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## *Dono del sangue.*

# The Research by Fabio Dei on the Cultural Conditions of Blood Donation in Italy

### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the course and the results of research on blood donation conducted between 2006 and 2007 in Italy among immigrant communities (Romanian and Senegalese) in Tuscany, conducted by the cultural anthropologist Fabio Dei and his team. The studies reveal that practices related to blood donation are accompanied by a pluralism of mutually incommensurable discourses stemming from a variety of contexts: biomedicine, religious belief, and conceptualizations of health and disease in traditional cultures. Their identification and description may prove to pose a major question in studies on blood donation conducted both in Europe and worldwide.

**KEY WORDS:** blood donation, medicalization, gift in culture, immigrant communities

### STRESZCZENIE

*“Dono del sangue.” O badaniach Fabia Dei nad kulturowymi uwarunkowaniami krwiodawstwa we Włoszech*

W artykule przedstawiam przebieg i omawiam rezultaty badań dotyczących krwiodawstwa we Włoszech, które przeprowadził w latach

2006-2007 we wspólnotach imigranckich (rumuńskich i senegalskich) w Toskanii antropolog kultury Fabio Dei i jego zespół. Dowiodły one, że wielość praktyk związanych z krwiodawstwem towarzyszy pluralizm niewspółmiernych względem siebie dyskursów wywodzących się z różnych kontekstów: biomedycyny, wierzeń religijnych, konceptualizacji zdrowia i choroby w kulturach tradycyjnych. Ich rozpoznanie i opis to obecnie ważny problem w badaniach nad krwiodawstwem w Europie i na świecie.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: krwiodawstwo, medykalizacja, dar w kulturze, wspólnoty imigranckie

Fabio Dei is one of the most famous contemporary Italian cultural anthropologists, actively undertaking the study of such phenomena, which not only require good recognition of cultural reality (including field research), but also deep and broad reflection. He deals not only with the history of anthropology, ethnography and folklore studies, cultural anthropology of literature (in a theoretical approach similar to that proposed by Ewa Kosowska), research into the cultural conditions of violence (including genocide), but also the transformations of popular and mass culture. And while his studies are conducted mainly in Italy, he closely follows the world trends and currents in reflection on culture.

Medical occupies a prominent place in anthropology Fabio Dei's deliberations, but so does the multiplicity of practices included in the sphere of non-conventional medicine sometimes observable today—not only in Italy—and regarded as a sign of the increasingly conscious attempts at demedicalization. He also challenges the concepts offered by the so-called *Critical Medical Anthropology*, not only from the point of view of his practice as a cultural anthropologist, fully conscious of the cultural weight of the determinants of health and disease, but also from the position of a critical historian of sciences referred to in Italian as *scienze demotnoantropologiche*. I consider his discussion as important and inspiring, as they relate very often to a local dimension of phenomena, which are interpreted in relation to the globally understood process of medicalization.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I focus primarily on the presentation of the course and results of Dei

1 Cf. F. Dei, *Cultura popolare in Italia. Da Gramsci all'Unesco*, Bologna 2018 (in particular, the chapter: *Antropologia medica e pluralismo delle cure*, pp. 18-210). Idem, *Medicine non convenzionali: una prospettiva antropologica*, in: *Le parole dell'antropologia medica. Piccolo dizionario*, ed. D. Cozzi, Perugia 2012, pp. 157-180. Idem, *Spettri del biopotere*, in: *Storie di un altro mondo. Percorsi di etnografia delle migrazioni*, eds. F. Bachis, A.M. Pusceddu, Roma 2013, pp. 45-65.

and his team’s research on the cultural determinants of blood donorship in Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, not all the problems mentioned by Dei and the researchers associated with him are present in Poland to the same extent and with the same intensity as in England, France or Italy.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean, however, that reflection on the different ways to manifest for *homo medicus* can be omitted completely. On the contrary, in view of the multitude of medical and paramedical practices and the accompanying heteroglossy of discourses, as well as the growing variety of ways of producing and distributing “medical knowledge,” their recognition and description are becoming an increasingly urgent task for culture researchers.

