

INTERVIEW WITH ARLIE RUSSELL HOCHSCHILD BY MADALENA D'OLIVEIRA-MARTINS

Madalena d'Oliveira-Martins

Institute for Culture and Society, Pamplona, Spain

Two years ago, I had the chance to do a research stay at Berkeley, and meet with sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild for the first time. I was conducting research for my thesis and wanted to know more about Hochschild's work and academic life; she graciously agreed to participate in an in-depth interview, which was conducted in Berkeley during February 2014 and updated and revised throughout January and May 2016. An abbreviated version was published in the International Sociological Association newsletter *Global Dialogue* in September 2014. Today, it seems of utmost importance to publish the complete interview with a complementary update. Hochschild is one of the most distinguished sociologists of our time. Through her work on the sociology of emotions, the American sociologist explores the most urgent problems and challenges our societies face. Zooming in on subjects such as feminism, work-family balance, gender roles and the stalled revolutions surrounding them, feeling rules, emotion management and political emotions, Hochschild shows how her sociological eye on the issues of our time is reinforced by a joyful spirit and deep faith in the importance and effectiveness of social action.

Madalena d'Oliveira-Martins (MOM) — In your books *The Managed Heart* and *The Outsourced Self* you mention a crucial change in your life when you were twelve years old: when your parents joined the U.S. Foreign Service, you and your family had to move from the U.S. to Tel Aviv. Given the kind of job that your parents were doing and the challenges that result from moving to a different culture, how did that influence your social awareness?

Arlie Russell Hochschild (ARH) — I became an observer, a watcher, by leaving my "ordinary life." I was sent to a Tabeetha School, Scottish Mission School in Jaffa, a poor town outside Tel Aviv, and my fellow students were mostly Jewish, with a few Christian Palestinians, from many countries, fresh from the diaspora, most from modest and poor families. I was twelve and was very American. I wore Oxford shoes, curled-up hair, wore crinoline under-skirts. I wore different clothing every day; my classmates changed theirs weekly. I was about a head taller than all the girls, and most of the boys. The playground and gossip language was Hebrew, and I didn't speak a word of it. I didn't know the rules of Machanayim, a playground game like dodge ball. The bread for my sandwich inside my lunchbox was sliced thinner and was wrapped in wax paper; my classmates' sandwich slices were thick and often wrapped in newspaper. The schooldays extended from 8:00 to 4:00 with a dreary mid-day hour and a half on a hot, dusty playground for lunch. The Scottish Presbyterian mission teachers were strict. Class stood when they entered the room, "Good morning, Miss Minty" or "Good morning, Miss Logan."

We copied our lessons from the blackboard as there were no school books. The classroom was dingy, one light bulb hanging.

So my first thought was “Oh please god, no.” After I returned from my first day, my mother asked me “so, how was school?” I remember going into a speechless weep. She answered in soothing voice but with an alarming message, “If it feels this bad three weeks from now dear, we’ll send you back to the U.S. to live with Gramma and Grampa.” Even though I loved my grandparents, two years was a long time and Boston was a long way from Tel Aviv. So it was sink or swim. All my knowledge was small and useless. I seemed weird to myself. It was terrifying and challenging. It forced me to develop something I was later to treasure: a third eye. I think all sociologists — those who take it seriously — have some version of my story. That’s the journey, and the marvel.

MOM — Besides that first impact that you’ve just described of arriving at a completely different country, with completely different customs, did you have any “wake up call” experience about the local community’s social reality?

ARH — In 1952, I remember my father driving our big Chevrolet from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and crossing over from the modern “new city” on the Israeli side into the “old city” on the Jordan side. Looking out the window from the back seat I felt I had passed from the 20th century to the 12th, from modernity to the middle ages, from affluence to extreme poverty. My father parked our car in a lot outside the *kasbah* — an ancient walled bazaar. I remember opening the car door and seeing a row of child beggars, one crippled boy paddling himself on a wooden platform, another blind, another nearly hairless, maybe a half dozen more. I was aghast. As I was taking this in, a middle-aged parking lot attendant, himself crippled, approached me (the custom was to pay someone to guard the car against break-ins or tire theft).

