imposed, adapted, and contested in interactions, depending on contexts, audiences, personal goals and the resources available" (Colombo and Rebughini, 2016, p. 446).
The research involved forty parents, living in different Italian regions, and known to professionals or volunteers in social services of the public administration or the third sector, supporting them in facing various challenges, including poverty. The recursive stages of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Sanfelici, 2023), guided by the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) method (Charmaz, 2014), took place during the period between October 2020 and May 2021. The overall goal was to explore how parents cope with the challenges experienced due to their conditions of economic precariousness, in order to develop a model of explanation (Sanfelici, 2023) as the result of their knowledge as expert by experience.
The process of data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, with the aim of exploring the processes involved in "doing parenting" when struggling with poverty. The initial open coding was conducted on 12 interviews, from which the first labels emerged. The writing of "memos" facilitated the identification of connections between conceptual categories. Subsequent analysis, focused coding and theoretical sampling resulted in data collection from a further 28 participants, deepening the exploration of the categories emerging from the first wave (Sanfelici, 2023). An intersectionality approach guided also the sampling process; gender, class, race, disability and juridical status in particular were taken into account in the second wave of data collection, to better understand how different levels of vulnerability influence representations and experiences, and may lead to different coping strategies.
More specifically, this article focuses on one of the main categories emerging from the CGT analysis, labelled as "forms of injustice". This category refers to the parents' accounts of factors imposing continuous barriers that limit their choices and possibilities as persons and as parents, both at the material and the symbolic levels, generating forms of oppression. A secondary analysis was carried out to analyse the meanings associated to the sub-categories related to this main one. The intersectionality lens allowed us to grasps the forms of oppression at a structural, political, and representational level (Crenshaw, 1991), highlighting their impact on parenting, as well as the participants' strategies to cope with them.

4. Findings: interlocking "forms of injustice"

The presentation of our findings is organized into two sections, which discuss the meanings that emerged in relation to two categories, related to the wider one ("experiences of injustice"), as follows: 1) the category "constrained parenting" includes sub-categories ("trapping forms of structural oppression"), referring to the participants' explanations of the multiple effects of structural factors that hinder parenting and child rearing; the expert knowledge of parents enables to understand the impact of conditions that constantly impose barriers to accessing resources needed to plan and pursue projects in life.
2) the category "(de)valued values" includes the subcategories "success vs. failure"; "autonomy vs. interdependence"; "competition vs. solidarity", emerged from the participants' reflections on the criteria used to attribute value to people and their qualities; these explanations shed light on the social and cultural processes that limit access to symbolic resources - crucial to build and maintain self-confidence and self-esteem - producing forms of epistemic oppression.

4.1. "Parenting constrained" by forms of institutional and structural oppression

The category "constrained parenting" emerged in our participants' discourses, referring to their experience of necessary choices that must be made in relation to the constant lack of resources available to "doing family" (Morgan, 2007), highlighting the impact of interlocking forms of oppression at the macro level. Many of the challenges related to economic poverty are common to our interviewees. The scarcity or absence of material and symbolic goods is described as a condition that "limits" or "blocks" their possibilities as people and as parents, "trapped" in what is described as "a cage", or a "vicious circle" that leads to "forced choices", rather than well-considered ones.
According to most of our participants, the difficulty in accessing livelihood-securing jobs is one of the main causes of the "vicious circle" that limits their opportunities. Living in the poorest areas of the country, characterized by high unemployment rates, and sometimes marked by the scourge of organized crime, makes a difference in determining the quantity and the quality of employment opportunities. Unemployment or access to poor and precarious jobs is a constant in the sample of our respondents, but the challenges are greater for people coming from poorer countries, those with a precarious juridical status and for women, particularly in contexts where public employment services and family services are absent or with precarious resources as well.
Being a mother in a context that has poorly invested in family services entails the "forced" choice between being employed in the labor market and taking care of the family members, undermining economic independence, or in some cases accepting the risk of precarious forms of supervision for their children. Nadia is an Italian mother who grew up in a neighborhood in a northern city marked by poverty and deviance, raising her five-year-old daughter alone; in the absence of support from family networks, she had to close her business as a hairdresser. Nadia describes a "constant struggle" to overcome the barriers daily experienced in her attempts to access the resources needed to make plans for herself and her family:

> «I was an hairdresser... and then I got pregnant, and not having help with the baby, and the possibility to pay a babysitter ... I was on my own, I had to close when the child was one year old. And after then I could not find anything anymore, except for precarious jobs; I do not know... it's just difficult honestly. (...) I'm stuck! I really feel as a lion in a cage, because I've tried everything, but I can't get out of this situation». (N.)

