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Contents

Anthropology of Urban Inequalities: Weakened Citizenship in Italy[1]

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Drawing on ethnographic evidence from Naples, Italy, this article examines the adverse combination, in everyday life, of a health system that is public in name only, of the misgovernance of a filthy, unsanitary and hazardous public domain and of the empirical consequences of central and local government's discriminative policies. I discuss the distortions brought about by these adverse dynamics and consider how they contribute to justify local people's feeling that they continue to be seen, and treated, as second-class citizens.
Keywords: Health care, public health, guaranteed vs non-guaranteed workers, second-class citizens.

It is beyond question that, alongside individual freedom, two non-negotiable democratic principles underlie the relationship between citizenship and governance. First, the power to govern must enjoy authority (Pardo and Prato 2011, Pardo and Prato ed. 2011). Second, the recognition of authority is directly dependent on the fair and responsible exercise of power.

An exercise of power that fulfils the demands of these principles enjoys legitimacy in society (Pardo 2000). The importance of this point for the democratic order cannot be overestimated (Stankiewicz 1980). Emphasizing a classic point in anthropology (Pardo 1996, 2000a, 2000b; Prato 2000, 2019; Gledhill 2004), in Italy (Costituzione della Repubblica Italiana 1947: Art. 32), as in other Western countries, citizens' rights are Constitutionally stated but they are unprotected in reality. In line with T. H. Marshall's (1950) the classic definition of citizenship and the rights of citizenship, this marks a significant difference between formal and substantive citizenship, between ideal and actual distribution of rights. Misgovernance and legal and illegal corruption in public life (Pardo 2018a) deeply undermine this *fundament* of associated life to the benefit of the ruling élite and their allies but at the expense of the wider society. This feeds various kinds of inequality which threaten the economic, social and political order.

Inequalities are at the forefront of today's public and policy debates on the major forces that combine to create inequalities and on how different forms of inequality are related to each other; such as inequalities in health, income, wealth, educational opportunity and family life, and gaps between rich and poor, and between different parts of a country.

In a democratic society, equality — of opportunities, of access to resources, to compete — continues to be a utopia. As a consequence of misgovernance, socio-economic inequalities are becoming stronger, more complex and ramified, and in many cases implicit, disguised or hidden. It is therefore important to understand both the impact and ramifications of bad governance and the complex ways in which individuals deal with it. Let us proceed step by step. First of all, why anthropology.

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[1] This article originates in a key note address that I gave at the Conference on *Inequalities and Health: Views from Anthropology*, May 2022, Accademia Peloritana dei Pericolanti, University of Messina, Italy, while serving as Visiting Professor at that University.

Why Anthropology: Deconstructing Stigma

Very much in line with Giambattista Vico's teachings (1999 [1725]) on the significance of empirically committed thinking as a scientific *sine qua non*, Social Anthropology champions the value of in-depth empirical knowledge for theoretical development. Distrustful of both excessive empiricism and unjustified abstraction (Leach 1977: xvi ff.; Harris 1986: Chap. 1), this discipline is well equipped to clarify the processes of inclusion and exclusion that determine belonging to society and to investigate the distribution of power in the social, economic and political system.

As a classically trained social anthropologist, I have kept faith with the methodological imperative that a serious study must be based on the in-depth involvement of the researcher in local processes over a long period of time (Pardo 1996, 2017).

In Italy, I have done extensive research in the South and in Tuscany. In the South, I have done field research in Naples and Palermo. In my research among ordinary Neapolitans and local élite groups in the media, the medical and legal professions, business, banking, the trade unions and politics (Pardo 2017), I have systematically applied the methods of participant observation and the in-depth case study of people, groups, situations and events. I have been lucky enough to establish solid relationships with Neapolitans in different walks of life. I am honoured that over time many of these relationships have turned into friendship. When away from the field, such strong relationships allow me to stay abreast of local events.

As demonstrated by the recently published volume on *Urban Inequalities: Ethnographically Informed Reflections* (Pardo and Prato eds 2021), anthropological research that is unequivocally free from personal opinion and political prejudice helps us to avoid the conceptual confusion between *equality* and *levelling* and to understand the empirical difference between the ideal distribution and the actual distribution of rights — a substantial difference that is experienced on the ground in different ways and degrees. The powers-that-be may have an interest in blurring this important distinction, as in the case sadly known to southern Italians of the dominant rhetoric on the complex relationship between crime, in its various expressions, and the criminalization of people and behaviours that are not criminal but are stigmatized and represented as such because for various reasons they are not homologated to the rhetoric and interests of the dominant élite.

The southern Italian reality offers stimulating insights for analysis that have wide relevance, beyond geographic specificity.

Over the years, the results of anthropological research have shed light on the difficult relationship between morality, norm and behaviour. Interesting ways have emerged in which the ruling élite deal with the expectations and demands of citizens, and interesting strategies have come to light with which they often dodge the absolutely key task of reconciling their ideology of what is moral and legitimate and what is not with the values and life styles of ordinary people. As recognized by the most enlightened jurists, ascertaining these dynamics is as indispensable to jurisprudence as it is to political philosophy, to the theory of the state and, essentially, to good governance.

Promoted since the unification of the country (1861), a stigmatization of Southern Italians has been endorsed by generations of Italian and international writers. According to much of the literature, bogged down by lack of trust in each other and by their 'amoral familism', ordinary southerners are politically and socially backward individualists who lack social responsibility and cannot be trusted. They are dubbed as people who, devoid of civil sense, have transformed fundamental rights and illicit benefits into transactable goods. They, the stereotype goes, prefer illegal ways to lawful ones; subterfuge to honesty; dishonesty and violence to respect for the rules and civil behaviour.