The man spoke English, and said, “From your license plates, I guess your family is American and coming from Israel, yes? We’re very poor here. We need help. Why isn’t your country helping us too?” As we headed back later that evening, I remember asking, “Daddy, why aren’t we doing anything to help the children there?” The conversation with the parking lot attendant probably lasted a minute and a half. But it’s stuck with me all my life.

MOM — In your book *The Commercialization of Intimate Life* you refer to the relation you had with your parents as a child and how you looked at them both — as a child and also as a “future sociologist”. Were they your first “case study”?

ARH — Yes. For me, and maybe for many of us, our parents and our families are our first “case study”.

I’m reminded of a marvelous sculpture called “The Family” by Louise Bourgeois. It’s a big iron cage filled with chairs you can’t sit in. One chair is hanging high, unreachable on the wall; another is very small, set by a large throne. One chair has spikes in the seat; others are set in a tangle. Where does one “sit” in a family? Even as a child, one has to study this question carefully. I grew up in a loving family, with

very devoted parents who were happily married. My older brother, Paul, was a very gifted psychoanalyst, a very special person, whom we've now lost to cancer. He inherited the family "throne." So my challenge was to find my own chair. I loved talking things over with Paul, and learned from him the power of depth psychoanalysis. But it also seemed myopic, given the global screen to which I'd been exposed. So I wondered how I might combine this deep view into the soul of the individual with my third eye on the larger world.

MOM — Was it through your parent's life that you first became aware of the differences between gender roles, and the way in which they might affect some behaviors or expectations in the public and private life?

ARH — Yes. I remember at the dinner table, my father — by then the family was stationed in Ghana — was considering the hugely important question of whether the United States should give millions of dollars to the Volta River project — probably ill conceived, but at the time it seemed a good way for an underdeveloped country to get electricity. That was the conversation at one end of the luncheon table. But at the other end, my mother was talking about the maid's toothache, how to get her to a dentist. Both very privileged but I ended up thinking, "My dad is dealing with important matters, my mother's is trivial. At that time I felt, "work that influences many people is important; work that influences a few is trivial." Many early feminists heroized their fathers and denigrated their mothers, I later learned, and was later to thoroughly reconsider that judgment, as the focus of much of my work — on care — reveals. We all have toothaches. And it's a real art to put home and work together with equal respect for the work of each. You could say, the *The Second Shift*, is my effort to understand all it takes to do that.

MOM — The 1960s were the growth years of the second-wave of feminism. Was there a point in your life, before the beginning of that second-wave of feminism, when you realized that a "feminine eye" — as you stated in your essay "The sociology of feeling and emotions" — was crucial for sociological inquiry?

ARH — I was thinking about the role of women way before of the feminist movement, because of the worlds of my mother and father seemed so unequal, and as a girl I was meant to head for the smaller world. I think, initially I — like others — looked to the male model. I thought, "Okay, that's the way for us all to go. Let's put on a suit, train for a profession, participate in the public realm, be important as "importance" was defined. That was my first model. It took some working out, reflection, emotional management, some resolution, to say, "You know what, that's not the answer." The answer is not for women ape men, but simply to adopt some features of the male experience. And for men to learn from women; to more deeply value care, attention, compassion, and the capacity to stay emotionally tuned-in, the time-honored specialties of women. We need more of such undervalued qualities in the world, not less — as applied to social life, politics, the environment. So we face two questions. First, should women try to be equal to men? In some ways, sure.

And I think we've made progress. But the second is: "Equal to what? Equal within what system of values?" Do we want more women waging foolish wars, polluting rivers, ignoring the poor just because there are public careers in doing so? I don't think so. We need to fundamentally alter what we consider good, right and honorable. So both are important "Equal." And "To what?"

MOM — Can you explain that a bit more?

ARH — American feminism of the 1960s and 1970s held up two flags: one flag stood for the struggle for equality. So if a male general had three stars on his uniform, a female general should have the same. Whether equality was defined as similarity or equivalence in importance, those holding the first flag had no critique of the status quo. Those holding the second flag did; they asked: "Equal in what? Equal to what?" The first group says: "We should have an equal number of male and female generals in the American army." The second group asks: "Generals in what army? Fighting what war? Why?" Again, the first group calls for many top managers in Dow Chemical Company, which is polluting the planet, or Monsanto that's now producing a special kind of genetically modified seeds that will put local farmers out of business and use questionable chemistry (add to seeds pesticides which ward off seed diseases, but may alter the human immune system). We need both to keep an eye on both gender equity, and the basic purposes and effects of human activity.

