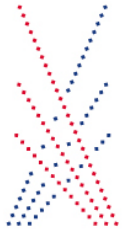

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Identity Formation and Resistance in Paternalism

(BAM 2019 Track 8: Identity)

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Abstract

Research on paternalism in organisations draws our attention to employee obedience through creating a sense of thankfulness and indebtedness to the employer. However, the dynamics of obedience in such systems and how the sense of employee thankfulness could constitute a mechanism of control is under-researched. Based on an in-depth case study of Volkswagen in Wolfsburg, Germany, my study contributes to extant literature by shedding light on the way that employees make sense of the paternalist employer and of themselves in this system. Five types of identities that employee discursively constituted under the paternalistic system of Volkswagen were identified. I examined how the interrelation between these discursively construed identities results in employees supressing their own and others' resistance and how they even encourage corporate paternalism as they see this to be a means through which they can care for the wellbeing of their community.

Keywords: Paternalism, identity and identity work, discourse, ethics of care, resistance, control

Word count (excluding references): 5945

Introduction

Studies of paternalism in organisations focuses on how the history of paternalism is representative of suppressing employee resistance through assimilating any objection to the paternalist employer with patricide (Zahavi, 1983). The minimisation of resistance in such systems has been largely analysed as 'crushing labour through kindness' (Bernstein, 1969) and the creation of the feeling of employee indebtedness to the paternalist employer (Pellegrini, Scandura, & Jayaraman, 2015). However, there have been notable exceptions in the studies of corporate paternalism that tried to develop a better understanding of the nuances and the dynamics within paternalistic system. These studies have analysed the workers' movements in paternalist systems, such as those in the Pullman city in 1894 (Sennett, 1980) and focused on the history of unionism in the context of corporate paternalism in the USA in early 20th century (Tone, 1997). Most recently, Fleming (2005) underlined in his study of a call centre in Australia that the feeling of being infantalised triggered resistance among the employees against the paternalist employer. My study builds on extant literature to examine the mechanisms of resistance and obedience to the paternalist employer through analysing how employees make sense of paternalist strategies and of the self within such systems. This research is an in-depth case study of corporate paternalism in a company city; Wolfsburg the home to the headquarters of Volkswagen, in which I draw on literature on paternalism, discursive identity work and the ethics of care to analyse the mechanism of control and the silencing of resistance in paternalism. I argue that living in a context where paternalist strategies are prevalent stimulates employee identity work which results in the constitution of particular identities. Five types of identities were identified: cynical, insignificant, appreciating, fearful and caring employee. The interrelation between these identities, my study shows, results in the minimisation of active resistance to the paternalist employer while at times employees encourage corporate paternalism as they discursively constitute this to be the means through which they can care for their community and fellow citizens.

Identity work and resistance in organisations

Identity refers 'the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves' (Brown, 2015, p. 23) to address the questions 'Who am I?' , 'How should I behave?' and thus, 'What is important for me?' (Alvesson et al., 2008; Cerulo, 1997; Scott et al., 1998). Many scholars of

identity research have used the concept of 'identity work' (Snow & Anderson, 1987) to analyse the various types of identities that individuals form in different social circumstances and encounters (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Ybema et al., 2009). Identity work refers to people's continuous engagement with 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626). These constructions or meanings are drawn from available discourses (Alvesson & Robertson, 2016). Based on Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, which marks the inseparability of power from knowledge (Foucault, 1977), researchers have understood the formation of the subject within organisations through the techniques of power that are interwoven with, and inseparable from knowledge, which is represented by a variety of organisational discursive practices (El-Sawad, Arnold, & Cohen, 2004; Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Ybema et al., 2009). However, the constitution of identities within dominant discourses does not undermine individuals' agency in this process. In forming their identities, individuals draw on some discourses and resist some others, as discourses are contradictory to and compete with each other (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994). It is within this framework that individuals' resistance to managerial discourses within organisations is understood. While some definitions of resistance in organisation refer to it as 'active' oppositions to the initiatives of other agents (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994), others, largely drawing on Foucault's works, have developed the meaning of resistance to include any *form of power*, practised by the subject that intends to 'challenge, disrupt or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses and power relations' (Collinson, 1994, p. 49). Resistance, as understood in these terms, is less obvious or action-oriented because it undermines the dominant discourses through the 'distancing of self' (Willmott, 1993, p. 538), but does not try to change the prevailing power relations (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Cynicism and scepticism are seen to fall in this category of resistance. However, they are seen as escape attempts that do not actively challenge the prevailing systems of domination (Collinson, 1992; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Fleming & Spicer, 2006; Willmott, 1993). Through cynicism, one tries to show she/he 'is "wise" to what is "really" going on' (Kunda, 2006, p. 178). Such forms of resistance are discussed to give the employees a 'false sense of autonomy' from the mechanisms of organisational control (Fleming & Spicer, 2006, p. 93), since, as Žižek argues, 'cynical distance is just one way to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*' (1989, p. 32).