## AVIS and Italian blood donorship

Italy occupies a special place in the system of European blood donorship, which is stressed by many Italian and other researchers—because here, unlike in Northern Europe, volunteering and blood donor associations play a dominant role.<sup>4</sup> They deal primarily with promoting blood donation at the regional level, although the scope of their activity is national. The oldest (and currently the largest) such organization is AVIS (Associazione Volontari Italiani di Sangue) founded in 1927 in Milan and initially centered on small branches created in factories and other workplaces, which soon “became the basis of a tight territorial network,” extended until today. Currently, the regional branches of AVIS, operating in many cities, not only

organize promotional and advertising campaigns, training courses for donors and managers, studies and research, but above all cooperate with institutions of the National Sanitary Service (*Servizio Sanitario Nazionale*) in building and creating the architecture of the blood donation system (*l’architettura del sistema-sangue*).<sup>5</sup>

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2 Cf. “*Il sangue degli altri*”. *Culture della donazione tra gli immigranti stranieri in Italia*, ed. F. Dei, Firenze 2007.

3 This is also partly connected with the emergence of an area of research called *refugee health*, or *medicina delle migrazioni* in Italian.

4 Cf. K. Healy, *Embedded altruism. Blood collection regimes and the European Union’s donor population*, “*American Journal of Sociology*,” 6/2000, pp. 1633-1567.

5 M. Aria, F. Dei, *Il segreto dell’altruismo. Il sistema-sangue e le associazioni di volontariato in Italia*, “*Jura Gentium*,” 1/2016, pp. 53-56. All translations from Italian come from me—M.R.

According to the latest reports, AVIS covers approx. 80% of the estimated demand for blood in Italy, which is a phenomenon on a European scale.<sup>6</sup>

During one of the conferences devoted to the issue of gift-giving, representatives of the association asked Fabio Dei to consult on blood donation among immigrants, and later to conduct an ethnographic survey (*sondaggio etnografico*).<sup>7</sup> Over the last few decades, AVIS has tried to promote (with different results) blood donation among immigrants, especially as they were usually in an age the most suitable to donate blood, and their numbers in the country have been steadily increasing. AVIS was also interested in integrating blood donations into the integration processes, focusing campaigns, among others, on “Different lands, same blood” (“Terre diverse, stesso sangue”). However, it is not only about referring, at the most elementary level, to human unity, but also about going beyond the universal conceptualizations of human community, focusing on highlighting the values associated with urban living (in its local complexity), which are a key element in the development of blood donation.<sup>8</sup>

### “The gift of blood” among Romanian and Senegalese immigrants

Fabio Dei and his team (which comprised of Matteo Aria, Martina Cavazzini, Chiara Di Clemente, Sonia di Giorgio and Giovanni Luca Mancini) in 2006-2007 led a fieldwork project about blood donation in two immigrant communities in Tuscany: a Senegalese one in Pisa and a Romanian one in Florence. The function of the national coordinator of the research was then performed by Mariano Pavanello, cultural anthropologist (an expert in African cultures of the sub-Saharan area, also dealing with

6 AVIS Nazionale, <https://www.avis.it/chi-siamo/identita-e-storia/> As part of Centro Nazionale Sangue Istituto Superiore di Sanità also: the Italian Red Cross CRI (Croce Rossa Italiana), FIDAS (Federazione Italiana Associazioni Donatori di Sangue), and FRATRES (Donatori di Sangue), <https://www.centronazionale sangue.it/node/6> operate (as of 1 July 2019). Here also the foundation acts and legal regulations are available.

7 The research received support as a scientifically significant ministerial project important for the development of the country. It has been approved by the Ministry of Science (Ministero della Ricerca e dell'Università) in 2005 and incorporated in the module “Sangue, cittadinanza, solidarietà” (“Blood, citizenship, solidarity”). Funds granted under the so-called PRIN (Programma di Ricerca di Interesse Nazionale—Relevant Researches of National Interest), <https://www.researchitaly.it/en/research-projects-of-national-interest/> (access: 01.07.2019).

