CONFERENCE REPORTS

Purposeful Agency and Governance: A Bridgeable Gap
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Convened by Giuliana B. Prato, Italo Pardo and Michael D. Fischer at the University of Kent, U.K., this International Interdisciplinary Conference was a coordinated effort to stimulate well-integrated analyses of key issues in today's increasingly urbanized world. The meeting was organized by the International Urban Symposium–IUS, the Commission on Urban Anthropology (CUA) and the HRAF Advanced Research Centres EU (hrafARC) in association with the Centre for Social Anthropology and Computing (CSAC) and the School of Anthropology and Conservation (SAC) of the University of Kent.

Ethnographers have demonstrated the moral and cultural complexity of *strong continuous interaction* between the material and the non-material in individual action. And they have studied the impact that misplaced or instrumentally selective moralities in policy and in the production of the law have on the legitimacy of governance. Mainstream anthropological analysis has shown how selective moralities underlying rules and regulations that are biased towards those in power or are badly defined or impossible to apply encourage exclusion and widen the gap between rulers and the ruled across the world. Parallel to this, anthropological research over the past decade has focused on the properties of the 'digital society' with respect to how people experience external changes, organize themselves and enact new change.

With specific reference to urban settings and the interactions between cities and regions, the meeting was convened in the belief that ethnographic research has a unique contribution to make to our capacity to understand important processes of agency (individual and collective) and the ways in which agency is capable of influencing the system and encouraging good governance, intended as governance that promotes and makes the best of the local resources and styles of citizenship. The meeting brought together high-quality, ethnographically-varied papers by a strong international field of distinguished senior, mid-careers and younger scholars (including doctoral candidates) that spoke to each other and stimulated reflection on the interplay between personal morality and civic responsibility, and between value and action. Participants used well the ample time allocated to discuss how governance is evolving and the many ways in which people deal with obstacles.

Enlivened by engaged debate, the ten sections brought together sophisticated analyses and criticism and suggestions were given and taken in a professional and friendly manner. Over three days we had the privilege of debating fully the listed issues. Participants' regional and academic diversity made the scholarly exchanges especially insightful. Astute chairing by

Manos Spyridakis, Jerome Krase, Giuliana B. Prato, Michael D. Fischer, Maria Kokolaki, Italo Pardo and Bella Dicks helped to identify strengths and weaknesses in the papers and to direct debate towards further intellectual development. While time was kept, vibrant discussion overflew into the breaks and the evening receptions.

Two sections were dedicated to a Panel convened by Maria Kokolaki (University of Kent, U.K. and Institute of Educational Policy, Greece) and Michael D. Fischer (University of Kent, U.K.) on *Spaces of Enclosure in the Globalised Information Society: The Critical Role of Education*, which focused on the modern world's transitioning to an 'information' phase, where information is the principal commodity, and to a 'network society' that stems from decentralised and diffused information technologies. Power becomes, thus, more polar, and formal and informal transmission of knowledge is critical. The Panel included five papers. Based on fieldwork in Greece, Maria Kokolaki's and Michael D. Fischer's paper on *Local Knowledge at the Crossroads with the World of Global Cultural Flows: Rhetoric of Resistance and the Potential Role of Formal Education* considered how local communities employ local knowledge to oppose 'cultural amnesia' and preserve their cultural distinctiveness. In a paper on *Secondary Education and Vocational Training of People with Disabilities in Greece: Mapping Heterotopias* Athena-Anna Christopoulou and Athina Zoniou-Sideri (both at the University of Athens, Greece) discussed special education examining educational policies and initiatives aimed at the elimination of discrimination. A paper titled *'What day is it today?': A Chronotopic Analysis of Classroom Episodes in a Special Education School* by Georgia Papastavrinidou and Athina Zoniou-Sideri (both at the University of Athens, Greece) looked at segregation through the study of special schools for pupils who are excluded from general education. The paper by Maria Kokolaki, Georgia Papastavrinidou and Athena-Anna Christopoulou (University of Athens, Greece) on *Schools as Thresholds within Prison Heterotopias: Perspectives on the Poetics of Prison Education* examined the role of school as a transformative anti-structure opposed to the prison's highly structured and controlled space and time. In her paper on *Space as an Ark and Ghetto or as a Field of Action and Social Change? The Case of Roma Space in Northern Greece,* Giota Karagianni (University of Thessaloniki, Greece) challenged the ghetto view of Roma space looking at their need to create new meanings for space and social relations.