This stigma and its contaminating ramifications (Goffman 1963: 4) have applied, in particular, to the Southern *popolino*. This word, *popolino*, is often used disparagingly by outsiders. My Naples informants are aware of this, but they use this word proudly to describe themselves. They have been collectively described as amoral and ungovernable people. They have been cast as a dangerous underclass — a deprived and oppressed *sottoproletariato* (lumpenproletariat), as they are called in Marxist parlance.[2] Those whom I have met over years of field research lack formal employment — and the benefits and guarantees that come with it — but they are very hard workers, profoundly animated by culture of *sapé fa* (literally, cleverness) that emphasizes pooling *all* personal resources in the pursuit of specific goals and of general betterment. They express an entrepreneurial culture strongly influenced by the belief that 'God helps those who help themselves'. It is as a direct consequence of this cultural makeup that their social and political relations can be understood as belonging to a 'moral climate', a 'way of doing things', a rationality that has been summarily dismissed as casual *arte di arrangiarsi*. Depending on the writer's interests, this unfortunate expression has been translated as 'art of making do' or as 'art of living by one's wits'. Spun to infamy, it betrays the mixture of contempt and apprehension with ordinary people's approach, embodied by a progression of local rulers of various political persuasions who have systematically frustrated in words and deeds a culture and morality that, difficult to control because creatively committed to personal independence and discernment, pose considerable challenges to their power.

This long-dominant stigma is based on an implausible axiom between a numerically small part (even according to the most pessimistic estimates) of the population that makes a profession of dishonesty and crime and the rest of society. The 'rest of society' is the majority; people who profoundly healthy, work hard, make the most of their personal abilities and resent the approach of the ruling élite, now flexible, now rigid and dirigiste, but instrumentally finding common ground into practising various forms of clientelism.

Plainly, the stereotype of ordinary Southerners that I have outlined is unacceptable. It does not stand to logic. It crumbles under the weight of empirical evidence. And yet, it greatly contributes both to obscuring what happens in real life and to justifying punitive policies. Underscoring the critical opposition between independent analysis and analysis that is *organic*

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[2] For an articulated criticism of this literature, see Pardo (1996, Ch. 1; see also Stewart 2001 and Schneider 2002) and Pardo and Prato (2011).

to vested interests,[3] it has long been instrumental to policies that are averse to the reality, interests and development of the South. In short, this stigma has greatly contributed to determine the inequality of an entire European Region.

As an independent scholar, I am interested in an objective analysis that sheds light on the nature, genesis, exaggerations, limits and consequences of this stigma. I am interested in the ramified ways in which, over time, the game of exaggerating selected aspects of the situation and underestimating others has visibly damaged crucial areas of associated life and institutions. The last thirty years have been characterized by the appropriation of the high moral ground by certain southern élite.

In a strangely successful game of parts, from the early 1990s an almost ideal New South was advertised. This new world was dominated by rulers who, despite having long participated in the management of power at various key levels, succeeded in selling themselves as 'moral champions', as the 'new' embodiments of clean hands and higher ideals. Now, everyone was supposed to be happier. Yet, things have turned out to be quite different, as the renewed and stronger intertwining of politics, business and crime has matched powerful élites' abuses for their own and their friends' benefit. Interestingly, however undeserving and irresponsible in the Weberian sense (Prato 2000: 79), their approach seems to be unmovable. Paradoxically, this unconscionable approach seems to benefit from the low level of trust in democratic participation, as most citizens have ceased to exercise their democratic right to vote. This disaffection with local politics, though amply justified, is a dangerous development for democracy that helps to perpetuate the obnoxious political status quo.

This has resulted in a further extension and worsening of inequality. Notoriously, and classically, while judicial inquiries drive scandal but often fail to deliver convictions of the accused, many 'new brooms' have become involved in abuse of power, bribery and corruption, which not always break the law. For instance, in recent times, I have been asked to note, while in office, the Naples mayor 'received a 15-month suspended jail sentence for abuse of office and a hefty fine for libel' — these crimes were committed while he was a serving magistrate. He was subsequently suspended from office by the judicial authorities, appealed, and one month later was reinstated on a technicality. Equally interestingly, it was also pointed out to me that 'his deputy received a 1-year suspended jail sentence for having assaulted a policewoman in the past. He, too, stayed in office'. But there have been other, subtler, ramifications.

Like those who have recently replaced them, these governing élite and their friends have thrived on a blurring of the dividing line between what is legal and legitimate and what is legal and not legitimate in public life, as they have aided and abetted the violent actions of local extremist groups and their ideology of the state as the enemy. Local commentators denounce Naples' governance as deeply embroiled with these groups, who guarantee extremist support to the powers-that-be. Antonio Polito, the deputy editor of an authoritative centre-left newspaper

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[3] Gramsci's ideas (1971) on the role of the 'organic intellectual' in establishing hegemony of his or her party (political and otherwise) in key domains of power and culture have been influential across the Italian political spectrum.

has described how these malcontents 'have become his (the mayor's) party' and 'his militant guardians'. In return, they have been allowed to settle in publicly owned buildings, like the Asilo Filangieri, named after the great 18th century Neapolitan jurist and philosopher. This building of important historical value was restored at public expense to be used as a venue for international cultural events. Like several other buildings in the city, it was illegally occupied by 'collectives', radical groups who were later turned into legal occupants through ad hoc Municipal Decrees (of 25 May 2012, 29 December 2015 and 01 June 2016). While the previous local rulers are under investigation for abuse of office and damage to the public purse, the recently elected rulers have awarded to these groups 30 million Euro for the upgrade of what are now legally their buildings. This share of the EU funds awarded to Italy is part of the 210 million Euro assigned by the national government to the Naples administration (Garau 2022). Part of the *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, this money is supposed to inject some lifeblood into the city's finances, which, evidently mismanaged, are on the brink of financial insolvency.