8 M. Aria, F. Dei, *Il segreto dell'altruismo*, op. cit., p. 57. Cf. F. Dei, *Introduzione. Il dono del sangue tra realtà biomedica, contesti culturali e sistemi di cittadinanza*, in: *Il dono del sangue. Per un'antropologia dell'altruismo*, eds. F. Dei, M. Aria, G.L. Mancini, Pisa 2008, pp. 9-40.

the transformation of the gift theory).<sup>9</sup> Also interesting for anthropologists were the materials collected by Anna Maria Fantauzzi on blood donation among Moroccan communities in Italy<sup>10</sup> used for comparative analysis. In addition to a good recognition of the mechanisms and patterns of behavior associated with blood donation in one’s own country, it was also necessary to recognize, as far as possible, what shapes different than expected attitudes of immigrants towards blood donation. The divergence of attitudes and behaviors has its origin not only in cultural diversity, in culturally conditioned perceptions of body and blood, community, solidarity and assistance to the other, in culturally shaped and sustained blood-related imaginaries and conceptualizations of health and illness. It also stems from the position immigrants take in a new community: especially if the needs of their own communities are sometimes marginalized.<sup>11</sup> The biographical interviews provided information on migration routes, forms of assistance known from the original place of residence and culturally appropriate ways of understanding human solidarity (as well as knowledge of the forms of assistance and manifestations of solidarity already encountered by the interviewees in Italy), in addition to attitudes towards medical services and the knowledge they provide. Particular attention was paid to any prior experience with the donation of blood.

### *Dirt and blood?*<sup>12</sup> Blood donorship among Romanian immigrants

In the case of a group of Romanians living in Florence, twelve extensive biographical interviews were conducted at the AVIS headquarters and at the premises of the *Cultura progresso e fratellanza nel mondo Italia—Romania* association (Culture, Development and Fraternity in the World: Italy—Romania). The interviewees were adult men and women who obtained the age of majority before 1989 and who had been resident in Italy for at least several years. These immigrants’ accounts

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9 Cf. M. Pavanello, *Le società acquisitive e i fondamenti razionali dello scambio*, Milano 1993. Idem, *Il dono del sangue*, in: “*Il sangue degli altri*”, op. cit., pp. 100-105.

10 Full results published in the monograph: A. Fantauzzi, *Sangue migrante. Pratiche e culture dell’emodonzione tra Marocco e l’Italia*, Milano 2012.

11 The problems of acculturation will not be the subject of my discussion in this article, nor will be any description of the social fabric of native cultures of Italian immigrants.

12 Subtitle of Małgorzata Rejmer’s book, *Bukareszt. Kurz i krew*, Wołowiec 2013.

were dominated by dissatisfaction, anger and bitterness about their current living conditions, far from the expectations with which they set out on their journey to Italy. Also, their relationships with the immigrant community seemed very loose—speaking of a Romanian community would be a vast exaggeration here. “Romanian” identity, however one understands it, ... seemed to be rather a burden, probably due to the clash with extremely negative media messages and circulating stereotypes stigmatizing Romanians.<sup>13</sup>

In these biographical narratives, “an important role was played by the memory of life in the Ceausescu era, presented as a struggle for existence in a definitely hostile world, in which everyone follows their own particular interests and no one can be trusted.”<sup>14</sup> At the time, people felt that sincerity, loyalty and solidarity were becoming increasingly looser. The informants mentioned blood donations in Romania carried out in military units, schools, and factories. The benefits of blood donation could be a day or two off work. Among people coming from the countryside a belief that “bloodletting” had a positive effect on the body, and promoted its cleansing was common.<sup>15</sup>

Dei notes that such a point of view somehow undermines the meanings that Italian associations would like to see in blood donation: “This is no longer a sacrifice for others, but first of all, a practice that is rewarding for us.”<sup>16</sup> It therefore turns potential donors into self-donors. Similar conclusions were drawn a few years earlier by Lucia Bocaccin and Giancarlo Tamanza, who, among other things, studied the activities of the third sector in Italy and the existing voluntary structures there, describing the activities of AVIS in detail.<sup>17</sup> They mentioned that the motivation for Romanian immigrants to donate blood was rather “self-referential” and “ego-syntonic,” related to the positive valorization of the activity, which was to bring measurable benefits to the individuals performing it.