Corporate paternalism and the minimisation of resistance

Corporate paternalism has been long the focus of various research for its effect on increasing employee commitment and loyalty on the one hand, and for decreasing organisational resistance on the other (Fleming, 2005; Wray, 1996). Studies of paternalism refer to this as engendering an environment of protection and nurturing of employees, with organisational relationships being based on care in such management systems. Paternalism is tightly bound in the literature to the infantilization of the workers. Different studies have argued that under paternalism employee identities were discursively moulded to resemble those of dependent children in need of a protecting father figure employer who should both reward and discipline them, just like what parents would do with their children (Bennett & Ishino, 1972; Joyce, 1980). As such, these strategies appear to be aimed at creating an 'ideological or discursive control' (Fleming, 2005, p. 1483) within organisations. Paternalist managers are understood to initiate communal services for their employees, believing that these will increase their satisfaction and happy employees are more productive along with being less strike-prone (Sennett, 1980; Tone, 1997; Varano, 1999). As a result, the strategies of protective tutelage in paternalism are analysed as being the medium for vesting control over employees, securing their consent and legitimising the hierarchy of power in such systems. That is, paternalism enables 'power relationships to become moral ones, so that not only would workers believe that their employers … rule over them, but they felt that they ought to do so' (Newby, 1977).

Paternalism is understood to control labour 'through the pretence of family imagery, by providing space for the manger to act as "caring" and "protective" head of the industrial "household"' (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993, p. 665). This protective approach is seen to have legitimised organisational hierarchy, 'giving it the appearance of "softening" inequality through fatherly and even communal intimacy' (Knights & McCabe, 2001, p. 267). Chou in her study of paternalism in Taiwanese textile industry showed how numerous welfare practices, such as providing means of transport, childcare facilities, factory dormitories mainly for young female employees, karaoke room, and health club in the factory resulted in the sense of obligation and gratitude to the employer among the workers which were ultimately characterised by 'quiescence, obedience, deference and low industrial conflict' (2002, p. 562). The interdependence of hierarchy and protection in paternalistic management approaches underscores the construction of paternalism within the discourse of control that 'draws on the familial metaphor of "the rule of the father" who is authoritative, benevolent, self-disciplined

and wise' (Collinson & Hearn, 1994, p. 13) and uses his power only for the interest of his employees and to practise his care over them.

Ethics of care: The cared-for and the will to care

Caring has shaped the central concept for the development of the 'ethics of care', which was established mainly by feminist scholars to criticise the assumptions of virtue perspectives of dominant moral theories, based on the perception of individuals as rational, self-sufficient and autonomous (Hancock, 2008; Held, 2006; Kittay & Feder, 2002; Noddings, 1984; Roberts, 2001). As such, the ethics of care works with a 'conception of persons as relational, rather than as the self-sufficient independent individuals' (Held, 2006, p. 13). The ethics of care sees people in caring relationships as acting for the self and for the other at the same time (Held, 2006). Hence, it proposes that the selves in a caring relationship are not 'the selves of contracting parties' (Kittay, 1999). In this sense, care is defined as 'everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible' (Tronto, 1993, p. 103). All caring involves attention, (mental) engrossment (Noddings, 1984) and devotion (Mayeroff, 1971). Caring, it is argued, involves 'stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's' (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). In a caring relationship, the one-caring acts in behalf of the cared-for. However, 'to act' must be understood in its broad sense, as it might involve doing nothing (Mayeroff, 1971).

