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Traversing the Golden Mile:
An ethnographic outline of Singapore's Thai Enclave

Kevin S.Y. Tan

(Singapore University of Social Sciences)

kevintan@suss.edu.sg

Described by locals as Singapore's 'Little Thailand', the Golden Mile Complex is known as an ethnic enclave for Thai persons. The environment of the Golden Mile Complex is described as a *liminoid* space, or a 'space out of place', where Thai cultural identity, language and religious beliefs appear to be dominant, while simultaneously suspending the everyday realities of the wider Singaporean society that surrounds it. Despite being viewed as a *cultural sanctuary* for many Thais, the building is also perceived as an *ethnic enclosure* that tends to isolate those working or living in it because of its association with 'low-end globalization'. The urban marginality of the Golden Mile Complex and its Thai community, therefore, reflects a broader ongoing and ambivalent social-cultural divide between Singaporeans and large numbers of foreign workers, who form part of a transnational 'precariat' and face substantial challenges to their economic and social security[1].
Keywords: Singapore, Thailand, ethnic enclave, liminoid space, transnationalism, globalization

Singapore's 'Little Thailand'

The Golden Mile Complex is an ageing 16-storey commercial and residential building in Singapore's city centre. It houses a three-level shopping complex, a car park in the basement, as well as office spaces for rent and residential apartments on its upper floors. Situated along Beach Road, the building and its immediate neighbourhood are commonly referred to by locals as Singapore's 'Little Thailand', where significant numbers of Thai nationals or ethnic Thais of other nationalities seek employment and often reside. While many Thais are there primarily for employment, the Golden Mile Complex has also served as a source of communal support for Thai foreign labour based in Singapore. Businesses or services currently operating there include tour and transport agencies, remittance companies, late-night restaurants and eateries, sundry stores, a Thai supermarket, massage parlours, karaoke bars and even four discotheques that operate into the early hours of the morning (National Library Board, n.d.). As a result, it has gained, over the years, a reputation as an ethnic enclave for Thai culture, and a site for various forms of nightlife and accompanying social vices often associated with urban working-class communities. All this has, inevitably, coloured the overall public perception of the building, causing it to be perceived by some as a 'seedy' or 'sleazy' place (Yusof 2017).

Interestingly, the historical origins of the Golden Mile Complex's emergence as a predominantly Thai ethnic enclave are a result of the initial surge of low-wage Thai construction workers who came to Singapore from the 1970s to 1990s. This occurred as part of the nation's modernization drive during its first 30 years of independence (Piper 2005; Porntipa 2001). The present name of the building was derived from an urban development project in the late 1960s, which sought to promote the Beach Road area as the next location for commercial and urban renewal (Campbell 1969: 9). Originally, it referred to a stretch of land along the island's southern shoreline, once earmarked as a prime location for ambitious urban developments along

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[1] I would like to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their comments that greatly improved this article. Special thanks too to the editors for their invaluable support and advice.

present-day Nicoll Highway, behind Beach Road. The project was ultimately far from successful, as the Golden Mile did not emerge as planned, although buildings such as the Golden Mile Complex adopted the moniker as part of its name. Initially known as the Woh Hup Complex upon completion in 1974 (DP Architects 2017), and despite acclaim for its revolutionary design during its time, it now remains a sobering reminder and namesake of a largely forgotten urban revitalization project.

The Golden Mile Complex as a Liminoid Space

Drawing from Victor Turner's (1969, 1974) seminal classic, 'The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure', the concepts *liminal* and *liminoid* are useful analytical tools to understand the spaces within the Golden Mile Complex. First conceived by van Gennep (1960), *liminality* is a term used to describe the transitional phase of various cultural rites of passage, characterized by a sense of indeterminacy and ambiguity (Downey et al. 2016). This phase is transcended once persons successfully undergo various rituals or performances, eventually emerging as an accepted member of one's community, often accompanied with a newly achieved status. The term *liminoid*, on the other hand, not only includes the earlier mentioned sense of indeterminacy and ambiguity found in *liminality*, but also implies disjuncture from the accepted views and cultural expectations of society. In other words, what is considered *liminoid* is often associated with practices or performances of culture that are not only transitional in nature, but also 'out of place' and deviant from the norms of mainstream society. Applied to the Golden Mile Complex, it is suggested that the cultural logic embodied within the spaces of the building suspends or, at least, diminishes and confounds the wider norms and realities of larger Singaporean everyday life, by virtue its 'un-Singaporean-ness'. Hence, the social spaces within and around the building tend to exhibit a character of being 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1964), revealing a latent tension between two or more cultural worlds. Such *liminoid* forms of experience overlap greatly with the marginal character of what mainstream society tends to call pejoratively urban 'slums' or 'ghettos', terms that have been examined at great depth by Wacquant (1997, 2004, 2008), where such urban spaces have emerged because of economic exploitation and ostracization. I would, however, hesitate to apply such terms to the Golden Mile Complex, largely because it does not reflect a similar severity of segregation from mainstream society. Nonetheless, it is precisely its urban ambiguity that makes the site worth examining.
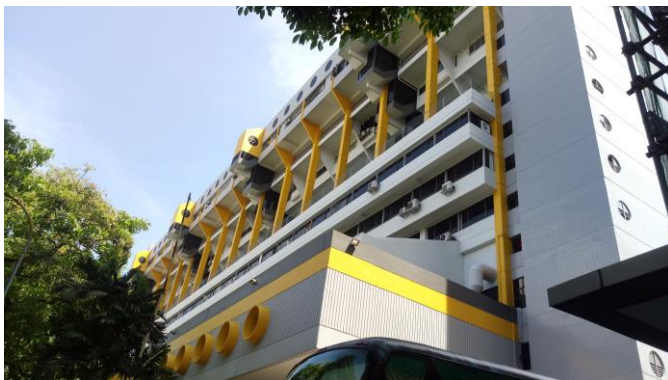
Fig.1 – *The Golden Mile Complex on a sunny day* – by Kevin Tan

This ethnographic outline, therefore, should be understood as a continuation of ongoing contributions by anthropologists and sociologists in the study of urban subcultures, social marginality, ethnic enclaves and transnational communities that have emerged due to the effects of globalization and migration (Low 2015; Lu and He 2013). Such close examination of the impact of the urban experience and the social production of its spaces is, of course, not a new endeavour among scholars, as observed in classical and well-known works by Weber (1960) and Simmel (1950). In the field of urban anthropology, the modern city and its spaces is now the site of an intense and irreversible conjunction of cultural, religious, economic and political spheres of life (Hubbard 2006). This is particularly so when they are inhabited, shared and contested by social forces that drive actions and behaviours along with the meanings attached to them. To a significant extent, then, the enterprise of urban anthropology in present times is an integral part of what anthropology stands for (Pardo and Prato 2012), due to the ubiquitous presence of cities and their mutually intersecting relationships with innumerable spaces and places on a global scale. For the distinction between the rural and the urban has increasingly become unclear due to the highly interwoven cultural fabric that many persons in various societies live in.

Prato and Pardo (2013) have convincingly and comprehensively discussed the importance and increasing relevance of urban anthropology in their excellent review of its intellectual origins and development. As they rightly point out, with more than half the world's population living in cities and partaking in highly urban lived experiences, it would be impossible to ignore the importance of an anthropology of such socio-culturally rich and diverse spaces. This is obviously reflected in the case of the Golden Mile Complex and its Thai community, which is situated within a small urbanized and multicultural island-nation with one of the highest population densities on the planet. It follows, then, that an urban anthropological perspective should not only recognize how urban spaces are socially and culturally produced (Gottdiener 1985, Krase 2012, Lefebvre 1992), but also examine the relationships between such spaces on a local and global scale. This is best achieved by critically examining the struggles, inequalities, meanings, emotions, ambiguities and memories that are constantly negotiated in the urban spaces that envelope us.

In recent years, one of the better known urban ethnographies of a building that has evolved into an ethnic enclave has been Mathews's (2011) 'Ghetto at the Centre of the World', which examined the social, cultural and economic lives of the inhabitants within Hong Kong's Chungking Mansions. It closely details the mutually influential relationship between the residents of Chungking Mansions, both transient and long-term, and the socio-cultural spaces that are constructed within the building. Based on extensive fieldwork over a period of several years, Mathews's description of life at the iconic structure located in the heart of Hong Kong's Tsim Sha Tsui district provides penetrating insights into the urban sub-cultural community that is the nexus of what he calls 'low-end globalization' (Mathews 2011: 19). Such forms of globalization are a reality for persons who exist as part of a transnational underclass, who are often drawn to developed economies in search of employment in occupations that are no longer undertaken by locals.

Equally deserving mention is Kitiarsa's (2014) urban ethnographic study of Thai workmen in Singapore. It examines what he describes as the 'bare life' of these men, who often engage in menial and hard labour within a workforce that increasingly includes foreigners from less developed nations. Kitiarsa provides a highly insightful, personal and poignant account of the challenges that many Thai workmen undergo to make a living and hopefully forge a better future. It also offers a detailed discussion of how the Golden Mile Complex has evolved into an urban subcultural space for many Thai workmen seeking familiarity and comfort in aspects of a culture they had left behind. In Kitiarsa's view, the Golden Mile Complex had become part of what he calls 'village transnationalism', echoing Mathews's observations of 'low-end globalization', where Thai workers engage in the Three-D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) forms of work often associated with low-wage migrant labour in developed countries (Kitiarsa 2014: 53).

Fig. 2 – *Thai men relaxing and socializing outside the building* – by Kevin Tan

The work of Kitiarsa and Mathews, therefore, reveal that urban spaces within buildings often serve as cultural and social conjunctions of intersecting identities, practices and histories. At the same time, the existence of the Thai community within Singapore's social landscape at the Golden Mile Complex appears to align with Friedman's (1985) hypotheses of a 'world city'. This is where global transnational flows are closely linked to economic interests that inevitably impact the nature of urban development within a specific society. In other words, capitalist relations between different nations within the world economy and transfers of global capital are closely related to the overall growth or decline of certain urban spaces. Consequently, because of its economic growth, Singapore has emerged as a hub for global capital that attracts inward flows of migrants seeking employment, which often consists of Three-D workers. The liminoid character of the Golden Mile Complex can subsequently be understood as a reflection of its fringe status within the larger cultural ethos of Singaporean daily life. Inevitably, the relatively lower socio-economic positions of the building's residents, employees and patrons play a key role in constructing the character of the social spaces within it.

In terms of appearance, those familiar with local urban landscapes will notice the retro look of the building, which evokes a sense of nostalgia among older Singaporeans, as the building's facade reflects the design and architecture of a bygone era, and is reminiscent of

Singapore in the 1970s. On the other hand, the building has been relatively neglected and poorly maintained, leading to a certain tiredness in its physical surroundings, both outside and inside. With paint peeling and discolouration on the walls alongside uneven lighting, the tiles that line the floors or the railings along the floor edges and staircases are often worn, stained and grimy. The building was even referred to as a 'vertical slum' by a member of parliament (Koh 2016; Teo 2006). In recent years, discussions and debates on its continued existence have been raised, as attempts to demolish and redevelop the site have been prevented due to legal complications surrounding its sale (Koh 2016).

These observations parallel Krase's (2012) argument regarding the primacy of the visual in the study of society, particularly in urban spaces and landscapes that are constructed by their inhabitants. The present physical and visual state of the Golden Mile Complex, existing as a form of 'migrant' or 'ethnic' architecture (Krase 2012: 12), is suggestive of the unequal relationship of its community with mainstream Singaporean society. At the same time, one also cannot help but notice the spontaneity and colour of human activity at the Golden Mile Complex, in spite of the building's less-than-spectacular physical environment. During its peak hours, at mealtimes on Friday nights or weekends, one can often hear Thai pop or *luk thung*[2] music echoing throughout, added to the buzzing excitement of human chatter, which unavoidably recalls an evening on a busy market street in downtown Bangkok. It may be said that the Golden Mile Complex has been 'countrified' (Krase 2012: 14) over time by its transnational occupants, becoming part of their vernacular landscape.

Figure 3 – *Patrons enjoying Thai food at the Golden Mile Complex* – by Kevin Tan

According to Kitiarsa (2005: 195), in 2004-2005 there were almost 45,000 Thai migrant workers in Singapore. Most were, and many still are, from Isaan in Thailand's northeast, which is considered its poorest region. Although seldom discussed publicly, prostitution is another significant sector for Thai migrant labour in Singapore.[3] Nevertheless, in recent years, the influx of Thai persons into Singapore to seek employment has fallen. This was partly due to the overall economic success of Thailand by the turn of the new millennium, which reduced the

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[2] *Luk Thung* literally means 'child of the field', a genre of folk music that is particularly popular among rural persons from Thailand's Northeast, where a significant proportion of the Golden Mile Complex community comes from.

[3] They work in a state-regulated red-light district along Geylang Road, relatively near Beach Road. There are also significant numbers of undocumented Thai women and transgender persons who engage in illegal prostitution.

attractiveness of Singapore as a destination for economic migration. Despite these developments, the cultural presence of the Thai community at the Golden Mile Complex and other parts of Singapore has continued to thrive for varied reasons, at least for now. The building's greatest significance for many Singaporeans rests on the stereotype that it is a place where one can obtain 'authentic' Thai food and 'experience Thailand' due to its strong association to aspects of Thai cultural practices.

Further reflections of the liminoid character of the spaces inhabited by the building's community are the major Thai holidays and festivals that are celebrated within and around the Golden Mile Complex. Although never officially recognized by Singaporean society, most significant are celebrations of the *Songkran* and *Loy Krathong* festivals. The former, which takes place in mid-April, is loosely described as the Thai 'New Year,' and is celebrated with water dousing rituals in public. Similarly, the latter is another water-related festival that typically takes place on a full moon night in November, where *krathong*, hand-made containers decorated with pandan leaves and fragrant flowers are floated (or '*loy*' in Thai) on a river to symbolize the act of 'letting go' (Kislenko 2004: 141-142). Remarkably, as Singapore's Kallang River is only a short walk from the Golden Mile Complex, the *Loy Krathong* festival has become an annual affair that sees the participation of Thais, Singaporeans and other interested persons. Derived from syncretized regional beliefs in the goddess of water, dozens of *krathong* are floated by the shores of the Kallang River and reflect how culture, identity and belief can often transcend and intersect with the new spaces they inhabit.

Another example of such cultural intersections is that of organized religion, particularly as culture and belief systems are closely related for Thai people. This alludes to what Levitt (1998) has described as 'social remittances', where traditions, ideas and practices tend to flow from the source of transnational migrants to their recipient societies. Located at the front of the Golden Mile Complex is the Phra Phrom Shrine, a replica of the Erawan Shrine[4] in Bangkok, a religious shrine popular among Thais, Singaporeans and Chinese travellers that again reflects a form of religious syncretism that is Thai, Chinese, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucian all at once. After several years, it has become both a religious and cultural icon of the Golden Mile Complex, symbolizing the presence of aspects of Thai culture diffusing into the spaces around.

Fig. 4 – *The Golden Mile 'Four-faced Buddha'* – by Kevin Tan

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[4] The 'four-faced Buddha' is a Sino-Thai interpretation of the Hindu deity Brahma. 'Erawan' refers to a similar shrine located in the Ratchaprasong district of Bangkok. It is at the site of the former Erawan Hotel, which has been replaced by the Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel.

The Golden Mile Complex as Cultural Sanctuary and Ethnic Enclosure

To complement the arguments of this article, I discuss the personal narratives of three individuals who gave their informed consent to share their reasons for coming to the Golden Mile Complex. For reasons of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in place of their real names. All three participants are women and were selected partly because they complement Kitiarsa's (2014) research with Thai workmen. Their personal narratives suggest that the decision to come to Singapore was not solely due to economic reasons, although this may have served as a necessary and initial basis for doing so. Seeking employment at the Golden Mile Complex was also very much an attempt to construct a new identity that provided further options for their lives and significant others. Each of their choices reflects a keen sense of agency within a broader structure of possibilities and obstacles. From the theoretical perspective of Practice Theory (Bourdieu 1990; O'Reilly 2012), the ongoing construction of each of their *habitus* is also contingent on their respective access to forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic and bodily). This, in turn, influences their personal *dispositions* and *strategies* as they seek to negotiate their practices within a broader field of the global economy.

Fern, dancer from Khorat turned office worker

Coming from the province of Nakhon Ratchasima, or better known by its shortened form Khorat among Thais, Fern grew up in relative poverty with her parents in a rural area. Becoming a single mum from an early age, she decided to leave her daughter in the care of her parents, hoping to seek better fortunes outside Thailand. She eventually came to Singapore and found work as a dancer in one of the discotheques at the Golden Mile Complex. A half year later, she became acquainted with a Singaporean man who was a regular patron at the discotheque, and their relationship ended in marriage. She subsequently gave up dancing as it did not fit her new status as a wife and mother, ultimately seeking employment at a remittance company in the same building. Now a mother of four children at the age of 35, she lives with her Singaporean in-laws who run a successful family business together with her husband.

> 'Am I happy? I guess one can say that I am happy being here…Being here, now working at ABC remittance company for around six years… Do I like Golden Mile? Well…I am not exactly sure as it certainly is still not the same as being back in Thailand, but at least I can access Thai food easily here...As for the future, I can clearly say that I don't see my future here and would never try to become a Singapore citizen. This is also partly because my husband and I have decided that we intend to return to Thailand and live out the rest of our lives there when we grow old…and with our children done with their studies…At the same time frankly, I don't try to think too much either…we want to take it easy or just get by…I have many good friends here…that's all to my life, really nothing special (chuckle)…just this…all I have.' (Fern, translated from Thai)

Although many things in her life have improved since her marriage, Fern still misses Thailand and eventually intends to return for good. But new challenges face her in Singapore, as her in-laws have never entirely accepted nor trust her as part of their family. Being a foreigner

and having worked in a discotheque appears to have some negative bearing on her reputation among her Singaporean in-laws. This is most evident from the fact that she has never been entrusted with any substantial responsibility in the family business. At the time of our conversation, she highlighted that she needed to keep her job to ensure a steady income for herself, as her in-laws do not give her a monthly allowance[5]. Fern's husband also maintains tight control over his monthly earnings, which he only partially shares with her in the form of irregular hand-outs, which she feels are never enough for herself and her children. This has led to growing tensions in her marriage and with her in-laws.

Fig. 5 – *One of the discos in the Golden Mile Complex* – by Kevin Tan

Shifting identities: Jo, the lawyer who wanted to come 'see see'

It would be a false assumption that the community at the Golden Mile Complex only consists of either Thais or Singaporeans. Such is the case of 31-year-old Jo, who is an ethnic Chinese person from Myanmar, and has lived and worked in Singapore for nearly eight years. Possessing a law degree, she grew up speaking Mandarin Chinese at home and taught herself Thai over the years working at the Golden Mile Complex. Her decision to come to Singapore was largely motivated by the potential of a better income coupled with a personal wish to leave Myanmar to, in her own words, 'see see' (看看 in Mandarin Chinese) the world. Coming from a family with five elder brothers, and originally intending to only spend a year in Singapore, Jo fell in love and married a Singaporean engineer she met through an online dating website. They have a son and have been together for six years.

Despite this change to her initial plans, Jo never regretted her extended stay, partly because incomes in Myanmar are far inferior to what she receives in Singapore. She also feels that her quality of life in Singapore is much better. Since her marriage and the subsequent birth of her son, Jo feels relatively settled with the life she leads. Although she plans to apply for Singaporean citizenship soon, Jo prefers her son to grow up acknowledging his Myanmese background. When asked if she had any qualms about being a clerk instead of pursuing a career

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[5] Clerks at Fern's remittance company typically earn $1,000 to $1,800 Singaporean dollars a month. This is also subject to an approximate 20% deduction that is deposited into a retirement savings plan that is mandatory for citizens or permanent residents.

in law, Jo had no misgivings. This is partly because she feels that Singapore has given her a stable and comfortable life, not to mention a family of her own. She has adapted well to life and the community at the Golden Mile Complex has provided her a source of support and many close friends. Work arrangements are also ideal as her company allows her to avoid working weekends because of her childcare commitments at home.

Ironically, even though her parents want her to become Singaporean, Jo's own parents have no intention of joining her in Singapore. This is because they find life in Singapore too crowded, too impersonal and too urbanized. Even so, Jo regards local approaches to doing things 'step-by-step' in a more orderly manner to be more appealing compared to the rampant corruption she experienced in Myanmar. She highlighted that there are 'laws' in place for Singaporeans and this is preferable for her, so she is willing to exchange a more carefree and easy-going environment for this, although she still misses Myanmar. Nonetheless, she has mixed views about the future:

> I know my husband wants me to become one of the people here…I understand why…I had to give all this a lot of thought as I was quite torn at the start…One bad thing about this place (Singapore) is that it is not a good place to grow old in. I don't want to be here, especially when you grow old. I do think about going back but it's not back to Myanmar. I am thinking about Mae Sai in Northern Thailand…we can actually still buy a home there. Just thinking you know? Maybe up there is still a better place to grow old. When we get to the age of 60 and above I guess…over here in Golden Mile, I don't really like this place as it can get too complicated at night with all the discos and pubs… (Jo, Translated from Mandarin Chinese)

At this point, although it is evident that the Golden Mile Complex is often associated with 'Thai-ness,' it would be misleading to assume that Thai identity is simply restricted to nationality. As in the case of Jo, who is technically *Lisu* in terms of heritage but has Myanmese nationality, I have come across several self-identified Thai persons who are Malaysian citizens. Many are from northern Malaysian states such as Perlis, Kedah and Kelantan, bordering southern Thailand. Distinct Thai communities have existed on the Malaysian side of the border for decades and many there identify themselves as Thai and not Malay in terms of cultural identity (Johnson 2012; Samrong 2014), not to mention being Buddhists. In fact, Thai-Malaysians at the Golden Mile Complex account for a sizable portion of people employed there. This implies that many within the Golden Mile community often hold complex, intersecting and transcultural identities. It is apparent, therefore, that nationality, in many cases, does not give a clear indication of the multiple alternate or sub-identities one can hold on to. One such Thai-Malaysian, is Mai, who works in the same remittance company as Fern.

Mai, who does not want to 'kid maak'

Mai hails from Perlis, Malaysia, and has worked at a remittance company at the Golden Mile Complex for the last six years. She moved to Singapore at the age of 22 at the encouragement of her husband, who had arrived four years earlier to obtain similar employment as a remittance clerk. While initially hesitant, as this meant leaving her children behind, the prospect of a better

income compared to what she earned working in paddy fields with her ageing parents motivated her to '*long du*' (Thai for try and see). Her husband subsequently found employment as a cook in a Thai restaurant away from The Golden Mile Complex. Mai lodges in a rented apartment in the upper levels of the building while her husband stays elsewhere, as the Golden Mile Complex is too far from his workplace.

As her children (a two-year-old son and a five-year-old daughter) are still young and are looked after by their grandparents, Mai returns to Perlis to visit them whenever she can afford to. When asked about her cultural identity, Mai readily identifies as a Thai person, although she is also fluent in Malay. The fourth child among five sisters, Mai grew up along the somewhat culturally porous Thailand-Malaysian border, where she was educated in local Thai schools in a community with overlapping national and cultural identities. Her daily life now centres on the Golden Mile Complex, largely because of her limited command of English or Mandarin Chinese, which are still a challenge for her in daily conversation. There is a sense of ambiguity when it comes to her views of her adopted home at the Golden Mile Complex, because although it has provided her familiarity and security in terms of language and food, she has never felt entirely comfortable with the seedier side of its nightlife and its poorly maintained amenities.

> 'I am Thai but I live and was born in Malaysia…I can speak Malay and Thai. I learnt Thai before but I am not very good at reading and writing. Anyway, if I can find a better paying job here I will also consider changing work, but it is not easy. It is even harder to find work in Malaysia …I don't like this place and don't have strong feelings about being here, things here are at most, ordinary…But it is still convenient for me when it comes to language and communication. I usually get up at 7 am on the days when I need to work but will sleep in a little later if I have an off day. I don't go around very often. At most with colleagues or meet my husband. I don't have many friends beyond those at Golden Mile…no Singaporean friends…When I first came here I never liked it very much, but it's the best I can find. It's like a little Thailand here but you get all kinds of people here although Thai persons here are the most… Anyway, we (with husband) have no intentions to remain here long term. Our home is really in Perlis, in Malaysia…' Mai (translated from Thai)

Mai's greatest reason for being at the Golden Mile Complex is to make as much money as possible before returning to her family and children in Malaysia. In another two years, her elder child will be entering primary school and she hopes to be home by then. This is because she still views Perlis as her home and eventually wants to return there. It naturally follows that she would never consider becoming a Singapore citizen, being both Thai and Malaysian. Life in Singapore is, at best, a necessary but transitional phase for her. However, it is not clear if she will truly have enough in terms of income and savings, as even the purchase a mobile phone is considered a major expense. But until then, Mai and her husband are hoping for the best and are trying not to '*kid maak*' (Thai for 'think much') about the future.

Mai's story reveals that not all Thai persons who come to the Golden Mile Complex necessarily achieve their hopes and dreams of a better life. On the surface, the stories of Fern

and Jo suggest that they are the more fortunate ones, as they married Singaporean men who appear to have a greater capacity to provide for them. On the other hand, Mai's situation is filled with more immediate uncertainty. While her young children remain in Perlis, she and her husband need to remain in Singapore for an indefinite period as their combined salaries are modest at best. Mai's account likely mirrors the ambiguous future that many transient workers at the Golden Mile Complex often face. There are no clear indications of when she and her husband can be permanently reunited with their children in the future.

Figure 6 – *Loy Krathong celebrations. Handmade krathong on sale* – by Kevin Tan

Traversing the Golden Mile: Recognizing Singapore's transnational precariat
The personal stories of Fern, Jo and Mai provide a humanizing voice to the many whose lives revolve around the community at the Golden Mile Complex. Their narratives evoke a better understanding of how the building, at least partly, serves as a *cultural sanctuary* for transnational migrants like them, who have come to Singapore in the hope of building a better life for themselves. Although they have lived several years in Singapore, it was apparent that their sense of identity, belonging and emotional ties remain with Thailand, Myanmar or Malaysia. For Fern and Jo, this is despite having married a Singaporean and bearing children; with Mai's situation appearing more fragile. This suggests that the spaces of the Golden Mile Complex, although providing valuable income, cultural familiarity and social support, is simultaneously rejected as a long-term goal or an enduring solution to personal challenges. A part of the reason is that life at the Golden Mile Complex is, paradoxically, also a constant reminder of what each of them had hoped to transcend or escape from in their previous lives before arriving in Singapore.