MOM — During your career at U.C. Berkeley you have witnessed and experienced the rise of women in academia. What would you say are the differences between the struggles of women during those years, and those that women face today and that young girls will face in the future? Are we still living a "stalled revolution"?

ARH — Yes. In many ways, life is harder for young women now. Not that we didn't face obstacles then. When I became an assistant professor of sociology at Berkeley in 1971 there had not been a ladder-rank — by which I mean assistant, associate or full professor — in the department at Berkeley since 1913. I was the first, along with Gertrude Jaeger, who had been an occasional lecturer and the wife of a professor. But no woman in recent memory had been a ladder-rank professor. Even worse — for me — nobody was working half time so as to share a serious career with family. That was unheard of, and that was complicated. And that was what I wanted to do, and did do.

MOM — How did you manage to share both?

ARH — I got a half time ladder-rank position. At Berkeley, such a position did not exist before I was given one. A group of feminists asked to meet with a university dean. "A half time appointment in order to permit a young parent to balance work and family? No. I'm sorry. It's not possible." The women didn't give up. So the

dean, consulting with more powerful administrators said “Okay, we’ll allow a half time ladder-rank position, but only for *women*.” But the feminist group said, “No, men will need this too. That’s the whole idea.” Finally, the Dean said, “Yes.”

MOM — Was that idea well received?

ARH — Some feminists at the time also felt that I was *compromising* the whole idea of a career, not innovating some new concept of it. “Work full time? (which those in academia know means time and a half). Why bother to make time for children? The whole idea is to be a professor.” Well, that was dicey because I both wanted to join the faculty as it was currently constituted and be a good parent too, and the two didn’t go together well. I wrote an essay about just that dilemma — called “Inside the clockwork of male careers” (I updated and included it in *Commercialization of Intimate Life*). The essay makes the point that the entire career system was itself designed for traditional men with traditional wives. And that challenging idea raises the question, do women want to work their way up through the traditional career system, or do we want to gear the career system to men and women who share the “second shift” at home? I breastfed our first son behind a closed door in my office; and some disapproving feminists criticized me for de-professionalizing myself. I worried I might be doing that myself. At the time, there was not the slightest sign of children in the visible lives of my male colleagues. I was the odd ball.

Still, I took courage from the feminist movement which was spreading, at the time, throughout the Berkeley campus and across campuses nation-wide. So I was an odd ball with some anonymous support. It is this rumbling sense of a national movement for change which is missing for young women today.

A group of us started the Sociology Women’s Caucus in the Sociology Department, which met in my apartment bi-weekly. We sat around on the floor, drank coffee and engaged in heady conversation about what sociology would look like if women were conceptually included. I edited a special issue in 1969 — *Transaction* magazine — that was made up of articles by members of the Caucus. We gave talks at the American Sociological Association. It was a great group. And I also took courage from Adam, my husband, who quietly encouraged me.

MOM — Are people more accepting of the condition of being a professional and a parent at the same time?

ARH — Oh yes. Our cultural push coincided with the rising necessity for middle class wives and mothers to work, as the earning power of male wages dropped. We didn’t want women to be forced to work, but if women wanted or had to work, we were fighting for fair wages, reasonable and flexible hours, state-of-the-art childcare, and male partners who shared the second shift. And in the meantime, many other things changed. In the early 1970’s, a female student couldn’t play an instrument in the “Cal Band.” Women couldn’t eat in the Men’s Faculty Club. In 1970, only 4% of full professors were women. So in obvious ways, life was harder for women then.

But today life is harder for women and feminist men in *other* ways. There isn't a shared moral *zeitgeist* as I mentioned. And the Academy is a more insecure place within a society for both men and women, and the number of year-to-year lectureships is rising. You may have a job today but do you have it tomorrow? This trend is frightening and fear makes us cautious: it makes it harder to step out and try to change the world.