In some experiences, gender-based violence intersects with the condition of poverty, or it is a consequence of it. Giovanna, lives in the South, is the mother of two children, and went back to live with her birth family, after a path supported by an organization that helped her as a battered

woman. The experience of severe psychological and physical suffering overlapped with her exclusion from the labor market, the subsequent economic dependency, and the inability to ensure housing and opportunities for her children. Giovanna describes her experience as a double source of injustice, due not only to the oppression suffered by her ex-partner's behaviours, but also to the unavailability of services to ensure a decent life for her family:

> «The State does not allow you to have a decent job, one that gives back dignity to women; we declare to carry on so many battles for battered women, and… I came out of a ... I was saved from violence against women and then what did the State do? It abandoned me, with my children (...). This is what I ask the State, to help us, not giving us money, but giving us dignity, a job, that's all». (G.)

Exclusion processes related to poverty are intertwined with those produced by race, skin color, and legal status. For non-Italian people, structural and cultural barriers hinder the access to housing and adequately paid and legal jobs. Mohamed and Cleo are two fathers, married, who migrated with their families from poor areas of two central African countries. Both are trying to secure the minimum conditions for survival, combining precarious income sources from seasonal jobs, and aids from charitable organizations; they experience a constantly precarious balance, frequently interrupted by unforeseen critical events, most recently the pandemic and its impact on the labor market. In the poorest or most isolated areas of the country, one of the ways to access job opportunities is mediated by organized crime, for example in lands where an illegal gang-master system named as "caporalato" has not been effectively addressed by institutions. Most often, this phenomenon involves migrants in hyper-precarious conditions, who are more easily subjected to labor blackmail and exploitation. Diana, a mother from an Eastern European country, describes her past experience as an exploited worker in agriculture; she highlights the risk of internalized oppression, when degrading working and living conditions for herself and her family become the "normality", preventing from "being able to see beyond" and imagining other possibilities for living in dignity:

> «Because here it's not that you are recognized for the work that you do, I'm talking about insurance, rights… it's not that you get this information (...). Even if I worked without a contract, it was fine for me, as long as there was a job and as long as we could eat (...) He [the gang-master] gave me a room where I could stay with my daughter and I thought it was also too much... even the other like us were not able to see beyond that». (D.)

Institutional responses in many cases appear to be poorly effective in countering forms of structural oppression, and sometimes involved in the reproduction of social discrimination that takes the form of institutional oppression. The response of public offices to requests of economic aid is often described as uncertain and unpredictable, and above all limited by the allocation of scarce resources for families in economic distress. Job search is described as weakly mediated by public agencies; social services workers often explain to parents that helping for a job search is not their responsibility, and at the same time employment services put on hold responses that rarely arrive. Integrated interventions between social and labor services are advocated by the participants, but in fact rare; they sometimes take the form of offers of internships, scarcely relevant in countering a condition of hyper-precariousness. Jessica, an Italian mother of two children, married to Mario, who is unemployed due to a severe heart disease, describes her enthusiasm when she was offered and accepted a paid internship, and the disappointment and concern when knowing that the 600 Euro payment would have been given "after months", at unpredictable times.

For parents in recent immigration paths, access to national and local income support measures or to housing is often not guaranteed, due to the absence of eligibility requirements, such as the number of years of residence in the territory. For parents with precarious legal status, the complexity and slowness of the bureaucratic paths necessary to update their permits to stay expose

them to periods marked by extreme uncertainty and the impossibility not only of making plans for the future, but also of guaranteeing in the present the satisfaction of basic needs.
Many parents refer to the traumatic experience for their family in cases of eviction. Ana, a mother of three children, with a residence permit yearly renewed, lives with the constant fear of losing her home, an event that has happened three times in her young life. Grace, a Nigerian mother, recounts the experience of "losing everything"; when her husband's long period of unemployment led to losing their home, in the absence of support networks, she was forced to adapt to an emergency solution in a temporary shelter, offered by a charitable organization, experienced as a further source of suffering and injustice.

> «I lost everything, I had no home, I had nothing, I didn't work, as soon as my husband got a job we lost the house. (..) I lived it [the shelter] as a place ... very ... with different families, in the daytime at 8 o›clock they kick you out, and you have to go out with your children in the street... This is not good for mothers and children». (G.)