There is obviously a sense of ambivalence among all three women despite their respective attempts at taking charge of their lives by reconstructing them with new meanings. This is because the *cultural sanctuary* of the building's spaces for these women is closely entwined with their recognition of its alternate character as an *ethnic enclosure* with a 'ghetto-like' quality, which inadvertently highlights and reinforces the cultural boundaries between their respective *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) and those of local-born Singaporeans. Regardless of the efforts they have invested to build their lives in Singapore, each of them still only has the Golden Mile Complex as a source of meaningful employment. Although two of them are

married to Singaporeans, their daily lives and concerns still revolve around sustaining meaningful ties with the societies they originated from, and this is often achieved by maintaining a *habitus* that relies heavily on practices and relationships found at the very same site of their employment.

It may also be argued, then, that the spaces at the Golden Mile Complex are both *home* and *hostel* for Fern, Jo and Mai, in their daily struggle as part of a global *precariat* (Standing 2014),[6] where occupational insecurity and social-cultural marginality are often experienced. At the same time, the liminoid character of these spaces serves to heighten a certain vagueness regarding their present and future. Similarly, as argued by Pardo (1996; 2012: 30-45) in his ethnographic study of ordinary citizens in Naples, the management of their existence in Singapore is, therefore, a constant attempt at negotiating and re-negotiating the possibilities and limits of the liminoid space they occupy. This is further complicated by structural forces such as the state and its social policies that often pose challenges to a *strong continuous interaction* between the tangible and non-tangible dimensions of their daily lives (Pardo 1996: 11; 2012: 33).

While a sense of agency in each of their lives is certainly evident, the challenges remain. Although life in Singapore offers some measure of comfort and security, Mai is still underemployed, notwithstanding her relatively low salary, and separated from her children indefinitely. Not too far from such realities is Fern's own marginal and occasionally strained status as an outsider within her husband's family business, precipitating the need for her to return to the Golden Mile Complex to enable greater economic security. Even for Jo, with a law degree, the promise of eventual Singaporean citizenship does not diminish her concerns or worries about Singapore not being the ideal place to grow old comfortably. While life at the Golden Mile Complex has allowed each of them to transcend the limits and hardships of their former lives, it has not enabled them to go much further without feeling any apprehension.

The Golden Mile Complex's dual function as *sanctuary* and *enclosure* for those who work and live there further suggests an unmistakable aura of *cultural otherness* that shrouds the building and its immediate vicinity. This view echoes Wacquant's (2004, 2012) arguments about the 'Janus-faced' nature of 'ethnoracial enclosures' in his writings on ghettos. The Golden Mile Complex protects but also ironically constrains the lives of its inhabitants. Its status as an ethnic enclave is, therefore, largely due to deeply embedded structures of self-conscious and essentializing narratives that marginalize the everyday experiences of how Singaporeans perceive cultural diversity among themselves and in relation to 'outsiders' (Saad 2013; Tan 2013).

This is again revealing of how Thai cultural identity and its accompanying practices and beliefs, although having existed in Singapore for decades, have never been recognized as part of its societal consciousness or national narratives. Attempts at integration have, at best, been minimal, due to the limited resources of non-state agencies (Mohamad Salleh 2014) that often struggle against rigid views of citizenship that privilege presumed commonalities, allowing less tolerance for diversity and difference (Thompson 2014). And while it has been suggested

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[6] Coined by Standing (2014), 'precariat' is a portmanteau of the words 'precarious' and 'proletariat'.

elsewhere that migrant communities may potentially negotiate with some degree of success between alternating identities (Aguilar-San Juan 2005), this may prove to be difficult in the face of the racialized and culturally determinist discourses maintained by the state.

In other words, the continued existence of the Thai community at the Golden Mile Complex suggests that the simplistic 'multiracial' categories of 'Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other' practiced by the state (Ackerman 1997; Benjamin 1976) may have inadvertently reinforced reductionist perceptions of cultural identity, where 'unclassifiable' persons or communities are conveniently defined as 'others' or labelled culturally alien to the nationalist rhetoric of Singaporean-ism. As a result, the spaces of the Golden Mile Complex have evolved into a site of urban and cultural marginality, where associated identities and practices considered non-Singaporean are drawn to and concurrently bound by it. Such sites are also often stigmatized as sources of 'social problems' due to their liminoid status. And while Singaporeans can enter its confines and even regard its transnational community as a temporary spectacle, it is conversely harder for its long-term inhabitants to venture beyond it.

As Singapore's 'Little Thailand', the Golden Mile Complex exists as a '*space out of place*', reflecting ongoing economic, political and cultural discourses that construct and reify its urban marginality. Too often, recurring discussions or debates about social integration in Singapore (Liu 2014; Rahman and Tong 2013) have a selective tendency only to consider the lives of its citizens, either 'native' or naturalized, while ignoring the lives of disempowered 'foreign bodies' who co-exist with Singaporeans within the same cultural spaces (Poo 2009). It is often conveniently forgotten that such persons, nevertheless, are just as crucial in terms of playing a role in Singapore's sustainability and 'success' as a nation. As observed by Kitiarsa (2005, 2009 and 2014), many Thai workers and other migrant labour are often the ones who engage in forms of employment that many Singaporeans would shun. Such persons are part of an *invisible* transnational precariat of 'low-end globalization', who form the urban 'underbelly' (Yeoh and Chang 2001) of the city-state's existence, as they silently prop up key sectors of Singapore's social and economic infrastructures.

However, perhaps the final question that remains is that of the future of the Golden Mile Complex. Partly the result of Singapore's own attempts at employing sizable foreign labour from Thailand from over 30 years ago, there are signs that the building's community and its liminoid spaces may be in danger of dissipating. Over the last 10 years, the numbers of Thai persons or those with close links to the community at the Golden Mile Complex have fallen. While Thai persons, particularly those involved in low-wage manual labour, are no longer arriving in vast numbers as they used to in the distant past, recent changes in the Singapore government's approach to immigrant labour may have also heightened ambivalent attitudes towards them.

Since the 2011 general elections, when growing dissatisfaction with the state's neoliberal employment and migration policies led to a significant loss of votes for the ruling party, more stringent criteria have been applied to the hiring of foreign labour and inward immigration (Chang 2015). Because of these changes and the rapid redevelopment and gentrification of the area along Beach Road, the Golden Mile Complex and the lesser known Golden Mile Tower are increasingly at risk of becoming urban anachronisms. At the time of writing, new office

complexes and a new hotel have been built along Beach Road, and stand in an incongruous, uncertain relationship with their older neighbours. Perhaps in time, Singapore's 'Little Thailand' will be enveloped by the very forces that first gave birth to it, and along with it, the stories and lives of the silent voices who once traversed the Golden Mile.

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Reinventing Urban Social Space in Times of Unemployment and Exclusion: Solidarity Practices in the Case of the ALTER TV Network, Athens[1]

Manos Spyridakis[2]   Vassilis Dalkavoukis   Chara Kokkinou
(University of Peloponnese)   (Democritus University of Thrace)   (Independent Researcher)
maspyridakis@gmail.com   vdalkavo@he.duth.gr   koxa17@gmail.com

This article deals with the way public space has been used, on the one hand, as a means of putting forward employees' demands and, on the other, as a silencing mechanism on behalf of authoritarian structures. This took place during the closing down of the ALTER TV Network, a popular TV channel in Greece. On the basis of ethnographic data, we argue that 'virtual communities' intended as socially created spaces go beyond the unequal communication imposed by the TV networks, as they contribute to rebuilding multiple and multi-level 'virtual' spaces, shaping an alternative mobility within the city and producing both new spatial realities and new uses for the old ones. In this light, we explore the extent to which these processes are radicalized and substantial interventions take place in the 'real' space through the use of virtual space.
Keywords: Media, network, solidarity, virtual space, precariat.

Introduction

Anthropologists are relatively late urban researchers compared to urban sociologists and geographers (Pardo and Prato 2012). This is largely due to the established priorities in the academic division of labour, whereby anthropology used to be engaged almost exclusively with non-Western societies. Although anthropologists have at times conducted research in cities of Africa and Latin America, it was not before the late 1960s that the discipline in general acknowledged the significance of urban studies (Prato and Pardo 2013). Since the 1970s, monographs and papers have been published, attempting to deal with the conceptual and theoretical definition both of the city and of urban anthropology, issues that are still of high interest and dominate the disciplinary agenda (Prato and Pardo 2013). This development is related to two different but parallel processes. On the one hand, non-Western societies are increasingly becoming part of the global financial system, a process which has led to massive emigration to cities and the emergence of new social, economic and ethnic issues. Up to the 1960s, anthropological studies of urban space focused mainly on the *urbanisation* of rural populations, their establishment and their adaptation to the city rather than on *urbanity* intended as urban way of life, a concept that was introduced by Louis Wirth (1938) in his essay, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life'. Due to this focus, the perception of the city as an urban system was side-lined and the production of data was based on the traditional fieldwork methodology (Foster and Kemper 2010, Pardo and Prato 2012). On the other hand, apart from the aforementioned social and demographic processes, the critical dialogue developed within the discipline criticised its relation with the history of colonialism and the way ethnographic research used to serve as a means to control colonised populations, both assisting and justifying European sovereignty. At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic anthropological research was focusing on the so-called 'salvage anthropology', whose

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[2] Manos Spyridakis, a social anthropologist, is also Vice Chancellor of the Open Greek University.

objective was to record and rescue the native American cultural practices, thought to be vanishing due to the cultural practices of people 'with history'. Therefore, in response to past criticism, since the mid-1970s anthropology steered clear of colonisation and shifted its critical focus away from the notions of 'the Other' and the exotic. Somehow, at that point, the research practices of anthropology were based on a tautology: the further a culture's study expanded in terms of space, the more 'the Other' was perceived as such, and vice versa. However, the realisation that diversity — in spatial or temporal terms — was nothing but another hegemonic Western construction (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) signalled the post-colonial era of the discipline, which emphasizes on the return of anthropology to the cities of Western Europe and USA; that is, the places where anthropology had formulated its research programme and academic perspective. Although this 'revisit' has been criticised for the ambiguities it generates (Coleman and Collins 2006), the context of the above reality, which is none other than the unequal relationship of the West with what is hypocritically referred to as 'the developing world', has led to new theoretical processes and research practices which take into account this inequality, recognizing that it results from a refracted projection of the Western self into the aforementioned societies. This contribution to the self-reflection of social sciences, and more specifically of anthropology, has been particularly important considering that the discipline was born amidst an identity crisis and the contradictions of the Western world itself. The transformation processes of the structures of industrial production (Harvey 1990), the transition from Fordism to the flexible 'era', the de-territorialisation of production and consumption, the reduction of the welfare state, the rise of unemployment and economic migration, the fluid boundaries between high and popular culture, the globalisation of cultural patterns and their empowerment through the rise of new nationalisms, the imposition of the Western 'democracy' on other regions and the scepticism of the citizens of the developed West about the quality and the orientation of their governments, have all abrogated a Western point of reference. The historical process of 'post-colonialism' as reinstated in the West, led to the postmodern period, which for many — and not unjustifiably so — creates confusion about both its form and its content (Gledhill 1995). In any case, the West's 'meta-period' has shown that the anthropological endeavour as a whole had been struggling with its self-understanding and, ironically, more research is now called upon to study aspects of its own self as a new field that needs to be examined. This is significantly positive, as anthropological instruments seem now to be revisiting their 'roots' equipped with the experience of their relation with non-Western cultures. Anthropology, in short, is called upon to explore peoples 'with history' and this 'revisit' also entails an engagement with issues and processes that take place in the urban space (Pardo and Prato 2012, Prato and Pardo 2013).

Conceptualising the Urban Social Space
Inserting the notion of space — both as an analytical instrument and an ethnographic field — in the study of social relations was described as 'spatial turn'. While in positivism, space was

seen either as a mental abstraction or as the geographical and physical' base of social activity, Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) dialectical influence on the social sciences was decisive. From the 1980s, the bidirectional relation between 'social' and 'spatial' became prominent (Pardo and Prato 2012). As a result, social relations are studied on the basis of their spatial existence, while at the same time space is conceived as a product of social relations, especially relations of power (Stevenson 2003, Murdock 2006). Bourdieu (1996), for instance, defines space as a set of distinct and coexisting positions and proposes a relational reading, introducing *habitus* in the dualistic view of subject-object. He notices the relation of different forms of capital with the construction of social space and aims to analyse the interrelation between social positions, dispositions and stances; so, his theory mainly highlights the correlation between space (physical and social) and people's choices (position-taking). This 'spatial turn' seems to have uncovered fields that were previously neglected, such as physical movement and its significance in the social production of space. It has also brought out the relational character of space: fluid and multilevel social relations form a physical space that is undetermined and open to different social contexts (Massey 1999, 2005).

However, it is beyond any doubt that capitalism has all the necessary means to shape social relations and impose them upon space. What are those means, though? A primary instrumental technique is the distinction between private and public space. As Lefebvre demonstrated, the relations between production and consumption concern private space, while in the public space the role of the state is more definite. The state can shape public space through institutional provisions, establish it through the use of symbolic codes (for example, Monuments) and determine its uses. Urban space is the product of the aforementioned division, which is also accompanied by regulatory behaviours regarding the use of private space and access to it. This results in the formation of a social attitude in accordance with the rules of power, which have been collectively assimilated and therefore enjoy consensus (Lefebvre 2009).

On the other hand, the emergence of the mass media, especially television and internet, has led to a different approach to space from a technical point of view. Space is now produced by a more specific form of social relations, identified as 'virtual reality' (Lévy 1998), through the formation of the so-called 'mediating landscapes' (Scarles 2004). For Lévy, the virtual representation of space, as attempted with its 'virtualisation', does not clash with reality. On the contrary, it is an interpreted dimension of reality, unveiling specific meanings attributed to it through its virtual representation. He says:

> 'Virtualisation is not a de-realisation (the transformation of a reality into a collection of possibles) but a change of identity, a displacement of the centre of ontological gravity of the object considered. Rather than being defined principally through its actuality (a solution), the entity now finds its essential consistency within a problematic field.' (Lévy 1998: 26).

The introduction of 'virtual space' and its use by the wheels of power brings to the fore the debate on networks and the so-called 'network analysis'. According to Zaimakis,

'The concept of the network allows us to overcome the geographical definition of social space and study the human experience through a wider network of relations formed in a supra-local level [...] Network analysis can highly contribute to the study of social change (in terms of a group, a community or a social space) by examining the changes of its inner relational conditions as well as the external milieu's influences' (Zaimakis 2009: 348-349).

Although we could refer to more formal networks to highlight their exploitation by centres of power — in particular the capitalist mode of production — in this article we are most interested in 'virtual' production networks, mainly television. The supra-local status of a television network is substantiated by the simultaneous broadcast of an image in completely different spaces through a transmitter-receiver system. However, given, on the one hand, the hierarchical and centralised production of the communication message and, on the other hand, the incapacity of such a communication to reverse the roles of the transmitter and receiver, the television network operates unequally, transforming space into 'a political product, a product of administrative and repressive controls, a product of relations of domination and strategies decided at the summit of the state, but also at the international and worldwide scale, the scale of the planetary state system. Hence the harmony and cooperation that is manifested in inspection and surveillance procedures.' (Lefebvre 2009: 214).

From the point of view of space production, this process has significant consequences; most important, the integration of a rather complex and socially produced space, such as the urban space, through the simultaneous consumption of a particular image. For example, a live transmission of a football match unifies spaces which are highly diversified in social terms and remote from the field of sports itself, thus transforming hundreds of thousands of indoor or outdoor private or public spaces into an extension of the stadium bleachers. In this context, the 'virtual' supporters are spatially approached through the TV image.

However, if space is the product of social relations and specifically of power relations, then its study can also be used to measure not only the sovereignty of power but also any disobedience towards it. Actually, the subdued employ the same techniques as power does to produce their own space (spaces ranging from those of everyday life to those of 'virtual reality'). Let us take a look at some versions of this social space. Michel de Certeau (1988), for example, suggests a series of day-to-day activities through which the 'weak' attempt to offend the 'order' of sovereign space, despite the fact that they are 'under surveillance'. Alternative 'emic' street names and points of reference throughout the city, the city walks, the memory of the city from below (Phillips 2005), the appropriation of public space for private actions, the repeated use of public space by 'strangers', like immigrants, and so on are some of the practices of the agents, which take place in the cracks of the predominant rationale of space production. According to de Certeau, the 'weak' lurk to seize the opportunity to act. So, the city is transformed into a plethora of living places, unseen by the panoptic surveillance.

Defining Unemployment and Exclusion

Who are, today, the 'weak', though? After the 'golden era' of welfare capitalism contemporary western societies experienced a steady tendency related to the transition from an 'ex-affluent' society to a qualitatively different one, in which increasing insecurity and employment deprivation prevailed. As the notion of full employment seemed to be a past luxury, the new guises took a 'naturalised' form for a considerable part of the workforce pushed to the edge of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. A number of studies in the social sciences have shown that social rupture is one of the most deleterious effects of unemployment. One of the most relevant classic studies — that of Marienthal in Austria in the 1930s — provides a useful basis for our discussion. Marie Jahoda's research team singled out five categories of deprivation suffered by the unemployed. Those who lost their job suffered from the loss of structured time; the absence of a regular activity; the reduction of social contacts; the lack of participation in a collective purpose; and the gradual decay of personal identity (Jahoda et al. 1982). A number of scholars (Paugam 1991, Edgell 2006) conceptualise unemployment as a way towards 'social de-skilling', which is experienced as a condition of social humiliation. The central hypothesis is that the unemployed experience multiple forms of deprivation and a condition of social decline is created, resulting in deregulation and in ruptured social relations (Demazière 2006). This experience, it is argued, leads to an antisocial way of being where agents not only are alienated from existing social networks but do not attempt to enter new networks. This is what Castel has called 'disaffiliation' (Castel 2003).

Other studies conclude that unemployment is not experienced in the same way by everyone. In other words, there is not a single category of unemployment in which all people share similar social or economic features (Jahoda et al. 1982). Following a similar argument, Schnapper (1994) emphasises three types of unemployment which are closer to anthropological analysis as she focuses on the agents' narratives; that is, 'absolute unemployment', 'inverted unemployment' and 'diversified unemployment'. Anthropological research has shown that people of former high ranking who have lower status jobs refuse to accept their new condition and start compromising borrowing money from their children in order to get by (Newman 1999). A recent study was concerned less with ideal types and more with the cognitive framework of the experience of unemployment in three cities: Tokyo, Paris and Sao Paolo (Demazière et al. 2013). In their comparative analysis, the researchers took into account the national, social and cultural differences among the informants, focusing on unemployed mothers, young workers and managers.

All studies more or less converge to illuminate a situation where unemployment threatens one's work identity, which is not restricted to working professionals or employees but includes the non-working individuals. It has also been underlined that the experience of unemployment increases significantly the probability of a downward occupational mobility and lessens the possibility of an escape from vulnerability (Edgell 2006). Moreover, a number of anthropological studies point to the fact that unemployment is experienced as a condition

of liminality for those who are forced to lose their former status and tumble into an insecure and precarious employment framework (Spyridakis 2013).

The Case of the ALTER Channel

The ALTER channel appeared in the Greek media market quite vigorously, mainly through the so-called 'internal productions'; that is, long daily shows on current affairs and the arts. This resulted in the employment of a much larger number of journalists and technicians, compared to the other Greek channels. These employees, together with the administrative personnel, formed the network's main workforce and, although they were paid in accordance with their unions' collective agreements, most were still underpaid, compared to general TV standards. This initially caused them to demand persistently and assertively that their employers should promptly meet their financial obligations, particularly for the technicians, who — on the network level — were the most 'proletarianized' group of workers.

Additionally, the vast majority of workers, particularly technicians, were young people having their first employment experience, which corresponded with a lack of a wider employment culture, union experience and political awareness. Therefore, their claims were focused almost exclusively on getting their accruals by means of taking over the network's premises and the program transmission. On 11 November 2011, the ALTER employees abstained from work, claiming their accruals. A large number of them took over the channels' transmission, mainly to control the transmitted advertisements but also to convey their messages to the public. This went on until 9 February 2012, when the signal from one of the transmitters — that on Mount Hymettus in Attica — was cut off.

During that period, ALTER was broadcasting the strikes of other workers, as well as documentaries and videos related to the financial crisis and its outcomes. The employees had also announced their intention to transmit live the demonstration outside the Greek parliament against the latest memorandum. However, despite the signal being cut-off in February, the employees remained in their workplace, guarding the infrastructure and all the technical equipment until October 2013, when as a consequence of the bankruptcy court order (following a petition of the employees themselves) they were obliged to leave the network's premises.

Producing an Alternative Social Space

How has this three-month process of 'independent' TV broadcasting influenced the production of space and how has it been conceptualised so far? For a typical worker, the everyday urban space (Watts 1992) consists mainly of the dipole residence-workplace — in cases where those two do not coincide — and of the space between them. For the employees of the ALTER TV, the experience of the work space had not been different, though working on reportages amplified the need to commute between various spaces. However, even in this case, the worker's space was strictly hierarchical, with restricted access to and liminal communication beyond the predefined spatial horizon of one's duties. In other words, it was a

space fully controlled by the employer; that is, the persons in power. On the other hand, the character of this space had radically changed during the employees' abstention from work, and while they were guarding their workplace, especially during the period of their own broadcast. Let us look, for example, at the following excerpt from a young worker's interview:

Q. How did you feel about this change in your time allocation? I mean how did you experience this change in your life?

A. Actually, we were quite used to messy working hours. It is the nature of the work. It was ok. I got used to it. Moreover, we had a good time. It was crowded. It had been crazy around here. It was interesting and so it was cool. The transition wasn't that difficult. We had a good time here. We have had great moments. For example, at one time there was a bunch of us playing hide and seek. It was 4 o' clock in the morning and we were jumping over the desks, in the press room […] all those years I had never been in the press room more than once or twice since there was no reason for me to be there. And there I was now, playing hide-and-seek.

Q. So you found out aspects you didn't know about?

A. I hadn't been around the channel (broadcasting offices). Our job is downstairs along the corridor, the other corridor. There was no reason for us to visit any other part of the channel. Apart from a few times when I had to sign a leave. That was in an office on the other side of the building and I always needed someone to show me the way.

Q. You didn't know how to get there?

A. I didn't even know where it was.

Q. So now you had the chance to see the space and use it differently [...]

A. [...] Yes! To play hide and seek! I hadn't even been to the offices over there and we ended up playing poker and 'Palermo', not only in this particular office but in other offices too, on the upper floors. I spent the night in the offices there (Informant 12, 16-9-2012).

On the other hand, private space, as the space of one's private life but mainly as space of consumption, was displaced during the period of abstention from work and the 'safe-guarding' of the network. Another young informant comments:

I am just optimistic as a person, and this doesn't let me get down on myself. Ok, I sat for 1, 2, 3 days just staring at the ceiling and then I said 'that's it. I can't go on this way. We will see what happens'. You know, you draw power from the next person when they've lost more than you have. It sounds carnivorous but comparing yourself to others on the brink of demise, you're thinking you're

relatively doing OK and then you all come together like a fist (Informant 9, 15-9-2012).

This change in the use of space involved most of our informants in their daily 'guard duties': the workspace, although not fully integrated,[3] was transformed into a hybrid category, between a private and a public space. It was also a space which had to 'accommodate' the change in the employees' social relations; specifically, the merging of the private and the public, for safe-guarding the public space of the TV network required their personal (private) presence while staying in this public space required them to meet there their (private) needs (such as nutrition, sleep, entertainment, and so on). This hybridisation of space seems to have produced new social relations in more ways than even the workers themselves could ever have imagined, since their working space was transformed into a space harbouring those new relations:

Q. Did you feel closer to your colleagues before or do you now?

A. Before I didn't even know most of the guys that I am now sharing my life with in here. We didn't even speak to each other, not so much as a 'good morning'. Now I can't even imagine 48 hours passing without talking to N. for example. He used to work in the other building and I had never met him. In this sense, yes, we are closer now but I don't know if it is in terms of fellowship or it is just habit. For sure, though, I don't really care for all those former colleagues with whom I used to work, talk and laugh together and who have now vanished. It is not that I would want something bad happening to them, but I don't really care seeing them or hearing about them (Informant 12, 16-9-2012).

Moreover:

We have reached a new level here. All these people doing shifts […] we have all almost become […] one. We are very close, regardless if we are journalists, technicians or administrative personnel. This experience has brought us together and I am not even counting trade unionists. We are different, every one of us is different, but we have gone past our differences […] Since the very beginning, I said that the crisis is valuable. The crisis shows us the true colour of sky. All masks come off in times of serious crisis and the truth is revealed. I like that. Not to mention that it is necessary […]. That is how life is: it is full of crises, which we somehow manage to overcome and move on (Informant 14, 20-9-2012).

The change in the relations between the employees who took part in the safe-guarding of their workplace and the reproduction of that place through the dialectic dipoles of the social and the spatial and of the private and the public were a first step towards a new

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[3] Meaning that during the safe-guarding of the work place some parts of the building (the control rooms with the expensive equipment, the accounting office and so on) were locked and secured by the workers themselves.

alternative space in terms of everyday life, the 'material geographic space'. However, this spatial core did not remain static; it gradually expanded to the neighbourhood and the entire city. Thus, the social reproduction of space, as in the ALTER case, can be schematically depicted by gradually developing concentric circles. Let us see some examples.

As we know, after the transmission was cut-off in mid-February 2012 the safe-guarding of the workplace and the employees' abstention from work continued, but these actions lacked the impact that they had had during the period of 'independent' broadcasting. Technicians of the Greek Public Power Corporation were sent to cut off the power supply because the station's electricity bills remained unpaid for months. Yet, the presence of hundreds of employees, who enjoyed the support of the Power Corporation's trade unionists, prevented this new development from taking place. Another unsuccessful attempt was made on 23 February 2012; by then, the workers had been joined by members of the workers' federation and by inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who stayed on site in solidarity.[4] The electricity supply was eventually cut off that December. At that point, local shopkeepers supplied the workers with gas heaters, which served to heat the front part of the building (the reception office) where the occupiers were all gathered. A generator was also offered in order to keep the electricity going.[5]

Those actions, though fragmented and possibly lacking a political framework, highlight the power of the 'weak' — to use de Certeau's terminology — in the production of alternative social relations and, consequently, of alternative social spaces in the neighbourhood. However, much more coordinated solidarity movements were developed in the wider urban space. Let us consider some indicative excerpts from the interviews:

> […] when we first started (the abstention from work) on 10 November, there were workers who were starving […] three or four of them actually lived in the building; they were sleeping here. I then informed the committee.[6] I said, 'Look, guys, I will go public, asking for food supplies'. We then decided not to accept any money and started asking for food supplies. Asking and asking and asking. So, I went live on a radio show […] for more than half an hour and then on websites. This escalated into a motto: 'ALTER channel needs food', and then more and more food was offered. We must have received more than 15-20 tons of food. Despite some objections in our ranks, supplies from PAME[7] were finally accepted. I had already told people, 'Look, guys, if the tomatoes are too red, don't

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[4] See http://ergazomenoialter.blogspot.gr/2012/02/7-alter.html. The attempt was broadcast live by the national TV Station (NET).