I look back and realize how lucky I was that there were jobs, they were reserved for men but they were there. So, on those counts, it's harder in 2016 than it was in 1970.

MOM — Are the problems that women face today more difficult to identify? Are they subtler?

ARH — I'll put it differently; I would say the values have changed. In other words, the value of gender equity and of a man being nurturing; those have entered American culture. That's the huge plus. But the realities with which people try to enact those values, that's gotten harder, and perhaps the problems are more nameless and subtle. It's not easier.

MOM — Your books are "user-friendly" in the sense that you combine theoretical depth with an accessible discourse — for people inside and outside academia. In your book *So How's the Family? and Other Essays* you remembered a time when you were moved by two forces of your personality "one geared to 'doing' and other to 'figuring things out.'"¹ Do you believe you were able to balance these two forces in your work? How did you combine them?

ARH — A word about "accessibility." A student once told me, "Oh, you write so simply, I could write like that." I had to laugh, because the hardest thing in the world is to make writing seem simple. Actually, the goal is not to write simply but to write clearly. In my view, the best writing aims to be crystal clear about a complicated subject, and the worst writing is windy and obscure in the explanation of something simple. I try to write the way I talk; I read my final draft aloud to myself. If words sound like cotton in my mouth, out they go.

As for "doing" versus "thinking," we all engage in both, and adjust the balance between them as we go along. I admire both friends who feel most alive as pure activists, and those who feel that as pretty much pure thinkers. What I have tried to do is take as my *topics* problems I think we need to do something about, and then to *analyze* the factors bearing on those problems.

MOM — Do you think that Academia needs more people that try to combine those two things?

1 Arlie Russell Hochschild, *So How's the Family? and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p.1.

ARH — Yes; that's the movement initiated by Michael Burawoy for "public sociology." Both as President of the American Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association, he's promoted that idea — and I think it's great. You can be a public sociologist providing quantitative data about poverty, or by comparing the effectiveness of this or that public policy, or by doing a deep think on long-term trends. Doing public sociology doesn't mean you become any less intellectual or balanced, or thoughtful; it means you are intellectual and thoughtful about matters of great practical importance.

MOM — Is Academia more bureaucratized? Does that bureaucratization make it difficult to reach to the "real world"?

ARH — Yes. Academia can have a lot in common with the church. Its language, can take on the function of distancing the scholar from the real world, and to join the priestly caste. The more separated from the practical world, as Thorsten Veblen pointed out, the higher one imagines one's social status. Does obscure language have a status function? I think so; that's why I try hard to never use it.

MOM — Could you briefly describe your research methodology? How do you set about investigating a new idea? Is there something indispensable in that process?

ARH — I start with something bothering me; a little mental itch. Usually it turns out to be a conflict or contradiction of some sort. Two things can't be true at the same time, or two things conflict, creating a problem. That's probably the mental recipe I unconsciously bring to the act of deciding what to work on. And in the choice of a conflict, or contradiction, one's values play a role. I feel it's good to be able to visualize a "better" world. That very image of a better world, leads us to ask, "why is the world we've got so much more conflicted than the one you'd like to see?"

Once I have my topic, I start talking to people informally (pre-test interviews we call them). Then I get up a research design: which determines the location, number and characteristics of the people I want to talk to. What's the purpose of my sample? Mostly I do what's called "exploratory hypothesis-generating research." As I explain in the Methodological Appendix of *Strangers in Their Own Land*, my most recent book, sometimes you want to discover how common something is (i.e., get a representative sample of it). Other times you want to discover exactly what that "it" is.

MOM — Was representativeness important for *The Second Shift* or for *The Managed Heart*?

ARH — For *The Second Shift* I wanted a representative sample, and I began by doing a survey of every 13th name drawn from the personnel roster of a Fortune 500 company. For *The Managed Heart*, I wanted to discover what emotional labor was, how one did it so I developed a purposive sample of people who specialized in emotional labor — flight attendants on one side, bill collectors on the other.

So I work out a design. Then I interview and observe. I learn the most from observation. That, to me, becomes tremendously exciting, and I come home reflecting on what surprised me. Then I think about why I was surprised, i.e. what I had previously supposed to be true. I think about people I've interviewed, carry them around with me. I try to understand what about a person's social and emotional experiences shaped them. So here is where my brother comes in; I really want to cure this person too, but in a sociological realm.