4.2. "Devalued values": forms of epistemic oppression, between adaptation and resistance

In contemporary Western societies, the availability of material resources is considered as evidence of merit and success. In a specular way, the condition of economic poverty is more often interpreted as a proof of failure, lower commitment, or capacities. The distorting lens of stereotypes and prejudices associated with these assumptions emerges in our participants' reflections and accounts, highlighting how, in relation to them, people are singled out and, at the same time, made invisible (Young, 1995).
The interviews trace numerous episodes in which parents in their daily life deal with prejudices, in the forms of judgmental looks, verbal expressions, devaluing attitudes, leading to experiences of shame and humiliation, sometimes anger, resulting in different forms of adaptation and resistance. Maria Grazia, a single mother of a child with special needs, explains how, at a time when she was facing a condition of extreme poverty, she had to neglect her needs to ensure her son did not experience any kinds of deprivation; in that period, she often perceived the judgmental stares of "other moms" she met at school, looking at the inadequate conditions of her hair, clothes and shoes; she also narrates her attempts to defend herself to safeguard her image and self-esteem, highlighting the value of her "sacrifices", her "strength despite all", her walking with her "head held high".

> «Before [receiving the minimum income] I went to school with broken shoes and they looked at me from head to toe (...). However, people should also look internally, taking into account what I went through, because (...) being a father and being a mother at the same time is hard, and I can say that I am proud of that». (M.G.)

The need to protect their own identity and that of their family from prejudices lead to different reactions, depending on the contexts in which they occurred, the different social positioning, their values and their representations of the roots of poverty, identified at the individual or at the system level.
Some parents emphasize what "really matters" to them, namely recognizing themselves as part of a family "rich in values": caring relationships, love for their children, enjoying their staying together and united, as well as mutual help and solidarity, which for someone seems to be limited to their family members, while for others extends to friendship and community relationships. For Ester, an Italian mother living in the North what matters is to "have gold in the family":

> « It's hard to make a living on such a salary nowadays (...), but what should we do? The important thing is not to swim in gold, but to have gold in your home. If you could see us all together, we are beautiful... so beautiful!». (E.)

In some interviews, it emerges how reference to values such as altruism and solidarity often ap-

pears at odds with the kind of performances required in everyday interactions. Assuming "sharing" as a value, in a context where competition prevails on reciprocity, and marked by unequal opportunities, can reinforce the condition of disadvantage. Laura, an Italian mother with parents from Albania, living in a northern city, explains how she often argues with her husband with regard to the values to pass down to their children.

> «My son has always seen sharing in the house, right? But, do you know what he told me last year? When he was 7 years old. 'Mom, you always talk about sharing, but that kid bought x [a brand of candy], every time I buy 10 candies, I share them with the others, but I don't even get one from them!' And my husband: 'Look! You want to teach him your "sharing", but then in life... I told you, this was coming!'. And so he's making me paranoid now, you know?» (L.)

Even asking or giving help to others - relying on one's family or community networks, or on public services - can be socially approved, or become a source of shame and negative stigma associated with "not autonomous people". The experience seems to differ, depending on the quality of exchanges in social networks and the assumed values ("individual autonomy" vs. "interdependence"), which in turn are constructed in relation to different meanings, associated to social categories that are intertwined in different ways.
Sonia, an Italian mother, living in the South in a small town, explains how, when she does not have enough money "to arrive at the end of the month", relatives, neighbors, and shopkeepers help her and her family, recognizing them as trustworthy. Sharing and exchange seem more valued in a context where economic poverty is a condition of many, and community ties are stronger. Daria, a single mother from Bosnia, escaped from the violence perpetrated by her husband, and now she is living in the Northeast of Italy; Daria states that "it is not shameful to be poor", but she actually feels ashamed to ask for help. Even if, in her words, "being poor" is portrayed as an unchosen condition, asking to others means publicly showing not to be able to make it. The experience is even more humiliating as parents. Franca is an Italian single mother who moved from the South to a northern city, where she can count on help from her brother and the presence of a stronger network of public services. Franca explains that being poor "is not a humiliation, but you live it as such", especially when you have responsibilities to your children. Her discourse seems to justify somehow her condition of economic deprivation in relation to contextual variables, but also to assume that the responsibility of care for children lies first and foremost with the parents, so it is up to them to cope, regardless of their conditions.

> «However, when you need to ask for help to others for your children's needs, you feel a little bit like ... it's not a humiliation, because unfortunately we are all in it, unfortunately this period is difficult, but... you live it as such [a humiliation] ... for parents not being able to meet the basic needs of their children is something that ... it's really hard». (F.)