This evaluation, as Dei stresses, was deeply rooted in the folk beliefs passed down from generation to generation and the convictions about blood shared within the Romanian community (*rappresentazioni e credenze folk riguardo di sangue*). During the interviews, the Romanians explained that as a result of excessive consumption of heavy foods in winter

13 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue: modelli culturali e forme di cittadinanza*, “La Ricerca Folklorica,” 58/2018, p. 20.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 21.

15 S. Di Giorgio, G.L. Mancini, *Immigranti romeni, donatori esangui. Simbolismo del sangue e valori di solidarietà presso la comunità romena di Firenze*, in: “*Il sangue degli altri*”, op. cit., pp. 52-56.

16 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue*, op. cit., p. 21.

17 L. Bocaccin, G. Tamanza, *Volontariato e donazione di sangue. Il caso dell'AVIS*, Roma 1997.

and relatively less physical activity, the quality and quantity of blood produced “rises” and “swells;” the changes over time; it is periodic, because the blood “renews itself” periodically. When giving blood, Romanians were often guided by the conviction that such “bloodletting” had health benefits, above all—in a literal and metaphorical sense—it promoted the regeneration of the body and its purification, because it has not only biological but also “spiritual” aspects. It frees one from “negative things,” and also from widely understood “impurities.” “The contradiction that lies in giving ‘unclean’ blood to others was apparently not seen [by interviewees],” as some of them claimed that “this blood has a good effect on others, even if one’s own body needs to free itself from it.”<sup>18</sup> One of the people asked during the interview about this “impurity” of the donated blood received an explanation of the problem in medical procedures: the blood is filtered and purified<sup>19</sup> (using advanced and proven technologies). This is what was believed to ensure the safety of recipients. The interviews revealed—on the level of expression—a tangle of notions known from folk therapeutic practices with anthropological-medical categories (such as “balance,” “quality,” “humor”, “excess,” “cold,” “heat,” known since the times of Hippocrates and Galen’s humoral pathology) and elements of contemporary discourse promoting blood donation.

Romanians, using slightly different names of blood groups from those used in the medical classification, also pointed out their relationship with certain character traits and even personality types, and sometimes mentioned the relationships between blood groups and zodiac signs. The interviews often repeated stories about “crazy people” (*i matti*) and “geniuses” (or people on the margins of a given community) who were distinguished from others by their blood type.<sup>20</sup> Only one person among the respondents had donated blood earlier for a fee (in Romania and Germany).

References to human solidarity, to solidarity as an essential value in the life of communities in urban structures, and even to civil rights and duties in the messages promoting blood donation proved to be at most a rhetoric detached from reality (*un’astratta retorica*) in relation to Romanian communities, completely out of touch with the world they knew on a daily basis (whether in Romania or as immigrant, especially as the Italians were perceived as inhospitable and clearly hostile to them). “These forms of discourse,” Dei stresses, “were unclear to them,” and their own biographies were proof of the incompatibility of their slogans with life experience.<sup>21</sup>

18 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue*, op. cit., p. 21.

19 S. Di Giorgio, G.L. Mancini, *Immigranti romeni*, op. cit., p. 63.

20 Ibidem, pp. 57-60.

21 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue*, op. cit., p. 21.