[5] The neighbourhood's shopkeepers were generally supportive of the workers, tending to their daily needs until after the evacuation of the building (October 2013). They also hosted some of the workers' meetings.

[6] The workers guarding the workplace had formed a six-member committee to represent them, mainly regarding the negotiations with the employers' side.

[7] This is the worker's branch of the Communist Party.

take them […]' Some wanted them anyway. PAME, except from the meat (lamb) must have brought another 3-4 tons of general food supplies — and that was only from PAME. Anyone visiting the TV station could take some of the food if they felt like it. We also made an announcement through our website. Then we set up five subcommittees: one was handling the guarding shifts; another was the solidarity one dealing with the food supplies; there was the medical committee; the committee running the website; and, finally, we made a cooking committee and started to cook in the station, offering meals (Informant 2, 13-9-2012).

Moreover:

[…] we were given food supplies, especially baby food, baby clothes, etc. Since we had plenty, including diapers, we thought we could share with others, like a solidarity action, following the steelworkers' example. The steelworkers were the first to show up here to support us when the police first arrived […] So, we went to the infants' foundation, 'Mother'. It was December and the babies were freezing […] X. and N. G. asked the staff 'why is it so cold in here?' and they told them that they had no heat since no one had money to pay for petrol. So, we went to the gas station owners' association, found their president and bought petrol worth 1000 euro. It was part of the money POSPERT[8] had given us — five thousand in total — and we decided we could give one thousand for the foundation's heating […] The president even donated an extra 200 litres […] This is the human solidarity side of what we did. We can be proud of that (Informant 1, 13-9-2012).

We can monitor these two-way 'flows' (Appadurai 1991) not only regarding their movement but also their material aspects: the TV network was essentially transformed into a field of solidarity redistribution; movements from that site and towards it have redefined the city's map, forming at the same time a space within the city which did not exist before — a city of solidarity. This new spatiality was formed by the rearrangement of both hierarchical social relations and spaces, which have acquired a new dimension independent of their humanitarian side. The city centre was 'relocated' to the west,[9] based on solidarity.

This is, however, just one aspect of this new spatiality. The aforementioned bidirectional flows also included a series of actions of solidarity and resolutions by trade unions, social and political movements, private companies, and even individuals. Those resolutions were presented in the live broadcast that took place during the strike. In this case, the spatiality of solidarity produced an amplification effect for it not only caused the

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[8] This is the Pan-Hellenic Federation of the workers in the national public media (TV and Radio).
[9] This region resulted from more than 40 support resolutions issued at that time. Among them, there were resolutions regarding many parts of Attica (Piraeus, Nikaia, Nea Ionia, Moschato, Peristeri, Koropi, and so on), as well as of Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece (for example, Chania, Ierapetra, Lamia, and so on).

relocation to the new city centre but also brought to light a series of neighbouring sites which could follow the same route. A typical example is given by the fact that the steel workers and the indignant motorcyclists not only marched outside the network, guarding its space, but as early as December 2011 they also distributed copies of the resolutions from the steelworkers to the TV workers and vice versa.

In the same context, two central events are related to the alternative use of space. In the first case, a concert was organised in a basketball stadium on 30 January 2012. This was an initiative taken by the workers of ALTER, DOL, *Eleftherotypia*, ERT and *Kosmos tou Ependiti*, the aim of which was 'to support the workers in the media in general'. A few days later, on 5 February 2012, also in support of the workers in the media (ALTER and *Eleftherotypia*), the Labour Centre of Athens organized with POSPERT a friendly football match between the teams of EKA and ERT at the 'Apostolos Nikolaidis' stadium. The money gathered from the sales of the 3-Euro 'nominal solidarity ticket' was distributed among the ALTER and *Eleftherotypia* workers; some money was given to a EKA player who was injured during the game. In short, spaces with different functions were rearranged to host spatially, in the city, the expressions of this new solidarity.

Dialectics of Virtuality

Considering the changes that took place following the three-month period of the network's 'independent' broadcasting, it could reasonably be assumed that the reshaping of the 'material geographic space' of the city involving this new spatiality would probably have never happened without the creation of a corresponding space in the 'virtual' sphere. It was not the workers' BlogSpot, Facebook or other social media groups that made the difference in the ALTER case study. What seems to have been determinant is the transformation of a typical broadcasting network into a network of solidarity. In spite of the fact that the majority of the workers was sceptical about the various 'attempts' by political parties to reap symbolic benefits from using the station's frequency, almost all the informants evaluated positively the extrovert use of the TV frequency:

> We then presented an alternative newscast […] Of course 'alternative' is a rather relative term, since it was the best we could do. Not all of us could work for it and we could not use the network's equipment either. We broadcasted a kind of… trade union newscast […] a workers' newscast! This was a first for Greece and it was brilliant. There were times that we'd make a record on viewer ratings! For example […] in the case of some interviews or when the Documentary of Aris Hatzistefanou, 'Deptocracy' was broadcasted […] Yes, this happened […] Of course we were immediately excluded from AGB rates. Meaning they wouldn't release our numbers […] but we could still find out from the other media […] When Deptocracy was broadcasted we reached 35% […] And then, with the government's blessing, the signal from Hymettus was finally cut off. That was it. That was a real alternative TV (Informant 1, 13-9-2012).

On the other hand, this reversal of the network's character caused a sort of global diffusion. In spite of the Greek media's deafening silence on the issue, the independent management of the ALTER network mobilised many networks from all over the world, as they either reported on the Greek crisis or reported on a phenomenon that was unique in the media field. For most of the workers guarding the network, this was a great collective achievement. However, this worldwide diffusion did not generate an alternative network space and went never beyond mere news report in the networks' bulletins. At least, we have no fieldwork evidence to the contrary. Besides, the experiment did not last long. Could it possibly be repeated?[10] Could it possibly generate the social and spatial conditions for a general network reversal? In other words, is it possible to have an 'alternative television network' opposing the systemic media and producing alternative social spaces, spaces of solidarity and resistance in the city?

ALTER's workers did not think so. For them, the media are *a priori* a means of 'the system' and an expression of power, totally depended on the market and on advertisements for their survival. Most of our informants filtered such a possibility through the rationale of hierarchical construction and not in terms of self-management: 'Who would decide what is to be broadcasted?', they wondered, 'And who would be willing to place their advertisements with us?'. Although they were passionate when they described the achievements of the 'strike period', they became condescending, computational and 'business oriented' when the discussion moved on to considering a long-term network management. Of course, many had been previously employed in other networks, especially on the internet, where, many of them believe lies the future of a free and alternative journalism.

Concluding Remarks

The ethnographic case that we have discussed is indicative of similar problems in the Greek media in general. For example, there is an attempt to take over the management of the daily newspaper *The Journal of the Editors*, while the MEGA channel presents a case similar to ALTER's; its workers, however, have not shown the same decisiveness in their mobilisation. Similar developments have taken place in smaller newspapers and local TV networks in Thessaloniki (for example, the newspapers *Thessaloniki, Macedonia* and so on) and the mobilisation in the case of the public Greek TV network, ERT, has been overwhelming. However, the case of ALTER TV has been the longest and most vigorous and influential on public space and discourse. In this respect, the tentative analysis that we have offered has Highlighted a most typical case of the crisis of the media in Greece.

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[10] A similar venture was undertaken with even more impressive results, since it conflicted the Government's decision to cut off the only Greek public network in alignment with an austerity policy aimed at downsize the public sector. The workers' attempt to overtake the network was widely supported and lasted from June to November 2013. However, the public network's regularity was restored when it reverted to its original broadcast, but the systemic media model was not reversed.

The reinvention of urban social space that we have discussed means, above all, that the established power relations both in the 'real' and the 'virtual' space were temporarily reversed. This reversal seems to be limited; the order of the urban structure was 'restored' once the signal transmission was cut off, ensuring a limited disturbance in the wider field of the TV network. This testifies to the direct relation between the real and the virtual space and the significant possibility that the latter may contribute to restructure the former. Thus, control of the potential space seems to be *a sine qua non* condition for the effective control of the real urban space. On the other hand, the intervention of ALTER's employees in the city's 'virtual' space as they took over their TV frequency appears to having been an extremely advanced idea for which no one was ready, not even the workers themselves or that part of the society which seeks to intervene in the urban space and re-conceptualise it.

It might be argued that the management of the public virtual space of the TV frequency constitutes the third level of self-management — following company public space and neighbourhood public space — where the connection among multiple interventions in the city may take place, as long as the other two levels are covered. This, however, would require a better organisation, a wide consensus and much clearer political starting points and targets. In other words, it would require a coherent collective subject.

Could this collective subject emerge from the 'crisis'? There is no doubt that the crisis has generated extensive unemployment and exclusion, as described here. It is also equally certain that some collective subjects — such as the ALTER employees — have become radicalised and have sought substantial interventions in the 'real' space, especially through the use of the virtual space. However, so far these movements are 'alternative proposals' with a limited spatial and temporal character; they are fragmented and lack a wider impact. This, of course, does not negate the 'dangerous' character attributed to this new subject, the precariat, which appears to be of considerable size. In any case, unemployment and exclusion may be necessary conditions for the reinvention of urban social space, but sufficient conditions for such reinvention do not yet seem to have been shaped.

Indeed, one might ask, is the TV's intervention in the shaping of a collective fantasy so important, in an era dominated by the social media and the Internet? In a society like the Greek one, which operates with significant 'inaction' and delays, the answer might be, 'yes'. However, television omnipotence has suffered a powerful blow, aptly summarised in the slogan 'punks, snitches, journalists' that was heard loudly during the rally of 3 July 2015 promoting 'NAY' to the latest memorandum that had been negotiated by the Greek government. The future of this controversial condition is still unclear, at least from an ethnographic point of view.

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Creating Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship:
Squatting in Activist-Friendly Helsinki[1]

Eeva Berglund
(Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland)
eeva.berglund@aalto.fi

Vesa Peipinen
(University of Tampere, Finland)
vesa.peipinen@gmail.com

In many European (and other) cities urban activism is being acknowledged and recuperated as a resource rather than a protest. This impacts urban governance, planning and marketing, and it has shifted definitions of the good citizen, increasingly expected to be self-responsible and even activist. Accounts of such activism encompass a range of social practices in the city, while commentaries including academic texts highlight use of online tools, its self-organizing or 'DIY' (do-it-yourself) ethos and the fact that contemporary activism appears less oriented towards protesting against something than in prefiguratively transforming cities at the level of everyday experience. We argue that though recognized as diverse, some forms of activism are deemed acceptable and even celebrated while others, notably squatting, remain unacceptable and are even violently quashed. Taking an ethnographic approach to Helsinki-based squatter activism, we show that it constitutes an important critique of the privatisation of public spaces, overuse of surveillance, over-consumption and socially hostile architecture. Although squatters in Helsinki are related to an international trend of pre-figurative grassroots (self-organizing) urbanism, which is highly celebrated in Helsinki, we want to make visible the different goals that people and groups labelled as 'activist' are working towards. We suggest that the concept of 'insurgent citizenship' (Holston) is a useful tool for throwing into relief how squatters challenge entrepreneurial, individualist and capitalism-friendly definitions of good citizens.
Keywords: Squatting, activism, Helsinki, insurgent citizenship.

Introduction: Self-organizing

Parallel to processes of de-industrialization, intensified urbanization and economic insecurity, European cities are witnessing a proliferation of world-improving, proactive, small-scale interventions, such as neighbourhood sharing schemes run on digital platforms, self-build skateboard and other parks, urban food gardens, pop-up restaurants and local festivals (Kohtala and Paterson 2015), and in Helsinki, even semi-legal saunas (Bird et al. 2016). Accounts of such activism highlight use of online tools, its self-organizing or 'DIY' (do-it-yourself) ethos and the fact that it is less oriented towards protesting against something than in prefiguratively transforming cities at the level of everyday experience (Bialski et al. 2015, Monge 2016). In Finland there has been considerable interest in and support for this new activism. It is even seen as heralding a transition in urban planning (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017, Rantanen and Faehnle 2017) and, as elsewhere, it is valued for contributing to environmental sustainability objectives as well as ideals of local democracy. Pro-active and entrepreneurial, almost akin to business start-ups, citizen activism (*kansalaisaktivismi*) is associated with a new, active and self-directing politics that constitutes a resource for a growing Helsinki, a Good Thing that should be supported.[2]

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[1] We would like to extend our thanks to all the people whose activism inspired this paper. Thanks also to Annuska Rantanen and Maija Faehnle, editors of a special issue of the *Finnish Journal of Urban Studies*, where some of the ideas presented here first appeared. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and to the editorial team of *Urbanities*.

[2] Finnish-language references are numerous: the main newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, the city's own websites, social media platforms and research-driven interventions like www.tilapioneerit.fi and www.kaupunkiaktivismi.wordpress.com (accessed 12 February 2018).

However, alongside this politically inoffensive activism, other interventions exist that are either ignored or discouraged. In this article we focus on squatters, activists who barely figure either in popular or academic accounts in Finland, unless it be to disparage them. They too are an important resource for wider debate: they make explicit deep contradictions in urban democracy worldwide, as regards for instance the normalisation of regeneration and gentrification as economic imperatives (Maeckelbergh 2012) or the promotion of self-help as a solution to inequality, both phenomena that corrode democracy.[3]

Officials and the police in Helsinki have even used considerable force to evict squatters and demolish buildings they occupied, fostering moral panic over squatting and its threat to the *status quo*. This happened for instance in 2015 when a suburban squat (*Mummola* or *Fastholma*) was violently evicted.[4] A wooden villa built in 1910, it had actually been transferred to the leafy suburb where it remained in private use until the 1980s. Owned by the city, it was later rented out as shared accommodation until 2011. Since then it had been empty. Located near a prized nature conservation area and in relatively good condition, far-reaching plans for developing it for public use had been proposed by volunteer groups (Hukkatila työryhmä 2011). It was eventually squatted by mostly young occupiers who posed questions about how youth homelessness persisted alongside buildings standing empty or abandoned and controversial new housing developments. Media coverage concentrated, however, on how a dilapidated building had been taken over by anarchist-sympathisers (*Helsingin Sanomat* 2015). What happened at *Fastholma* contrasts markedly with the support enjoyed by other activists who also appear self-motivated, keen to participate and sympathetic with the city of Helsinki's ambition to solve global problems whilst building 'the world's most successful everyday life' (Unspecified source in the City of Helsinki, quoted in Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017).

This discourse sidesteps the relationship between public space and private property, even though the question has animated Helsinki activists at least since the early 2000s. An area now filling up with new cultural building in front of the parliament building was then a 'left-over space', but it became a pioneering site of grassroots action (Lehtovuori 2005). The right to city space, particularly green space, returned to political debate in the run up to municipal elections in 2016, and there has been growing and sometimes acrimonious debate as to whether privatization and neo-liberal policy are perhaps even leading to the end of public space. In Helsinki as in other cities, the role of law in mediating or structuring the relationship between property and publicness is also a question that gets posed but rarely elaborated (Bird et al. 2016).

Our efforts to put squatting activism more squarely into the picture builds on Eeva Berglund's work on Helsinki's activism (2013) and, above all, on many years of participating in and researching squatting by Vesa Peipinen, with the core ethnographic and archival

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[3] There is some research on these in Helsinki. See for example, the work in Finnish by Eeva Luhtakallio and Maria Mustranta (2017).

[4] See https://en.squat.net/2015/03/30/helsinki-finland-eviction-report-of-mummola-squat-and-the-solidarity-demonstration-that-followed/ (accessed 02 February 2018).

material[5] drawn from his Masters dissertation on the life-courses of activists. This article is a result of being invited to contribute to an edited collection on self-organized activism in Finland, and wanting to elaborate our ideas beyond that short comment piece (Berglund and Peipinen 2017). Our approach questions dominant framings of contemporary activism and reconnects it to a politics as well as an analysis that takes worsening structural inequalities seriously. We also echo recent calls to analyse marginal forms of resistance without pathologizing, resorting to binaries or making moral judgements (Theodossopoulos 2014).

Activist self-organizing can be both part of and opposed to the dominant control and consumption-oriented tenets of urban development. However, the 'hegemonic drive of neoliberal capitalism to stabilize state-citizen relations by implicating civil society in governance' (Miraftab 2009: 32) has blurred distinctions between projects that support and those that protest against prevailing policies. Notionally horizontal governance (in contrast to top-down government) does not just give citizens more voice, it turns activism into a generalized virtue: cities, states, companies etc. are all exhorted to be activist. Urban activism also provides occupancy and interest in spaces awaiting development that would otherwise lie empty and unattractive. Such areas have been abundant in Helsinki over the last decade (Berglund and Kohtala eds 2015). Pursuing a kind of shape-shifting capitalist policy (Harvey 2012), the city of Helsinki has appropriated several recurring grassroots projects — cleaning day, restaurant day, pop-up sales points of all kinds, as well as countless greenish and wholesome-sounding design and innovation ventures. Though they may be technologically radical, healthy and green, or just quirky, these self-organizing initiatives can also prolong and strengthen business-led and growth-oriented politics (Berglund 2013).

Helsinki offers an example of how, in a short time, urban activism has made city life more inclusive, fun and permissive for some (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017). From a social science point of view, however, the inclusion implied is not convincing, even deflecting attention from worsening structural problems (Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017). The situation thus demands empirically more precise, analytically sharper and politically more imaginative understandings of urban activism that acknowledge the different roles self-organizing can play in shaping cities. It also invites attending to activists' expectations of the state and their understandings of citizenship. In this vein, we suggest that squatters are seeking to create spaces of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008) in a struggle for freedoms and rights and a refusal to collapse the important distinction between the world as it is and how it should and could be. We hear an echo in their labours of Henri Lefebvre's (1996) idea of the city as a joint *oeuvre* that needs to be vigilantly cared for and frequently fought over. And we identify some refashioning of old socio-political claims being directed at the state in symbolically laden urban space, not unlike the indignant demands of the 2010s 'movements of the squares' (Gerbaudo 2017).

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[5] Archival material was collected mostly in the People's Archives, the central archives of the Finnish left-wing Labour movement and civil society organizations. Additional interviews were collected in 2014-17.

To spell out the specificities of squatting, we first briefly discuss shifts in what activism means, sketching out how these relate to trends in planning, social movements, squatting and subcultures as well as to citizenship.

New Functions for Activism

In just two decades it has become commonplace for those tasked with producing interest, vibrancy and attractiveness in cities to foster cultures of informality, civic voluntarism and practical grassroots initiatives. This has effectively refunctioned urban activism. The results can be visible changes in the urban fabric but are also felt in how things that a generation ago were marked deviant or marginal environmental causes, animal rights, anti-consumerist or antiracist agendas, are now valued. This is activism recuperated. Discussions of it usually highlight its global focus and the way it has been facilitated by digital technologies, and often note a strong anti-materialist orientation, lack of reliance on institutional supports and resources (such as trade unions) or respect for centralized leadership structures (Luhtakallio 2010, Mayer 2013, Laine 2013). Further, these repertoires of small-scale urban improvements have been paralleled by the normalisation of participatory planning (Bialski et al. 2015: 13).

At the same time, many cities are witnessing large-scale municipal and metropolitan developments that encroach on familiar landscapes and infrastructures and impact, sometimes heavily, on everyday life (Monge 2016). The social costs of recent urbanization have, of course, been the focus of much scholarship, for example in New York City (Maeckelbergh 2012), London (Lees et al. 2014), Hamburg and Berlin (Novy and Colomb 2013) and Helsinki (Lehtovuori 2005), in contexts where housing crisis is mixed with urban upgrade and cultural policy. Critical research in geography, planning and urban studies, particularly since the financial crisis of 2007-8, have generated a persuasive picture of globally dominant urban economic policy that offers privatisation of public space, overuse of surveillance, unsustainable consumption and socially hostile architecture, also raising the question of whether the disposal of spatial assets is either just or sustainable (Kaika 2011, Brenner et al. eds 2012, Harvey 2012, Maeckelbergh 2012, Edwards 2016). Furthermore, terms like enclosure, land grabs, extractivism and even expulsion (Sassen 2014) and shrinking cities (Ringel 2018), are helpful in making sense of spatial dislocation and responses to it all over the world.

Squatting as the occupation of buildings and other spaces in someone else's ownership operates where spatial injustice and social movement mobilising overlap (Vasudevan 2017) even as it intersects with broader, often anti-capitalist, agendas of change making (Krøijer 2015). As usually with political mobilization, success in squatting requires group longevity, trust and organizational capacity, even if the movement's aims are not always clearly articulated (Krøijer 2015). So although squatting operates like a social movement in generating social change and making space for politics, our ethnographic approach follows anthropological work in highlighting new cultural and social meanings, and less in terms of the success of otherwise of movement aims.

The Helsinki case also illustrates the continuing salience of subcultures, a concept that underlines the mainstream's discomfort with cultural forms that appear as strange, even dangerous and mysterious, to outsiders (Haenfler 2013: 19). The media still often portrays them

as socially corrosive even though contextual understanding of youth cultures and their histories have long offered a counter-force to negative popular impressions (Malone 2002, Williams 2011). An ethnographic sensitivity to subcultures can, we suggest, shift the way urban cultures in general take shape within political and economic conditions. This is necessary, we argue, as urban decision making is recasting 'activism' as a resource, whether to help improve a city's image or to displace responsibility for urban goods. This has 'instrumentalized dynamic local subcultures and harnessed them as a competitive advantage in interurban rivalry' (Mayer 2013: 4-5). As a result, all kinds of discourses reproduce politically expedient stereotypes (quirky hipsters), where young citizens are valued predominantly as a resource, as potential 'talent' for business. Stereotypes aside, many people's material fortunes are increasingly precarious, even as Helsinki's administration routinely uses their entrepreneurial DIY-spirit to project an image of the city as a hot-bed inventiveness (Berglund 2013). People get caught up in the contradiction between symbolic affirmation ('ethnic' food, 'exotic' music and night life) and material hardship wrought by prejudices, economic constraints and state authorities.

We argue that squatters are challenging the now dominant view of the city as a collection of privately owned properties, as well the idea that urban governance is above all about their proper management. Squatters also demand respect for doing so, which brings us to the indignation typical of mass mobilization and back to the concept of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008), understood as continuous struggle or negotiation over terms of membership in the wider collective. Even in the cities of the global North squatters, we argue, put questions about rights and responsibilities back into the depoliticized arena of urban development. Their actions respond in context-specific ways to many other issues too, but here we highlight squatting as a way to deal with unprecedented strains in the socio-material conditions of reproducing life (Mayer 2013, Van der Steen et al. 2014, Vasudevan 2017).

Squatting in Helsinki
Squatting is an unlawful occupation of abandoned buildings or urban space, but definitions, like activism, vary by context, land law or availability of housing. Following Hans Pruijt we see it as 'living in – or otherwise using – a dwelling or empty buildings without the consent of the owner' (2013: 19). Squatting has often been intertwined with youth cultures, and as such has had an important role in many local protest movements across Europe (Pruijt 2013, Mayer 2013, Andresen and Van de Steen eds 2016). Helsinki is no exception. In January 2015, when Helsinki faced a new wave of squatting, *Fastholma* was occupied and then evicted prompting public debate about activism in which, however, some essential questions were not asked. The squatters were framed in a hazy way as young 'anarchists' with unclear intentions. Few commentators bothered to ask who the young squatters were, what were their objectives and what were they really doing. Squatters' unauthorized presence in urban space was simply seen as an attack against the regulated, privatized and diminishing norms of urban space (Hou ed. 2010: 1-17).

In Europe the history of squatting runs parallel to the historical normalisation of private property in land and fixed assets. Knud Andresen and Bart Van de Steen (2016) suggest that the diverse urban movements in European cities can be summed up as 'youth revolts'.

Alexander Vasudevan's survey of post-1960s European and North American squatting (Vasudevan 2017) shows huge variety, but also argues that it makes sense to speak of it as a movement seeking an alternative to contemporary urbanism. In Finland Leo Stranius and Mikko Salasuo (eds 2008) also see squatting as a youth movement and note that it has been diverse but that as a social movement it has been studied surprisingly little.

The first time that squatting came into the spotlight was in 1979, when the building that later became the alternative cultural centre *Lepakko* (Bat Cave) was occupied by mainly young activists associated with punk culture. A former warehouse, it had become somewhat notorious having been a night shelter for homeless men. After a relatively peaceful take-over, the building, abandoned by then, was occupied by artists, musicians, students and political activists. *Lepakko* became an important and visible scene for alternative culture: from within it punks, hippies, and urban activists together 'fought against apathy' (Rantanen 2000) and facilitated the arrival of a new, youth and creativity-led alternative culture in Helsinki. In the 1980s there were other individual squats in Helsinki also, some of which pushed young people's housing problems into public consciousness.[6] Much as in Berlin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Vienna, activists were mainly young students, artists, left-wing political activists and punks who adopted 'green' and alternative lifestyles. Although squatting remained marginal, as a milestone *Lepakko* shifted the boundaries of what kinds of cultural practices were acceptable.

A second wave of squatting coincided with the severe economic crisis of the early 1990s, triggered by the fall of the Soviet Union, leading among other things to housing crisis and youth unemployment but also to growing numbers of empty buildings. This was in many ways an exceptional period, a difficult episode in the economic history of Finland particularly for young people. For most of the 1980s, unemployment rates had been around five percent, in line with the other Scandinavian countries, but in just four years, starting in 1991, unemployment rose to close to twenty percent (Koskela and Uusitalo 2002). Conditions for squatting activism were fruitful.

A key event was the occupation of an old soap factory, *Kookos*, in 1990 (for instance, discussed in English in Peipinen 2015). Located on a prominent corner plot near the industrial waterfront in the Sörnäinen district, the empty building was owned by the Haka Oy construction firm, which was planning to demolish it and build a new headquarters on the site. Debate about saving the old factory rumbled on until in April the council voted to adopt a new plan allowing the demolition. But to prevent this, in May 1990, activists occupied the old factory. Squatting lasted a week, with hundreds taking part, mostly young residents and some passers-by. Here is an excerpt from a diary by an unknown writer, found in the People's Archive.

> 'The third of May 1990 was a fine and sunny Spring day. Plenty of sweat on our cheeks as we waited for the word "go" on the Haapaniemi sports field. Chatting with friends. A little after three we set off for our destination: the old soap factory on the corner of Sörnäistenrantatie and Haapaniemenkatu. The owner, Haka-

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[6] For instance, the *Freda 42* -movement, which took its name from the address of an empty old church occupied in 1986. The church was sold and renovated as a nightclub and eventually reopened as a church in 2014.

company wanted to dismantle it from under its new HQ. A handful had already been there to clear away the shit and open the way in. Inside the building it was lovely and cool. We hung banners from the windows and took our places…'

The building was cleaned and around hundred people slept there every night, and the squat received media attention. During the occupation, squatters organized concerts, art exhibitions, public discussions and opened a café. Public appeals to save the building were made, not only by the squatters but by many local associations. The squatters even received financial support from the Helsinki University student's union for a telephone and a fire extinguisher. A group of young architects produced a plan for renovating the building. Plans began to be made for all kinds of activities in the building: space for alternative culture, workshop spaces, small businesses, flea market, youth hostel, café and concerts as some people began to see *Kookos* as a venue for a new kind of urban culture.