Contrary to the 'ethics of justice' that has long been the dominant framework for the thinking of moral philosophers, assuming universal principles for moral actions, where morality should be sought for individuals who are independent and unrelated, commentators of the ethics of care argue that the one-caring does not act for humanity in general (Gabriel, 2008). Rather than a generalisable and universal other, the cared-for in a caring relationship is a 'particular other' (Held, 2006), a 'non-fungible concrete other' (Kittay, 1999) . As such, the ethics of care should be understood contextually (Tronto, 1993), to the extent that the situational conditions and the type of the relationship between the cared-for and the one-caring influences the frequency of the care given and the intensity of the caring relationship (Kittay, 2002; Noddings, 1984).

My research draws on the literature on the ethics of care, corporate paternalism, and on Foucauldian studies of resistance and the discursive formation of the subjects in organisations to analyse how and through which dynamics resistance is minimised in the paternalistic system of VW. Research on corporate paternalism has largely focused on how paternalistic

mechanisms survive by 'crushing labour through kindness' (Tone, 1997, p. 3). While the minimisation of employee resistance is understood to happen through creation of a sense of indebtedness to the paternalist employer (Pellegrini et al., 2015; Sennett, 1980; Wray, 1996), the agency of the employees in this process has remained understudied. This research contributes to the studies of paternalism in organisations by analysing the dynamics through which employees accept and even encourage paternalistic mechanisms as a means to care for their entire community. In doing so, I examine the various ways that employees in such systems make sense of the system, of themselves and of others in these systems.

Research Design

Context

The company town in this study is Wolfsburg, Germany, the home to the headquarters of Volkswagen (VW). Wolfsburg was founded in 1938 in order to accommodate the employees of VW (Riederer, 2013). In 2014 the population of Wolfsburg was 124,481, out of which 77,360 were aged between 18 and 65 (City of Wolfsburg, 2015). At that time 70.000 individuals were directly employed by VW in Wolfsburg (Volkswagen-Karriere, 2015). This number excludes those who work for the suppliers of VW, as other employers operating in the city. VW is not "only" the main employer in Wolfsburg, for whose sake the city was founded. Indeed, VW's presence in various aspects of life in Wolfsburg is far more visible than that. The life in Wolfsburg is in different ways dependent on VW. For example, VW's plant provides part of the electricity supply of the city, VW owns leisure centres and the major sport teams, runs many entertainment activities, and sponsors many others across Wolfsburg (Autostadt, 2013; VfL Wolfsburg Website, n.d.).

Data collection

From autumn 2014 until January 2015, I conducted 45 semi-structured interviews in Wolfsburg. Being a resident of Wolfsburg, I employed a snowball sampling method, starting from friends and acquaintances to cover a wide range of respondents so as to capture different voices and experiences within the chosen context (Miles & Huberman, 1984). All the interviewees were either born and grown up in Wolfsburg (N=16) or had moved to Wolfsburg for work purposes (N=29). There were 31 male and 14 female interviewees. 37 interviewees

were current employees at VW, 6 were ex-employees and 2 were subcontractors of VW. In addition, a range of documentation was collected, including Volkswagen's in-house newspaper, Wolfsburg's local newspapers, company press releases and other articles, audio and video news records relating to VW and Wolfsburg. I also consulted Volkswagen's website, the websites of VW's subsidiary companies based in Wolfsburg and the website of the city of Wolfsburg and reviewed multiple German Federal Acts regarding VW and its relationships with the unions and institutions, such as Lower Saxony's[1] local government to provide a deep contextual understanding of the case of the study.

Data analysis

Studies of language and identities assert the identity constructive role of language and discourse (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). These extant studies aim to attract attention to the active role of language in the constitution of one's own and others' identities (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004, p. 157), dismissing the claim that language is only representative of what is said. The direction of my analysis is influenced by the ontological understanding, that language and discourse 'construct and give order to reality' (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2011, p. 20). I used Willig's (2001) framework for adopting a method of discourse analysis which is most associated with Foucault's works (Potter, 1997), and is known as Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Closely reading and re-reading through my interview data and field notes, various initial codes were created, such as 'VW is a parent', 'strict hierarchy', 'second-class citizens', etc. Going back and forth between the data and the codes, new codes emerged, some were replaced with others and some were combined with each other. During this process, some analytical categories (Charmaz, 2000) were created and they were ultimately grouped under four major themes which I present next.