MOM — Do you take into account the fact that you have your own expectations before you do fieldwork?

ARH — Always. I think we take our subjectivity into the field, there's no avoiding it. And the only way to get closer to objectivity is to admit your subjectivity, number one. But simply admitting it is not enough. So, number two, we need to work on it; to manage our bias emotionally as well as cognitively. I try to exercise the discipline of asking myself, "If I didn't believe what I do believe, how would the world look?"

My approach greatly differs from positivism which says: "There's no subjectivity at all." As long as human beings are invited, we are expressing or "coping with" subjectivity. The selection of the problem; the perception of the problem; inferences about the problem: all of these call on our feeling; we can't get rid of ourselves. We are our own instruments of knowing.

We see what we see through feeling. But then, (a) we need to ask whether we're getting in the way of what we're trying to see, (b) compare it with what our respondent sees, (c) compare it with what others, with different feelings see. I often speak of turning my "alarm system off" — suspending judgment. I can fail to do that, of course, but it's what I try to do when I'm in the field.

MOM — Do you believe sociology today still wants to be recognized as a "real science"? Or does the question now belong to the history of the field?

ARH — Yes, it still does. But the real question is: what's a real science?

MOM — In your book *The Outsourced Self* you looked at emotions in personal and market life, and pointed that we use "emotional metaphors" to establish boundaries between these two spheres. Recently, you delivered the Ulysses Medal lecture and talked about your new book on emotions and politics, *Strangers in Their Own Land. Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. And addressing the question of how emotions underlie political beliefs, you mentioned an allegorical story, a "feel-as-if" story. Can you briefly explain the general idea behind that story? Are "emotional metaphors" crucial to our political beliefs and feelings?

ARH — For the book, I interviewed 60 people — 40 of them Tea Party enthusiasts — all white, and mostly blue-collar workers living mainly in southwest Louisiana, a center of the petro-chemical industry in America. I came to them wondering about a paradox — similar to that Thomas Frank brought to Kansas in his book, *What's the*

Matter with ansas? On one hand, people had a need, and on the other, they resisted government help in meeting it. In southwest Louisiana, people were faced with high pollution and rates of cancer. But they also resisted the idea of government regulation of polluting industries. I wondered why.

It was this which led me to the “feels-as-if” story — what I call their deep story. Such a story begins with a metaphor — standing in line for a well-deserved reward. Such an image locates a self, defines relationships to others, and shapes what emotions arise. My method was to listen to a lot of people for a long time, then distill from it a story that fit what they’d told me, and then try the story on them, and get their reactions. People said such things as “I live your metaphor” or “you read my mind.”

MOM — So what is the deep story?

ARH — The deep story is this. A line of people are waiting in a line extending up a hill, patiently to receive a reward they feel they strongly deserve — the American Dream. The line is unmoving, but they remain hopeful, expectant. Then they notice others cutting in ahead of them — affirmative-action-supported blacks, women, immigrants, refugees, public sector workers (many of whom are female and/or black). Even the oil-drenched brown pelican, the endangered Louisiana state bird, seems in the story to take precedence over them. They are disturbed, anxious, angry, indignant.

Then, they notice that President Barack Obama seems to be aiding the line-cutters, and blame shifts to him, for he too seems to have profited from some ill-defined institutional preference (How did the son of a single mother pay for his Columbia and Harvard education? They wondered). At this moment in this story, people feel suspicious, abandoned, even mournful. The federal government unfairly favors all the groups getting ahead of them; the game is rigged. So, they distrust the federal government and virtually all it does —including the “good” things, like regulating polluting industries.

The narrative has invited them to feel bypassed and betrayed but there is one final moment — of humiliation. Someone ahead of them in line turns back and says to the patient line-waiter, “You’re ignorant poor white trash.” Such an insult translates into the message, “You deserve to be in back of the line.”

MOM — How does the researcher find the deep story useful?

ARH — In three ways. First, it helps the ethnographer and her or his readers to empathize with the respondent. It helps everyone climb over an “empathy wall” as I call it. It moves us from Position A (“Oh you guys are fools to feel so suspicious of government and so mad at innocent refugees or underprivileged blacks.”) to Position B (“Oh, if you see the world *that* way, then I may not agree with you but I get why you feel as you do”). It permits progressives and liberals to feel toward those on the extreme right what I call “empathic disagreement.”