Meanwhile, as we shall see, Naples remains a dangerous and dirty place; a city marred by administrative inefficiency, wildcat strikes and street crime. A city whose public purse is perilously close to insolvency.

Ethnographic evidence highlights broader issues of high comparative value as it testifies to the tyranny, in Hanna Arendt's sense (1951) of the structural inequality that historically undermines local society; a tyranny now dramatically evidenced by the impact of Covid-19. Anthropological reflection helps us to understand the tension between the *de jure* and the *de facto* legitimacy that qualifies ordinary Neapolitans' access to healthcare, their right to public health and safety and growing precariousness in their lives. In a national scenario dominated by the unspoken but pervasive fraudulent idea that the tax-paying citizen is in debt with the state, they are dealt a mighty triple blow. A triple blow that effectively turns them, as they say, into '*figli di un Dio minore*' (children of a lesser god), citizens whose life is *made* pervasively hazardous and precarious. They must contend with a health service that, increasingly, is public in name only. They are forced to live in a filthy and hazardous public domain. They are subjected to discriminative policies that disadvantage large, vulnerable proportions of the population. As I explain in a forthcoming essay (Pardo 2023), these three blows need attention, as they add up to a toxic socio-economic and political situation. Here, it will be useful to outline them briefly.

Three Blows to Ordinary Italians

1. A Public *Health Service?*

In Italy, healthcare has been gradually turned from a citizen's right to a commodity. Since the early 1990, this progression has ridden on the back of the so-called *intra moenia* scheme, whereby medical personnel are legally allowed to exercise privately while they are publicly employed in the 'Aziende Sanitarie Locali'; literally — indeed ominously — Local Healthcare Corporations, generally known by the acronym ASL. The ASLs are part-funded by the central government and are managed by the Regional authorities, which, as Prato has noted (2022), explains significant variations (in technical equipment, personnel, performance, cost to the patient, and so on) across

Italy's 21 Regions. Flying in the face of the Constitutional principle that healthcare is a citizen's right (one's taxes pay, of course among other things, for one's healthcare), an ever-expanding proportion of medical and pharmaceutical services is accessible only by private purchase, and access to the rest involves varying amounts of payment. As brought out by the Fondazione Gimbe (2019), in recent years, these legal yet illegitimate dynamics have been paralleled by cuts in public funding to the tune of 37 billion Euros.

The impact of the foregoing is felt more in some Regions, like Naples', where the everyday reality of the inadequate and understaffed public health system raises serious challenges to key aspects — medical, moral and ethical — of the Hippocratic Oath. As a social anthropologist doing field research there since the early 1980s, I have recorded how the actions of some in the medical profession contribute to the deterioration of public healthcare. I have observed the conflict between the dedication and professionalism of many doctors, nurses and health administrators and the corruption — moral, criminal or both — of some of their peers, some holding 'qualifications' obtained through corruption (Beneduce 2021). They generally stay within the strictly-defined boundaries of the Law but practice what their patients resent as *de facto* abuses of power, pursuit of private interest in public office and monetary and career greed. These unscrupulous — and well-networked (Beneduce 2019) — medics, trade unionists, contractors and agents of pharmaceutical companies act, often jointly, with little or no concern for the patient. They routinely refer their public health-service patients to their private practice, or to private specialists, or to private test laboratories (in each case, tax-avoiding cash payments are requested), and so on. Once these professionals sell their public office and professional ethics, their profitable contacts expand, as do their lucrative contracts with private medical establishments and their favour-credit in their networks.

Interestingly, these efforts to turn patients into customers, or clients, or supplicants do not always appear to have the intended results. Stubbornly resisting pressure to make them subaltern to some 'superior powers', the ordinary Neapolitans whom I have met over the years have developed varied and complex ways to deal with this and most other distortions of associated life. As I have explained elsewhere in detail (Pardo 1996: Ch. 6 and 2017), inspired by their will 'not to be subject to anyone',[4] many have built multiple contacts and generalized relations of (often delayed) exchange. When in need, they use more than one contact, usually with good *and* relatively not-too-expensive results.

2. A Filthy and Hazardous Public Domain

The developments that I have outlined occur in a context where uncollected rubbish continues to jeopardise local public health[5] in lethal combination with the injuries and deaths caused by alarming levels of street crime[6] and badly maintained public property: overflowing sewage; falling trees; and

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[4] They say: *Nun voglio sta suggett' a nisciun'*.

[5] This continuing problem (Corriere del Mezzogiorno 2022, Folle 2022) has become entrenched since the early 1990s. Some of those responsible are under criminal investigation (Beneduce 2020).

[6] As increasing street crime dominates local news (Crimaldi 2022), Naples rulers are accused to have failed to heed top policeman Alessandro Giuliano's assessment and warning (*NapoliToday* 2022).

broken or uneven pavements (*Il Mattino* 2019); large and deep potholes; pieces of public buildings that fall on pedestrians (*La Repubblica Napoli* 2019).