## *Teranga* and the gift of blood among the Senegalese community in Pisa

Interviews conducted among Senegalese who came to Tuscany brought different data, both in terms of the degree of integration into the Italian community and the motives for donating blood. Two researchers, Martina Cavazzini and Chiara Di Clemente not just carried out biographical interviews, but also accompanied the everyday life of the Senegalese community for a few months. The immigrants were mostly men who had previous experience of many migrations and moves to different countries. Many of them had an intention to return to their homeland in a distant future. In the community studied, “the context of the receiving culture (and internal relations within the local migrant community, which universalized the context of Muslim religion and culture, as well as the context of the traditional culture from which they come” were intertwined. This multitude of diverse contexts “also manifested itself in the area of medical knowledge and medical practices.”<sup>22</sup>

Pisan Senegalese, well acquainted with the institutional health care system functioning there, used its services willingly, with a sense of security and trust in biomedical techniques. However, their system of ideas about healing also included “elements of Islamic medicine and the practice of traditional healers (even in the form of remote telephone consultations), creating a configuration of an extremely interesting system of medical pluralism.”<sup>23</sup> Cavazzini and Di Clemente also devoted a lot of attention to the subject-matter of gift-giving strongly exposed by their interviewees. They admitted that

Senegal has, through colonization, partly internalized European gift-giving practices ... even in the course of conversations in the native language, the French terms *don* and *cadeau* were used, which emerged when we discussed gifts (*doni*) and presents (*regali*) and it was partly their perception thereof as cultural elements of foreign origin.<sup>24</sup>

22 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue*, op. cit., p. 21. Dei referred to the work of Bruno Riccio, who even regarded Senegalese immigrants in Italy as representatives of a transnational culture (*transnazionale*). Cf. B. Riccio, *Spazi transnazionali: esperienze senegalesi*, “Afriche e Orienti,” 3-4/2000, pp. 62-66.

23 F. Dei, *Il dono del sangue*, op. cit., p. 21.

24 M. Cavazzini, C. Di Clemente, *Conversando i doni, sangue e solidarietà con immigranti senegalesi a Pisa*, in: “*Il sangue degli altri*”, op. cit., p. 27.



The European concept of gift-giving was not accepted uncritically. On the contrary, they would refer to their traditional institution called<sup>25</sup> *Teranga*<sup>26</sup> in the Wolof language. This term is nowadays translated into foreign languages (French, English) as hospitality, but from an emic point of view—as Di Clemente and Mancini’s interviews show—it does not fully correspond to the meanings that *hospitalité* and *hospitality* carry in their original linguistic settings.

In the stories of Senegalese immigrants, *teranga* appears as a basic and inalienable form of disinterested and anonymous (at least in the ideal formula) help. One of its forms is the practice called the “night gift”—*dono notturno*—which consists in leaving material goods in front of the homes of those most in need in such a way as not to be noticed. No direct contact is made, nor is reciprocity required to the specific donor thanks to the anonymity. This does not mean, however, that *teranga* does not involve the principle of reciprocity. Quite the opposite. Simply,

reciprocity does not lie in the fact that one is obliged to give back to the person from whom they received something. One gives back to someone who is in a difficult situation. ... when the individual, who had previously received help achieves a decent economic status, they will rather prefer to exploit what they have, helping others rather than bestowing on those who had helped them. Therefore, one of our interlocutors spoke about the absolute imperative of giving [*imperativo assoluto del dare*].<sup>27</sup>

It resembles the “ether of obligation” or “obligatory freedom” that Mauss mentioned. Senegalese do not speak—like the Maori—about “the spirit of the given, *hau*” but they know that the exchange process should not be interrupted. To maintain it, you do not need to return the same thing to the same person, you just need to give—even to someone else—an “equivalent

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25 The Wolof language, which belongs to the family of Nigerian-Congo languages, is currently spoken not only by the Wolof ethnic group who live in West Africa, mainly in Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania, but also by other inhabitants of the area, where it is gaining the status of a vehicular language facilitating communication between ethnically diverse populations. Some of the interlocutors of Chiara Di Clemente and Martina Cavazzini, who were also fluent in Italian, explained that the openness of the Wolof people and their love for trade contributed to the spread of the language in this area. The official language (and thus applicable also in school education), however, remained French. Cf. classification of languages available on the Ethnologue. Languages of the World platform at <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/wol> (access: 01.06.2019).