Also being identified as a "service user" becomes a source of stigma, when it is assumed that service recipients are people who are not able to cope by themselves, people with weaker capacities and strengths. Ciro, a father who lives in the South, recounts, for example, the refusal of his niece, for whom he has guardianship, to attend a day care center for "disadvantaged youth", a condition that makes her feel different and exposes her to the risk of being labeled by her classmates. At the same time, Ciro suggests the importance of "services for all", avoiding pathways for "second class children".
Being a parent "known to social services" becomes in many cases not only a source of shame, but of "fear" for not being considered as an "adequate parent". This happens in interaction with professionals perceived as representatives of institutions aimed at controlling parents' performances in relation to standards that are equal for all, therefore unable to deeply understand and consider their perspective and the impact of contextual conditions.
An emerging topic, though often not explicitly addressed, concerns the value placed or denied

on family members that are in charge of caregiving. In many families, the traditional gender division of labor in line with a patriarchal model, seems to be taken for granted; other parents described instead attempts to equally share house keeping and childrearing. In most interviews, it is evident how the recognition of the importance of care as a form of social reproduction is, at best, limited to the household, but misrecognized in the public sphere, where "income-producing" work is required.
The consequences of the misrecognition of care emerge predominantly in mothers' narratives, sometimes even in the form of internalized stereotypes. Elena, an Italian mother living in the North, a housewife, explains how despite choosing to become a mother "as a gift", not being able to contribute economically for her family struggling with poverty makes her feel "useless" and less worthy of esteem:

> «I wanted to become a mother, that was my choice (...), so, I stopped working, even if it was my passion selling books, really; and I became a mother... And sometimes you feel… because only your husband is working, so you feel useless [E. cries]. Maybe not useless… but as you are not really helping your family, right? So, this makes you… it lowers your esteem [E. cries] a little bit, your self-esteem». (E.)

Two fathers expressed awareness of their privileges as men in a dominant discourse that devalues care, more often attributed to women. For a period, Fabrizio was the principal caregiver of his four children, since his wife had easier access to work; he explained how, while doing it, he realized how care work is not recognized, both for the value it brings and the "sacrifices" it entails.

> «I found myself in this situation, and I had to do it; and now… to say that a woman who takes care of the house and the children show less commitment than a woman who goes to work sounds like heresy to me, the wrongest thing I have heard; a woman who is forced to give up work and to neglect herself, because that's basically how it works in practice, she also ends up being judged». (F.)

5. Discussion and conclusions: the "cage of oppression" and the possible ways out

Our findings are useful to highlight how the intersection of multiple forms of oppression makes parents living in poverty as systematically vulnerable (Frye, 1983). Their experience is confined and shaped by forces «which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable», but interrelated «in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction» (Frye, 1983, pp. 4-5).
Frye states that the experience of oppressed people is that of "being caged", surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers. Similarly, the image of a "lion in a cage" was used by one of the interviewed (paragraph 4.1), to describe how all her daily efforts and struggles are constantly frustrated, leading to the feeling of being trapped, despite her strength and constant battles. The experience of forces that restrain, restrict or hamper the possibility of moving forward is common to our participants facing economic disadvantage. On the one hand, people in poverty are prevented from accessing the resources necessary to live independently; on the other hand, dominant cultural assumptions place in a position of inferiority those who do not access adequate resources to participate in social life as the others. Within these processes, parents who cannot ensure the satisfaction of material and educational needs risk to be considered as inadequate; for some, this judgment may become internalized and experienced in the form of guilt and shame. This paradoxical condition - being simultaneously excluded and judged for the consequences of exclusion - varies in relation to different social positioning that allow or hamper the access to material and symbolic resources.
While the impact of structural forms of oppression in limiting possibilities is evident, our findings also highlight how the meanings and practices associated to social categories that interact in producing oppression are constructed and therefore transforming, without excluding indi-