Amidst medieval visions of filthy roads and pavements populated by stray cats, rats, cockroaches and feral packs of dogs, these hazards now include a 'rubbish trade', whereby illegal immigrants peddle objects scavenged from dumpsters and displayed for sale on rugs thrown on the pavement; a practice on which the authorities appear persistently inclined to turn a blind eye. In spite of citizens' repeated protests and widely reported appeals to the authorities (Garau 2020), this practice has expanded across the city centre (Folle 2021).[7]

This dangerous setup is magnified by the practice of shallow-burying household, industrial and hazardous waste in dumping sites (Beccaloni et al. 2020). Over the years, pulmonary disease, cancer and death have multiplied exponentially (Senior and Mazza 2004, Martuzzi et al. 2009, Beccaloni et al. 2020).

In short, for over 30 years, local authorities have mismanaged both public property and what takes place in public space. That such mismanagement should have continued during the pandemic has raised widespread anger among citizens.

3. Discriminative Policies that Disadvantage Many

As authoritatively stated by Gian Carlo Blangiardo, the President of ISTAT (*Il Tempo*, 24 May 2021), 'in 2020 the number of people below the poverty threshold reached unprecedent levels'. Meeting Prato's discussion (2020) of new inequalities, he points out that the increase in poverty is explained by the loss of jobs and income, especially among the self-employed and the micro and small entrepreneurs.

Earlier, I mentioned the inequality between the privileged and 'the others'. Let us now dwell briefly on 'the others' in view of the inequality between the secured and the empirical impact of this inequality, especially in times of crisis.

The bias of a certain political ideology against the self-employed and micro and small entrepreneurs is known and widely discussed in the literature (Pardo 1996: Ch.2; 2017: 39-43; 2021). This bias has played a key role in discriminating the non-guaranteed; That is, the heavily stigmatised Southerners who are traditionally forced to fence for themselves. At the same time, the guaranteed, enjoy secure, trade-union-protected employment mostly in the public overstaffed and historically clientelism-ridden sector. South Italy is marked by extraordinarily high formal unemployment (Banca d'Italia 2020, Bulian 2022). According to the Eurostat dossier of 2022, while the average EU unemployment rate is 7%, in Sicilia, Campania, Calabria and Puglia it reaches an average of 60%.

In this environment, most of my Naples informants are (by choice or more often *perforce*) self-employed (Pardo 1996: Ch. 2; 2017). They have developed excellent entrepreneurial abilities that highlight the socio-economic complexity that in most societies underscores the not-strictly legal but widely regarded as legitimate (Pardo 2000, Björklund Larsen 2010). Under contextual pressures, they mostly employ these abilities informally in productive economic activities at the micro and

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[7] For more on this, see Pardo (2020a).

small level that, as amply demonstrated elsewhere (Pardo 1996, 2018b), expose the unlikeliness of the 'dual economy' view as they interact meaningfully with the formal in the market.

Recently, 'those in command', as my informants contemptuously call their rulers, have used the pandemic as a convenient trojan horse to grab extraordinary powers and impose incredibly unfair policies, while continuing to exercise power Italian style; ruling, that is, without being elected and staying in power despite losing the elections.[8] Lockdowns (inevitably impeding business) and the exacerbation of bureaucratic and fiscal weight have brought to bear the aforementioned political bias, amplifying throughout the country the inequality between the guaranteed and the non-guaranteed, with particularly devastating effects in urban environments like that we are dealing with.

During the pandemic, none of my 'non-guaranteed' Neapolitan friends received help or assistance, monetary or otherwise, from the local, regional or national government. Most are *popolino*, some are middle-class. Many were driven out of business. Many others who worked for small entrepreneurs lost their jobs. As always, they could count only on themselves. The 'luckier' among them could rely on limited help from their kin. Local stall-keepers' experience typifies the plight of precarious workers' struggle to survive. Referring to Italian rulers' rhetoric of *tutto andrà bene* (all will be fine), one remarked:

> 'Market's shut. I can't work. No one is helping. Savings are dwindling. My children and wife are barely coping. Nerves are frayed. The neighbourhood is dirtier than ever. Yeah, we'll be all right indeed!'.

As a small entrepreneur put it,

> 'we've been forced to eat the few savings from a lifetime of working without a parachute. Now I and mine're truly in the shit, as we have almost nothing left to fall upon. If, God forbid, one of us should fall seriously ill as my little daughter did a few years ago, we'd have to borrow from loan-sharks. We have no patrimonial guarantees, you know; so, banks won't even look at us.'[9]

The severe impact of this third blow has egregiously complemented the punishing job done by the seriously crippled health 'service' and the misgovernance of the public domain.

The precarious are more precarious, or dead. The guaranteed have kept their jobs and financial security; the well-connected have thrived; the wealthy have become wealthier.

In this scenario, one's mind is drawn to the complications brought out by the ethnography of mismanagement of power that fosters difficult relationships between an autochthonous population traditionally tolerant of diversity and generally accepting of foreigners and the ever-growing number of undocumented immigrants. This substantial urban change, my informants in central Naples say, has made their neighbourhoods dangerous and unliveable. Here, as across Italy and

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[8] For an anthropological analysis of this practice, see Pardo 2021.
[9] I have discussed local experiences during the pandemic (Pardo 2020b). The forthcoming full-length chapter cited earlier (Pardo 2023) offers ethnographic evidence on the plight of these Neapolitans.

beyond, misgovernance has bred these dark overtones, engendering critical dynamics of integration versus exclusion and of tolerance versus toleration, as they have contributed to turning the autochthonous population's natural *tolerance* into *toleration* and, gradually, into *intolerance*, as citizens' instances have remained unaddressed and problems have stayed unsolved.