26 Apart from the Wolofs, the *teranga* institution is also known to other ethnic groups living in Senegal and Gambia: the Serer, the Toucouleur, the Jola, thus going beyond the native belief systems (animism) and the religions (Islam and Christianity).

27 M. Cavazzini, C. Di Clemente, *Conversando i doni, sangue e solidarietà*, op. cit., p. 33.

that will replace it.”<sup>28</sup> The act of giving does not have to be regular, but requires a willingness to help (a person who turns away from the needy is called “bad”—*cattivo* and this has a strong emotional, but above all, moral overtones).<sup>29</sup>

The Senegalese attitude towards active blood donation was very much influenced by the “unwavering relationship” (*saldi legami*) with their country of origin, the sharing of ethical and religious values and the spirit of solidarity (*spirito di solidarietà*),<sup>30</sup> which is still alive in the exchange institution of *teranga*. Also, in the new conditions, there was a strong sense of belonging to a religious groups and prayer communities (some of them engaged in the promotion of blood donation), but above all, there was a clear and proudly articulated awareness of creating a permanent group, all the stronger that it was based on a community of origin:

Senegalese origin was perceived as a strong and positive element of identification. As a result, native culture was seen as the object of extremely positive perceptions; it also sometimes became the main object of more or less nostalgic memories and recollections which, in a somewhat stereotypical way, were contrasted with features of Italian or European culture such as individualism or consumerism.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, we can speak here of a situation that is completely different from that observed in the group of Romanian immigrants in Florence, who, as a result of centuries of completely different experiences, rather held to the “everyone for himself” (*“ognugno per sé”*) principle than tried to rebuild community ties based on cooperation and trust. Among the Senegalese interviewees, it is worth noting that there were also people who had been in Italy for a long time and had cooperated with many associations, such as *Africa insieme* (Africa together) or *Batik*, and even represented them. Among them were also some who obtained a university degree. According to the researchers, Senegalese immigrants not only successfully updated important elements of their cultural heritage under new conditions, but also achieved a high degree of integration into the host community. The ready on-call model (*il modello della “chiamata”*), which was clear among

28 M. Mauss, *Sociologia i antropologia*, introduction by C. Lévi-Strauss, transl. by M. Król, K. Pomian and J. Szacki, Warszawa 2001, pp. 180-182.

29 “More than one of our interlocutors used this adjective to describe people who turned away from direct requests for blood donations,” the researchers add. M. Cavazzini, C. Di Clemente, *Conversando i doni, sangue e solidarietà*, op. cit., p. 36, footnote 10.

30 F. Dei, *Dono, corpo, cittadinanza. Implicazioni culturali della donazione del sangue presso comunità immigranti stranieri in Toscana*, in: “*Il sangue degli altri*”, op. cit., p. 18.

31 F. Dei, *Dono, corpo*, op. cit., p. 18.

the Senegalese, who most often donated blood in response to the appeals of religious leaders or the demands made by hospitals and schools<sup>32</sup> even before their arrival in Italy, also functioned among the Moroccans living in Turin.<sup>33</sup>

It turned out that the official message of AVIS was not fully understood and supported by both Romanian and Senegalese immigrants currently living in Italy.<sup>34</sup> The first believed donating blood as a “pro-health” activity, not necessarily connected with the idea of sharing with others, with a “gift of self,” fraternity and solidarity, while the latter placed the greatest emphasis laid on the care of the relationships between people, creating interdependent networks of local relations: from the family to the appropriate religious communities.

## Theories of gift and social pluralism discourses

In global studies of blood donation, an important role is played by two widely discussed works: *The Gift Relationship. From Human Blood to Social Policy*<sup>35</sup> by Richard Titmuss (1970) and *L'esprit du don* by Jacques T. Godbout (1992).<sup>36</sup> The first, considered a classic work in social policy, contains a comparative analysis of the blood donation systems in the United States and the United Kingdom operating in the first few decades after the World War II. Titmuss pointed to the “marketization” of the blood donation system (including the creation of blood banks) in the United States, where blood was donated for a fee, and juxtaposed it with the British system supported by disinterested donation rather than commercial transactions. He opposed European solutions, in which he saw examples of “modern altruism” to the American “possessive egoism of the marketplace,” preferring a desire to possess and love for oneself over helping others. He even

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32 Interestingly, Senegalese immigrants were convinced that thanks to their commitment to helping others, and therefore also in the shares of blood, their full availability and openness to giving—especially in the case of requests for help—blood should not be scarce. Dei notes that this was in contradiction with the official data, which did not correspond to the image created within the group. *Ibidem*, p. 20.