On the eighth day there was a massive police operation at the request of the owner. It took several hours from the police to empty the building. Some squatters strapped themselves in doorways or climbed onto the roof. After the eviction, squatters continued to campaign by sleeping nights in front of the building and by lobbying city council party groups. Occupying *Kookos* was tough for the movement because, unlike in previous squats, the building owner was a big business, the largest construction firm in Finland at the time. Its effort to secure the demolition of the building was supported by the major political parties in Helsinki. Following the squatting, fifty-one activists were charged of whom twenty three were under aged.

Significantly, the building was in fact not demolished: it now houses the Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts, Helsinki. Public interest in the episode had complicated tenets of urban development that some had presumed beyond question, but it had also given visibility to youth cultures. It had also given this generation of squatters a confidence-boosting chance to develop their own practices and politics, both internally within the group and vis-à-vis the wider public. Squatting the old factory allowed young activists to explore and develop new forms of collective self-governance.

This second wave of squatting activism peaked in 1990-1994, but squats continued to shape later urban processes in different ways. Generally, it was buildings awaiting demolition, owned by the city or the large construction firms that were occupied. As former squatters set up to organize youth housing by renovating old buildings for collective housing and run an active alternative cultural centre in an old gas factory,[7] they even made squatting into an 'acceptable' form of activism but one that arguably nurtures diverse and alternative youth activism (Peipinen 2012, 2015, 2017).

Since the 1990s, housing and the question of youth unemployment have been the squatters' primary focus. As the city was undergoing change, occupying publicly owned property in particular put important social, economic and legal questions into the spotlight. Squatters not only questioned why houses remained abandoned, they also contested the legitimacy of ownership when it meant keeping houses empty while there was a housing crisis.

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[7] This is known today as Oranssi Association and Oranssi Apartments, Ltd. See www.oranssi.net/English, accessed 12 February 2018.

For young activists, direct action and civil disobedience have periodically felt like the only effective means of influencing things: if housing is not otherwise forthcoming, there is always squatting.

Putting Politics Back into Activism

We have argued that in the last twenty years, in Helsinki, the acceptability of grassroots urban initiatives has increased and activism has merged into participatory practices that range from the genuinely transformative to the rhetorical. Now an imperative, activism's oppositional force and political critique has been diluted. Squatting activists, however, are resolute in keeping politics in urban activism. It is difficult to say whether their recent activities could be deemed to have influenced policy or economic practice, and it is even debatable whether their activities are aimed at taking power. What is clear is that they are opening up political space, for instance for alternative definitions of urban success.

Let us return to January 2015, when a new generation of squatters was again challenging norms of ownership. Here the site was owned by the city, but it was under pressure to behave like a business aiming for commercial profit.

Afterwards, one young activist interviewee captured a general mood by saying:

> 'We should not be forced into thinking that nothing is possible outside this capitalist system. All these rules and all kinds of controls have affected people's minds. And if you want to do something you need to think about what it costs and is it allowed. So what we need is freedom and not to be scared. We need to believe that we are right.'

This quotation illustrates how squatters identified urban space not merely as a site for competitiveness and as part of a city's attractiveness (to both capital and the right incomers), but as a political space where the meaning of citizenship is negotiated as part of a struggle. That is, squatters' own articulations of what they are doing point towards discourses that are much broader and deeper in their social critique than the celebrated forms of today's self-organizing, more 'fun', activism. Squatters question the prevalent idea that spaces beyond the reach of private (or at least clearly demarcated ownership) are inherently suspicious or abnormal, really in need of 'development'.

This points to the very many things that squatting achieves: the actual act of civil and social disobedience, which then allows other counter-cultural practices to take hold and pre-figurative free spaces to be built; horizontal forms of self-organization; counter-cultural identities and imaginative modes of political participation. It is also clear to squatters that doing something illegal is a way to draw the public's attention to massive social problems that become manifest in urban development trends, like the high social cost of speculation, or the privatization of public land and buildings. This puts squatters at risk of repression however, even as — and this is our current intuition to which we return below — their actions may be gaining some popular support.

The local state's repressive or containment strategies however, often force the movements to 'choose' either eviction or some form of legalization (Pruijt 2013). Sometimes squatters go

back and forth between direct action and negotiating with authorities, in a kind of dual-track strategy where radical core groups and more moderate supporters elsewhere divide up the political labour. In Helsinki, squatters have been able in this way to extend their squats and the infrastructures for collective living and political organizing. And even where squats have been evicted more or less by force, their actions have often led to saving old buildings, like *Kookos,* from demolition. In many European cities squatters' movements have also enhanced the political participation of vulnerable tenants and residents (Lees et al., 2014), and led to new forms of institutionalized participation and 'careful urban renewal' instead of 'urban removal' (Mayer 2013: 1-9), that is, outright eviction.

The *Fastholma* activists were arrested and charged with criminal offenses. Against the background of celebrating DIY culture, this was testament to the vacuity of political rhetoric. Despite explicitly calling for young people to act self-responsibly and to adopt a more 'active citizenship', when they actually took their values seriously and defended the shared environment, they were treated almost as criminals. But in challenging the use of literal space, they made new space for politics. The occupied urban space served to explore direct-democratic decision making, to prefigure post-capitalist ways of life, and to devise further innovative forms of political, including practical, action. As bodies that continue to be present — that do not go home at the end of the demonstration and that speak for themselves rather than being represented by others (Mayer 2013) — they were putting politics back into activism.

If these demonized activists were treated differently from those seen to be contributing to urban change in acceptable ways, one reason is the well-known question of what and who urban space is for that mainstream society still refuses to confront (Vasudevan 2017). For in parallel to stories of citizen activism, whether radical or more polite, the last two decades have witnessed a massive shift of urban property — including people's former homes as well as shared spaces — into private ownership, overwhelmingly under the guise of 'regeneration', 'development' or other notionally positive processes of urban change (Edwards 2016). Where international capital seeks refuge in real estate, notably in London and New York, housing crisis and homelessness are endemic, and where it does not, abandonment and decay tend to follow, Detroit being the paradigm example. Evictions and foreclosures continue, squatting has become criminalized around Europe (Vasudevan 2017: 6-7). After decades of permissiveness, initiatives to confront squatting have swept across Europe, like the new offence of squatting in a residential building created in England in 2012. In the face of this new law, thousands of homeless and vulnerable people became criminals overnight, facing up to six months in jail and fines of up to £5,000. The critique has raised the question that the new legislation affects the most vulnerable people in society, empowers unscrupulous landlords and burdens the justice system, police and charities.[8] The aim of the law is outlawing the practice of squatting ('inconvenient' activism) as such (Dadusc and Dee 2015: 141). As a result, situations that were previously managed by means of civil proceedings between squatters and owners have become the responsibility of governments. Before criminalization, municipalities had autonomy in their policies towards squatters and the police could intervene only after a court judgment. The new

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[8] See http://www.squashcampaign.org/ (accessed 12 February 2018).

laws, aimed at protecting the interests of property owners, have made the process of eviction less dependent on the juridical system, with the result that the police had more authority to act against squatters. This has been widely regarded as a right-wing ploy to defend and enhance private property rights over the human right to shelter (OʹMahony and OʹMahony 2015, Vasudevan 2017).[9]

This is compounded by a shift from universalistic welfare politics towards control-oriented politics, which target particular individuals and groups for punitive measures. Helsinki's decision makers and media appear happy to follow such international trajectories, even if some scholars sometimes align with critics (Berglund and Kohtala eds 2015, Luhtakallio and Mustranta 2017). If the incumbent political logics and economic imperatives of urban development invite the criminalization of squatting, in return squatting today voices a powerful critique of what and who is protected by law. It also rehearses the old call for the 'right to the city'. Claiming this right, pushes against the normalised imperative in Helsinki to attract 'good tax payers' over others. As a website article on *Fastholma* observed, 'The squat Mummola existed as an obstacle to capitalist and authoritarian urban space, as part of a global movement of autonomous spaces'.[10] This throws into relief how urban activism flourishes in Helsinki insofar as it is novel, constructive and imaginative, but poses no threat to capitalist principles and the security apparatuses maintaining them.

Citizens and Activists

We believe that there are sociologically and perhaps even existentially important reasons for paying more careful, indeed any, attention to squatting activists. We conclude by approaching them as — dare we say it — activist academics, because alongside the activism that has become so acceptable and inoffensive, the critique posed by squatters provokes us all, academics, activists and other change makers alike, to think much harder about how the success of a city and the criteria of belonging are currently defined. The starting point is how squatting urban space and buildings challenges visions of the good city but also of the good citizen that neoliberalization has put beyond discussion. Not of course completely, as squatting activism shows, but also not without impact, although in this respect, our conclusions remain speculative.

Basically, citizenship by any definition confers some form of inalienable and basic political rights that bind the personal to the collective. These rights are imagined as independent of parentage or wealth and are enjoyed by all regardless of allegiance to a political party or leadership. The origin of the word citizen comes from its association with cities. Throughout history, citizenship has been connected to urban space through the organisation of space of political power (from parade grounds to playgrounds) or types of labour (from state offices to polluting industries), while claims to citizenship have often been pursued by occupying public

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[9] The work of the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson (1975) on the hysteria of the recently privileged capitalist class in 18th century England after they enclosed for their own enjoyment land formerly accessible and necessary to others offers a suggestive historical parallel.

[10] See https://en.squat.net/2015/03/30/helsinki-finland-eviction-report-of-mummola-squat-and-the-solidarity-demonstration-that-followed/ (accessed 2 February 2018).

squares and other symbolic spaces. Thinking historically about citizenship allows an appreciation of the fact that ideas of the good citizen far predate modernist planning ideals. A historical view combined with an ethnographic sensibility alerts us to the way that cities are and always have been to some extent self-organizing. Even ancient cities did bureaucracy. It seems likely that the modern administrative machines that for so long have helped create an illusion of the city as *not* self-organizing, along with arguments that the modern state was a violent imposition on urban life, were products of an unstable, often imposed and often colonially upheld, industrial capitalism. Urban governments have no doubt under-appreciated how much citizens' self-organizing has always been necessary to urban life.

A simplified historiography of self-organizing might go something like this: welfare-based and biopolitical arrangements turned more and more aspects of everyday city life into legible or quantifiable values labelling all that lay beyond these historically shaped institutions as informal, voluntary or vernacular; gradually and unevenly, a new and broadly neoliberal preference for flexibility and horizontalism allowed urban development interests to co-opt acceptable urban activism; with accessible online connectivity, self-organization reaches a new intensity and stretches the reach of political as well as practical projects.

This may be to oversimplify, but what is undeniable is that today online and offline feed off each other in all types of activism (Ratto and Boler 2014), and the use of online communications is perhaps unusually prominent in Finland (Luhtakallio 2010). The use of the networked and 'flat' internet, accentuates the horizontal and self-organizing aspects of activism, key examples being neighbourhood support networks and happenings like Restaurant Day and other small online-facilitated initiatives or 'tiny social movements' as the activist-author Pauliina Seppälä (2012) has called them.

A caveat is necessary: we do not wish to belittle any contributions to vitalising collective life let alone challenging the *status quo*. Activism can be less political or more political (and we can think of situations where it might be politically expedient to deny the political nature of change). Yet there are fundamental political issues at stake where Helsinki's squatters are among the few who are offering alternatives to the depoliticization, even 'immunization' (Kaika 2017) of urban publics against the very idea of structural change. For squatters are not driven by hopes of becoming empowered as online users or consumers of services, such frequent explanations of the apparent democratization of and progress in urban change making (Mäenpää and Faehnle 2017, Rantanen and Faehnle 2017). Rather, the democratic values espoused by activists confer a different kind of dignity and sense of self. The context of Brazilian urbanization as analysed by the anthropologist James Holston (2008) is vastly different, yet it offers a helpful analogy with what we believe squatters in Helsinki seek.

Holston's concept of 'insurgent citizenship', developed from an analysis of Brazilian political history, captures a historical shift in subjectivity and the position of the poor in Brazil's wider political and legal landscape. It was, in his argument, part of late twentieth-century urbanisation, born in the auto-constructed — self-built semi-legal or illegal shacks — neighbourhoods of Brazil's peripheries. Here the poor transformed themselves from people the state could ignore, because they were without rights to themselves (slaves) or other resources (land and skills like literacy), into citizens with 'rights to rights'. This shift was channelled

through neighbourhood associations and alliances fighting for tenure of the houses they called home. It was squatting, but it was also a strong claim for the right to enjoy a roof over their heads. For it had earlier been assumed, writes Holston, that Brazil's masses were 'silent and mostly ignorant citizens who were incapable of making competent decisions on their own and who needed to be brought into modernity by an enlightened elite and their plans for development. As insurgent citizens, they are informed and competent to make decisions about their own organization, whilst they still participate in and hold accountable the institutions of society, government, and law that produce the conditions of urban life' (2008: 248).

Inspired by this analysis, but also aware of the multiple goals of any protest mobilisation as we explained above, we argue that Helsinki's squatting activism creates spaces of insurgent citizenship, literally and figuratively. It persistently challenges the intensifying drive for urban growth, competitiveness and private ownership. In offering alternatives to the dominant discourse that equates progress with properties to attract more high-paying tax-payers, more data, tighter security and more entertainment, it makes space for quite a different political imagination from that offered by activism when it is reduced to a resource for the broadly speaking neoliberalising city. Squatting activism does not demand revolution, it asks that the state serve people, not an abstract economic calculus.

In Helsinki such official aspirations are rapidly becoming visible and tangible in a singularly commercialized urban fabric. The local costs of the city's desire for growth are also becoming apparent.[11] In relation to unbuilt recreational areas and some cherished old buildings (particularly, Malmi airport) there have been conventional protests, but when it came to squatting buildings such as *Fastholma*, activists drew attention, successfully we feel, to the economics that most commentary overlooks: squatting challenged not just a specific property owner, but the whole direction of thinking and acting regarding the urban environment. An older claim to shared and collective enjoyment of urban space flew in the face of the new imperative to enclose and privatise. Moral indignation ensued on all sides.

As Lucy Finchett-Maddock points out, 'the extraordinariness — otherness — of squatters, the peculiar method of adverse possession, does not quite compute with the constructs of neoliberal capitalist times' (2015: 228). Indeed, the city, the police and the country's main newspaper operationalized this discourse all the way to an efficient demolition operation. Subsequently, few if any people have publicly admitted to wanting the house demolished, yet it was a job done with remarkable speed and thoroughness. In fact, the episode was quickly seen by other commentators including local residents, city-wide amenity associations and writers (some with ties to squatting culture) as unduly hasty and unnecessary.

In the aftermath of the action there was, perhaps, a new sense that one could and should question the way space in the city was being reduced solely to a source of profit. For a while squatting appeared as reasoned rather than unreasonable, as better grounds for more just and sustainable ways of planning urban futures. This suggested hope for a number of other groups

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[11] A comprehensive new plan for Helsinki was passed in October 2016 after heated debate. http://www.yleiskaava.fi/en/2016/city-council-approves-new-city-plan-after-six-hour-debate/ (accessed 2 February 2018).

working for similar ends to the squatters but using polite — acceptable — registers, and a hazy promise that a different politics might be on its way.[12] For others still, it gave resources for questioning the almost naturalized elision of citizen with consumer that has occurred in the last three or so decades. Also, there was a very interesting development that took place in the wake of the *Fastholma/Mummola* eviction: newly appointed Deputy Mayor Anni Sinnemaki appeared to be stepping into the space created by the squat's demise. She simply noted in public that squatting was a 'form of citizen activism' and that she intended to revisit the way authorities handle it.[13] It has not been our intention to assess whether or not Helsinki's squatters constitute a continuous 'movement' or are just temporary reactions to a crisis. Like social movement mobilizations generally, they rise to visibility in specific situations (Fillieule and Accornero eds 2016) but operate quietly — latently — when not under the gaze of the media or social scientists. It is only occasionally that squats emerge as a confrontational response to crisis. What is less visible, yet sociologically fundamental, are the ongoing socio-spatial processes that exacerbate inequality even as they escape notice. Also at the edges of Finnish urban life disengagement from the collective political process grows relentlessly but also mostly beyond the spotlight.[14] What we have called acceptable activism gets into the spotlight but only as long as it avoids questioning society's deep structures and recapitulates entrepreneurial, individualist and capitalism-friendly definitions of good citizens. *Kookos* factory and *Fastholma*, in contrast, generated alternative definitions of the city and belonging. The practical experience of using abandoned buildings or urban wastelands for alternative activities also allowed young people to explore possibilities for creating a society more reliant on an ethic of sharing than the imperative of profit.

Discussing the new forms of ownership, commodification and control of public space, Jeffrey Hou notes that the scholarly challenge is 'to think and to act in novel ways in support of a more diverse, just and democratic public space' (2010: 12). In this light, the invisibility of squatting in debates on activism in Finland is troubling. It makes it harder to pose what we feel is the critical question: what is the city towards which the good (activist) citizen might aspire? Currently only one vision has traction. It is green and clean, capitalism-friendly and hostile to refugees. As they challenge it, squatters are making fresh political space.

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[12] See, for example, Lapinlahden Lähde, low-budget interventions in a historically significant old psychiatric hospital www.lapinlahdenlahde.fi/fi/yhteystiedot/ (accessed 2 February 2018, in Finnish).

[13] See http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7872189, national news (accessed 12 February 2018).

[14] A key exception is Luhtakallio and Mustranta (2017).

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Between Formal and Informal Work: Entrepreneurialism in Colombia

Julián Medina-Zárate
(Cardiff University, U.K.)
medinazaratej@cardiff.ac.uk

This article explores perspectives for the application of multi-sited ethnography in the study of the Colombian formal and informal world of work in relation to entrepreneurial practices that can be traced in the local and global contexts. The core idea is that, in neoliberal globalisation, the Colombian world of work is expressed in diverse ways that cannot be studied as isolated phenomena. Instead, they must be examined in relation to broader contexts and to the juxtapositions and synergies between different systems. A multi-sited ethnography provides a framework to understand the entrepreneurial field of Bogotá in terms of movements, forces and imaginaries. The emerging reflections stimulate criticism of the division between formal and informal work and encourage an understanding of the different expressions of work around the world as interconnected and interdependent.
Keywords: Entrepreneurship, discursive practices, informal work, formal work, precarity, subjectivity.

Introduction

A fascinating figure arises while I research about identities and subjectivities of precarized entrepreneurs around the world. His name is *San Precario di Milano* (Saint Precarious of Milan). He is a Catholic saint who appeared on February 29 of 2004 in protest against precarization of work in Italy. San Precario is the patron saint of all precarious workers: the flexible workers, the temporary employees, the informal workers and, in general, all those workers who experience at different levels the insecurity and vulnerability of neoliberal regimes of work. That is why this Saint has no nationality, even if he appeared in Italy for the first time.

What catches my attention is the attempt to represent a common base to express and to make visible the conditions of workers that experience precarity, intended as the embodiment of the power relations and forces that constitute the state of this condition under neoliberal capitalism (Tsianos & Papadopoulos 2006). So, this image is used by many different groups, such as workers of the fashion industry in Milan, Mc Donald's workers from Paris or feminists in Spain, the *Precarias* (Shukaitis 2007).

Immediately, this makes me ask, who else could pray to or ask for help of San Precario in Colombia? Could it be the sub-employed workers that are searching for more hours of work to earn sufficient money to subsist? Could it be the street sellers who work in insecure and inadequate contexts while making just the basics to live? Further, what about the 'formal' employees of creative industries that are paid by product, independently of the time they invest in each duty? Also, what about the academic workers who have to deal with a combination of academic, bureaucratic and administrative tasks, which impairs the formal academic and educative activities? And what about the self-employed workers and entrepreneurs who invest both their capital and their workforce because of the lack of job opportunities, forcing them to make work the core of their existence?

In many ways, San Precario represents all these workers. Even though their professional and economic backgrounds are different, using a material image to represent them is a robust strategy oriented to find shared experiences that configure the injustices and inequities of the globalised neoliberalism. For this reason, San Precario will be the principal character of this

article, making it possible to refer to shared experiences of neoliberalism rather than to specific groups of people. I will start by discussing the global work system that configures diverse experiences of precarity in local contexts. Then, I will introduce global entrepreneurialism as a context in which Colombian entrepreneurship is configured in relation to the division between formal and informal work. I will consider continuities and discontinuities of entrepreneurial discourse that while practised define the subject — in this case, the Colombian entrepreneur — who performs them (Parker 1996) between the formal and the informal systems. Therefore, informal and formal work will be characterised looking at public policy, statistics and regional data. Moreover, I aim to analyse how entrepreneurship is related to both these kinds of work. Also, I will problematize the categorisation of formal and informal work from the perspective of entrepreneurial activity in precarious work contexts. I will describe the Colombian case emphasising the geopolitical economy of the country to show the complex network that configures precarity across the territory. Subsequently, I will present concepts from multi-sited ethnography, labour process theory and univocity that emphasise the relationship between the global and the local expressions of work as a whole and the *rhizomatic* conception of the fieldwork. These concepts will be developed while establishing links between global entrepreneurialism and the Colombian world of work. Specifically, I will suggest that it is essential to reflect on the epistemological issues relating to the ethnographic research of subjectivity and the world of work. Finally, I will reflect on the possibilities and the pertinence of a multi-sited perspective in studying the Colombian entrepreneurialism in relation to the global world of work. These reflections are meant to encourage researchers in the social sciences to consider the continuities and discontinuities between the formal and informal systems, for an empirical understanding of this phenomenon may contribute to public policy, activism and academy.

San Precario and the Global Work System

The appearance of San Precario in 2004 not only represents an icon that gives a face to the flexible Italian workers in their struggles; it embodies the conception of a life characterised by vulnerability and the deterioration of the social relations that constitute subjective experiences (Tarì & Vanni, 2005). This conception of the effects of exploitation in neoliberal global capitalism as more that a lack of capital or wellbeing is fundamental because it addresses the experience of the impact of neoliberal regimes of work. Focusing on the experience of precarity rather than on capital accumulation or econometric rates bring challenges as well as opportunities.

However, this focus on the experiences of precarity could be misunderstood with individualising and psychologizing discourses, leading to superficial conceptions of precarity as just a 'state of mind' or a 'subjective perception' of natural conditions of work and management. This would be extremely dangerous for understanding how precarity is experienced because it would imply a detachment of the experience from the material conditions in which it emerges. I say 'dangerous' in view of the political implications of separating the precarious material conditions from the precarious modes of existence. This subjective comprehension of precarity, like a psychological experience, does not allow

questioning the system in which it arises. Precarity, even when experienced subjectively, is not just a matter of perception; the material conditions that enable the experience of precarity cannot be ignored.

Hence, precarity is neither the lack of capital nor the perception of the lack of capital. Far from this dichotomy, precarity is a distinctive way of existence lived in different contexts by different communities and subjects (Pardo 2012, Casas-Cortés 2014, Campbell and Price 2016). This opens the question, if the material underpinning of the experience of precarity is so relevant, how pertinent is such an icon as San Precario, who represents different groups of subjects in qualitatively different contexts? To answer this question it is important to analyse the relation between the global organisation of work and the configuration of precarious local settings. This approach is relevant for us to understand how different contexts present continuities and similarities in terms of precarity. For example, regarding continuities and discontinuities between different contexts of entrepreneurship, the Colombian case illustrates how similar experiences and discourses can be traced in different entrepreneurial narratives. During interviews with entrepreneurs in Bogotá who participated in my research, different narratives emerged that brought out similarities and connections among experiences that were apparently not linked to each other.

Let us compare two cases of entrepreneurship from my ethnography. On the one hand, we have the experience of a street seller, Fernando, a 46 years old man who has been working informally for more than 20 years near a private university in Bogotá. On the other hand, we have the experience of Felipe, a 25-years-old graphic designer who has worked on different entrepreneurial projects in a software company and is now working on a political campaign in the run up to the elections. At first sight, their experiences and discourses are very different. However, they articulate some of those experiences in similar way. For instance, even if their socioeconomic, educational and cultural background is different, their narratives about the wage labour are comparable, which in both cases is seen as a source of wellbeing, security and stability. In the narrative of Fernando, wage labour is a utopic work condition for people like him who have been working on the streets all their life; it is seen an alternative option in a culture that promotes individual effort and flexible life-style. In the case of Felipe reflections and mediations emerge between the mainstream discourses of entrepreneurship, where the wage labour is presented as obsolete, and the entrepreneurs' experience of the struggles involved in the entrepreneurial activity.

In the Colombian context, the idea of wage labour as a source of psychosocial tranquillity associated with the benefits offered by this kind of job is limited even for those who are supposed to be in 'privileged' social positions. This generalisation of economic and social insecurities among a significant proportion of the different social classes that compose the Colombian socio-political system — which I call 'generalised precarity' — extends to the entrepreneurs in Bogotá. The narratives of some entrepreneurs with 'privileged' socioeconomic backgrounds also show a deterioration of their living conditions. This situation is illustrated by the case of Camilo, a 26-years old-man who is CEO of his school of social entrepreneurship. Being a wage worker was not attractive to him as a life project because of the conditions in the neoliberal labour market and the distance between most of the standard

jobs and organizations and his ethics and political values; that is, teaching that enterprise should be reasonably socially and environmentally sustainable. So, he decided to start his own enterprise. This decision has produced some benefits and freedoms that he recognises as fundamental in his life. However, this also has exposed him to economic struggles that affect his life in different ways. The bureaucratic structure and fiscal weight are among the difficulties faced by many entrepreneurs who work in the formal sector. In the case of Camilo, the social and political emphasis of his project applies to the kind of smaller network that is widespread worldwide. The question that he raises about the impact and the sustainability of an entrepreneurial project is, however, not frequently addressed. So, he needs to establish new links regularly in different spaces and at different times. Between the work required by the programmes offered by his school, the management work and the networking needed to expand the network of possible allies and clients, his daily experience is characterised by a high flexibility of time and space. This traduces into long and irregular trajectories across the city, working in diverse places such as universities, coffee shops and co-working offices, and the need to work at different and alternate hours for most of the day. His experience embodies what Tsianos and Papadopoulos, referring to the experience of precarity in neoliberal regimes of work, call 'unsettledness'; that is, 'the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and timelines.' (2006: 4).