These oppositions and their worrying ramifications, I note, were incisively discussed fourteen years ago by Giuliana B. Prato in her early, bravely argued, critique of 'multiculturalism as a political project'. In a fine example of what Laura Nader has called 'contrarian anthropology' that questions assumptions that inform entrenched mindsets, Prato and the contributors to her book drew on ethnographic evidence from across the world to examine this obnoxious project on the ground (Prato 2009). Their robust analyses foresaw its failure, powerfully bringing to light its contribution to furthering injustice and inequalities; a failure now of course broadly recognized in the mainstream literature and, critically if belatedly, in politics. As we have seen, local examples of such a failure abound.

These dynamics tally significantly with illegal immigrant dealers being allowed, by default, literally to monopolise pavements, gardens and squares, while the autochthonous licensed traders are heavily fined for any transgression, including exceeding the space allocated on their trading licenses. The latter are identified and must pay — 'unlike', as one of them noted, 'the illegal peddlers who operate here, run from the police just to reappear when it is safe, and if caught cannot be made to pay because officially they've no income and often no identity documents'. As residents and traders in the city centre grow concerned for their health, a highly explosive situation is brewing, one that brings to mind past riots motivated by similar reasons. A young man who was forced by the municipal police to close his stall because he could not pay the fine was, in his own words, 'sorely aware that unlicensed illegal immigrants can sell what they want where they want'. He went on to remark, 'why I can't sell my wares but they can sell my rubbish?'.

The foregoing spells out a plethora of serious problems, each raising deep concerns for associated life. Combined, they very seriously endanger individuals' health, security and critical citizenship rights, and undermine many fundamentals of the democratic order. It would be difficult to contest the view held by many ordinary Neapolitans that much responsibility for this dangerous combination lies with their rulers — local, regional and national. Let us consider briefly this point looking at abuses of democracy and asking the question whether such abuses are a done deal — whether they are 'destined' to go unaddressed.

Abusing Democracy: A Done Deal?
In Naples, as elsewhere in Italy, the view is dire. The democratic covenant between rulers and the ruled has dropped into the chasm between some dominant élite's running roughshod over it — a practice that is peddled to 'the masses' as a bitter but necessary pill to swallow — and the real-world incarnation of such riding, which is widely resented as a rotten deal. This rough handling of the democratic covenant is both resented and actively opposed at the grassroots level as it patently protects the interests of the powers-that-be and their networked friends, in

most cases at the expense of the rest of society. Things have recently escalated, especially because during the pandemic people have had to live with the impact of local, national and international political inefficiency and questionable policies that are now under intense scrutiny, including from the judiciary.

In her recent essay on 'Pandemic Emergency, Solidarity and Brutus Tactics', Giuliana B. Prato has drawn on the Italian scenario to raise an important point that has worldwide significance. She writes:

> 'The Italian philosopher Agamben has recently criticized the "techno-medical despotism" of the Italian government, justified in the name of the "common good", but in fact resulting in the suppression of political and civic freedoms, of human rights and dignity (Agamben 2020). Internationally influential in the social sciences until recently, Agamben has lost the support of the Italian "radical" intellectual establishment because of his position on Covid-19 and his criticism of the government. With punctual descriptions and denunciations, he describes the government's action as a "gigantic operation to falsify the truth" and points out how the Covid-19 pandemic has been exploited as an opportunity to bring in authoritarianism and a new political rationality centred around biosecurity'. (Prato 2020: 10)

Critically, far before the Covid-19 pandemic, it had become only too easy for powerful élite groups to spin their repeated disregard for the democratic principles of governance as a measure mandated by some 'critical situation', by some 'emergency'. The thing is, such a 'critical situation', such an 'emergency' — mostly imaginary but represented as true — have become the established state of affairs in the country. Hence, the 'extraordinary' — but de facto normalized — step of '*having to* recur' to emergency governments led and staffed by unelected people, who may sometimes be prestigious figures. It is increasingly clear that citizens are not gaslighted by this dominant rhetoric, which visibly lacks legitimacy at the grassroots. Yet, this seems to make no difference to the powers-that-be, as legal but illegitimate governments have regularly encountered only minority opposition in Parliament. Untainted by ideological bias or commitment to be *organic* to a political agenda, my informants draw on their lived experience as they remark that the support given by most Parliamentarians to unelected prime ministers and governments illustrates the point that Italian political culture appears to contain deep reserves of intolerance to citizens' will and cynical manipulation of electoral results.

There is, of course, little comfort in the growing belief across Europe that many aspects of this Italian picture extend to the workings of the European Union. Many increasingly view the commendable ideal that originally inspired the EU project as having turned into an undemocratic, ineffective, even harmful reality.

Closing Remarks

In closing, I shall remind the reader that, by definition, misgovernance breaches the democratic contract with citizenship. I may well be at risk of labouring a point, here. But this is a point that I believe to be fundamental.

When it affects people where it hurts most, I would argue, the legitimacy of the 'system' becomes dangerously questioned. The casualties are trust and, ultimately, authority. The Naples ethnography graphically exemplifies this progression in a country that has manifestly become a test case for social and political consequences of the eroded legitimacy of the system which, until relatively recently were too dire to contemplate but are now unmistakably real.

Bluntly, these brief reflections on the crisis of legitimacy in Italian public life remind us that, by definition, democracies may well be more resilient than some expect, but they are still fragile — and imperfect — achievements. In a national context marred by a succession of governments manned until recently by unelected people, we have examined how in Naples the actions of ideologically driven rulers elected by the minority who bothered to vote pander to the interests of select groups. We have seen how, holding power but lacking authority, this style of 'governance by double-standards' has contributed substantially to making life difficult at the grassroots, where it is resented as illegitimate.