33 In Piedmont, unlike in Tuscany, there was much more interest in games and festivals and blood donation events organized during them (they were also aimed at strengthening integration between immigrants and the local population). The Senegalese approached these events with much greater distance, preferring individual donorship. However, indicating the reasons for these differences would require further in-depth analysis of the materials collected.

34 F. Dei, *Dono, corpo*, op. cit., p. 23.

35 R.M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship. From Human Blood to Social Policy*, London 1970.

36 J.T. Godbout, *L'esprit du don*, Paris 1992.

defined his book as “a study of the role of altruism in modern societies.”<sup>37</sup> One of its most pronounced manifestations was to be the “selfless gift of blood.”<sup>38</sup> Dei notes that

Titmuss resigns from the Maussian triad: “give, receive and reciprocate” for the idea of altruism ... In his opinion, ... individuals are not born as altruists, but learn to become them to be thanks to the institutions that support the moral sentiments respecting the needs of others.<sup>39</sup>

He opposes social values related to cooperation and interoperability the commercialization of medical practice, which leads “to the erosion of ethical relations, and subordinates medical aid to pure profit.”<sup>40</sup> This was also in line with his concept of the state (*Social Welfare, Welfare State* as a state of prosperity and social security) and the typology of European social policy models proposed several years later.<sup>41</sup>

Titmuss’ monograph met with polemics on many occasions—some of the critical voices were included in its 1997 reissue.<sup>42</sup> Titmuss opponents also included Jacques Godbout associated with *La Revue du Mouvement Anti-utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales*. He categorically rejected the idea that the state should promote altruistic behavior, including—selfless blood donation. On the contrary, he felt that the state “tears apart gift networks by favoring individualistic and technocratic behavior.”<sup>43</sup> Unlike the British sociologist he stressed that “blood donation is not working *through* the state, but *in spite of* its interventions that destroy the chain of giving, receiving and reciprocity.” What sustains the existence of disinterested blood donation is a “spirit of giving” (*l’esprit du don*), manifesting itself in voluntary action of the donor, who does not expect any compensation. It manifests itself, however, only at the beginning: in the gesture of a gift-giver. Godbout argues that the presence of intermediaries in the case of a state system of blood donorship distorts the true nature of gift-giving. The

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37 R.M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship*, op. cit., p. 141.

38 He also presented a typology of blood donors, ordering them into those who donate blood in order to receive payment to those located at the end of the eight-point scale who do the same, but are guided by the best interests of the community. Ibidem, pp. 128-141.

39 M. Aria, F. Dei, *Il segreto dell’altruismo*, op. cit., p. 59.

40 Ibidem.

41 Cf. R.M. Titmuss, *Social Policy. An Introduction*, New York 1974.

42 Cf. R.M. Titmuss, *The Gift Relationship. From Human Blood to Social Policy*, eds. A. Oakley, J. Ashton, New York 1997.

43 I was using the Italian version: J.T. Godbout, *Lo spirito del dono*. In collaborazione con A. Caillé, trad. A. Salsano, Torino 2002, p. 78.

beneficiary, therefore, receives no blood as a “gift,” but “as a medical treatment, which he has the right to as a citizen.”<sup>44</sup>

Nowadays, however, in the conditions of global medicalization, the question arises whether it is possible to go beyond the opposition thus posed: blood as a “true gift” and blood as a “neutralized,” “depersonalized” product. What is more, several decades after Titmuss and Godbout, the conditions of its transmission have changed significantly. This was due to a number of various factors, among which Dei lists the spread of AIDS as the most important one.<sup>45</sup> The threat of this disease has modified and tightened safety requirements in practices related to any contact with blood, i.e. also in institutionally organized blood donation, improved planning of blood collection, introduction of “indirect donation,” which is now made possible by new methods of blood filtration, obtaining blood-derivatives, production of blood-based drugs on a wider scale and the spread of other types of donation applicable to other parts of the body<sup>46</sup> (e.g. organs, stem cells, semen and even human milk<sup>47</sup>).