This political position of the precarious worker is why San Precario can reach different places where precarity is experienced. This way to understand the experience of neoliberal exploitation implies positioning this process in a global work system that is tending to deteriorate people's life experiences, both in terms of material conditions and of psychosocial relations. Even if precarity is experienced in places separated by oceans and continents, the pervasive effects of global neoliberalism have configured the experience of individuals and communities, making them more insecure and unstable in terms of social rights and general well-being. As Siegmann and Schiphorst indicate:

> 'We argue that work-related insecurities offer a conceptual umbrella for the conditions that a large and increasing number of workers in the global North and South experience. They emerge in the context of neoliberal globalization that intersects with marginalization based on social identity as well as with the denial of political rights. Such multidimensional causation of labour precarity offers starting points for intervention. For instance, for precarious workers' struggles to be successful, organizational strength needs to be combined with the forging of coalitions that transcend class identities.' (Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016: 112).

From this viewpoint, precarity is not only an objective condition of work mediated by subjectivity. It is a global, widespread and dynamic phenomenon, meaning that the interconnections between different scenarios of the labour world form a network that needs to be understood as a whole, complex system. As a concept, precarity is a tool that helps us to approach the multiple expressions of the labour world in a neoliberal and globalised context as a whole rather than as isolated, static, organised and hierarchized realities (Casas-Cortés 2014). Considering this, factors such as the extreme mobility of the workforce around the

world and the dislocation of workplace boundaries configure unstable and atypical labour relations characterised by low income, high risk of being fired and the dismantling of social protection.

Siegmann and Schiphorst (2016) correctly point out that the experience of neoliberal capitalism is lived in various ways simultaneously across the global work system, linking precarity to transnational capital accumulation. This relation between a *generalised precarity* and the global trend of accumulation of capital and wellbeing by the global élites is highly relevant because it affects the core dynamics of global capitalism that impact decisively in the diverse spaces where precarious experiences take place. This has motivated social scientists to study the relationship between neoliberal policies and precarity from different perspectives. For instance, the analysis of the colonial relation between the Global North and the Global South, migration and social class studies, new feminist perspectives and the production of interdisciplinary knowledge on international precarity have enriched the debate on this global issue (Casas-Cortés 2014, Campbell and Price 2016, Meyer 2016, Mosoetsa et al. 2016, Munck 2013, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016, Worth 2016). Studies carried out in geopolitical places as different as North Atlantic countries, Africa, Asia and Latin America (Mosoetsa et al. 2016, Munck 2013) have produced knowledge on contexts marked by high vulnerability and inequity — as they are reproduced in an interdependent world system — and have highlighted power dynamics that mark the transnational concentration of wealth and the spread of precariousness around the globe (Harris and Scully 2015, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016).

Paths of Precarity: The Colombian Work System and the Global Entrepreneurialism

In Colombia, the entrepreneurial paths through which San Precario may circulate are diverse and interconnected. The complexity of the networks that shape the precarious experience in some entrepreneurial trajectories implies connections among spaces, practices and imaginaries that are not necessarily determined by the division between formal and informal work. As Pardo (2012) has illustrated in the case of entrepreneurs in Naples, this kind of subjects find in informality an option to make their economic activity easier or even sustainable. Hence, informal work can represent a source of security and wellbeing as the entrepreneur is not exposed to the difficulties and bureaucratic requirements of formality. These dynamics between formal and informal work cannot be understood in a binary system. They cannot be understood without considering the complexity of the phenomena that emerge within these categories and the experience of work as a whole. In this light, in order to approach the fields where precarious experiences take place, it is essential to consider some key economic, political and social features of the Colombian world of work.

In Colombia, as a country of the global south, there are expressions of precarity similar to many other countries in the region. Since the end of the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century, Colombian governments have adopted international policies in their attempt to reduce poverty, mitigate inequality and increase economic growth. They have mainly applied the financial strategies suggested by international organisations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have a high impact on the internal and external policies of most Latin

American countries. Most of the recommendations made by these international bodies are oriented to promote entrepreneurship as the solution to social and economic problems. They stand for the reduction of State influence on individual economic liberties, which, it is argued, helps to increase the levels of entrepreneurship because 'an environment consistent with economic freedom encourages entrepreneurial activity and economic growth.' (Larroulet and Couyoumdjian 2009: 95).

Following these recommendations, the Colombian governments have implemented legal and political devices — such as laws, decrees, public policies and social programmes — to promote entrepreneurship. For example, the *Law 1014 of 2006 for the Promotion of the Entrepreneurship Culture* was implemented to promote the entrepreneurial spirit at different social levels and to guarantee a good environment for entrepreneurship (Presidency of Colombia 2006). This policy was constructed following studies made by international academic bodies that provide suggestions to international organisations. For example, the *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Project* and the *Doing Business* study by the World Bank were used to construct the aforementioned legislation.

However, even if entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon in Latin America, especially in Colombia, the economic growth and development rates are still low. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), this region has high rates of entrepreneurship but despite this the economic situation in Colombia does not reflect the positive correlation between entrepreneurship and economic growth (Amorós 2011, Larroulet and Couyoumdjian 2009). Even though the GDP has shown a relatively consistent growth since the economic aperture of 1991, the experience of more than 20 years of neoliberal politics is distant from these rates. In 2015, the World Bank (2016) rated Colombia as the 39th country with a larger GDP. However, in 2014 the Gini coefficient for the country was 0.53,[1] which makes Colombia one of the most unequal nations in the world (World Bank, 2016). Moreover, in 2015 the poverty rate in Colombia was 28%, amounting for almost a third of the total population (National Administrative Department of Statistics 2017).

Today most Colombians live in dramatically difficult socioeconomic conditions characterised by inequities regarding labour conditions and a lack of opportunities for acceding to social rights such as education, health, housing and work. Most people are unemployed, sub-employed or self-employed workers; this, without considering the illegal economies. In short, the world of work in Colombia is characterised by high rates of inactivity, sub-employment and informality. According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (2017),[2] in the last year more than 30% of people of working age were inactive; the level of unemployment is over 7% of the working force; and informal employment and self-employment account for almost half the work market. These people do not have access to the guarantees, security and rights traditionally offered by formal work. Taking this into account, we can understand the world of work in Colombia as a context

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[1] This is an indicator that shows how concentrated is the production of wealth in relation to the number of people.

[2] DANE is the acronym in Spanish.

characterised by a lack of job opportunities and high insecurity and instability in terms of survival.

Things are not much different for the formally employed. A study made by Ferreira (2016) revealed the inconvenience of the division between formal and informal work in the Colombian context. She points out that there is not necessarily a relation between formal employment, the quality of jobs and socioeconomic growth (Ferreira 2016, Siegmann and Schiphorst 2016). She concludes that, first, there are different configurations of the informal sector that are not necessarily related to vulnerability and precariousness and, second, that precariousness is present at various levels in both formal and informal work, for the study shows that in the formal work sector, too, there are significant expressions of precarity. If we analyse the different characteristics of the experience of precarity proposed by Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006) we can see how they can be found in formal and informal work. According to these authors

> 'The embodied experience of precarity is characterised by: (a) vulnerability: the steadily experience of flexibility without any form of protection; (b) hyperactivity: the imperative to accommodate constant availability; (c) simultaneity: the ability to handle at the same the different tempi and velocities of multiple activities; (d) recombination: the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources; (e) post-sexuality: the other as dildo; (f) fluid intimacies: the bodily production of indeterminate gender relations; (g) restlessness: being exposed to and trying to cope with the overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity; (h) unsettledness: the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines; (i) affective exhaustion: emotional exploitation, or, emotion as an important element for the control of employability and multiple dependencies; (j) cunning: able to be deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, a trickster.' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos 2006: 4).

Workers in both the formal and informal sectors face similar demands on how they can be desirable to the neoliberal labour market. This issue is illustrated in the experience of precarity made by entrepreneurs in the formal and informal sectors in Bogotá. The case of Yanira, a producer of organic cocoa and chocolate bars who has run her business for seven years, is exemplary. She distributes her products in the organic markets of Bogotá. However, she can only distribute what she produces in markets that accept products that are not licensed according to certain requirements demanded by the industrial authorities because to fulfil such requirements she would have to make an investment that she cannot afford. As a result, Yanira, like other producers and entrepreneurs, has been forced to develop alternative networks of exchange for her products. For example, they work alternative gathering centres like the one owned by Natalia, a Spanish woman who studied in Bogotá and has been an entrepreneur in the city for a year. She has established a network of entrepreneurs who share the same problem and need to organise and find an alternative to work informally because their entrepreneurial projects are oriented mostly to survive, not to grow economically. They struggle with several problems, which they try to solve using resources closer to their

experience, such as networks and connections, as opposed to investing capital or taking loans that they would find difficult to repay.

We can compare this case with the case of Andrea, who owns a bakery shop and embraces a hiring policy based on the inclusion of LGBTI communities. She has received support from different sources such as her family and her academic network and social circle, and has participated in the programmes for entrepreneurs offered by the government. She is in the process of finishing the premises for the bakery, which has presented additional worries, and consolidating the business model. She is looking forward to getting a return from the investment she made with her partner. The insecurity involved in finding a balance in their business is one stress factor alongside others, such as dealing with the initial stages of formalisation of the business.

In the cases that I have briefly described we have observed shared experiences of informal and formal work characterised by the struggle with formal requirements, even if the experience and agency as entrepreneurs are different. In the cases of Yanira, Natalia and Andrea, we have seen that the distinction between formal and informal work is unclear and that the generalisation of precarious work conditions and modes of experiences has implications for the entrepreneurs' lives (Pardo 2012, Ferreira 2016). About this situation, Pardo (2012) has highlighted the ambiguous relation of entrepreneurs with the division of formal and informal work. In his work, Pardo questions this binary view of work, showing that entrepreneurial activity involves implied interconnections between formal and informal spaces and dynamics, thus relegating this division to a matter of law and governance, for it is not a categorisation that describes the different conditions of work accurately. These reflections contribute to our understanding of the continuities of entrepreneurial practices and beliefs between formal and informal labour and, also, of the discontinuities between models of governance, management and citizenship in the socioeconomic spectrum (Pardo 2009, 2012).

The work of Pardo on entrepreneurial experiences in Naples and of Ferreira on the experiences of precarity in Colombia share a critique of the modern organisation of work into formal/informal, material/immaterial, legal/illegal (Ferreira, 2016, Pardo 2012). This critical comprehension of the world of work highlights the gaps between the binary divisions that inform the political and legal bodies that regulate labour and the economy, and the experiences of workers in their struggle to succeed economically. Therefore, in order to understand entrepreneurship in the Colombian context, we need to approach the incoherence that I have pointed out between the entrepreneurial boom and low economic growth moving beyond the separation between formal and informal work. It is necessary to shift to an analysis based on the experiences of the entrepreneurs, which enables us to understand more accurately the relation between socioeconomic practices, individual and collective identities and global macro systems.

However, a perspective rooted in the daily experiences of entrepreneurs in precarious contexts implies moving away from traditional boundaries, such as the modern definitions of labour, time and territory. In the next section, I will review concepts drawn from the literature on multi-sited ethnography, the labour process theory and *univocity* that are useful in our

study of the relation between the global and the local expressions of entrepreneurship and precarious work.

A Multi-sited Understanding of the Global Work System:
Perspectives from Social and Ethnographic Research

In Colombia, the entrepreneurial paths in which San Precario could circulate are many, diverse and interconnected. The complexity of the networks that constitute the Colombian world of work implies different positions and trajectories. Hence, the experiences of precarity by local communities and subjects are also diverse and develop at several levels (Casas-Cortés 2014). So, the paths in which San Precario might circulate through Colombian entrepreneurialism cross a wide variety of lines related to different social classes, territories, identities and socioeconomic and political issues.

When studying a complex phenomenon that implies such high diversity, we face the challenge of grasping the variations within the entrepreneurial networks while systematising and organising the information and knowledge produced by the research. To avoid the practice of modern sciences of categorising the empirical data in binary systems, we need to engage with a more sophisticated understanding about the intrinsic difference among the empirical experiences. Therefore, in view of the conceptual developments of the philosophy of difference, it is more than pertinent to face the challenge of grasping the diversity and difference that mark this global phenomenon.

In his work, *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1994), one of the most prominent philosophers of difference, presents a perspective of difference strong enough to escape traditional superimpositions of binary categories over specific and general multiplicities. He problematizes how the determinations imposed by representation imply neutralisation, a literal impossibility of *making, producing difference*, of the substantial multiplicity in a series of multiple and diverse events (Deleuze 1994). When addressing the entrepreneurial networks of Bogotá, it is critical to question the relationship between the individual efforts of the entrepreneurial agents and the extensive series of practices marking the broader entrepreneurial system. How can we understand this series of events if each expression of the series is different from the others and from the wider network itself? It is here that the Deleuzian concept of *univocity* seems to be a useful conceptual tool. Aware of the substantial and immanent difference among singularities in broader context, Deleuze proposes to use this concept to develop an understanding of the relations among different events. Univocity implies a denial of division in a series of events — in this case, the series of events that constitute the global work system — and among the events that constitute such a series — in this case, the different levels and experiences of the global work system. For him, there are distributions and hierarchies within a group of singularities. However, this does not imply that they are isolated from each other and the series in which they arise. The difference between events and series of events *is* difference itself, intended as the ontological condition in which a particularity can be related with a totality. This means that the difference between events is what can make a series which is, at the same time, different from the events that constitute it (Deleuze 1994, Tormey 2005). From this viewpoint, the totality can only be expressed by the

constitutive diversity of its elements and the differentiation among them; at the same time, all the differences among the events in a series is what makes that series distinctive from the terms that constitute it.

When dealing with the global world of precarious work as a series of interconnected expressions marked by profoundly different local experiences, it is important to highlight that it is the plurality at the local level that brings out the global dimension of the work system. I mean that the multiple experiences of precariousness at local level are what produces a general phenomenon of precarization in the world of work that is also distinctively different from the expressions within it. Specifically, the distribution of knowledge through a widespread and dynamic system such as that of global entrepreneurialism makes the local experiences around the world at once qualitatively different from each other and a global entrepreneurial system of practices; thus, these different forms of entrepreneurialism acquire their global dimension.

This view of the diverse expression of precarious work at different levels and distributions is embraced by the Labour Process Theory (LPT). Some perspectives in this body of knowledge recognize how labour issues occur beyond the limits of the strictly defined modern workplace, and that other ideological and political factors configure the process of labour and the diverse experiences of it (Burawoy 1979; Litter 1986, 1990; Nichols 1980; Thompson and Smith 2009). As Thomson and Smith have pointed out, '[…] The central argument was that the dynamics of relations between capital and labour as actors in the workplace cannot be assumed to be continuous with capital and labour as societal actors. In other words, labour process struggles might have diverse, not predictable or singular, outcomes at the level of the political and the political within work.' (2009: 918).

Burawoy (1979) encourages us to understand the labour process as a complex global system in which transnational labour relations constitute a network that configures local expression. This understanding is highly relevant to the study of global phenomena such as entrepreneurialism and precarity with regard to local experiences. Deleuze's concept of univocity applied to the global world of work and the different phenomena in it, helps us to identify the relation between global entrepreneurialism in times of generalised precarity and individual entrepreneurial experiences in precarious contexts. The general context (global capitalism, global entrepreneurialism, generalised precarity) finds always local expression in different forms that differ from the broader context while being part of it.

These ideas open the door to new approaches in the study of global and local systems of work. For instance, Thomson and Smith argue that 'Multi-site, multilayered research studies can overcome some of these issues, but these often end up disconnected from actual labour processes' (2009: 923). This poses a challenge and an opportunity for multi-sited ethnography, for a multi-sited ethnographic understanding of global issues such as precarity or entrepreneurship could provide new insights on the relationship between these two categories in the local/global context and on the division between formal and informal work.

According to Marcus (1995, 1999), multi-sited ethnographic work arises not only as a study of a global system but a study of the flows of imaginaries and forces of global capitalism. This conception allows us to escape from the dichotomies between local isolated

systems and a global impossible-to-reach system. For him, 'Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography.' (1995: 105). More specifically, this approach enables us to study the relation of entrepreneurship to precarious local contexts in terms of the trajectories of global discourses and the ways in which they operate in diverse backgrounds; thus, we can study phenomena related to labour and employment without the spatial restrictions of traditional ethnography and extract the general from the unique and move from the *micro* to the *macro* (Burawoy 1998). Understanding the complexity and interconnections of local contexts that constitute the global world of work is highly relevant to grasping the relations between objects and spaces that are apparently unlinked.

Tracing the Entrepreneurial Practices through Precarious
Formal and Informal Work Contexts in Colombia

Considering the opportunity of constructing a *bigger picture*, as Marcus proposes, of a complex system like that of Colombian entrepreneurialism in the context of global-local relations, my ethnographic fieldwork in Bogotá should be understood as a space that is configured by movements and flows of ideas, communities and objects that are significant beyond the geopolitical delimitations of the territory. The entrepreneurial networks of Bogotá are connected with wider regional, national and international systems that configure the experience of local entrepreneurs.

Following Marcus' model of ethnographic fieldwork, it is important to define *what to follow*. We need to trace the paths of the different forces that construct the entrepreneurs' subjectivity in precarious contexts in order to map the social correlates through different entrepreneurial spaces. According to him, *following the metaphor* is 'especially potent for suturing locations of cultural production that had not been obviously connected and, consequently, for creating empirically argued new envisionings of social landscapes' (Marcus 1995: 108). This, I believe, was the most appropriate way to construct the field for my study, because it allowed me to analyse social correlates of entrepreneurship in different spaces where precarity is expressed. It also allowed me to trace the entrepreneurial discursive practices that circulate between global and local dynamics of precarity in the Colombian work system.

Being in some way heterodox, a hybridisation between 'following the metaphor' and the single site of traditional ethnography is a strategic starting point that enables us to follow entrepreneurial practices better, in the sense of identifying better the ramifications of these practices and seeing the bigger picture of the system. This *strategic* space, or starting point, provided different perspectives from which I started tracing the entrepreneurial paths in different areas of the social spectrum, identifying connections and associations between different social spaces and configuring history, politics, macro and microeconomics, class, race or gender.

The concept of 'strategic space' is, in this case, a social device that involves the power to govern effectively: The Law of Entrepreneurship of Colombia 1014 of 2006. Laws are devices of government and control that affect the social body in different ways. In modern societies, they affect the everyday life of individuals and power relations, as they operate in different spaces and normative bodies. For Foucault (2005), regimes of truth and discipline are the ultimate means by which power can affect these bodies). From this point of view, laws are useful devices to organise the social body in determined spaces and times; they prescribe a repertory of movements, enunciations and functions that underpin the legal discourse that guarantees efficiency as a goal of neoliberal capitalism. As Foucault (1990) has pointed out, legal prescriptions determine both the purposes of an activity and the shape of it, the forms and methods that it must replicate to accomplish the demanded duties. The way in which laws operate in society makes them ideal devices to start tracing the economic and social practices. A large body of knowledge produced by sciences such as psychology, management and economy has also contributed to the construction of the Law for Entrepreneurship of Colombia (Law 1014 of 2006). These inputs, mostly from the transnational academic community and international organisations, identify a particular kind of socioeconomic and political entrepreneurial subject and configure the set of experiences and practices that characterize the imaginaries and behaviours of these subjects.

As it is exemplified by the Colombian normative bodies that govern the entrepreneurial world, the power relations of the global economy may be turned into legislation that has a direct impact on the experience of individuals. The Law 1014 of 2006 was passed with the specific objective of promoting the entrepreneurial spirit in different sectors of Colombian society and guaranteeing a good environment for entrepreneurship (Presidency of Colombia, 2006). This law has the objective of 'creating an inter-institutional framework that encourages the development of an entrepreneurial culture and the creation of companies'. In this line, the law envisages the creation of an Investors Network, a National Entrepreneurship Network and Regional Entrepreneurship Networks. These are networks of public organisations, education institutions, social associations, economic groups and communities. They are responsible for the implementation of policies and for designing programmes that promote an entrepreneurial culture. These normative bodies are determinant in the way in which entrepreneurs interact with each other, with other social actors like other entrepreneurs, the academic community, clients, industries, banks, the government, public institutions, NGOs, transnational neoliberalism and the territory itself.

It is in this kind of network that the law is implemented, including education programmes for entrepreneurship, institutionalised systems that bring together socioeconomic actors interested in the promotion of an entrepreneurial culture, economic and financial programs for entrepreneurs. In the case of Bogotá, the local Chamber of Commerce and INNPulsa[3] coordinate most of the official events and public programmes. These organisations are important reference points for the different entrepreneurs who shared their experience with me during my research; in particular, those who participated in the formal

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[3] This is the government's office in charge of promoting entrepreneurial activity in the country.

entrepreneurial projects offered by the official institutions. Other entrepreneurs who operate informally have a more distant relationship with the institutions and remain suspicious of these programmes.

Looking at the different ways in which the Law 1014 of 2006 is implemented, in terms of the paths of knowledge and ideological features about entrepreneurship, allows us to analyse where these discourses are created, how they become *knowledge*, how they are translated into public policies and how these ideas are received at local level. These entrepreneurial trajectories; these discourses, practices and networks of knowledge around the world are observable in Bogotá's local contexts, such as organic markets, neighbourhood shops and natural parks but also in other, different, spaces such as international academic and business conferences. In order to analyse these dynamics it is necessary to extend the fieldwork into the relevant spaces. Using strategically the Colombian Law of Entrepreneurship I will expand the field to include different Colombian local contexts. Thus, the activities, networks and communities that are related with each other and that interact with this legislation will constitute an additional multiplicity of paths where ethnographic fieldwork will be conducted.

Conclusions

In the contemporary context of neoliberal globalisation, precarity is a phenomenon expressed in multiple ways. Austerity policies and deregulation of markets have shaped a precarious global labour market characterised by unstable work relations and psychosocial insecurity for workers. In this perspective, precarity is a distinctive way of existence marked by the exploitation of neoliberal work regimens.

We have seen that the entrepreneurial phenomenon in Colombia is marked by incoherence between the entrepreneurial boom and the low economic growth and that to understand this situation we need to move beyond the separation between formal and informal work. To address the relationship between the entrepreneurial social, political and economic practices and the entrepreneurs' subjectivities in a global system we need to develop a view based on entrepreneurs' experiences of precariousness. I have argued that this view of the labour process as a complex of labour relations that configures local expressions is highly relevant to study global phenomena such as entrepreneurialism and precarity. This effort finds useful conceptual and methodological tools in the concepts developed by socio-economic studies that engage with the relationship between global entrepreneurialism and generalised precarity and with individual entrepreneurial experiences and activities in precarized contexts. I have shown that, as these concepts respond to the diversity and the complexity that characterizes the entrepreneurial world of Bogotá, they enable us to trace the different trajectories of the Colombian Law of Entrepreneurship regarding movements of entrepreneurial knowledge and action; thus, they help us to understand the relationships between public policy and entrepreneurship, and particularly how legislation operates in the different contexts of Colombian entrepreneurialism.

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Cross-cutting Precariousness:
Values, Work and Inequality in Post-2008 Spain[1]

Marta M. Lobato   José Luis Molina   Hugo Valenzuela-García
(Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain)
martamarialr@gmail.com   JoseLuis.Molina@uab.cat   hugo.valenzuela@uab.cat

Precariousness has been used frequently in recent anthropological debates to designate the subjective and material worsening of living conditions experienced by people around the world. However, it is uncommon to see studies where both elements are carefully juxtaposed to illuminate wider processes of inclusion and exclusion. Starting from its application in the context of post-2008 Spain, we show how *precariousness* can have different meanings for people, depending on their economic and cultural backgrounds. By exploring two contrasting cases, we show similarities and differences in the ways people experience and act upon the changes they have undergone during and after the crisis. We contend that analysing how both material and subjective *precariousness* are articulated, through comparative case studies, can illuminate the ways in which crisis is transforming 'the condition of work' to deepen social inequalities.
Key words: Economic crisis, material/subjective precariousness, value-spheres, multi-sited ethnography, Spain.

Introduction

The use of the term *precariousness* inside and outside academia has fluctuated over the past decades, but it has recently been treated in anthropological theory as a global phenomenon, affecting both the global South and the economically stagnating societies of the Western world. However, recent studies of precariousness have engaged with the subject either from the perspective of individual and collective forms of resistance to neoliberal governance and deregulation and/or have interrogated the ontological experience of precariousness (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, Molé 2010, Standing 2011, Millar 2014, Armano et al. 2017). In other words, recent research on precariousness has primarily taken place within the realms of changing economic landscapes and the production of subjectivities. As Kathleen Millar stated in her work with Brazilian *catadores*, the concept of precarity 'has emerged as a way to capture both the tenuous conditions of neoliberal labour as well as states of anxiety, desperation, unbelonging and risk experienced by temporary and irregular employed workers' (2014: 34). Spyridakis (2013) had also explored issues of liminality in his 'liminal workers' when following the survival strategies of ordinary actors in post-2008 Greece, and more recently Calvão (2016: 458) suggested looking at precariousness as forms of unfree labour (paid or unpaid), to explore disparate social processes linking specific qualities of work and the properties of the things worked.

Very frequently, however, anthropological studies have focused on the links between

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processes of precarization of labour and of life (Allison 2013) in singular contexts; rarely are different cases in various locations brought together for comparison. This article adds to studies guided by an ethnographic understanding of material and subjective precariousness, but it employs a methodological practice which attempts to draw together distinct local processes, their actors and specificities, within the wider context of the global transformations resulting from the 2008 financial crash. It is for this reason that the discussion focuses in great detail on two case studies, involving four different actors who belong to two demographically-opposed urban settings in Spain. As recent writing in *Anthropology in the City: Methodology and Theory* (Pardo and Prato 2012) states, urban settings should be addressed as places of meaning and identity, and anthropologists need to find ways of acquiring in-depth understanding of how people relate to the wider social system. It is therefore important not to isolate local realities but to use empirically-based analysis for comparative reflection and theoretical development in the study of the relationship between micro and macro levels (Pardo and Prato eds 2017, Prato and Pardo 2013). In this way, this article offers detailed ethnographic evidence of how the lives of the four actors in Barcelona (north-eastern Spain) and Cádiz (southern Spain), are curtailed by a downsizing of material life conditions, in response to which each of them thinks and acts very differently.

We, however, are not so much concerned with a *class* reading in Marxist terms. Readers might find it striking, nonetheless, that the actors who enjoy a better material position engage more publicly in 'modern', anti-precariousness movements than the actors in the other case, who become more deprived. In the search for the commonalities and differences between the informants' lives, we sought to look into the meaning people attach to changing labour configurations and what this means for capitalism's inequalities and unfreedoms (Calvão 2016: 452). These are the kind of ethnographic suggestions made by Narotzky and Besnier when linking 'value, crisis and hope' (2014), and that David Graeber puts forward consistently in his work on the theory of value (2001, 2006, 2013). By making use of Weberian analytical tools, such as *life spheres* (Weber 1964 [1947])*,* it becomes clear that the crisis has accentuated processes of inclusion and exclusion, leaving some actors marginalised from the productive and creative opportunities that draw people to affluent urban settings, and offering others more opportunities for public engagement and relevance. For this purpose, we juxtapose 'stability' and 'flexibility' as imperative differences that cut across the (subjective) *precariousness* experienced by the four informants, to reflect on the ways in which new forms of inequality might be crystallizing.