The Naples predicament brings out a warning for committed democrats across the world. It spells out critical dangers engendered by the gulf between ruling élite and the rest. Some specifics may change from context to context, but here, as in much of the democratic world, the situation that we have studied raises the general warning that as this gulf keeps widening there is no simple road back to authoritative, because legitimate, democratic governance — certainly not from the viewpoint of the ordinary people who have to live with the practical consequences of this gulf.

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Flexibility and Flows: Work Time, Commute Time and Getting in Line[1]

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This article analyses the relationship between daily space and work (re)arrangements for more flexibility for worker-commuters, specifically organisational work-time adaptation and innovation in response to a sudden, prolonged interstate bridge closure. Human resources (HR) representatives at a small sample of organisations were interviewed regarding their employers' flexibility policies and practices, employees' use of flexibility options, their own use and their own experience of the catastrophic breakdown of the regional automobility system. Flexibility award winners adapted relatively seamlessly with one exception. Otherwise, adaptation occurred within limits, and some workers had to adapt personally. The HR representative's contradictory gatekeeping position was revealed as one that intersects organisation and community, not among the key urban actors who typically populate the scholarly literature.
Keywords: Commuting, human resources, organisational change, transportation, workplace flexibility.

Introduction

Spatial form and social process are interrelated; configuration shapes activity, and social interaction creates the built environment. In capitalism's dynamic of expansion and crisis, new structures are built as old ones lose value over time (Harvey 1973, 1982, 2001). Sometimes, however, structures lose use-value precipitously and temporarily, as in cases of flood, fire, wind damage or other structural failure.

Time-space compression is a feature of capitalism's unrelenting search for profits (Harvey 1989). I assert that within compression there are moments of decompression — in this case resulting from sudden, prolonged unavailability of a bridge, engendering a conundrum for employers and workers: how does this calamity affect our workforce? How do I rearrange my life so I can get to work on time? Labour power as a commodity is distinctive in that it brings itself to market (Harvey 1982: 380).

This article analyses the relationship between daily space and work (re)arrangements for more flexibility for worker-commuters. Commuting to and from work marks most adults' day and is a key ritual of the urban experience. Arguably, consciousness of urban space is enhanced while traversing it. The 'rush' is a collective endeavour given form by local infrastructure.

Urban scholars often study local economies, but they do not go inside the employment relationship because that is the purview of other specialists. Here, however, the two broad specialties are joined in an investigation of a temporary reconfiguration that doubled, tripled and occasionally quadrupled normal 15- to 30-minute commutes. I analysed work-time adaptation and innovation during the unplanned five-month cross-river interstate bridge closure in the Louisville, Kentucky, USA area that disproportionately affected the 17% of the workforce that resided in southern Indiana (Pryor 2011). Four months after the bridge reopened there were incidental lane and ramp closures lasting several weeks during maintenance on a second cross-river interstate bridge in the nearby downtown area. A year later, construction on

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a new adjacent downtown cross-river interstate bridge began in earnest, disrupting the commute for two years. Although the organisational adaptations were specific to a local 'decompression,' they revealed the contradictory gatekeeping role of human resources officials, not among the key urban actors — politicians, business leaders, economic development practitioners, developers, school officials and community activists, for example — who typically populate the scholarly literature.

Flexible work has been studied as employer-provided benefits for work-family integration (see Negrey 2012 for a review of numerous studies) and as supply-side employer adaptations, such as part-time and temporary jobs (Katz and Krueger 2016, Negrey 2012). In this study, flexible arrangements are examined as organisational adaptations in response to a unique crisis in the organisation's environment. On Friday 9 September 2011, one of two interstate bridges (one of three bridges in total) connecting to and in close proximity to the Louisville downtown area was closed during the evening commute by order of then-Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels upon the discovery a day prior, during a routine inspection, of two cracks in each of two steel support beams below the lower deck of the I-64 Sherman Minton Bridge, an east-west span over the Ohio River connecting the states of Indiana and Kentucky that had been built in 1962 (Quay et al. 2011). Anticipating extraordinary traffic congestion with the diversion of an estimated 90,000 vehicles per day from the Minton to the north-south I-65 John F. Kennedy Bridge (which normally carried 122,900 vehicles per day and routinely had its own congestion problems) and in close proximity to the Kennedy to the west, the north-south Clark Memorial Bridge (which connects surface streets and normally carried 21,900 vehicles per day), officials encouraged carpooling, staggered work times, telecommuting and no driving when possible during peak times. Then-Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer in particular urged employers to be as flexible as possible (Green 2011b, Green and Lord 2012, Lord 2012).

Louisville has become a distribution and logistics hub, arguably a key node of time-space compression (Cañedo 2016), since UPS located there in the 1980s and subsequently expanded its Worldport cargo sorting facility alongside expansion of the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport (Negrey et al. 2011). Fears of substantial business losses subsided when it was learned that bridge repairs would take about six months (Green 2011a, Otts 2011). Manufacturing and transport/warehousing, the two sectors most closely linked to logistics, accounted at the time for more than 100,000 jobs or about 20% of all employment in the 13 counties in Kentucky and Indiana that comprised the metro area. Large companies such as UPS and Ford adjusted and experienced no problems (in theory, multi-site businesses have options that small businesses and workers do not have, although this was not studied). Some smaller companies reported shipping schedule adjustments and additional costs of fuel and driver overtime (Otts 2011).