## The multiplicity of practices, pluralism of discourses

Research carried out by Fabio Dei and his team in the immigrant communities in Tuscany helped draw attention to the fact that going beyond the gift-market opposition (*oltre la dicotomia dono-mercato*) has become not only desirable, but even necessary. Here, as the author argues,

the donation system shows the complicated relationship between the systems of gift-giving, the market and the state, and the specific biomedical technologies. This practice, in which altruism is somehow forced to connect to various forms of mediation, specialized (professional) and academic expertise ... The interface (*interfaccia*) between the state and society, between the abstract subjectivity in the legal system and the concrete one, manifested in local ties, is one comprising of the moments of our social

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44 M. Aria, F. Dei, *Il segreto dell'atruismo*, op. cit., p. 62.

45 Titmuss draw the attention to the risk of a hepatitis infection from a transfusion. Idem, *The Gift Relationship*, op. cit., pp. 70-73. In 1980-1990, many people were infected by hepatitis and also HIV in this way. Cf. A.-M. Casteret, *L’Affaire du sang*, Paris 1992.

46 The 2018 edition of Titmuss’ work was expanded with discussion of these issues.

47 Fabio Dei gave a lecture titled *Donar il corpo. Sangue, altruismo e bene comune* on this subject at the tenth edition of the event in Pistoia. Dialoghi sull’uomo, 26 May 2012. Idem, *Quel che non si può vendere: L’economia morale della donazione del sangue*, “Snodi pubblici e privati nella storia contemporanea”, 9-10/2012, pp. 70-83. Cf. also K. Healy, *Lasts Bests Gifts. Altruism and the Market for Human Blood and Organs*, Chicago 2006.

life, in which the dimensions (*dimensioni*) are almost always separated from each other, immersed in incomparable languages and moral concepts (*immerse in linguaggi e concezioni morali incommensurabili*). What is happening today requires relational thinking, strongly rooted in a particular territory, in the local community, a reflection that knows not only the language of the gift, but is also able to translate it into other forms.<sup>48</sup>

This translation would necessarily have to have a contextual dimension, i.e. it would have to relate to the forms of realization of the gift—especially the gift of blood—at a specific time and place, taking into account historical-cultural conditions and current variables. Blood donation research is now carried out globally by doctors, sociologists and cultural researchers—humanists, always taking into account the cultural context.<sup>49</sup> It is obvious that the multiplicity of cultural practices corresponds to the multiplicity of the most disproportionate (and sometimes competing) discourses. The complexity of cultural reality and the pluralism of discourses—not always used to describe it, but rather to interpret it, does not exempt us from the obligation to recognize them and from attempts at multi-level translation.

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48 M. Aria, F. Dei, *Il segreto dell'atruismo*, op. cit., pp. 62-63. Also cf. *Culture del dono*, eds. M. Aria, F. Dei, Roma 2008; M. Aria, *Doni di Mauss. Percorsi di antropologia economica*, Roma 2016.

49 Cf. e.g.: N. Wittock, L. Hustings, P. Bracke, V. Buffel, *Who donates? Cross-country and periodical variation in blood donor demographics in Europe between 1994 and 2014*, "Translation" 11(57)/2017, pp. 2619-2628; J.K. Makin, K.L. Francis, M.J. Polonsky, A.M.N. Renzaho, *Interventions to Increase Blood Donation among Ethnic/Racial Minorities: A Systematic Review*, "Journal of Environmental and Public Health," 2019, pp. 1-14. Currently I am also collecting information on the forms of blood donation in Poland.

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