Crisis and the Post-wage Economies

As mentioned earlier, we focus on two cases in which actors have sought to deal with the work-related uncertainty that resulted from the large number of layoffs and acute labour market deficiencies that followed the 2008 crisis. The differences between the cases give us a snapshot of the paradoxical situation in Western economies, in which experiences of work are becoming more like those in the global South, rather than the other way around (Breman and van der Linden 2014). In Spain, we find that post-crisis austerity measures incentivising flexibility and leading to further deregulation of the economy have not only failed to create jobs, but have

incentivized forms of 'atypical employment', in which workers are met with less protection and more uncertainty.

It could be argued, nonetheless, that the post-wage economy has its roots in the neoliberal turn of the late 1970s. In this respect, we agree with scholars who propose understanding such phenomena as a process of *informalization*; as a set of global-level processes resulting from alliances between money and power (Hart 2000), or between the State and capital (Piketty 2014), which began in the 1980s (Portes et al. 1989). The deep financial shock which Spain underwent in 2008 was met with further deregulation, not only through the privatization of public goods and services and changing labour laws to secure employers' profits,[2] but also through global finance capturing the political and institutional sector (Massó and Pérez-Yruela 2017). Approaching post-2008 precariousness from a political economy perspective inevitably involves reference to the framework of corporations' and States' efforts to assimilate the workforce further into neoliberal regimes of value extraction and profit-making, which escape public scrutiny. This 'informal' quality of neoliberal governance includes many of the exploitative and hidden practices that corporations and companies are currently undertaking in pursuit of capital expansion and acquisition, leaving middle and lower waged classes at the end of the value chain suffering from 'the condition of work' (Wong 2013: 15-16).

It is due to practices associated with the expansion of large-scale profit-making at a time of deep economic contraction that the informants described here have found themselves living in ever-worsening conditions. We are able to affirm that, on the one hand, capital is acting to the detriment of workers as a whole under the regime of financial accumulation. On the other hand, our fieldwork has shown that different actors do not refer to such dispossession in the same terms, and thereby lack a shared sense of what Allison (2013: 54) termed the 'feeling of being dispossessed'. This might be explained by the contrasting value regimes that characterized the post-Fordist turn. We will elaborate on this in the following section, with reference to the stability/flexibility paradigms that cut through precariousness as experienced by the actors presented in this article.

Crosscutting Precariousness

Stability

As is often the case when scholars encounter ordinary people in their everyday lives, general accounts of social change sometimes fail to understand the overlapping nature of processes and the geographical varieties of capitalist accumulation. Spain is a good example of this, with its 'delayed' industrial development, which was based primarily on foreign capital investment, and the subsequent rapid expansion of its financial markets to other sectors, such as construction and services. The post-Fordist turn was already established in many factories when young workers in the 1980s were entering them, while the public sector enjoyed much better conditions. Higher salaries and a stronger welfare state allowed many of these workers to

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[2] We refer here to the Labour Reform passed by the Popular Party (PP) in 2012. This reform made it easier for employers to fire employees and reduced the costs of dismissal. The reform received severe criticism from trade unions and other worker collectives.

participate in the housing market and become indebted, to use their leisure time by consuming in the service sector, and to provide for their children's university education. Professional training was often provided in the workplace, as was the case in the banking sector. For these working classes, precariousness is now the inability to continue making a living from unskilled jobs, and in many cases to meet their responsibility as debtors. In terms of the centrality of *work* in people's lives and its relation to other forms of provisioning (Warde 1992, Narotzky 2012), precariousness is a direct result of the decline in the wage economy.

Flexibility

As mentioned earlier, in Spain a drastic two-speed economy has developed in parallel with the post-Fordist turn. In sectors that are growing in cosmopolitan urban settings, the rejection of 'a job for life' is becoming increasingly common. These workers, when being able to access more varied forms of provisioning (such as rents from house ownership), as well as better opportunities for the acquisition of educational capital, are integrated in the post-wage economy holding different value regimes. These are workers that often refer to narratives of empowerment in overcoming the wage economy. In this context, social reproduction is not so dependent on work. *Structural* precariousness can be better tolerated because, to some extent, these workers can afford it. In this value regime, precariousness is more *relative* because it also emanates from subjective experience. Workers seek flexible jobs that will allow them to balance different life spheres, and emphasis is given to *work* as a source of fulfilment (Armano and Murgia 2017: 48). More importance is also given to professional values, competencies and skills (Morini and Fumagalli 2010). Narratives of passion, autonomy and self-exploitation simulate those of the 'enterprise-self' (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007), and we find greater reliance on technology and alternative workplaces, such as the home or co-working spaces. Here precariousness is the inability to arrange life spheres with a certain degree of flexibility.

Methodology and Sample

The research upon which this article is based explored the changing livelihoods of low and lower-middle-income individuals who were affected by the 2008 financial crisis, with the aim of exploring the social and economic transformations that Spain was undergoing and the potential forms of inequality that might be emerging. This article draws on 51 interviews conducted during the research, which used a snowball technique to find informants living in a precarious situation, and was multi-sited, meaning that interviews took place in different places for the purpose of comparing connections and associations (Marcus 1995: 97). Thus, in exploring precariousness as structural and ontological, in its various manifestations and locations, in what Marcus described as 'strategically situated ethnography', this article seeks to reach a broad understanding of contemporary socio-economic changes in ethnographic terms.

To avoid common critiques of multi-sited ethnography for producing 'thin' empirical evidence, due to a possibly 'lighter' presence in the field (Falzon 2009), we took an alternative pathway by following six case studies in detail, two of which are presented here. In a similar fashion to that proposed by scholars such as Pardo (1996) and Pardo and Prato (2012: 11) in their interpretations of this methodology, we followed informants continuously over a period

of time and we consistently asked them about the same topics. However, the complexity of carrying out work in urban settings proved challenging, in terms of systematizing the amount of time spent on each case study, also partly because informants' pace of life varied, meaning that it was the ethnographer who decided when a case-study had been sufficiently understood, and this varied greatly from case to case. In this regard, the first case introduced here was followed for two months and the second one for three.

The two case studies exemplified in this article, which include four different actors — two men and two women — were chosen because of the contrasting perspectives they provide on the same process: two different faces of precariousness as a consequence of financial re-structuration, with significant capital differences (education, social capital, place of residence) in the Bourdieusian sense. Otherwise, both cases included informants of similar ages (Angel, 43; Maria, 39; Jose, 37; Montse, 35), but with very different interpretations of what precariousness is.

Nonetheless, the reader might find the disparity of the cases striking, given that Cádiz and Barcelona comprise very different urban, social and economic landscapes. The first case is located in Puerto Real —a small industrial city on the outskirts of the city of Cádiz, in Andalusia; the second case takes place in a neighbourhood of Barcelona. Puerto Real has a population of roughly 40,000 inhabitants whereas Barcelona's is 1.6 million. Similarly, both urban settings were hit differently by the crisis; in Puerto Real unemployment reached 40% in 2012 and in Barcelona it rose to 15%. The professional trajectories of the informants presented here are very different; in the first case Angel and Maria have limited educational backgrounds, whereas in the second both hold university degrees, and a PhD in Montse's case. However, the aim of using multi-sited methodology was precisely to understand the implications of such disparities, for the purpose of understanding social correlates and groundings of associations (Marcus 1995: 108). In other words, the sites were chosen with comparative translation in mind, as a phenomenon that is central to the way in which societies (and systems) are mutually constituted. In the following section we turn to the exploration of the aforementioned cases.

Case 1. 'I was middle class before, with my stable income and my permanent contract'
Angel started working in General Motors 20 years ago, in a seaport town on the northern shore of the Bay of Cádiz, in Andalusia. His educational background back then consisted of professional training for the metal industry. He did this at a very young age and knowing that if he was a good worker he would have a job for a lifetime, as his father did in the plant. Not surprisingly, he started as an apprentice but soon after he joined the permanent workforce as a mechanical adjuster. Angel spoke of having been lucky, as in the 1980s it became increasingly difficult to get permanent contracts. Efforts were being made to modernize and expand the economy after the severe oil crisis in the 1970s, as Spain transitioned from nearly 40 years of Francoist rule to a parliamentary democracy. Such modernization went hand in hand with an upsurge in tourism, a sharp reduction in the exchange value of the United States dollar, and a massive increase in the inflow of foreign investment (Solsten and Meditz 1990). After decades of an isolated, centrally-planned autarkic system, the road to a liberalized market-based

economy was opened and processes of liberalization and privatization began. It was then that the General Motors Corporation decided to make its single largest overseas investment in Spain.

During Angel's early years in the factory, General Motors created the separate entity of Delphi, and his plant became part of it. During those years he moved into different positions within the production section. At the factory Angel used to work long shifts but his monthly income was very high, as was the norm during the years in which Spain's economy was booming. He was also maintaining his whole family, wife and two children with that one salary. He had the right to holidays and the extra months of pay which permanent workers received each year in Spain as standard. If he needed to have a day off to visit a family member in the hospital, for example, he could easily exchange his shift with another worker from the plant.

Angel was a typical case of the breadwinner that characterized Fordism, even though the company was already making significant changes by relying on a larger pool of temporary workers. During the 1980s and up to the mid-1990s wages increased significantly and internal demand grew steadily. It was at this point that ideas about the growing 'middle class' were being shared widely in the public realm. After some years of working and saving, Angel and his wife bought a flat not far away from the factory, in a newer residential part of Puerto Real, and bought a standard car. When their second child was born in 2005, he and his wife decided to buy a new flat with an extra room. The sale cancelled out their mortgage and they acquired a loan for the new flat. Angel always talks about this decision with a cautious tone, 'we didn't go crazy like other people did. We could have had a mortgage of 800 Euros, but thankfully we always made reasonable choices'. The defensiveness with which they both reflect on this decision came at the very moment at which there was a deluge of news on housing evictions in the media, as politicians also appeared judgmental and were blaming citizens for 'living beyond their means'.

Angel and his wife would socialize a lot with other workers' families. In a small town like Puerto Real, where thousands of men were employed in the shipping and automobile industries, there was a sense of community linked to work. This was evident from the spatial, economic and geographically delimited urban configurations that the settling of multinational corporations and state-owned shipyards had created in this place. Effectively, Angel says that most of his life used to take place at the factory: 'I used to work extra hours at the weekend, but they were remunerated … at least I got to hang out with the other workers! I think with a job like that, you socialize more with the colleagues than with your own family'. In fact, Angel recalls very well all the times he has had to ask for a day off, usually for celebrations like a wedding, his children's first communion, or a funeral.

In 2007, however, everything started to change for Angel and his family. Delphi announced the closure of the plant in Cádiz and thousands of workers were laid off, including from the subcontracted businesses. Since then, Angel and his family have been living on unemployment benefits and doing activist work to oppose the conditions of the layoff. His wife joined other workers' wives and would go to the street to protest on Wednesdays; Angel was in the workers' committee and would go out to protest on Tuesdays. The workers got organized and set up a collective fund as many of them, due to their age and low level of qualifications, had become 'unemployable'. In contrast to public-owned shipyard companies, such as

Astilleros, the scope for action was more limited for Delphi workers. At first, the State and the European Union offered support by paying the workers a wage while they attended courses so that they could be redeployed in other jobs. After a while, however, it was revealed that a good part of that money had been siphoned off and was never used for the training, bringing about a huge corruption scandal. Once the benefits stopped and people were faced with the risk of not having enough money for food, many started to give up on the collective protests. Angel's wife, Maria, who used to be a stay-at-home-mother, started working irregularly for a cleaning company, and Angel was eventually hired by an employment agency to work at a sugar factory.

Angel has therefore gone from the mechanical work he used to do at the plant — taking pieces in and out of the production line — to packing up sugar with an electric coil. He now has a temporary contract with an eight-hour daily shift, with the possibility of extending it to 12 hours (paid) if he wishes. He supervises the machine and inserts the cardboard that wraps up the final package. He does this repeatedly for eight hours, sometimes for six consecutive days, changing from morning to night shifts when asked to, and also having to go to the factory on his day off when there are 'emergency' situations. He cannot exchange shifts with colleagues anymore and has a lot of problems when he has to ask for a day off to visit a family member or attend an important celebration.

As he now works for the sugar company but is employed by an agency, he has to deal with two bosses and make sure he is regarded as a good worker by both at all times. When talking about the changing nature of his work, Angel does not seem to mind the fact that he has moved to another repetitive type of job: 'I do not know what I prefer, in all jobs you have to work. I have not had many jobs in my life. I go to work to justify my salary. But I know that they take advantage of our situation'. At first Angel does not describe his situation as 'precarious'. He insists that even though he has fewer rights now than before, the pay is still good, because he can choose to work extra hours and they are well paid. 'If I was doing all these hours just to get 900 euros, then yes, I would say this job is precarious. But I am getting around 1300 with all the extra hours, so that is ok … yes, my body feels very tired a lot of the time, and I do not get to see my children for days sometimes because of the different schedules … but at least, even if I cannot take any holidays, they still pay me for them'.

The life changes experienced by Angel outside of the economic sphere, however, are significant. Even though he used to spend long hours at the plant, he had a social life outside of it. When we are in his house, his wife shows us photos taken at different times of him with his colleagues. It was, in Angel's words, his *home,* something that he contradicts at other times when he states that 'work is work, and one has to do it for a salary'. Maria, Angel's wife, shares these intense feelings towards what used to shape their lives so deeply. She still has a good relationship with the other women and tells us that they all struggle to find work: 'we are all trying to work as cleaners in houses. But things have changed. Before, a girl without studies could still find jobs easily, but not anymore. Now you can get paid five euros per hour', and because of the crisis people decide to manage their house without cleaners. Both Angel and Maria know when the other families go through bad times and try to organize themselves to help. However, they do not idealize these solidarity bonds, and this is made clear when Angel says that he became distant from the others when he became unemployed. In their case, the

economic support has mostly come from their closest family members, such as Angel's mother and sister. They help when big payments have to be made for their children's health or education, or celebrations like the youngest's first communion.

When the company closed down, the State promised to redeploy them in new jobs. However, after months of uncertainty and false promises, it became clear that this would be impossible to carry out. Moreover, Delphi workers began to be subjected to public criticism for 'asking too much from the State'; they were portrayed as lazy, undeserving workers who were asking for special treatment. Moreover, over the past decades the unions had weakened and were accused of aligning with the State, tacitly allowing the closure to take place. Angel's view on the role of the State (what it should or should not do) is well anchored in his experiences as a factory worker and the scandals related to the handling of the mass layoffs. He says, 'we've been cheated by everyone, workers should at least trust each other, but why are some people so keen on governing? They must want to get something out of it, right?' In his new job, he does not expect 'any special treatment' from the employers. 'Work' now belongs to a sphere which is further separated from the collective responsibility that makes up the State.

In Angel's case, the work he used to perform at the plant was significantly embedded in all other spheres, thus shaping his sociality, sense of belonging, identity, ability to plan, and expectations for his kid's education and future. In this case, we can say that Angel's value spheres were deeply intertwined. When the plant closed after 20 years, Angel joined a new factory production line in another multinational company, this time through an external employment agency. For both Angel and Maria, precariousness is experienced as the lack of stability in the form of a stable income. It translates above all into difficulties with paying for the children's school books and extra-curricular activities, thus intervening in their social reproduction.

Case 2. *'We refuse to live according to values we don't believe in'*

In a different case, Montse and Jose are active members of *The Coop,* a cultural association that started in 2013 as a way for members of the neighbourhood to organize and work towards a new model of urban residence. *The Coop* was initially funded informally by a few members, but it soon gained wider support and grew into a full cooperative. Born as a continuation of the protest that took place in Barcelona after the 2012 cuts, the cooperative now coordinates many different projects relating to alternative education, organic food and a communal kitchen.

Jose is an economist who decided to enter the cooperative sector after his previous company in the automobile sector closed down in 2011. He enjoyed a good position at the company, where he was responsible for 350 workers. He received a good salary but had to travel abroad often. When his company was closing, he was given the chance to be redeployed in another position, but on the condition that he had to work even further away from his hometown. Jose had just become a father and was not keen on living far from his children and not being able to see them grow up. On top of this, he did not like the company's work ethic and its hierarchical structure. Whenever we met at the cooperative, he would tell me that everything he had to do was dictated from above and that 'there were too many rules there'. He did not want to continue. Jose then decided to do a Master's degree in cooperative economics,

as he thought there was a strong associative culture in Catalonia and realized it was getting increasing institutional attention: 'a friend of mine who worked as an entrepreneurial advisor told me about it, and then I just realized there was a whole new economy around giving support to self-employment'. Jose was, in fact, right. In 2012 Catalonia registered a 32% increase in the creation of new cooperatives.

Institutionally, both the local and national government and the European Union were incentivizing this turn towards the so-called social economy. Just as the restructuring of the financial and banking sector was taking place after the 2010 bailout, and cuts in public spending were increasing, a moral narrative was emerging around the economic realm that crystalized in grassroots forms of self-employment; be it individual in the case of entrepreneurs, or collective in the form of cooperatives (Escribano et al. 2014, Molina et al. 2017). One could argue that it was, in a sense, the essence of the 'small is beautiful' French movement of the 1990s (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005), finding its expression through small entrepreneurial ventures.

At that time, Jose was also buying food from an environmentally-friendly cooperative in his neighbourhood and eventually got to know other people who held similar ethical interests. Social upheaval was at its greatest at that point, and protesters against the austerity measures had started organizing assemblies and occupying public spaces. It was in these social spaces that Jose met his current business partners, with whom he eventually created a cooperative: a lawyer and a specialist in fiscal policies who were both unemployed at the time. Knowing that there were few job opportunities, the three eventually decided to create a social consultancy in the form of a cooperative to help associations, social enterprises and ordinary citizens from the neighbourhood develop their own projects. When asked about the transition from his previous lifestyle to the new one, Jose usually talks about the importance of values in his decision to opt for this new life, and about the vocational character of the work he now does: "we are all very active. Essentially, you build your life around this work". Jose now gets a third of the salary he used to earn and has the responsibility to keep the business he created himself going, while making sure he is constantly networking and getting involved in as many projects as his time allows.

Nonetheless, Jose and his partner, Montse, spend a lot of their free time in *The Coop*, and even though it does not provide them with an income, they help as much as they can in the hope of finding a different way of living; hope for a world where not everything is dictated by money. Jose provides the association with his knowledge on financial matters, while Montse volunteers there. Montse has a PhD in sustainable architecture, which she finished just as the crisis broke, and even though she had the chance to get a job as a draughtswoman, she does not see that as a job that could fit with the lifestyle she wanted to pursue:

> 'I was not willing to live a life I did not believe in. It makes no sense to accept a job that will consume most of my time. It makes no sense to work so that you can pay someone else to take care of your children. That job I got would have taken too many hours; I would have spent too much time travelling back and forth, and for what? So that I can have more money to spend? Working from home allows me to have the flexibility I need to be able to take care of my children'.

Jose and Montse have found in each other the kind of support they need for the lifestyle they claim to want to pursue. They live in a flat that was bought with the money Jose made when he was working at the automobile factory, so they do not have a mortgage to pay. In addition, owning no car and living close to the spaces where they socialize and do networking allows them to reduce some of the usual living costs. Montse usually gets an income of up to 300 euros, so most of the money comes from Jose's jobs. They spend the money they make on what they prioritize the most: eating good-quality food and paying for the extracurricular activities of their children (this amounts to more than 50% of their income). In turn, Montse tries to make sense of the situation she lives in; working sporadically from home as an architect while taking care of the children (something that goes, she states, 'against what [she] was educated for'). In fact, at some points she would say that it was not easy to be a stay-at-home mother while Jose went away for work. She perceives herself as *precarious* and complains about how little help women receive with raising their children in Spain, and the general lack of institutional support.

It is evident that Montse is not completely content with the compromises they have had to make to meet their needs, but this is easy to miss in her initial, well-constructed narrative about the moral anti-capitalist values that have compelled her to choose this kind of life.

The cooperative and the *social* consultancy are the ways through which Jose, Montse, and others seek to resolve the tensions between different value spheres. Furthermore, the collective, anti-capitalist and mutualistic narrative attached to the idea of the cooperative serves as a moral framework which can, and in fact does, accommodate personal ventures. These personal ventures, however, are anchored in ideas about what is worth desiring. Jose and his partners identify themselves with *ordinary* people when they naturalize their choice, by arguing for an anti-establishment, pro-social way of working and living. However, the affective relationships created through years of socialization in these spaces have turned into a small ecosystem of entrepreneurial possibilities.

Discussion

On Values, Life Spheres, and Ascribed Capital

The two cases explained in the previous section represent very contrasting examples of the meanings of 'precariousness' and the moral aspects brought up in each case. We chose to show this through the ways in which actors acted upon value-spheres that stood in tension. We argue that in order to do this, it was necessary to understand the very different contexts from which such spheres had arisen, thus the need to understand aspects of the informants' social, economic and geographic backgrounds. Before the crisis, Angel and Maria's lives were characterized by the fact that work and family were connected by a community (of co-workers). Nowadays, this 'community' is dissolving, leaving an economy to which one has to adapt in order to survive. In this case, precariousness is both a loss of community and a loss of the ability to shape one's (family) life according to one's wishes. Because of this, Angel and his partner find it difficult criticise/judge their vulnerability from a moral perspective. Neither Angel nor Maria see themselves as precarious.

The case of Jose and Montse is different from the start. They portray their life before the crisis as already being one of tension between work and family. They aim to resolve this tension (and the crisis is a chance for them to do so) by choosing a way of life that integrates different spheres under one umbrella of common values. The integration of these different spheres seems to be a value in itself for them. They reflect/elaborate on that very explicitly by forming part of *The Coop*. However, there are deeper layers of value commitments that are hidden beyond this explicit value narrative (which makes it more difficult to reveal them). Glimpses of these value commitments, nonetheless, are given by Montse's uneasiness with her situation as a working-from-home mum. Striving to integrate spheres of life has its 'costs' on a moral/value level, as well, paradoxically, a loss of autonomy. Her partner Jose, on the other hand, is still struggling to finding a work-leisure balance, as he has become self-employed and struggles to make a decent salary. However, their discourse is much more positive, and is not focused on their losses, but on the desirable pursuit of flexible work.

All four, however, are objectively worse off. In the following table we give a summary of the objective elements that make up the precariousness that all of them have been subjected to:

Angel	Loss of labour rights, loss of work/life balance, loss of community, self-exploitation, decrease of income.
Maria	Loss of autonomy, loss of community, decrease of income.
Jose	Loss of work/life balance, loss of labour rights, self-exploitation.
Montse	Loss of autonomy, loss of work/life balance, absence of labour rights.

When Angel experienced the dissolution of the arrangements around which work, family life and sociality had been co-constituted, he was socially pressured not only to leave the worker's association but also to find whatever job could give him a stable income. For him and Maria, it was uncertainty that put the social reproduction of the household at risk. Montse and Jose, in contrast, are mobilizing their economic capabilities (for example, they own a flat in a good neighbourhood of Barcelona). In their case, relationships of affinity (such as those that emerged from *The Coop*), have helped them create a small, albeit weak, network of socio-economic capital. In their case, the entrepreneurial venture is one in which work is wrapped up in a narrative of self-realization, social values (such as creating enduring, cooperative forms of work) and meaningful activity.

There is, therefore, a difference between the cases that stands out clearly: the disparity in the families' accumulated wealth, which is the result of both ascribed status (inherited) and achieved status (throughout their working lives). This was an issue that was impossible for us to overlook in 'the relationship between the worker-subject, the product of work, and the political problem of unfreedom in precarious labour' (Calvão 2016). As Marx stated, 'capital is not a simple relation, but a process in whose various moments it is always capital' (1973: 258). In this sense, the case from Barcelona is placed in a context where a property is easily translated into a 'possibility' for commercial purposes. In the case of Puerto Real, where

unemployment came close to 25% in 2014, and where there is not a high demand for housing, that was not the case. From the contrasting ethnographic data collected in the case studies we contend that accumulated wealth, and especially wealth that is transformed into capital, changes the relationship between work and the working-subject in significant ways.

The Bourdieusian kinds of capital that we have explored in this article were mostly associated with education (which provides more opportunities for selling labour and accumulating wealth) and property (enabling less dependence on debt and the possibility of receiving an income from rent). Both cases are examples of 'middle classes' that stand at different ends of the value chain, Angel and Maria being in a more constrained situation than Jose and Montse. We contend that, given these differences, 'earning a living' in a climate of dispossession is an imperative with different implications for each case.

On Gender and Work Cultures: Stability, Flexibility and Autonomy as Grounds of Intersection
Maria is facing greater precariousness in her home because her casual, informal work as a cleaner has declined severely. This is something that threatens her ability to meet her most urgent needs, like paying the mortgage of the house where the family lives. She has been 'forced' to go back to domestic work, as she lacks the skills to apply for other jobs. Her autonomy is located outside the home, in her job, but also in the community of workers and families of Puerto Real. She does not aspire to meaningful work, but to a good enough salary to meet the needs of the family, as does Angel. In both cases, their life spheres are totally mobilized by the need to earn a wage and minimize the impact of uncertainty. It is not an expansion of sociality that we see, but the opposite; the loss of sociality, in a working culture that was always strongly mediated by its relationship with the State. In the case of Montse, where the home is not threatened by mortgage debt, she experiences wagelessness as an opportunity to fulfil herself in other life spheres (like the reproductive and activist ones, in the form of a different way of life). As a consequence, she 'adapts' her working arrangements to these other life spheres and therefore turns a situation of precariousness into a narrative of opportunity. She reaffirms the invisibility of 'unproductive' labour, and thus paradoxically experiences a loss of (real) autonomy. For Montse, the precariousness comes with the fact there is no institutional support for her decision to become self-employed, like having taxes reduced while taking care of the children. Nonetheless, she regards this decision as a personal one; a lifestyle choice where money-making is not the paramount value for her and her partner.

Similarly, Maria and Montse offer yet another intersection of structural positions and subjectivities. Maria did not attend school and has been working temporarily as a cleaning lady in middle-class homes, many of which have had to give up the cleaning services that she and other wives of the industry-related workplaces offer. As a result, she is finding very little work with which contribute to the family income and finds herself having to fight for her husband's job (note that she was very active in the initial protests against the closing of the plant), a terrain where she feels more empowered. Montse, on the contrary, is well-educated and finds herself in a position where child rearing conflates with her own values on maternity. As a result, she also finds herself back at home, where she feels she can manage these different value-spheres that are in tension and which she resolves by working precariously from her home. In both cases

we can identify a retreat to the household, a familiar phenomenon seen in other contexts such as, for instance, the transition of socialist Poland to a market economy, where women found themselves back in the home when unemployment was rampant (Pine 2008). In a nutshell, it is clear that behind tales of self-fulfilment and individual choice, there lies the deeper weight of individual responsibilities to carry on the productive and reproductive activities that define livelihoods.