[1] Wolfsburg is located in the federal state of Lower Saxony.

VW as the parent

Interviewees unanimously believed that Wolfsburg owes its very existence to VW. For example, Lukas referred to historical events to opine that the very formation of Wolfsburg as a city was dependent on the immigration of people to the area to work for VW:

> *Back then in the 50s and 60s, many came here from outside of Wolfsburg. For example, many Italians moved here for work. Before the 70s there was nothing here, only four or five villages and that's it. Wolfsburg is such a young city.*

Not only did employees considered Wolfsburg as being dependent on VW, some went on to attribute the existence of themselves to the company:

> *If VW was not here, I wouldn't have existed. Because my mother's dad only came here for work (at VW). The same for the father's dad. They lived about a hundred kilometres away from here. They moved to here only because of VW. Because VW offered a job here (Torben).*

The discursive construction of this dependence presupposed a parental relationship between Wolfsburg and VW: '*It's a parent. [It] has a parental role'*. Wolfsburg was understood to need the parenting of VW:

> *Wolfsburg needs Volkswagen. Volkswagen is like a parent who feeds his child* (Ariane).

Constructing VW in talk as feeding Wolfsburg arguably aims to underline the significance of its paternal role for the employees and for the entire city. This role is referred to as having shaped employees' ability to make a living, raise a family and live the life they live:

> *Through VW I got the possibility of going abroad, to get to know my [future] wife and start a family. I'm not sure if such a thing would have ever happened to me without going abroad [via the company]. So, in fact, I have reached a life goal through VW (Oscar).*

While the discursive construction of VW as the founding father of the city and the parent of its citizens who '*provides life*' in Wolfsburg was dominant in talks, the fatherly figure of the paternalist employer was mirrored in two distinctly separate elements: control and care.

Paternalist control: The cynical and insignificant employee

Organisational hierarchy appeared to be the most disliked feature of VW paternalistic system among my interviewees. Interviewees expressed their abhorrence to the hierarchical system of control in various ways. As I asked Michael what he disliked about VW, he said:

> *What I do not like at Volkswagen? I really do not like the hierarchy. It makes me sick ... Sometimes I have this feeling that this hierarchy mentality in Volkswagen results in people seeing themselves as being above others and so, they don't behave humanely anymore ... Sometimes I am not treated like a colleague but like a little slave. 'Do this! Get this done!' like that. And I do not like this*.

Despite the strong employee cynicism, the mechanism of control seemed to have perpetuated in VW over years. VW's managerial system came into focus in the outbreak of the so-called emissions scandal[2]. For some months after the event, many critics wrote about the top-down managerial culture at VW, speculating that this was the reason for the scandal occurring in such a huge dimension ("Viele VW-Führungskräfte [Many VW Executives]", 2016; "Volkswagen Executives Describe Authoritarian Culture", 2015). Amid many discussions around the direct or indirect responsibilities of Winterkorn, the former CEO, a local newspaper, *WAZ* published several articles, praising him:

> *He ...wanted to make every important decision personally. Engineers and designers often got into a sweat when the boss was around from before the start of a new model's production up until its final inspection ("'Volkswagen War Mein Leben" [Volkswagen Was My Life]", 2015).*

The reference to the strict hierarchy of power at VW, top down decision making and direct controlling of employees' conduct, as emerged in this comment, can be traced back to several press articles. Control in paternalistic systems is understood to be retained through '*protecting* subordinates from the responsibility of decision making' (Knights & McCabe, 2001:622, Italic added). Throughout the interviews, employees were shaped in talk as the sheer doers of managers' decisions, made for them from the above:

> *The hierarchy is very present. There are a few people who decide everything…They make everything more or less* (Mathis)

[2] In 2015, VW admitted that it had been cheating the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the USA through manipulating its cars' performance under test conditions to meet the standards of the EPA.