Second, the deep story also permits respondents to feel that you, the

sociologist, are offering them more than detached curiosity; you really get how they feel, and so this permits a closer bond from which your understanding of them can grow.

Note too that the deep story releases the subjects of the story from facts. Blacks, immigrants, women, pelicans did not, as a general truth, *really* cut ahead of those who wait in line. The government did not *really* cease to serve their interests. But to those I came to know, that *is what feels true*. At the same time, they felt American culture was telling them that they were feeling the wrong way. Tea Party advocates call this “PC” — politically correct truths. In essence, the deep story invites the respondent to feel in the presence of conservative feeling rules (you are marginalized, the government is doing it to you). And it allows the respondent to detach him or herself from the idea that they feel the “wrong” thing.

Finally, you can put together two lines of analysis. One explains how a person’s circumstances induce them to believe the deep story. The second explains the larger circumstances to which you believe the person is also exposed — here you include many factors which the deep story blocks out. The deep story of Louisiana Tea Party enthusiasts, blocks out the fact that while the oil and petrochemical industry spokesmen talk about “jobs, jobs, jobs,” in fact these industries provide at most 15 percent of the jobs in the area (fishing and tourism account for other jobs, and these sectors are actually hurt by oil). Most such companies are foreign owned, highly automated, rely heavily on imported labor (a global elite of engineers, Filipino pipe-fitters, for example) and pay few taxes to Louisiana.

In the end, we can understand how people come to vote against their interests — not out of ignorance, or false consciousness but out of attention to interests progressives don’t notice and empathize with. Most of those I’ve interviewed embrace the 2016 Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

MOM — In this book you focus on a really interesting topic, specifically now that the political environment in the U.S. is volatile. What drove you to study the American Right in the first place?

ARH — I’d very much wanted to see a federal government program offering paid parental leave for working parents, and subsidized state-of-the-art childcare — this from my study of the second shift. But the very idea of it was disappearing from public discussion in America. It was as if I stepped outside and felt a strong wind blowing. I had lived through the 1960s — the movement against the Vietnam War, for ethnic diversity, women’s rights, better schools and housing for the poor. Now I felt a strong wind blowing against all these causes and not just in the U.S. We see a rise of the right in many different forms in France, Britain, Poland, Hungary, Russia, even in Sweden and Norway. So if I didn’t want to see my moral causes blow away, I thought I’d better try to understand the deeper sources of opposition to them.

MOM — Looking back, how would you assess your contribution to the field?

ARH — I hope to have introduced a new perspective on social life, one that actually has as its core, an attunement to feeling. We can apply it to every realm of sociology — even the most apparently “rational” — say, the sociology of market life or science, realms in which the feeling rules are not to feel much of anything at all. This perspective potentially opens up marvelous vistas into social life. I’m pleased with this contribution.

MOM — Having in mind topics such as emotions, gender, capitalism, globalization, community, and family, if you could pick three positive aspects or trends of social reality in the U.S. from which other countries could benefit what would those be?

ARH — Three positive aspects of American life? First, openness to and appreciation for creativity, going out on a limb, forgiveness for mistakes. Here, we’re just 40 minutes from Silicon Valley where computer nerds get together to cook up new ideas: I love that. Other countries come here for that, there’s a value on that.

Then, although I’ve been a big critic of sexism in America, there is almost no other country in which I’d rather be a woman. Then third, on the whole we are culturally rich in social trust — we’re open to strangers, or long have been. I hope we don’t lose that.

But we’re a very difficult society to live in if you’re poor, because, given our individualism, people tend to assume each person is responsible for their fate. The more unequal we become, the crazier, and crueler, that idea is. In fact, by itself, free market individualism — with its rejection of the idea of government help for the poor — increases inequality and then places blame on the poor reflecting the results of it. We can do so much better than that.

Madalena d’Oliveira-Martins. Research fellow, Institute for Culture and Society,
University of Navarre, 31009, Pamplona, Spain.
E-mail: madalenaom@gmail.com