Conclusion

As Denning stated, 'capitalism begins not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living.' (2010: 80), therefore, when we talk about value extraction through labour, we always come back to the issue of value extraction as generative of further capital and thus, further value extraction. This is the accumulative element that defines 'capitalism'. However, as other scholars have pointed out, it is not only the production of objects that matters in understanding value and exploitation in capitalism, but also the production of people and social relations. As Graeber stated, drawing from Marx, 'if the notion of mode of production is to be salvaged, it has to be seen not merely as a structure for the extraction of some kind of material surplus between classes, but as the way in which such a structure articulates with structures for the creation of people and social relations' (Graeber 2006: 77). We have explored two cases with four informants, in which place, gender, and work culture are articulated in their life-spheres differently. These different value regimes have led, firstly, to different subjective understandings of dispossession, and secondly, to the pursuit of different actions.

In summary, we have argued herein that the present 'crisis' has entailed an increasing informalization of the economy resulting from capital's pursuit of flexibility, and in a context of State withdrawal from worker protection. This has prompted individuals to bring narratives of morality down to the level of life-spheres, and consequently, to create value out of their re-arrangements. Drawing from the cases explored in this article, we see that ascribed capital allowed some informants to have a higher — but false — sense of freedom as choice (by re-configuring life spheres that stand in tension), which was less common in informants who relied mainly on income from selling their labour.

These differences limit the ontological and material opportunities for such actors to identify the common 'unfreedom' of their respective situations and hinders possibilities for joint action, which we have explained in this article through the stability vs. flexibility dichotomy. The study of precariousness and its effects must, therefore, take into account the ways in which subjectivities have been formed and are being articulated in the agency-structure relationship, which moves us away from focusing solely on identifying self-referential precariousness. We thus suggest that in order to understand what precariousness might mean for the emergence of new socio-economic forms, more emphasis needs to be given to comparative cases where flexible capital encounters different value regimes.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Kristina Graaf and **Noa Ha** (eds). 2015. *Street Vending in the Neoliberal City: A Global Perspective on the Practices and Policies of a Marginalized Economy.* Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books.

The latest UN-HABITAT (2016) global report shows that urban informality is exponentially spreading, and socially disadvantaged groups and individuals find it increasingly hard to experience the urban public space, especially the city centre, as a resource and an opportunity. This is the main background against which *Street Vending in the Neoliberal City* appears as timely and unique. While the overall aim of the work is to 'demonstrate the ongoing importance of the practice [of street vending] in the Southern hemisphere and the growing relevance of informalized labour in the North' (p. 12), the impression I had after reading it was that of a much more comprehensive accomplishment — a way richer variety of arguments, reasonings, new data and global connections than the relevance of street vending across the world resonated in my thoughts.

Street vending, while being the key phenomenon under scrutiny, ultimately emerged from my reading as a heuristic angle from which to approach numerous social phenomena, including a) the various and variable, but always present, intersections between racialisation and the making of gender hierarchies in (informal) labour; b) the meanings and significance of urban public space, structured and produced around the dialectic between repressive strategies and resisting tactics; c) key 21st-century transformations in urban governance in the very city centre; d) the connections between gentrification, racialization and gender inequalities within and across families and groups, and finally e) the value of ethnography as a uniquely positioned optic and practice for investigating global urban phenomena, and a critical correction to generalizing claims. How can an edited collection cover such a wide range of intersecting issues? This question was haunting me while I was reading each chapter, and in what follows I would like to propose an answer in the form of critical appraisal.

The four parts in which the volume is organized already give a sense of this variety: Responses to neoliberal policies; Street vending and ethnicity; Spatial mobility; and Historical perspectives. And yet, the impressive variety of themes and topics deceives any short title. Chapter 1, for example, by Dunn, traces not only the ways in which family organization in Brooklyn becomes a handy tool for resisting exclusionary policies on the urban space, but also the pivotal role of women in the informalized economy of street vending. The informal economy scholarship, as the author points out, has overall overlooked the large proportion of women in the sector — 30 to 90 per cent, according to the ILO (2002; quoted in Dunn: 23). Indeed, for instance, Harvey's (1989) highly influential essay on urban entrepreneurialism left gender and race out of the picture.

The second part of the volume foregrounds and unpacks the relevance of multidimensional analyses. Ha's essay on Berlin's city centre, for example, discusses racial inequalities between sausage sellers, typically white German, and souvenir and jewels sellers, typically people of colour.

Under the recent law prohibiting portable trays to lay on the ground, this division of labour becomes racially unequal as souvenirs trays are on average heavier than sausage trays, and police checks occur way more frequently on souvenir vendors. Munoz's essay on Los Angeles and Graaf's work on New York City complete the section by showing how selling books in the street articulates a 'sense of place' and engenders 'Latino cultural citizenship' (Los Angeles) and how West African and African American book sellers inhabits separate circles and networks (NY City).

Space and mobility is the focus of the subsequent section, in which Cupers' sharp analysis of how both Los Angeles vendors' strategic use of mobility and the state regulation of mobility articulate two different and antagonistic conceptions of urbanism. Etzold's documented analysis of how most food vendors in Dhaka live constantly under threat of eviction accounts for everyday violence and insecurity. And Bandyopadhyay's engaging analysis of street vending in Calcutta 'beyond the optic of the "informal economy"' (p. 191) proposes to foreground the concept of 'pedestrianism' (borrowed from Blomley 2011) as a post-human normative ideology according to which the sidewalk should only serve the orderly movement of pedestrians. This last section closes the entire volume, and no closing chapter is proposed. This appears as a limitation, as a conclusion would have allowed the reader to pull all different and precious strings together and see the whole picture in its variable and multiple dimensions.

To answer my question about what makes it possible to have such a variety of dimensions and phenomena, it is probably the value of focusing on urban phenomena across the world — not on 'the city', but *obliquely* on cities — i.e. on urban issues such as street vending. How many studies have shown from a global urban perspective the multiple ways in which urban life, politics, class, space, race and gender come together? To my knowledge, very few have even tried. I can only think of Nightingale (2012) on racial segregation, Bowser (1995) on racism and anti-racist movements, and Davis (2006), partially, on class and race. There certainly are works which I ignore, but the relevance and uniqueness of Graff and Ha's edited volume makes it a must read for anyone interested in the complex intersections of social dimensions and phenomena in the study of cities from a global perspective.

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Giovanni Picker
University of Birmingham, U.K.
giovanni.picker@gmail.com

Shahram Khosravi. 2017. *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran.* Pennsylvania, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Being young in an Islamic Republic may appear a destiny exception compared from that of the global youth. Restrictions on the public code of conduct, prohibitions on consumption (such as alcohol) and impulses (such as premarital and homosexual sex), precariousness of economic life and unsettledness of social conditions produce the perception, among Iranians themselves, of living *differently* from the rest of the world. Their way out of this condition is none but mixing the stoic endeavour of waiting with the disingenuous task of hoping. Starting from this assumption, that of hope and patience, play the part of topical elements of Shahram Khosravi's latest work *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran* published by University of Pennsylvania Press (2017). The book is, in the words of the author, about 'the temporal aspects of Iranians' everyday life: waiting, queuing, imaging a futureless tomorrow, feeling nostalgia, hoping, replication and repletion, and transiting from youth to adulthood' (p. 18). It is a book about the *desperation* (from the Latin, *desperatio*, 'lack of hope') — and not hope — of being young in a country for no young.

This is a meaningful task at a time when global politics has been tagged with rise of detachment, hopelessness and regressive trends, embodied in the election of Donald Trump (2017), the UK referendum rejecting EU membership (2016) and the failure of popular revolts in the Arab world (2012-16) (Brownlee and Ghiabi 2016). In Iran, hope and patience had become political motives too, but of another type. The negotiations between Tehran and world powers regarding the Iranian nuclear programme were experienced by most Iranians as a test for their hope and a challenge to the country's capacity to wait for change. Rouhani's election campaigns in 2013 and 2017 centred on the promise of hope of Iran's reconnection with the international community and the request of patience for fruitful outcomes. This came to result with the signing of the nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, 2015), which fuelled Iranians' hope of economic prosperity and political reform (with no real avail so far).

Khosravi's book, on the other hand, dwells on the years that preceded these events, under the presidency of Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). In this regard, the book is amongst the few ethnographic contributions pertaining to this period, characterised by a great transformation of Iranian society and Iran's place in the world. It is made of seven chapters, three of which are promised to be of the urban ethnographic kind. The book travels across the most up-to-date debates in social theory and anthropological inquiries; it brings in useful comparisons between the circumstances of Iranian, Japanese, African and Latin American youth through a careful reading of anthropological scholarship. The latitude of the author's knowledge, in this field, is truly remarkable.

The author makes also ample use of local terms, indigenising the theory in the Iranian situation while progressively allowing the reader to experience through the ethnographic narration. The mole of details is impressive: thoughtful analysis of changing family-society relations; situating

the category of deviance and youth; description of street life and political manoeuvrings to counter it; historical contextualisation from the initial revolutionary period (1980s); and, finally, the potential of political transformation of young people's presence in the city. These and other themes are recurrently discussed in the book, which rather than an *ad hoc* study of precariousness in Iran, works well as a compelling analysis of contemporary Iranian society and the way it can be located within global anthropological debates.

In this also stands its major deficit. The book, says the author, is 'the outcome of a long conversation and ethnographic engagement with Iran' (p. 17). It follows Khosravi's other major publication, *Young and Defiant*, which focused on youth's practices of resistance to the Islamising state under the reformist presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). While the author's ethnographic sensitivity is central to the flow of the narration, ethnography remains on the margin of the analytic fulcrum. For instance, the author diligently discusses urban poverty and state-led class war against the *arazel va awbash* (the social scum in today's Persian parlance), but it does so almost exclusively via discourse analysis and media sources (pp. 166-8). There are ethnographic details and observations, but no systematic engagement with the field stands out of the volume. Characters succeed one another through the author's momentary though meaningful encounters in the cityscape. Their stories, for how telling and useful in the formulation of the argument, remain stand-alone or, rather, a series of disconnected voices seconding the book's powerful argument. This is also proved by

the massive use of secondary materials in the guise of newspaper articles, online data (with an over-reliance on the internet-based media) and reports. If one looks for weak points, the author's promise for urban ethnography remains a crucial one. One questions that what might have been worth exploring is how the author has been able to carry out an ethnography inside Iran, with all the obstacles of the case.

The author also attempts at creating a new vocabulary. This is generally based on scholarly references and justified, but, at times, it results in oddities. 'Urban citizenship' (p. 155), among others, is an expression that could have been thought otherwise because it is redundant: *citi*zenship implies the condition of belonging to the urban space (even when rural areas are involved); moreover, the 'new forms of urban citizenship' which the author pledges to investigate have more to do with urban practices than with new ways of being citizen. Another expression that remains vague is 'moral geography' (p. 137). Heir to E. P. Thompson's moral economy (1971), one struggles to get full sense of it in the author's narration. *In nuce*, these examples capture a general tendency of the volume. In its attempt at theorising precariousness in Iran, the argument spans too many phenomena, which risk missing connections other than that of belonging to our unsettled times. Its capacity to bring back Iran into global anthropological and sociological studies is also tempered by the lack of a coherent comparative frame, which may result in the reader's eye as the odd reference thrown out in the page.

Nonetheless, the book remains rich in original material, especially in terms of analytical formulations and, for this reason,

it deserves serious consideration for scholars interested in the study of urban ethnography. After all it is a cutting-edge work, with few equals, on a country that has been absent from academic investigations of this kind. Instead, for those interested in the study of the Middle East and Iran in particular, the volume could not be timelier, for it describes salient social and political dynamics with ample empirical material.

The book invites the reader to reflect beyond borders. One result is to see the patient hopefulness demanded by governments, East and West, amidst the everyday emergencies of terrorism and economic downturn as nothing more than an invention of capitalist times (to which Iranians fully belong): the hope of betterment through the status quo.

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Maziyar Ghiabi
École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris.
maziyar.ghiabi@gmail.com

Jerome Krase and **Zdeněk Uherek** (eds) 2017. *Diversity and Local Contexts. Urban Space, Borders, and Migration*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

In the introductory chapter the two editors, Krase and Uherek, lay the foundation of their edited volume: 'This volume provides a contemporary "worm's eye" and "ground level", i.e. "ethnographic look at the interdependence of world markets and local cultures' (p. 1). They cite the expressions, 'glocalization' and 'glocal' to describe 'how the homogenizing and universalizing forces of globalization interact with the heterogeneity and particularity of local forces to create hybrid cultures' (p. 1). While this is not a novel departure, most chapters adequately build on a growing scholarly literature on the themes of diversity, migration, borders and alterations of urban life. As with most edited collections, in Diversity and Local Contexts there is less interest in theoretical arguments about these concepts, more attention is placed on providing local data. The European focus is dominant; out of the ten chapters seven discuss European urban issues.

Giuliana Prato's chapter, 'Changing Urban Landscape in Albania,' places paramount importance on eliciting historical contextualization on the transformation of the urban landscape in the Tirana–Durrës metropolitan region. In particular, she analyses the 'impact of post-communist policies and European programmes on the development of this area' (p. 17). Her ethnographic discussion is informative and structured with an important proviso: Albanian government may be democratic promoting political and civil participation, yet — as is the case with many former Soviet bloc countries these days — governance is an entirely different matter. Problems of urban Tirana — unemployment, corruption, poverty, urban expansion, poor housing construction — are multifarious and, as the author suggests, they will be hard to fathom in the future.

In the next chapter, Giovanni Picker gives a critical consideration to what is a 'post-Socialist Europe' in relation to a 'socialist Europe' from an 'external and comparative synchronic perspective' (p. 39). He briefly compares social transformation of the Italian city of Florence and the Romanian city of Cluj by looking at the situation of the dispossessed Romani people. Despite the East-West divide, that is the socialist and post-socialist rhetoric concerning mutual 'socialist' past, the Roma in both urban enclaves have faced marginalization, prejudice and forced sedentarization. Notwithstanding the original comparison of the two urban populations, Picker's 'postsocialist' theorizing remains somewhat haphazard and I can only lament the missed earlier anthropological analyses on this important topic (Hann 2002, Kürti and Skalnik 2009). I have a similar reservation with regard to his description of socialist/post-socialist Romania — in particular, interethnic relations, nationalism, and the case of the Roma — for major works that are just too numerous to cite here are missing in his analysis (K. Verdery, C. M. Hann, R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt and J.Fox, L. Fosztó, V. Achim).

The chapter by Ivana Bašić and Petrija Jovičić, analysing the 1970 novel The Pilgrimage of Arsenije Njegovan by Borislav Pekić is an excellent chapter that should have been placed in some literary collection rather than in Diversity and Local Context. While the chapter is certainly interesting in itself — it is a description of changing Belgrade through the eyes of one narrator — the sources used, the theoretical framing and the authors' sense of scholarship adds little to urban anthropology.

Hana Cervinkova and Juliet Golden offer a fresh view of the Polish city of Wroclaw (known previously by its German name as Breslau), a welcome addition to urban anthropology of Poland, where the discipline that has long been hampered by a rural focus. The chapter's main focus is on memory politics, how the Polish presence in Wroclaw has been re-evaluated by local leaders in accordance of the neoliberal turn in politics and economy. Wroclaw is a success-story: it has experienced generous EU funding, major international investment, an exciting urban renewal programme and, to top all that, has managed the well-nigh impossible: to eliminate previous (that is socialist) urban heritage. Cervinkova and Golden, however, carefully examine Wroclaw's memory politics and come to the conclusion that not everything is so neat and perfect. Introducing the city's Centennial Hall (recently added to the UNESCO World Heritage list) and the Monument of Shared Memory (testament to the many German cemeteries in the city destroyed after WWII), as sites where historical memory politics can be witnessed by students and visitors alike, the chapter offers rare anthropological insights into how Polishness and Polish multiculturalism can be distorted. By so doing, the authors provide a finely tuned ethnography on memory politics. This is one of the absorbing chapters in this volume.

Karolina Koziura and Zdenek Uherek both provide their excellent ethnographies: the former investigates the urban renewal of the Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi bordering Romania and Moldova; Uherek deals with the Czech capital, Prague, his long-term

fieldwork site. Koziura rightly asks: what kind of history is embedded in this new urban renewal as Chernivtsi's rulers attempted to forge a nationalist Westernized and de-Sovietized image of the city that seems to be far from the daily realities as experienced by citizens. For Chernivtsi, a city in the Northern Bukovina region of Western Ukraine, has a much more complex history to show, and Koziura manages to tell us about it in a cogent and coherent fashion. Uherek, similarly to the chapter on Naples by Italo Pardo, analyses the uses and politics of public space in Prague, a city that 'has become almost a model laboratory of neoliberal transformation of a post-socialist city' (p. 84). This is a well-written chapter on Prague's internal politicking about the use (and abuse) of public space, especially as it relates to foreign tourists.

Marianna Mészárosová also focuses on Prague and discusses the distinct language use among Hungarians and Slovaks in that city. Her material is based on her earlier fieldwork, when she too was a student in Prague, and only part of that original analysis has been included, which explains why her chapter is short on detailed ethnographic material. For example, Mészárosová spends considerable time discussing the pre-1990 period while describing her research method in detail, yet the results of her fieldwork are mentioned in passing. Regrettably, there are no informants who speak, neither Slovaks nor Hungarians express in their own words what their native language use really means to them, or why and in what contexts they decide to use that instead of the majority national Czech language.

Italo Pardo deals with his long-time familiar Italian city, Naples, interrogating the very essence of democracy in the face of growing distrust of government and politicians by local citizens and migrants as well. Peddlers, shop-keepers and ordinary citizens are locked in a continual battle with the government and law enforcement because of corruption, mismanagement and carelessness on the part of the 'rulers'. Migrants, both legal and illegal, only contribute to this escalating mayhem as the police, instead of keeping up the law, are closing a blind-eye and through their inaction contribute to even more corruption. It is obviously, as Pardo rightly states, that the principles of legitimacy and governance are seriously undermined in Naples, a situation that seems to continue despite the changes brought by the 'orange revolution'.

With the obvious heavy emphasis on European data and Europeanist urban anthropology, two chapters discuss non-European contexts: Jerome Krase uses Italian-Americans in New York City, specifically the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn; the other is a contribution on South Africa. The major purpose of Krase's chapter is to correct some of the 'characterological distortion of Italian Americans as categorical bigots' and by doing so to 'document the positive activities of Italian American organizations with African Americans, and Chinese Americans over the period in question.' To support the latter point, Krase provides an email correspondence (p. 203); as far as the 'characterological distortion' of Italian-Americans is concerned Krase has plenty to offer on African American and Italian American racial relations yet nothing to say for example about the anthropology of

Italian Americans (Di Leonardo, 1988), or — more importantly — the Pizza connection and the crime families (Gambino, Gotti) that controlled the troubled ethnic enclaves of the period he describes. Obviously, there is an overemphasis on the mob in US popular culture, and anthropologists have been trying to counter such slanted view but to remain silent of this aspect of 'seven decades' of Italian American presence in New York City is a major omission. Anyone wishing to read another interpretation of these racially motivated urban crimes should consult Vicky Munro's chapter (Munro 2007).

The chapter on South-Africa, written by Henk Pauw, Carla Collins and Stephanie Gouws, all from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, aptly titled 'African Migrants and European Expatriates in Port Elizabeth, South Africa', somehow misses the original purpose of the collection. Full with data and numbers, we learn more about African migrants than German expatriates. Actual data are from two studies by MA students from 2008-2010, but still there is only a page on German expatriates. Here too, I encountered the same dilemma that hampers Mészárosová's contribution: there are no individual voices and perspectives, we do not learn what African migrants or German expatriates think or feel; the 'worm's eye' view or the 'glocal' espoused by the volume's editors are nowhere to be found here.

Apropos glocal, I have two comments. First, in an earlier similar collection we utilized 'glocal' to refer to the clashing and blending of cultures following the collapse of the Iron Curtain (Kürti and Langman 1997:2-3). Thus, with so much emphasis in this volume on Eastern Europe, some of the authors have missed the opportunity for a more thorough survey of previous anthropological studies on this issue in East-Central Europe. My second quandary is actually a question: why is it that only the editors mention glocal and glocalization but nobody in the volume picked up on these terms?

I enjoyed reading this volume, especially its breath and diversity, but kept feeling that careful editing should have dealt with the outdated sources and scholarly references in some of the chapters. 'Recent' sources in most chapters are from 2013. In Jerome Krase's chapter the latest scholarly work cited (not counting some newspaper-clippings) dates from 2004. While many of the original contributions of the 2012 Prague conference gave birth to this volume, the five-year hiatus between that meeting and the published volume should have been bridged by scrupulous updating. All in all, I stress that from the ethnographic standpoint, the volume edited by Krase and Uherek has merit. The real value of this collection lay precisely in the diversity of the intriguing urban experiences and in some of the complex civic and political problems presented. There are not many anthropological analyses where we can read about Wroclaw memory politics, intricate local conflicts in Naples, the connection of seemingly different and distant Florence and Cluj, African migrants in South Africa, Albanian urban development, or inner-city transformation of Chernivtsi in western Ukraine. I hope that many more volumes like this one will be soon forthcoming in the Palgrave Studies of Urban Anthropology.

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Laszlo Kürti
University of Miskolc, Hungary
kurti1953@gmail.com

Pardo, I. and **G. B. Prato (eds**). 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography edited by Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato and published in 2018 is an impressive collection of original works of an ethnographic nature in more than fifteen countries over five continents.

The introduction and the 30 chapters provide multicultural examples of holistic analysis taking into account the triggering features of urban settings: social diversity, unique physical landscape, particular demographic conditions. It is not organized by spatial criteria or theoretical debates, but by aspects of city life: everyday activities, economic performances, urban planning, grassroots movements, transnationalities and urbanity. Some overall topics emerge, such as deindustrialization, work and employment, gentrification, heritage conservation, family, kinship, identity and religion. Issues in the urban studies of recent interests also come to the fore in this Handbook, such as the value of mid-sized or secondary cities, the stability of communities in times of change, the rural/city divide in spatial terms and in practices.

The chapters in the Handbook prove that robust urban ethnographies can (and have to) shed light on the ways the macro processes affect urban settings and people's lives all over the world. The authors of the chapters quote abundantly the editors' previous works on the need to analyse cultural and economic structures in order to enrich our perspectives on the micro observations made in the context of ethnographic research. Urban anthropologists may sometimes go astray from traditional ethnographic work, but the commensurability of the Handbook chapters and their excellent bridging the micro-macro contexts confirms the profound relevance and solidity of the ethnographic method.

However, questions about the ethnographer/outsider viewpoint and the differences among the traditional local academic traditions are barely covered. These questions, and the usual dilemmas and challenges of ethnography as a methodology, only transpire in the texts. This Handbook is not on ethnography as a strategy for data collection in specific cultural contexts — except for the first

chapters in the Part 1. It is a corpus of ethnographic work in cities, and a great demonstration of the range of its methodological and analytical achievements.

I cannot think of a better way to review the Handbook than through its seven sections, as the papers in Part 1 to 7 cover a great range of urban dimensions yet talk to each other in a very substantial way. This testify to the significant work done by the editors in their quest for contributions of quality that truly 'avoid abstractions and generalities', as rightfully claimed in the abstract, and in arranging them meaningfully.

The introduction presents the Handbook as rooted in the will to promote ethnographic work in urban settings, on lifestyles and organizations. Pardo and Prato underline the placing of the Handbook in the classical debates. They define ethnography as an empirically based long-term in-depth holistic analysis. Ethnographic work in Western cities came late, yet major theories and concepts come from the Western scientific tradition, with additions from emic definitions of the city and urban life. In introducing the 30 chapters, the editors acknowledge influences from sociology and history in the essays and refuse to think of the discussions that follow along the lines of the anthropology of/in the city debate.

In Part 1, Paradigmatic Reflections, the chapters work around commonplace notions and demonstrate, with impressive field knowledge, how the ethnographer's work is a thoughtful patchwork of diverse data collection suited and adapted, through

time, to specific cultural, economic, social and working contexts. In this section, the authors report on their many decades of ethnographic research to discuss the importance of understanding the macro and micro contexts in the strategic deployment of methodological tools. Those tools comprise participant observation, in-depth case studies, discussions with key informants, and the systematic collection of field notes from visual observation and participation and on auto-, virtual, digital and public events. The papers also underline and demonstrate that the qualities of ethnography (flexibility and adaptability) bring out the biggest intellectual and practical challenges. Shokeid (Chapter 2) reflects on his fieldwork sites in Jaffa and New York City to unveil the relationship between his research in urban settings and classical anthropology. Pardo (Chapter 3) highlights the strategic deployment of methodological tools over time as his fieldworks in Naples, Italy, unfolded deeper complexities. Prato (Chapter 4) illustrates the importance of economic and social processes for a greater understanding of good urban governance with examples from South Italy and Albania. Krase (Chapter 5) challenges the assumptions of the requirements of classic ethnography by putting them to the test in the light of his 40 years of fieldworks in Brooklyn, New York.

Part 2 brings together texts on the everyday practices and challenges faced by citizens in terms of inclusivity, social mix, traditional social identities and conflict. Through ethnographic methods such as the interviews, observations and *dérives*, the authors explore the direct relationship

between spatial materialities in Indian, British, French, American and Israeli cities, and the social reproduction of identities and communities. The authors describe the cultures of specific neighbourhoods and their dynamic inter-affecting components, such as social control, production of gender and social mix, and their influence on education, employment, housing and violence. Abraham (Chapter 6) analyses proximity in two middle-class neighbourhoods of Indian towns. Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong (Chapter 7) explore the superdiversity of a London estate shaped over the last 50 years by direct and indirect housing legislation and international geopolitics. Shortell (Chapter 8) explores how everyday slow mobility can foster — or not — inclusions, prejudices and racism in three immigrant neighbourhoods in Brooklyn, London and Paris. Markowitz (Chapter 9) writes about Beer-Sheva in the Negev Desert of Israel and the power of representations in coping with fear and violence.

Part 3 offers ethnographic works that demonstrate how small-grain observations, interviews and informal discussions with citizens can account for richer and more complex descriptions of the fall of the industrial economy and the rise of neoliberalism and all its forms. These texts illustrate that ethnography is essential to our understanding of the profound and long-lasting consequences of economic changes on social and economic polarization and urban forms. Spyridakis (Chapter 10) explores the complex articulations of forces at all levels and their destructive effects on social and economic polarization in the

Greek shipping industry. Arnold (Chapter 11) questions the United States national unemployment statistics demonstrating the variety of unemployment forms. De Sena (Chapter 12) sheds light on the positive but mostly negative experiences of gentrification in a Brooklyn neighbourhood. Kürti (Chapter 13) documents the complex transition from a socialist system to a global economy in a Budapest neighbourhood. Védrine (Chapter 14) writes on how the ideology of neoliberalism has affected the urban form and the social and economic fabric of Clermont-Ferrand, France.