While the interviewees appeared to be cynical to this patronising form of management, the systematic removal of decision-making responsibilities seemed to have undermined the significance of their job. Oscar, a controller said:

> *Our job, if we do it or not, has no influence … It affects the number of cars produced or sold, but not whether VW would exist or not … the VW plant would work fantastically well even without us. Maybe after some years the costs would get higher. Perhaps. You never know. But the cars will be produced with no change.*

Here, VW is constituted as an independent entity that works '*fantastically well*' even without its employees, just like a parent in a parent-child relationship, where the latter needs the former for survival and not the other way around. Such a discursive construction of the relationship between VW and its employees, in turn produces a discursively made replaceable and insignificant employee, as Alex recognised:

> *It is quite big here. So many people. […] one is only a small part in a whole. You know it very clearly that you are replaceable. When you fall, the next one comes… You know you are only a small worm or a little cog in a wheel.*

The hierarchical system appeared to have produced subjects who discursively form themselves as powerless and insignificant in face of the paternalist corporation, being disciplined towards docilely acting in line with the managerial strategies. As a result, active resistance was reduced to cynical comments which did not seem to intend to destruct the existing relations of power (Collinson, 1994), making the strict hierarchical system the collective experience of all for some decades.

Paternalist care: The appreciating and fearful employee

VW's policies of paternalistic tutelage and largesse was referred to very often in the interviews. The dominant employer was understood to spend substantial financial resources on the well-being of its employees. The accounts of the company's care, embodied in high salaries, job security, flexible work time, etc. were mentioned frequently by the interviewees:

> *VW takes an extreme care of your personal needs, of your personality. For example, you have flexible work time, […] and you can also plan your holidays freely... You earn well for what you do. Your salary increases automatically after a period of time. These are social benefits. VW also offers high job security. So, it gives you a feeling of having a very secure job* (Timothy).

The care that was given to the employees by the paternalist employer was said to exist beyond the boundaries of the plant:

> *Here (in the city) they (VW) offer me something for entertainment. It is not only about having my salary from VW and that's it. They take care that I feel good, that I have leisure activities, that I can also do something outside of work* (Merle).

As with Merle's comment, I was often faced with expressions of thankfulness towards VW as my interviewees believed that the firm had created an environment of care in Wolfsburg through creating many possibilities for leisure activities, so they and their families could benefit from:

> *When I go to the water shows*[3] *[in Autostadt] with my kids, I find it nice that we have such things in Wolfsburg. I tell myself: I can actually be proud of myself and be happy that Wolfsburg has been developed in such a way. And I realise that VW has had a significant role in that, for which I am thankful (Dirk).*

The sense of appreciation to VW, due to its welfare policies in Wolfsburg was mentioned often by stressing '*VW does a lot, so employees live happily here*'. The feeling of thankfulness fabricated as a consequence of the company's paternalistic care had resulted in many employees having an intolerance to any kind of criticism or grievance towards VW:

> *It is not a big city … and those who were born here, are sort of fixed to the city. They also do not have a good idea about other places … they cannot see the bigger picture and do not see that … Wolfsburg is doing really well and that everyone is prosperous here. Some people complain anyway and this I cannot understand. I cannot understand when someone works here at VW and says I'm not happy, or I don't have enough money or others have more than me (Lenard).*

Distancing himself from those who complain about the company, he defines any dissent as unjust and a result of inability to see '*the bigger picture*'. At the same time, he shapes himself as an appreciating employee by underlining his lack of understanding for his ungrateful colleagues who are unable to understand the generosity of their paternalist employer.

Constituting the self as appreciating was often accompanied by the expression of fear and anxiety about the possibility of weakening the dominant employer. Referring to the various possibilities for leisure activities in Wolfsburg, Artur said:

[3] During the summer Autostadt organises a programme of summer celebrations including a show that features a choreography combining water, pyrotechnics, images, light and music. This so called water show is claimed to be among the largest of its kind in the world (Autostadt, n.d.).