Fifteen papers were presented in the other eight sessions. In their discussion of *The Death of the Social and the Birth of Tel Aviv Singularity*, Orphee Senouf Pilpoul (Tel Aviv University, Israel) and Tamar Barkay (Tel Aviv-Yaffo Academic College, Israel) unravelled the ways in which single women's agency and sense of belonging are constructed and negotiated daily. In *Performing Veganism: On Vegan Subjectivity and Activism*, Zohar Yanko (The Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, Israel) and Regev Nathansohn (University of Michigan, U.S.A.) explored how vegan activists' day-to-day practices are crystallizing into dominant personal and political identity in Tel Aviv. In *'I bring social well-being to the public space, but no one knows it'*, Marie-Pierre Gibert (University Lumiere Lyon 2, France) analysed invisible social competence drawing on her rich ethnography of French street cleaners. Chris Diming (University of Durham, U. K.) explored personal agency in a governmental context considered by informants to be unstable and unsupportive for would-be

entreprenuers in a paper on *'With Connections': Agency, Networks and Public Space in Pristina*. In *Crossing the Line: Silenced Voices, Urban Policies and Illusive Means of Participation,* Margarida Fernandes (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal) discussed infrastructural deficiencies in Lisbon, people's feeling that nobody will listen to them and their subsequent lack of action. In a paper on *Facing the Financial Crisis: Governance, Entrepreneurs and Territorial Economy*, Paola De Vivo and Enrico Sacco (both at University of Naples Federico II, Italy) investigated how businesses in South Italy succeed thanks to new strategies, despite a financial crisis and weak governmental support. In their paper on *Migrations Guided by the State: Motivation and Agency in the Czech Republic*, Zdeněk Uherek (Czech Academy of Sciences and Charles University, Prague) and Veronika Beranská, (Czech Academy of Sciences) analysed integration in the light of the connections between the power relations of the state and of immigrant groups. Lucy Koechlin (University of Basel, Switzerland) drew on comparative research in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire in her paper on *'Fertile Ambiguities': A Tentative Typology of Urban Political Articulations* to argue that normative ambiguity may provide spaces within which the governance of rapid urbanisation is articulated. Bianca Botea's (University of Lyon, France) paper on *Urban Research as Agency. A Case Study of Urban Renewal* looked at how the effects of an 'urban renewal' policy on everyday life in Lyon pointed to a gap between the governance of urban spaces and actors' agency. In their *Brooklyn Re-Viewed from the Street: Agency versus Governance*, Jerome Krase (Brooklyn College CUNY, U.S.A.) and Judith N. DeSena (St. John's University, U.S.A.) discussed the radically changed public perception of Brooklyn and local people's resisting government agencies' attempts to displace them from their home territories. Robin Elizabeth Smith's (University of Oxford, U.K.) *The Unintended Consequences of Tax Reform: Istrian Winemakers Confronting a Bureaucratizing State* showed how state efforts to make business easier may raise new barriers to entering the formal economy, ultimately increasing informality. Z. Nurdan Atalay Güneş' (Mardin Artuklu University, Turkey) paper on *How to learn to spend? Financial Literacy Practices in Turkey* examined financial literacy looking at key strategies that have emerged under conditions of extreme debt. In *Governing the Poor: Social Exclusion and Citizenship in Today's Greece*, Manos Spyridakis (University of the Peloponnese, Greece) studied state policy on poverty and the uneasiness of a population on the verge of social exclusion to reflect on how this situation is producing new social categories and modes of citizenship. Italo Pardo's paper, *A Gap that Can but Will Not Be Bridged: Misgovernance Frustrates Southern Italians' Entrepreneurialism* examined how rulers' lack of recognition of the grassroots culture and actions makes unbridgeable an otherwise bridgeable gap between citizenship and governance. In *Government, Governance and their Discontents*, Giuliana B. Prato contextualized case-studies from Italy and Albania in a changing Europe since the collapse of real Socialism to argue that the application of the concept of 'governance' has too often yielded outcomes contrary to the originally stated aims.