Part 4 is where the contributions talk to each other the most. They focus on how residents, bureaucrats, officials and experts react, cope, reorganize their lives and relationships with their environment in the midst of urban physical change. From the ethnographies of small and large cities of China, West Africa and Europe discussed here, one can theorize on the processes of community resilience and cultural adaptation to physical changes. Graezer Bideau (Chapter 15) analyses a rapidly changing neighbourhood in Beijing and the activists', residents' and officials' relationships to historic urban forms. Koening (Chapter 16) writes about the ways in which West Africa countries' urbanists try to create, manage or sustain changes regarding governance, climate changes and demography. Rautenberg (Chapter 17) illustrates his concept of weak heritage in French cities. Lindsay (Chapter 18) documents at the micro level the outcomes of the 2012 London Olympics. Labdouni (Chapter 19) writes on urban housing

renovation in a medium-sized Chinese city and how the community evolved around the new physical environment while maintaining a continuity.

Part 5 focuses on grassroots dynamics but mostly offers a thorough critic of larger structures — urban planning, international and national legislation and politics, economics, and science — that foster local social practices, community organizations, urban representations and decolonization processes. The Chapters testify to the variety of views and actions among individual activists and grassroots organizations. Koechlin and Förster (Chapter 20) illustrate how local social practices and mundane experiences in middle size cities in West and East Africa shape political spaces, despite national legislation and politics. Matsuda (Chapter 21) writes on the potential and limitations of local and global community organizations in Nairobi. Gonzalez (Chapter 22), following the decolonization processes of sciences, applies a critical urban anthropology to ethnographic work in Watts, Los Angeles. Tsibiridou (Chapter 23) discusses how politics, daily activities and aesthetics contribute to create perspectives and representations of urban spaces in Turkey.

Part 6, on transnational urbanities, explores various facets of the ways in which international immigrants express, desire and represent citizenship and the tools (national and state policies, associations and community and religious groups) that are offered to them to do so. The underlying issue is the negotiation of complex and unique identities rooted in multiple

territories facing positive and negative prejudices and ideologies. Andrews (Chapter 24) analyses how Anglo-Indians in India realize their citizenship considering their exceptional wealth, yet distant cultural backgrounds. Ciubrinskas (Chapter 25) looks into the multiple sense of belonging of Lithuanians immigrants living in Chicago. Da Silva (Chapter 26) writes on Haitians' social integration in a Brazilian town and examines the discrepancies among policies, associations and community groups. Giordano (Chapter 27) looks at the ideologies and political *mise-en-scène* in the management of diversity and the promotion of social cohesion in a Malaysian town.

Part 7 discusses urbanity beyond and above the spatial boundaries of the contemporary metropolises, looking at the intricacies of traditional practices in the urban environment and the urbanites' behaviours and perceptions in rural/town settings. The authors unpack the city/rural, centre/periphery, tradition/urbanity divides and classic notions and events such as religious practices, gentrification, economic change and sense of belonging. Sarfati (Chapter 28) explores traditional religious beliefs in the city of Seoul and how they become manifest in the urban landscape. Boscoboinik (Chapter 29) proposes a reflection on lifestyle and tourist gentrification in an urbanized rural setting in Switzerland. Fernandes (Chapter 30) is concerned with the views that the inhabitants of Lisbon with a rural or urban background have of demographic and economic changes. Rogers (Chapter 31) writes on the lack of a sense of belonging in

a community of African Americans in a Tennessee town.

Because of its prohibitive price, the Handbook is obviously meant for institutions and libraries. But it is a necessary instrument. No other book, or anthropology handbook, offers such extensive and strong original works, which will prove to be long-lasting contributions to the study of urban issues and to regional studies.

Nathalie Boucher
Director and researcher, REsPIRE
nb@organismrespire.com

Lakshmi Srivinas. 2016. *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience.* University of Chicago Press.

There have been many excellent reviews of *House Full*, so in this analytic autoethnographic review, I will try to do something different. Lakshmi Srivinas provides the reader with a well-written, detailed, and comprehensive description and analysis of what I would term the 'glocal' culture of India cinema. Although its table of contents could never convey the richness of its historical, theoretical and ethnographic contents, a brief listing of the topics is necessary to provide a guide for deeper explorations: 'Participatory Filmmaking and the Anticipation of the Audience', 'Cinema Halls, Audiences, and the Importance of Place', 'Audiences Negotiate Tickets and Seating', 'Families, Friendship Groups, and Cinema as Social Experience', 'Active Audiences and the Constitution of Film Experience' and '"First Day, First Show": A Paroxysm of Cinema'. I must also issue a caveat in this regard since this review will focus primarily

on the value of Srivinas' work for urban ethnographic theory and practice. Thankfully, she provides the reader, unfamiliar with the Indian scene, with a comprehensive overview of the industry's production and distribution practices. More importantly for ethnographers, she bravely ventures into the heart of the nation's mass media culture by joining with the, sometimes-rabid, and occasionally massive, crowds of fans. Fans who parade through the streets to celebrate the openings of their own stars and pour into theatres of all types where the performances on the screen are sometimes secondary to those in the audience. To gather her wealth of data, she visited many theatres, and spent hundreds of hours in the field speaking with the widest range of subjects in the widest range of venues; from ordinary audience members to high level members of the film industry itself, and from autorickshaw drivers to film cast members; on the streets, in shops and, of course, in higher and lower status theatres.

Although the American and European film industries effectively dominate the world market, at most as to reputation and global impact, Indian filmmakers, distributors and theatre owners occupy a more enviable place than Hollywood. Many, if not most films, in the United States, for example, seem to lose money or barely make a profit for their producers and investors. Relatedly, neighbourhood theatres in American cities have been in rapid decline for decades. On the other hand, in India, where they release many more films, Indians at all levels of society flock to higher and lower-class theatres to pay to watch them or be present with them as a backdrop for socializing. This is only

partly explained by the fact that in India 71% of its over 167 million households have television sets, while of the 126 million American households the proportion is 97%, and the majority of these have more than one. The sheer size of the growing Indian population of 1.4 billion potential ticket buyers provides incentive to try to satisfy their growing filmic appetites. More to the point, as Srivinas explains, standing in long lines to buy tickets in order to watch movies in jam-packed theatre with more than a thousand seats continues to be a much more important part of Indian mass culture than in America's perhaps more media sophisticated and already video-saturated western counterparts. As opposed to Hollywood, in India, not only is the *House Full*, but it is enormous.

As to her innovative, critical, ethnography she explains:

'As I sought to address cinema and its reception in public settings, I encountered the challenges associated with access in these settings. The problems posed by mobile and dispersed audiences, they're shifting terrain, and the transients of film screenings contributed in no small measure. Crowded public spaces in the volatility of fans and movie enthusiasts affect in fieldwork. … Rather than a "sitting" exercise in front of the screen, mine was a "mobile ethnography", I roamed around the streets in the cantonment and in the Gandhinagar-Kempegowda Road area where theaters were clustered. I also traveled across the city to interview people, attend a film shooting, or go to any of the many sites at which cinema was elaborated in the city.' (p. 25)

As to her comparative cultural approach to the subject, Srivinas explains that in contrast to the Western norm of audiences passively consuming screen images, Indian audiences actively and loudly mimic them. In a sense they enter into the projected scenes by talking with each other, and the screen characters. They shout, whistle, cheer and boo their heroes and villains. During musical segments, they sing and dance. Hindu dominant audiences might also engage in ritual blessings of their favourite screen stars. These last practices heightened my sense that at least Hindu Indian's cinematic culture parallels that of its solemn yet colourful religious practices. In so many ways, she is successful in placing the reader in the picture, so to speak. Reading *House Full* led me to interrogate one of my Indian-born neighbours who had similar fond memories of consuming movies in her native country.

Although it was not always this way, most Americas now view 'films' on small screens at multiplex theatres, flat screen home theatres, or on personal devices. These viewings are individual or in small intimate groups.

'In the West, Cinema growing has become progressively segmented and home on June eyes following Hollywood's aggressive niche marketing to age, gender, ethnic city, and other demographic categories. Silent and wrapped viewing by an audience of individuals, maybe seen to be the product of concerted efforts by the film industry to elevate the film, standardize its experience, and make it the centre of the audiences experienced. This style of viewing is also rooted in

broad societal shifts in entertainment culture and Public life.' (p. 226)

As to analytic autoethnography, I was a participant, or rather I have 'performed', with Srivinas as an 'Author Meets Critic' panellist at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Other critics were Sofya Aptekar, UMass Boston, David Grazian, University of Pennsylvania, and Jonathan Wynn, UMass Amherst. During our unrehearsed yet, as Erving Goffman would call it, 'team' performance a number of different insights were discovered. As we made our prepared comments and intensively conversed with each other and the author it was clear that we all benefited from the reading but in very different ways, as per our academically varied disciplines and especially our biographies.

The greatest value of ethnography is making the unfamiliar familiar and demanding comparisons. In this way, Srivinas provided the basis for understanding the cinema-going cultures of both India and America. For example, she discussed some of the reasons Indians go to the cinema. The heyday of American cinema ended during its post-war peak, in 1950, as numbers of televisions and television viewers began to soar. At the time, movie chains and urban movie palaces abounded. As an adolescent in the 1950s, many of my Saturdays were spent in local movie houses. Until the age of ten, my mother sent us to the movies on Saturday mornings with paper bag lunches, to watch ten cartoons, film shorts, and a main feature. When we came out into the afternoon the daylight temporarily blinded us. Our mother's reason for sending us was not our

entertainment or edification but to have time to clean the apartment. She told us that her Sicilian-born mother ran to the nearby movie in her apron during the day to take a break from housework. When I was a teen, my neighbourhood 'gang' went to the movies on weekends as a group and spent much of the time in the theatre chatting, throwing things at each other, loudly commenting on the film, and otherwise disturbing the non-teenage audience. If another gang was there, the verbal exchanges were intolerable and often resulted in ejection from the theatre. The movies I remember that minimally approached the activity and decibel levels in Bangalore described by Srivinas were action movies, especially westerns and 'war' movies, during which the good guys were loudly cheered.

In late teenage years the farthest reaches of the theatre, especially the last rows in the balcony were places where we took our girlfriends and what was on the screen was of little important. As in Bangalore, in Brooklyn, too, there were different 'classes' of theatres, audiences, and behaviours in them. In my mixed-income neighbourhood a low-ticket price, rundown 'fleabag' theatre called 'the itch', showed third and fourth-run movies. On the other hand, there were several luxurious chain theatres at which first-run movies were shown. Most middle-class people would not be seen dead in 'the itch'. Another very small local theatre showed foreign and what were called 'art films', which were frequented by the neighbourhood intellectual and cultural elites.

House Full also connects behaviour in and about cinema with religious practice

and the emergent spectacle when locals become part of the scene in the theatre as house of worship. The interaction of the audience with the film creates a new thing — the audience as a performance. Indian cinema mimics the religious experience of Indian ticket buyers. In the United States, not only do passive audiences dominate theatres, they also dominate houses of worship. Compared to those in India, it appears that the religious practices of major religious denominations in America are demure. However, some American churches and smaller denominations such as Evangelicals, are more performative. With singing, shouting, and animated worshippers. Even in Roman Catholic and 'high' Christian churches where there is considerable 'spectacle' and performance, it is among the clergy, and music ministries, and not the collected followers.

There is so much more that I can discuss about Lakshmi Srivinas' *House Full: Indian Cinema and the Active Audience*. I have only touched upon those aspects I believe are of most value to comparative and ethnographic approaches, not only as to the study of the cinematic industry but the wider society of which it is an integral part. However, I must leave that larger more demanding task to other readers, whom I believe will be many.

Jerome Krase
Brooklyn College CUNY, U.S.A.
jkrase@brooklyn.cuny.edu

FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Long Story Short. Director, **Natalie Bookchin.** 2016. 45 minutes.
Colour. Distributed by Icarus Films, United States.

This is an audio-visual narrative about being a human. *Long Story Short* presents us with a dialogue about poverty. The director interviewed over 100 people at homeless shelters, food banks, adult literacy programs and job training centres in Los Angeles and the Bay Area in Northern California. 'You don't really know how people are when looking at them until you ask them'.

The film editing is masterful. The interviewees are juxtaposed to each other and interchange according to the themes discussed. The effect is amazing in the sense that those who do not speak appear to be the audience of those who do; next to each other, to each other. The sound in the film is like a symphony. Silence has an important role in the entire talking show. The purpose of the film is to give voice to those who are rarely heard. Urban poverty is a global issue and it can come as a surprise to anyone. The goal of the film is to understand the cause of poverty and to stimulate debates about better public services and social assimilation.

'Money is power. You need money to feel like a normal citizen. You cannot participate without it in normal life. Without it, you are not a human! It is a new kind of slavery'. The film is shot in Los Angeles, California, where the rich live on the hills and the poor live downtown. The rich are distant and unfamiliar from the urban conditions. They do not know about urban poverty. According to the participants, living on welfare is not a solution. One cannot live on monthly welfare payments and pay the rent. People work and still have no home. They simply do not earn enough.

Who are the homeless people? Do you really know who they are? It is common to think that they are mentally ill, but then, when you get into that position yourself you say: 'Me? I never thought of being homeless'. Most people do not understand that being homeless is hard work, unpaid, a 24 hour a day job. 'To work feels good. I want to work. But, I got no phone where they can contact me; no address; no shower to take before doing a job interview […] We sleep in the car. Because of all that you are not comfortable, you are exhausted and that makes it hard to go to the interview. People can feel it'. [Silence]

The film introduces us to educated people, those who lost a good job and could not find a new one and thus slipped into greater depths, and homelessness. We also get to know those who were in jail. Most of the homeless interviewed, however, are ordinary citizens. Many have seen gunfire, police shooting innocent people only because they were living on the street. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We also learn that without good guidance, one can get on a wrong path in life. Many say that they did not have a good childhood. They followed their parents' footsteps with lack of mentoring and education. When the family becomes poor, the mother does two or three jobs, and the older children look after their younger brothers and sisters. 'When growing up we did not make the right choices. We did not have tools; role models! You have to learn it […] You need to learn how to become

rich'. Some found their escape in alcohol, some in reading books, and some in social media. It is something that takes them out of the situation.

'Is there a way out? Lots of times there isn't!' At the end of the film, there is no actor and no audience, only an empty seat.

Daniela Vávrová
James Cook University
daniela.vavrova@jcu.edu.au)

Visible Silence. Director, **Ruth Gumnit**. 2015. 47 minutes. Colour.

Visible Silence is an engaging and informative documentary film about gender-nonconforming Thai women. The film focuses on the narrative and life histories of women known as 'toms' (from tomboy), a reference to a masculine woman who is sexually involved with a feminine partner, or 'dees' (from lady). The film aptly captures the ways that these Thai women balance societal norms and familial expectations with their desire for visibility and acceptance in Thai society.

Their stories also shed light on their hopes and fears. One woman, for example, yearns for companionship and love. As she states: 'I'm getting older. I really want to have a woman who can spend her life with me […] who understands me […] I want that'. Another woman reflects on the stereotypes of 'toms' as 'sex obsessed'. According to her: 'They presume all toms just run after any woman. That's wrong. I am an adult and know how to act properly'. Yet another laments the discriminatory attitudes in the workplace. She discusses how on business trips, typically two female

colleagues share a room, and that she is always the last one to get a room. 'They never put me in a room with a woman with a pretty face. I always get picked last. Sometimes I feel like I am a disease'.

The lives of these women unfold in a changing and modernizing Thai urban society. The interviews with women are juxtaposed with scenes of cityscapes and public culture in urban Thailand. Women preparing food in roadside cafes, the hustle and bustle of a market, a crowded metro train and a skyline replete with high rise buildings point to progress and modernity that, at least on the surface, is inclusive of women. Signs of social change are also evident. Scenes from a public march for marriage equality illustrate the emergence of a gay community that is informed by 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual' (LGBTQIA) movements in the West. Yet, as gleaned from the documentary, modernity co-exists with tradition in scenes of people worshiping in Buddhist temples and narrow streetways traversing older parts of a city.

The urban milieu foregrounds the stories of the women. For women from small towns and villages, the city can provide an escape from the watchful eye of family and community members that expect conformity. For others, it is travel to Europe and the United States of America, and not cities in Thailand, that provides the social space to construct identities as women who love other women and to connect with other lesbian women. Such international travel experiences are significant for enabling women to establish a modern lesbian identity and subjectivity.

Visible Silence provides valuable insights into the lives of toms and 'dees' in

Thailand and is highly captivating. However, there are a few issues that compromise the viewer's ability to fully immerse themselves in the film. For one, the women are not fully contextualized in terms of their socioeconomic status or within specificities of their familial and social identities. Moreover, the director does not identify the women featured in the film by name or by other identifying markers. These omissions limit the extent to which viewers can engage with the subjects on screen in more humanistic terms. Moreover, the urban setting depicted in the film is also not specifically defined. A voiceover or captions with information about the setting would provide greater depth to the narratives.

These issues aside, the film is an important addition to documentaries about culturally constructed sexualities and should be of interest to students, scholars and lay audiences interested in gender and sexuality. *Visible Silence* highlights the experience of 'toms' and 'dees' as they transgress gender norms but remain silent due to societal constraints. In *Visible Silence* they get to tell their stories.

Ahmed Afzal
California State University
aafzal@fullerton.edu

Live from UB. Director, **Lauren Knapp**. 2015. 85 minutes. Colour. Distributed by Documentary Educational Resources.

Lauren Knapp, the director, writer and producer of the full-length film *LIVE FROM UB* calls herself a 'non-fiction storyteller'. However, her background in anthropology shines through, and the central themes of this documentary — national identity and globalisation as expressed through rock music — focus on the post-socialist urban youth of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital. These are key issues for anthropologists interested in the post-socialist world, ethnomusicology, and identity and social change more broadly. Furthermore, in this country of 3 million, nearly half now live in the capital. Thus, the recent urbanisation of this formerly nomadic society is an underlying theme.

A number of Mongolia's most important musicians, bands, and music promoters of the past several decades provide running commentary. The film contextualises the emergence of a uniquely Mongolian rock-fusion genre. Original musical footage from the Soviet period and the early post-Soviet 1990s helps explain the variety of styles experimented by different bands, as the post-socialist decades allowed exposure to more foreign music than had been permitted previously. In the 1970s and 1980s, subversive rock-loving musicians struck compromises with the cultural censors: to be allowed to play even soft rock, they were forced to play traditional folk music (which at times was electrified). There is a longer story to tell about the role of rock in counter-hegemonic practices in socialist societies. Tom Stoppard's play 'Rock 'n' Roll' shows how this played out in 1960s Czechoslovakia.

The early days of independence saw a phase of mimicry of Western bands, particularly the Beatles (a large Beatles monument was erected). This transformed as some musicians realised that they could not compete with Western musicians, so they began to look inward, examining

indigenous sounds, instruments, shamanism and Buddhism. The music of the band that plays the film's central role, Mohanik, developed a strong relationship to nature and a nomadic, romanticised past. At the same time, an emergent Mongolian nationalism was flourishing, much of which centred on the heroic Genghis Khan. Urban music videos featured Khan and his warriors, in traditional clothing on horseback on the steppe, celebrating Mongolianness. The subtext here, that after decades of USSR propaganda teaching Mongolians to be ashamed of the evil Genghis Khan, they were now free to celebrate him as their national hero. This process is far from unique, as Khan's putative descendant, Tamurlane-Timur has undergone a similar historical revision in Uzbekistan.

The film incorporates helpful commentary from an animated member of parliament who presents a cultural-historical-political analysis, tracing the connections in Mongolia between freedom of speech and rock music.

Ulaanbaatar's uncontrolled, un-zoned urban sprawl takes a post-nomadic form. Scenes of yurts on the outskirts of the city contrast with ubiquitous Soviet-era housing blocks. One of the musicians expresses this juxtaposition, explaining that they are still nomadic despite urbanisation, and how horses have a place of pride. One of the early hits in this genre, Mohanik's 'I wish I had a horse' mines Mongolian folk rhythms and melodies, while celebrating the nomadic horse-filled past. One of the musicians describes the quest for a new, localised rock that 'didn't need to be imported', and we hear the confluence of beatbox and throat singing.

This well-crafted film also examines the economic precarity faced by the young musical visionaries it features. Ulaanbaatar is the sole city in the country where they can work; so some travel to China to play concerts. Constantly seeking audiences and financial support, despite positive reviews, they are frustrated by their peers' preference for Western pop music. An elderly musician affirms: 'it's time for the young to write their own history'. Indeed, Mohanik are attempting just that.

Ruth Mandel
University College London
r.mandel@ucl.ac.uk

The Auction House. A Tale of Two Brothers. Director/Screenwriter, **Edward Owles**. 2014. 85 minutes. Colour. Native Voice Films.

Anwer Saleem had lived in England ever since he left Kolkata for higher education in 1969. Arshad his younger brother had stayed back to help his father with the family business, 'The Russell Exchange', which is India's oldest auction house. Bought from the British in 1940 by their grandfather, the brothers remember it being the 'Sotheby's of India', patronised by the élite of Kolkata. Today the auction house resembles a derelict warehouse crammed with an assortment of goods ranging from antique furniture to cheap ceramic figurines and used DVDs, and patronised mainly by those at the lower-end of the socio-economic ladder. The film begins with Anwer returning home from London to rescue the business from becoming a historical artefact by 'bringing [it] to the 21st century'. The scene is set for what becomes a nuanced, unsentimental, sometimes

comical, yet deeply emotive exploration into how individuals and families navigate the inexorable force of social change even as they try to define and stay true to their core values: loyalty to kin, family honour, commitment to one's faith, and constancy in their business dealings.

At the heart of the film is a question about whether the profit motive of contemporary business is compatible with the ethic of responsibility to community. Anwer pushes for efficiency in a globalised marketplace in which economic transactions have become increasingly impersonal. For Arshad the business represents enduring relationships with both employees and customers. Anwer understands — after all, his return to India is motivated by family loyalty not profit — but struggles with how to run a viable business that he hopes to pass on to the next generation. He turns down a lucrative offer to convert the place into 'a gentlemen's club', because it compromises his religious values, but relents to a fashion show — which Arshad grumbled was a 'circus'. It is when an employee of more than forty years has to be fired for negligence that these competing values are tested. Although Anwer is furious upon discovering that the employee had been drinking at work, which allowed a robbery, he eventually throws a farewell party to appreciate the man's loyal service.

Rather than being nostalgic about the past, the film skilfully reveals the contradictions of thinking within the binary framework of 'tradition' and 'modernity' through questions the brothers themselves verbalise in their soliloquies and dialogues: Has Kolkata changed? Or are we stuck in time? Should we be proud of our heritage or ashamed of our present? Have we become antiquated or are we being faithful to tradition? And ultimately: what should we do with a business that stands for both the family's progress in the past as well as its stagnation in the present?

The cinematography meditates on these questions by depicting a changing urban landscape. Inside 'The Russell Exchange' we get brief glimpses into its former glory. When the camera lingers on antique indigo lampshades and large Grecian sculptures we can imagine a time when the auction house was located at the heart Kolkata's business district, which is home to successful industrialists — a 'posh area' says Anwer. But the signs of urban decay are everywhere: from the mouldy walls of the auction house to the neighbourhood populated by struggling small businesses and street vendors. The rich have 'moved on' to more 'modern' neighbourhoods, reflects Arshad. It captures the capriciousness of 'modernity' — always aspired to but never achieved.

The film ends on a hopeful note. But we are left with the question: will 'The Russell Exchange' continue with the next generation?

Asha L. Abeyasekera
University of Colombo
asha.abeyasekera@gmail.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS

IUS-BRUNEL UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE

Urbanity: Empirical Reflections

Brunel University, Uxbridge London, Saturday 19 May 2018

<u>Convenors</u>: Giuliana B. Prato, Italo Pardo, Gary Armstrong.

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IUS-ARU SUMMER SCHOOL AND RESEARCH SEMINAR

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<u>Convenors</u>: Italo Pardo, Giuliana B. Prato and James Rosbrook-Thompson

With more than half of the world's population now living in cities, and this proportion set to increase to two-thirds by 2050, the ethnographic study of life in urban settings has never been so urgent and important. Urbanisation proceeding at such a pace has meant increases in the number

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18th IUAES World Congress
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<u>Convenors</u>: Zdenek Uherek, Giuliana B. Prato

Throughout history, cities have adapted to movement of population. In many cases, they have also been gateways to the rest of the country. Newcomers affect changes in the urban infrastructures and bring new lifestyles. Places of contact between locals and newcomers have expanded beyond the public square, as cities are now dominated by hotels, headquarters of multinational corporations and other meeting places. Social networks and other online facilities add to this. The panel builds on recent publications by members of the IUAES Commission of Urban Anthropology that address current trends on urban diversity world-wide, stimulating critical comparative analysis.
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I. Pardo (i.pardo@kent.ac.uk) is Honorary Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent, U.K. and serves as President of the International Urban Symposium (IUS). Dr Pardo, a well-known specialist in Urban Anthropology, is the author of several books and peer-reviewed essays.

G.B. Prato (g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk) is Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the University of Kent, U.K. Widely published in anthropology, she serves as Chair of the IUAES Commission on Urban Anthropology and as Secretary and Treasurer of the International Urban Symposium (IUS).

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Half of humanity lives in towns and cities and that proportion is expected to increase in the coming decades. Society, both Western and non-Western, is fast becoming urban and mega-urban as existing cities and a growing number of smaller towns are set on a path of demographic and spatial expansion. Given the disciplinary commitment to an empirically-based analysis, anthropology has a unique contribution to make to our understanding of our evolving urban world. It is in such a belief that we have established the Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology series. In the awareness of the unique contribution that ethnography offers for a better theoretical and practical grasp of our rapidly changing and increasingly complex cities, the series will seek high-quality contributions from anthropologists and other social scientists, such as geographers, political scientists, sociologists and others, engaged in empirical research in diverse ethnographic settings. Proposed topics should set the agenda concerning new debates and chart new theoretical directions, encouraging reflection on the significance of the anthropological paradigm in urban research and its centrality to mainstream academic debates and to society more broadly. The series aims to promote critical scholarship in international anthropology. Volumes published in the series should address theoretical and methodological issues, showing the relevance of ethnographic research in understanding the socio-cultural, demographic, economic and geo-political changes of contemporary society.

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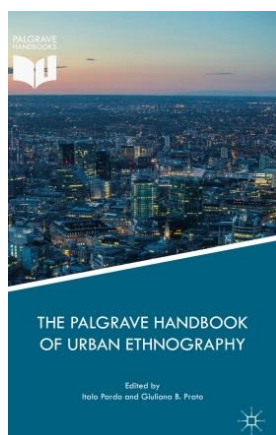
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