> *Without Volkswagen Wolfsburg would not exist … With the taxes that Volkswagen is paying, Volkswagen can offer all that [in Wolfsburg]. We realize this when taxes that Volkswagen is paying to the city decreases. The politicians here are checking for ways, how they can reduce their expenses, so, if Volkswagen would have a problem, [we don't become] like Detroit. I think the linkage between the city and the company is that strong like GM and Detroit.*

The juxtaposition of Wolfsburg and Detroit[4] demonstrates an existential worry that warns Wolfsburgers of the same destiny as Detroit, which is now far from its golden times as a consequence of the weakening or departure of its industry. This anxiety has produced fearful subjects who feel apprehensive about the possibility of declining of their benevolent parent caused by any criticism of or resistance to it. This existential worry was evident in Michael's comment as he assimilated resistance to VW to biting the hands of his breadwinner:

> *I live here, I work here, I have my friends here, I have relatives here, I should talk positively about my breadwinner… There is a saying which says: 'do not bite the hand that feeds you'. It applies to VW. Yes, I do not bite the hand but sometimes I can be recalcitrant and say 'I do not like this!' or maybe leave… but yeah, I try not to bite the hand.*

Michael's entire life, family and friends are shaped in talk to be dependent on VW's tutelage. The strong reliance for life in Wolfsburg on VW and the anxiety ignited in the citizens of Wolfsburg merely by the imagination of its collapse, has led to the formation of fearful employees, who define any kind of resistance as ultimately threatening to themselves since it is discursively shaped to equate with biting the hand which feeds them.

Extending the paternal care: The caring employee

While some referred to VW as '*providing life*' to Wolfsburg and even the entire region, some other referred to their family members and friends who did not work at VW and expressed resentment for the concentration of care of the paternalist employer on its own employees and its lack of care to the non-employees. This was evident, my interviewees said, in the various opportunities and benefits that VW employees have in Wolfsburg and others are made deprived

[4] Detroit in the US was similar to Wolfsburg in terms of having great dependency on huge corporations; the so called Big Three of the automobile industry in the US (Ford, Chrysler, GM). Unlike Wolfsburg, which is one of the wealthiest cities in Germany, with a low unemployment rate, Detroit has had high unemployment rate and poverty ever since its dominant industry was hit by the economic crisis of 1970s, resulting in the departure of Big Three as well as the vast automation of those parts still remaining in the area in 70s and 80s. Detroit could never again return to its heyday after those events.

of. Barbara referred to many discounts and offers that VW employees can enjoy in shops upon demonstrating their VW ID card:

> *My family has never worked for VW. Just my father. None of my siblings have worked there. None of my friends work there. But what did we learn by this? We learned that here is a two-class society… everywhere VW is better.*

Similarly, Ariane mentioned the hardship that a part of her community goes through because of (not belonging to) VW. She referred to the imbalance between the demand and the supply in the housing market due to the increase in the number of VW employees who move to Wolfsburg and said:

> *Now the flat rents have increased and for some, it's hard to afford it. There are people who don't work at VW and for them it is hard to afford a flat because they don't have the salary of VW.*

The care for the other was also expressed in my interviewees' concern about how the subcontractors were treated at VW. The latter are those who worked in the plant but had their contract with a service provider of VW. The 'othering' of the subcontractors, despite their working very closely with the VW employees were often criticised:

> *Something that I don't like at VW … is the way we work with subcontractors (based at VW). There is a strong separation. For example, they are not allowed to sit together with us… or attend our meetings because we talk about many internal stuff… I wish we could make it more normal and equal for them* (Tillman).

Showing his care for how his colleagues feel due to such treatments, he highlighted his ability of stepping into their 'frame of reference' (Noddings, 1984) and said '*I understand the feeling. I've been myself in such a position in another company*'. Referring to the cases of subcontractors, who were in many cases the close colleagues or friends of my interviewees, the latter expressed their criticism about the different treatment of the subcontractors by phrases, such as '*it is not humane*', '*it is against their dignity*' and '*they also need to belong*'. The expression of care for and concern about their colleagues, friends and fellow citizens served to shape a caring self which was underlined by their criticism of the paternalist employer for not expanding its paternalist practices to everyone in the community.

Discussion and conclusion

Volkswagen was shaped in talk to play a paternal role not only for its employees, but for the entire city of Wolfsburg. Employee identity work was conducted within a context where the discourse of VW paternalism was dominant. I identified five types of identities as a result of this identity work: cynical, insignificant, appreciating, fearful and caring employee. These identities were interrelated and reinforced each other. Their formation within the prevailing discourse of paternalism resulted in the minimisation of active employee resistance and even the encouragement of paternalist mechanism.