The Sherman Minton Bridge reopened in February 2012, offering some relief. Subsequently, during June and July 2012, there were lane closures on the north-south I-65 Kennedy Bridge and selected ramp closures nearby during maintenance that caused extraordinary congestion during peak times, even with some traffic diverted to the Minton Bridge. Local law enforcement encouraged area employers to stagger employees' work hours.

In September 2013 construction began in earnest on a new span linking Kentucky and Indiana via I-65. This bridge, the Abraham Lincoln, opened in December 2015 and carried both north- and southbound traffic for a time while a new round of maintenance was done on the adjacent Kennedy Bridge. Since the Kennedy returned to normal use, it carries southbound traffic and the Lincoln northbound. This major construction required numerous lane and ramp reconfigurations, closures and detours, inconveniencing motorists on both sides of the river, while more than 60 overpasses and bridges were re/constructed, more than 60 new retaining walls were set and nearly 50 miles of new roadway were built (Shafer 2016). Drivers were advised to travel off peak if possible.

Flexibility is often informal and more common at small workplaces (Glass and Estes 1997, Glass and Fujimoto 1995). Flexible scheduling increased over time but reached a plateau; demand exceeds supply, and use would increase if there were no negative repercussions to doing so (Altman and Golden 2007; Galinsky et al. 2005; Negrey 2012: 115-116). During the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work tripled (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). In the sociology of work, studies of flexible arrangements are usually concerned with family, not transportation, although increasingly authors acknowledge broader work-life integration, but commuting is not a focus. In urban studies, transportation is a matter of infrastructure, land use and local conflict (regarding the Messina Bridge, for example, see Mollica 2012 and Sacco and Scotti 2013 in this journal) and not generally investigated in relationship to work routines, although commute times and congestion are topics in their own right. Urban theorist Manuel Castells' (2000) notion of 'space of flows,' electronic flows in the 'network society,' also applies to transportation flows on the ground. The preference herein for the organisation as a unit of analysis advances the idea of their social productivity in the urban context (McQuarrie and Marwell 2009), addresses their role as participants in automobility (Urry 2004, 2007) and recognizes them as a mezzo linkage of individuals and the broader spatial-temporal-social system. This study reflects the divergent interests among employees, of employees and organisations and the tensions and complexities of work and employment relations (Townsend et al. 2019).

Urry (2007: 46) developed the mobilities paradigm in the social sciences, arguing that social life involves continual processes of shifting between co-presence and distance from others, which depend in part on multiple technologies of travel and communications (Urry 2007: 46-47). These processes stem from five interdependent mobilities, among them corporeal travel, such as but not limited to daily commuting, physical movement of objects and communicative travel (Urry 2007: 47).

In the modern world, automobility — its vehicles and related infrastructure — is the most powerful mobility system (Urry 2007: 50-51), and the contemporary city is organised around 'the objective architectonic of motion' — traffic (Scanlan 2004; Urry 2007: 55). 'Wayfinding occurs without reflection except when systems breakdown' (Urry 2007: 55), then the system reveals itself while drivers are trapped in an 'iron bubble' (Urry 2007: 120). The car is a place we inhabit (Laurier et al. 2008), perhaps most evidently during traffic jams, as we live life along the motorway (Laurier 2004, Urry 2004). The car is simultaneously flexible and coercive,

forcing people to juggle tiny fragments of time so as to deal with the temporal and spatial constraints it itself generates while endeavouring to complete the day's many tasks (Urry 2007: 119-120, 123-124). Hagman (2006), by contrast, has argued we have never been mobile — the majority of car travellers are stuck in queues and commuters adjust habits to life in a queue.

Urry's roots are in the classical sociological theorizing of Georg Simmel, credited with the first attempt to develop a mobilities paradigm by analysing proximity, distance and movement in the modern city (Jensen 2006: 146; Urry 2007: 20). Path-building creates connections between places, 'freezing movement in a solid structure' (Simmel 1997: 171; Urry 2007: 20), reaching its zenith in bridges (Simmel 1997; Urry 2007: 20), which reorganise how people dwell and move (Heidegger 1993: 354; Urry 2007: 32).

Before the Sherman Minton Bridge closure, queues were predictable. Afterward, they became much longer by experience and local custom. Wayfinding and queuing became eventful in and of themselves similar to Bissell's (2007) notion of waiting-as-event. Stillness on a congested bridge permits feeling its movement — squeamish for those a bit phobic.

The reconfigured, retemporalised commute necessitated change in pre-travel planning, and new tie-ups led to new improvisation enroute (Peters et al. 2010). Improvisation could make matters worse, such as the morning a tractor-trailer crashed into a construction barrier and caught fire, shutting down that section of interstate, resulting in an unplanned tour of the countryside in pouring rain and very late arrival to destination (personal experience).

Sitting in traffic is experienced as a colossal waste of time; or it may be used productively in work-related calls and texts (Laurier 2004), calls and texts to family and friends, as a period of leisure while listening to music/radio and/or time of extended conversation among co-occupants of the car. Sitting in traffic is time to sit, however calmly or impatiently, with one's thoughts.

Ordinarily we conceive of work time and commute time as discrete, one beginning when the other ends. In lived experience, however, they are intricately related because the commute is the boundary between work and the rest of life, arguably an extension of work when, for example, mass transit riders work during the commute using mobile technologies. Managing life as a whole requires not only the integration of work via the work schedule but also the timing of the commute, when other household members may also be dropped off or picked up and errands run along the way, thus blurring the distinction between the commute and home (Jensen et al. 2015, McLaren 2018, Peters et al. 2010). During the Minton Bridge closure and subsequent Lincoln Bridge construction, timing the commute was more problematic than usual. While this 'decompression moment' took unique and specific dimensions in the Louisville area, it is a case illustration of similar difficulties that commuters experience in many places. In May 2021, for example, the I-40 Hernando DeSoto Bridge between Arkansas and Tennessee was closed to vehicular and barge traffic after a structural crack was discovered. On 28 January 2022, the Fern Hollow Bridge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania collapsed, diverting almost 15,000 vehicles per day. Modernization of bridges is among the objectives of the recently enacted Biden administration infrastructure plan; such construction will surely disrupt workers' commutes.