The success of an International Conference of this kind is measured in terms of intellectual output and academic exchange. The aim to encourage exchange of ideas and to build upon existing, intellectual bridges and engender new links was well met in what by common agreement turned out to be an unqualified success, intellectually, academically and

socially. Old relationships were reinforced and new friendships and collaborations were forged, promising well for the future.

The collective findings of this Conference have produced an in-depth, ethnographically-informed understanding of the problematic of the relationships between citizenship and governance and of the traditional and new ways through which ordinary people cope with this problematic. The quality of the papers, their well-integrated analyses and their in-depth discussion have motivated the Convenors to edit a Special Issue for the peer-reviewed Journal *Urbanities* and a volume for the Series 'Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology'.

On a less formal note, a great deal of professional networking, academic exchange and socialization took place 'off-duty'. While the conference was untouched by the scourge of 'academic tourism', participants enjoyed the warm evenings taking advantage of the natural beauty of the University Campus and of what the medieval city of Canterbury has to offer historically and culturally. Many participants took dinner together at restaurants in the city centre. Most remarked that they felt that we were evolving into a real human group as opposed to an association of disparate scholars who happened to be in the same place at the same time.

Understanding the Postcolonial City: New Directions for Urban Research

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The Bangalore Research Network (BRN) was formed in December 2012 to bring together scholars researching the city using perspectives from the humanities and social sciences. In collaboration with NAGARA, an urban research collective represented by Professor Smriti Srinivas (Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Davis), the BRN held a day-long workshop to discuss ongoing research on Bangalore in August 2015.

Participants included PhD students and faculty from the Azim Premji Institute, Cambridge University, Emory University, National Institute of Advanced Studies, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of California (Los Angeles), the University of California (Santa Barbara) and other Bangalore–based scholars. Papers were divided into three panels focused on space/spatiality and practices in the city (with Dr Smriti Srinivas as discussant), identities in postcolonial and neoliberal Bangalore (with Dr Lata Mani, independent researcher, as discussant), and economies and ecologies (with Dr Carol Upadhya, NIAS, as discussant). In addition, Dr Purnima Mankekar (UCLA) offered comments and feedback.

In her opening comments, Smriti Srinivas contextualized the workshop against a larger background of urban studies research in India. Describing the current moment as a transitional and productive one for the study of cities, she identified the late 1990s as a time when theoretical approaches to cities in India shifted. There has been an expansion from the dominant thinking about cities in terms of migration, caste, and industrialization to include new frames: gender, media, technology, popular culture, and architecture, to name just a few. The work up until the 1990s had largely been focused on colonial cities (Bombay), archetypical 'religious' cities (Banaras), or capitals (Delhi); this has been joined by research on other cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad and 'middle' towns and middle cities that expand the scope of earlier projects. With a surge in urban growth across Africa and Asia, scholars need new terminologies to study emergent urban processes that do not follow the same historical patterns as European or colonial cities. Scholars working on the city need to maintain a balance between theorizing the nation–state and understanding urban processes in the global South. Full–length monographs theorizing Bangalore are still few in number, Srinivas noted (they include Heitzman 2004, Nair 2005, Srinivas 2001, Stallmeyer 2011).