Paternalism is understood in extant literature to 'facilitate the development and legitimacy of [organisational] hierarchy' (Knights & McCabe, 2001, p. 627). However, the organisational hierarchy at VW did not seem to be legitimised, as my interviewees expressed strong cynicism towards it by referring to it as nurturing a 'master-slave like relationship'. In shaping their identities through talk, they undermined the hierarchical system of VW through 'distancing of self' (Willmott, 1993, p. 538) which was marked by showing that they are critical about the status quo and do not simply accept it. Cynicism is understood to create a paralleled form of resistance which 'significantly limit[s] worker's otherwise radical-sounding oppositional practices' (Collinson, 1994, p. 33). As a result, rather than undermining prevailing power relations through active resistance, cynical employees reproduced the hierarchical system of power over decades by simply doing what the system expected them to do (Žižek, 1989), which fed into the creation of another type of identity, i.e. the insignificant employee. Working within a strict hierarchical system, where decision making authority was removed from the employees in the lower level of hierarchy, resulted in employees construing themselves as having no significance for the company. They produced in talk, their own docility in their encounter with the paternalist employer, who would do well even if they do not work or do not exist. However, just like a father in a family who only uses its authority to protect his family members (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993), VW was understood to protect its employees, not letting the 'insignificant' and 'unimportant' ones fall.

VW's protection and care comprised the main discourse within which appreciating identities were constructed. Through expressing their thankfulness and their criticism of and marking their differentiation with the non-appreciating 'other' (Brown, 2015; Ybema et al., 2009), my interviewees tried to construct their own identity in talk as being appreciating. The literature on paternalism asserts that employee resistance is minimised in such systems through the

creation of the feeling of indebtedness to the paternalist employer (Bernstein, 1969; Pellegrini et al., 2015). However, the feeling of thankfulness to VW did not seem to automatically result in the minimisation of resistance as employees, my interviewees said, took VW's paternalistic care in Wolfsburg as granted. Instead, employees silenced their own and their fellow employees' resistance due to a sense of existential worry about the total collapse of their city and life if VW shrinks. The appreciating employee seemed to be at the same time fearful of losing all those for which she/he was thankful. The fearful employee was construed within a discourse that connected all aspects of life in Wolfsburg to the economic prosperity of VW and hence, predicted a misery for Wolfsburg and its citizens if VW was weakened. Therefore, employees disciplined themselves towards conformity with the organisation and abhorred grievances made by others, since any attempt to undermine the organisational policies would be self-destructive. The fearful employee, however, did not seem to be only concerned about her/himself, her/his own life or job. In all expressions of fear, the city and the entire life in Wolfsburg were addressed.

The expression of concern and care for others was the central point around which my interviewees shaped their identity as caring. The caring employee was constructed in talk through three elements: concern for the non-VW employees, criticism of the paternalist employer for its allegedly lack of care to the non-VW employees in Wolfsburg, and expressing expectations from the paternalist employer to extend the care so it involves everyone in the city, regardless of their employment relationship with VW. The care that is given by the caring employee is not a universal one. It is only focused on a particular and concrete 'other' (Held, 2006; Kittay, 1999), i.e. the citizens of Wolfsburg and the colleagues or friends of the caring employee who were not directly employed at VW. As a result, her/his care will also serve her/his own interest and the wellbeing of her/his community (Tronto, 1993).

The care 'given' by the caring employee did not seem to involve any action. Their care was narrowed down to demanding the extension of the status quo, which is, the extension of the paternalist care to the 'other'. Being focused merely on 'something must be done' by the paternalist employer, the care was transformed into 'abstract problem solving' (Noddings, 1984, p. 25). As the paternalist employer was articulated in talk to be the body who can 'solve the problem of' caring for everyone in the city, the care of the caring employee merely reproduced the existing relations of power by ignoring any possibility of resisting the power mechanisms which had created the very 'othering' of the 'other' they cared for. As such, in

their care they supported and encouraged the paternalistic strategies in an illusionary hope that the company will have a devotion to and care for all.

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