

Kamil Luczaj

Christine J. Walley. *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 216 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-87180-6.

Kamil Luczaj. Address for correspondence: Jagiellonian University, ul. Grodzka 52/52, 31-044 Krakow, Poland. kamil.luczaj@gmail.com.

The highway exit ramp for Southeast Chicago is numbered “zero.” This fact inspired Christine J. Walley to title her analysis of southeastern neighborhoods this way. Obviously, we can suspect that “zero” has a figurative meaning as well, because the book not only depicts working-class neighborhoods in Chicago but also discusses salient issues related to deindustrialization and its consequences. Zero denotes the emptiness that one could observe in the 2000s in the former steel mill region of Southeast Chicago.

Analogically, it is possible to read Walley’s book in two different ways. On the surface, the publication is little more than a personal story. Moreover, this story has only a few threads and nodes, which can be easily listed here. It tells stories of mill shutdowns in the region, stories of immigrants to this part of the United States, and stories of upward and downward mobility. All those stories are related to one central story: the life experiences of a bright working-class girl who managed to become a professor of anthropology. Obviously, it is not the first time an ethnographer has used her own biography to construct an anthropological narrative (see Taylor 2008), but this narrative is a very special and personal one, as we will see.

The personal story should not be treated as a main part of the book under review, though. The other level is a social level, as we can read these stories as a kind of autoethnography (165). Walley argues that family stories are not mere anecdotes but a form of analysis of the world (12–13). This is an analysis of inequalities in twentieth-century America. It is important, as the author notes, because there has been a historically widespread tendency for Americans to downplay issues of class (x): “for poor and working-class individuals, admitting to being less than middle-class opens one to charges of being lazy, a failure, or, in some other way, personally at fault” (7).

Walley states that “telling this story offers a chance to rebel against the meanings that others would attribute to my life” (92). For instance, when the author is talking about the shutting down of the mills, she notes that normally this story is told from a global, even evolutionary perspective, and those events are treated as historical necessity (78). On the other hand, Walley’s book is a manifesto against romanticized ideas of the moral righteousness of the working class (96). Walley notes that leftist labor narratives widespread among her college friends were somehow superficial, because she doubted that most of her college friends would actually like “labor” if they met them in person (42). Furthermore, in her view the academic literature is also very distant from working-class life. She highlights the irony that “the more theoretically sophisticated a text seemed to be about class, the more inac-

cessible and distant it sometimes felt from the working-class lives it was intended to describe" (12). Thus, one of the objectives of the book was to find "a language of class that 'fits'" (167).

Walley's opposition to dominant narratives widespread throughout America is only a partial description of her work. The book has also a "positive" side—it depicts the everyday lives of white working-class Americans. It is important that Walley does not treat class as a dominant variable that trumps others but rather as one strand of inequality among others (11–12). In many sections of the book we can take great delight in her in-depth descriptions of everyday life. For instance, when Walley notes, after writer Alfred Lubrano, that "working class people yell" (110), she offers a description of working-class demeanor. Elsewhere she mentions a "clean home" (71) as an indicator of status. She also points out the plain language used by members of lower social strata (108). This description is very similar to Pierre Bourdieu's analyses ([1979] 1984), but the author chose not to refer to *Distinction* here. In other sections of her book she writes about the "stigma of being out of work" (68). Here again we can see the characteristics that have been already described in Bourdieu's magnum opus: the practical attitude of the lower social strata. Walley explains how members of the working class prefer to choose practical professions for their children (104). This practical attitude is also visible when she recalls a situation when the plumbing in their upstairs tub broke and her father perceived asking someone else to repair it to be an "insult to his manhood" (161).

What I find interesting in Walley's book is her observation that the definition of life success varies across social strata. As the author notes, "while many parents do want their children to do well, many also hope their children will stay close to home, remain part of their family's social world, and continue to value what they value" (98). Contrary to the conviction widespread among the middle classes, Walley shows that education may not be a value in and of itself. She uses the metaphor of two different worlds (97). According to Walley, basic "instincts," like those related to child-bearing, are very important in a world defined by dense overlapping social ties with extended family (48–51).

In chapter 4 she refers to the biological and chemical composition of her body. Walley shares with us memories and feelings from her painful cancer treatment. She argues that her childhood in Southeast Chicago might have influenced her health condition because the area was extremely polluted back then. The inhabitants of this part of the city were not concerned with environmental issues. For instance Walley's father used to say: "The more smoke the better—it means there's food on the table and the kids are eating!"; and her mother wore street clothes while she worked in the on-site trailer even though men who worked just outside wore protective equipment (120–121).

Despite the fact that I really enjoyed the book, it is not devoid of drawbacks. The first is of a theoretical nature. The author's story is a history of one of *les miraculés* (to borrow Bourdieu's language again). Unfortunately, Walley's description in the case of her class position could not be described as profound. When she writes that human identities closely related to our class background are "like patchwork quilts forged of

many pieces" (115), she does not refer to Erik Olin Wright, whose terminology might be helpful here. Especially what Wright calls "mediated class locations" (different kinds of ties that change one's own class position) or "contradictory locations" (of people who have antagonistic interests of capital and labor) might have helped Walley express her observations and conclusions in a more precise way (Wright [1997] 2000).

I am also afraid that the book is a bit ethnocentric. Let us have a look at some examples. Although Walley does not limit her citations to American authors, she very often mentions her compatriots simply by name, while even giants of European sociology are introduced, as in the case of Bourdieu who is described as an "influential French social scientist" (100) (is there really anything unusual in quoting Bourdieu in a paper about social class?). Furthermore, although she quotes the author of *Distinction*, those references are rather general and seem not to be fully explored. We can also see some carelessness in citing geographical names. My concern is clearly visible in this rather unusual list: "thousands of immigrants from Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Bohemia, and, later, Poland, Croatia, Serbia, Lithuania, Italy, Greece, Mexico, and elsewhere" (32). Why is the Bohemia region juxtaposed with other national states? Obviously Czech Republic was the part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire back then, but so were essential parts of Poland as well as Croatia and Serbia. It looks like Walley treated her own country more seriously and carefully than others. This interpretation may be supported by the usage of possessive adjective "our." She easily says that her story is intended to counter "our national" narratives (104). I was wondering what that is supposed to mean. If Walley thought of it as an indicator of Americanness, it would be a clear example of pure ethnocentrism—the book would appear to be intended only for Americans. I hope that this is only an unfortunate expression, as *Exit Zero* seems to be applicable to contexts outside US borders. In my opinion, the story told by Walley is far more than a study of a particular group (south-eastern Chicagoans)—it is about the human condition in a neoliberal economy.

As a nonnative English speaker I cannot fully understand what the author means when she says that standard English is not her first language (108). I obviously agree that for a privileged member of non-English speaking society (of at least middle-class origins) it would be easier to participate in academic culture than it would be for an American with a working-class background. In my view, however, this is because of doxa (another not fully exploited Bourdieusian term) rather than language itself. That is why I find this linguistic metaphor unhelpful or even offensive to some nonnative speakers.

To sum up, this book helps us feel what a working-class individual may feel. This story is worth telling, and the tour offered in Walley's book is worth taking—not only in the United States.

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