The papers presented at the workshop drew from a range of methodological approaches including visual ethnography, oral life–histories, interviews, participant observation, and surveys. They reflected ongoing research including on the current social life and circulation of historic postcards in the city, understandings of 'heritage' in an élite neighborhood, the role of lawns as green space in the city, on English–language learning classes, Anglo–Indian teachers, as well as ethnographic work on food economies, Corporate Social Responsibility programs, and sanitation work.

The workshop's call for papers invited research challenging dominant characterizations of Bangalore that are rooted in Information Technology, its most visible — and celebrated — industry. Yet the discussants noted that several papers tied resolutely back to I.T., if not directly then by invoking it as a central referent. Lata Mani asked, 'To what degree is contemporary critical discourse too closely entangled in terms of normative understandings and predispositions with the very phenomena it seeks to illuminate to be able to produce genuine insight?' Carol Upadhya noted that Bangalore has become a favourite site to study certain kinds of things — 'are we reproducing the same representations that we are confronted with?' These questions prompted discussion on how researchers carve out certain objects of inquiry.

Relatedly, workshop participants discussed how to study the 'new' and, conversely, what it means to harbour nostalgia for a remembered or imagined past. There is much about Bangalore that seems 'new' or 'emergent', after all: its aspirations, its public–private partnerships, the return migration of professionals and the turn to English–language education through private tutorial centres. Carol Upadhya urged a more careful consideration of how practices or objects that seem 'new' are located within larger commodity chains shaped by deep and embedded social relations. Lata Mani cautioned that by focusing on certain practices that seem ascendant (or new) we are 'running the risk of inadvertently doing the marketing for neoliberalism's rapacious imagination'. In response to papers on the 'work' of heritage and on the circulation of colonial postcards, Mani suggested that we might ask how particular

constructions of nostalgia also offer an understanding of the historical. To think critically about our practices of remembering — what kinds of events do we remember? How do we memorialize memory? Who is feeling nostalgic? — is also to destabilize 'the present' which within neoliberal discourse merely operates, she noted, as a way-station for the future.

Participants' research questions centred on memory, nostalgia, aspiration, and idealism initiated another productive conversation around method and epistemology: how do we come to 'know' the city? Papers relied on traditional social science approaches that focused on oral testimony. But what if ethnography were to serve as a primary entry point into methodologies that explore a whole range of senses? Purnima Mankekar suggested expanding disciplinary conversations to better grasp — or sense — spaces of the city. For instance, ethnographic inquiry might draw from film studies literature on the haptic to use the visual as a point of entry into a whole range of senses that come into play. Discussants suggested sensorial modes of approaching the city: sensing its rhythms, walking it (see also Srinivas 2015), feeling it, smelling it, drawing from visual art and non–oral modes of representation and understanding (see also Mani 2015), and privileging affect to place relationships between humans and non–humans as part of a larger energetic field (see also Mankekar 2015). Purnima Mankekar noted that urban anthropology has not typically taken popular culture seriously; when discussed it emerges as a hermeneutic project rather than through its potential to offer structures of feeling and knowledge about the city.

Looking ahead, Smriti Srinivas wondered what it means to talk about studying 'Bangalore' as a composite whole in the present, given the city's tremendous growth in recent years. Carol Upadhya drew attention to one such collaborative project: an urban lab documenting different ways of inhabiting the city (online here: http://srishti.ac.in/centers-and-labs/center-for-experimental-media-arts). Participants also discussed the possibilities for mapping projects that could trace the diverse temporalities of walking in the city, gendered spatial movements, or developing connections between different neighbourhoods in the city.

Following the success of last year's workshop, the Bangalore Research Network and NAGARA, in collaboration with Jaaga, invited participants to its next iteration, planned for July 30, 2016 in Bangalore. Researchers employing social science and humanities perspectives-broadly understood—to ongoing analyses of the city were invited to submit paper abstracts of 250 words to bangaloreresearchnetwork@gmail.com by 1 April 2016.

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