viduals' agency. Parents draw on and confront the dominant narratives, internalizing them, reacting to them, defending themselves, or trying to assert new perspectives and interpretations of reality. Forms of internalized oppression are recognized in some discourses, when parents seem to normalize their conditions of disadvantage, and refer to the same dominant ideologies that exclude their perspective. By contrast, other parents describe several forms of resistance to oppressive structures, and attempts to assert different standpoints. For example, many respondents seem to refer to a dominant cultural model that represents autonomy as a condition in which one achieves self-sufficiency, free from dependence on others and external help. Others proposed a different perspective, one that values interdependence, as the possibility of building one's autonomy within relationships of solidarity, based on sharing. The first position is consistent with a representation of autonomy, widespread in modern Western societies, in line with an individualistic culture. By denying the vulnerability of human beings as a common ontological condition, this representation obscures not only the structural and relational variables that influence autonomy, but also the social practices functional to its maintenance. It is a cultural model, dominant in liberal societies, consistent with a patriarchal culture, that has in fact promoted positions of "privileged autonomy" for some (males, adults and affluent), at the expense of others (women, for a long time legally and socially deprived of autonomy, and people from impoverished groups, "serving" the privileged ones) (Verza, 2018, p. 240). For a long time care work, despite its essential contribution to social reproduction, has been relegated into the private sphere, devalued, most often attributed to women or delegated to the "working poor", namely those employed in poorly recognized jobs. From the second half of the last century, unpaid care work and income-generating jobs have been competing within systems that enabled women's emancipation, allowing their greater participation in the public sphere (Camozzi, 2020). In affluent (Western) households, some of the activities related to home care and care work for family members have been delegated to domestic workers (mostly, migrant women) from poorer backgrounds. In the "global chain of care" (Hochschild, 2007) the dimensions of class, gender, and ethnicity are now intertwined, with a national and international division of labor that reproduces forms of inequality and social oppression.

Oppression is also reproduced through the institutions in residual models of welfare systems, in fact excluding the ideas of interdependence and reciprocity, and assuming their beneficiaries as those who are "weaker", with the perverse effect of further stigmatizing them (Verza, 2018), as highlighted from some of our participants.

Also the discourse on intensive parenting is consistent with an individualistic view of parental autonomy and responsibility, obscuring the influence of contextual variables, with the risk of blaming parents as the only responsible for possible negative outcomes in their children's developmental path. This assumption spreads a narrative that easily results in epistemic and discursive forms of injustice, which can induce internalized oppression.

The reflections shared by parents also point to possible ways out of the "cage of oppression". Many indicate how structural barriers can be broken down by institutions taking responsibility for promoting access to the resources needed to ensure a decent life and dignity for all. Participants have also described their attempts to affirm different perspectives that value mutual aid, solidarity, reciprocity and collective efforts to address common social issues.

These positions seem to be reflected in the concept of "relational autonomy" (Anderson and Honneth, 2005; Verza, 2018, op. cit.), which considers vulnerability and diversity as conditions of human beings, rather than making them the object of social stigma. Interdependence is recognized as a necessary condition for autonomy, at the same time resisting the dominant idea according to which collective well-being depends on economic development only (Prilleltensky, 2003). The inclusion of such a perspective, however, implies for "privileged" groups the recognition and the willingness to question their position of unearned advantage (Pease, 2010). It entails unveiling how their autonomy is not just a self-earned condition, as well as their power and strengths are not simply due to their own achievement, but conferred as members of groups

that are attributed privileges related to gender (male), to living in wealthier contexts with greater opportunities, and to having access to well-paid jobs.

This study highlights how the integration of concepts from the intersectional approach and the anti-oppressive perspective (Baines, 2007) allows not only to overcome individual-blame explanations of poverty, but also to critically analyse assumptions that orient policies and interventions. If the latter are ultimately based on the idea of "activation" to foster individual autonomy through temporary aids for the "vulnerable", without addressing structural roots of disadvantage, they actually risk obscuring the systems of domination that maintain conditions of privilege for some, through the exploitation of the most oppressed groups.

An intersectional lens can help policy makers as well as professionals to recognize and critically question the invisibility of disadvantaged populations. Redistribution of resources and welfare interventions able to vehicle recognition (Honneth, 2005: Lister, 2001; Krumer-Nevo, 2020) are keys in the formulation and implementation of policies to tackle poverty as a form of multi-facet form of social oppression. Anti-poverty politics and interventions need to address both questions of material resources and of power relations within and among groups, overcoming programmes which consider separate systems of oppression, focusing on one, while obscuring the others. This perspective also implies the willingness and the capacity to activate people's participation, recognizing them as "experts", not only of their unique situation, but also of how unjust systems that impact on their lives can be transformed.

Future research can help move in the direction of anti-oppressive policy and services, in several ways. Through a constructivist approach to intersectionality, it is possible to highlight the risk of essentialization of both social categories and identities (Colombo e Rebughini, 2016), leading to othering processes both in the public debate and in welfare services. Studies can further contribute to explore power dynamics in socially constructed identities and structures, as a way to foster awareness and change. Researchers can also think themselves as allies with citizens, professionals and policy makers, giving back power to different voices; the fight against poverty can be interpreted as a collective action, to advocate for the development of welfare systems authentically oriented toward the promotion of social justice, overcoming discourses that only formally defend the access of people to human rights.

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