Methods

Urbanity expresses the multidimensionality of form and process and the relationship between micro and macro, in stasis and in change, in porous places we call cities (Cañedo 2016, Pardo and Prato 2018, Pardo et al. 2020, Thiessen 2011). Life is not lived in discrete conceptual blocks (Harvey 2001: 9). By interpreting lived experience, the holistic methods of qualitative sociology and classic anthropology (Pardo and Prato 2018, Pardo et al. 2020) are well suited to uncover this complexity in the deceivingly mundane, such as the daily commute and the work schedule.

In addition to media accounts and implicit or explicit personal experience, this study analyses in-person semi-structured qualitative interviews I conducted in 2016 with human resources representatives at selected companies and organisations regarding the extent to which their employees were permitted to and used flexible work arrangements and/or telecommuting to adapt to the more difficult commute. HR representatives are in boundary-spanning roles that, despite the strain of role conflict inherent in them, link organisations to their environments and may aid adaptation to the environment by importing innovations to the organisation (Aldrich 2008: 263-264). Large companies and organisations ('major employers') in Louisville and southern Indiana were selected to maximise the likelihood of cross-river worker-commuters. These major employers were compared to a sample of companies and organisations that had won workplace flexibility awards near the time of but before the Minton Bridge closure. These award winners represented a local benchmark. I was particularly interested in organisations that offered few if any flexibility options prior to the 2011 bridge closure but acquiesced or expanded options in light of commuting difficulties of long duration. The question posed by Jiron and Imilan (2015) is turned on its head: how does flexibility change mobility practices becomes how do mobility practices change flexibility? Are employers willing to accommodate workers' reconfigured, retemporalised mobility? Insights were gained from this study regarding the distinctiveness of award recipients, major employers' history of workplace flexibility and (re)arrangements made by employers during the period of bridge closure/construction and for the future. It should be noted that none of the major employers were among the flexibility award recipients at the time of sample construction.

HR representatives were invited by phone or email to participate in the study. Interviews of 40 minutes to more than an hour were digitally recorded for accuracy, transcribed and coded by this author, then compared by categories of (1) award winners, (2) large Louisville employers and (3) large southern Indiana employers. The study was approved by the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board.

Sample Characteristics

HR representatives from 13 organisations agreed to participate in the study. Six had won flexible workplace awards, four more than once. Among the large area employers selected to compare to the benchmark award recipients, four were among the largest employers in Louisville (two with establishments on both the Louisville and Indiana sides of the river) and three were among the largest employers just north of the Ohio River in southern Indiana. Of the 13 participating organisations, eight were private sector companies, four were in the public

sector and one was a non-profit. Two large employers had employees represented by labour unions. The award winners ranged in size from 19 to 30 employees, with one outlier at 300 — making them distinctive in their small size and consistent with literature cited above that workplace flexibility is more common in small organisations. The large Louisville employers ranged in size from approximately 5,000 to 17,000 employees; the large southern Indiana employers, approximately 900 to 1,800 employees. All of the organisations were in service-sector industries including education, health care, information technology, professional services, protective services and retail trade. Three — all award winners — had salary employees only; the other 10 cases employed both salaried and hourly workers. Among five award recipients (the sixth did not provide an estimate), the majority of employees resided in Kentucky except for one company that estimated a 50-50 split of Indiana and Kentucky residents. Among the other award winners that provided an estimate, the number of Indiana residents was small, ranging from one to nine. Only one of the four large Louisville employers ventured an estimate of residential distribution — 75% Kentucky and 25% Indiana. Two of the three large southern Indiana employers provided estimates — 85% to 90% Indiana in one case, 65% in the other. The latter reported that this was an increase from 55% a few years earlier. More on this in the discussion below regarding the impact of bridge closure and construction on commutes.

Flexibility Practices

The Award Winners

Five of the six award winners offered work from home/remote work options and flexible schedules. Two of them also offered flexible or short Fridays to offset overwork demands of busy seasons. One had terminated mandatory weekend hours. All five were office-based organisations. The sixth award winner was a relatively unique employment situation by comparison to the other five; its flexibility practices were specific to its jobs in the form of short-time 'trades' in an occupational setting where full-shift trades are normative.

I should add a caveat here. The award competition required organisations to submit employer and employee surveys, thus reflecting initiative and employee morale. Award winners were proud that they had won awards, leading them to be generally very receptive and responsive to my interview.

Flexibility practices among the award winners had been in place in some cases for at least five years and in others more than a decade. What was striking about the award winners was that in most cases flexibility was available to almost all if not all employees. One organisation made the flexibility options available only to full-time salaried staff; the part-time employees, who were not offered additional flexibility, were few in number at this worksite. Otherwise, HR representatives in this category tended to say things like, 'Everyone can work remotely,' or that formal and informal flexibility options were available to 'anyone'. At perhaps the most flexible extreme, the representative had this to say:

> '[…] because of the way our cycles work here there's not a one-size-fits-all that
> works well. We offer the flex schedules in terms of a reduced schedule; we have

probably 25%, 20% to 25% on some sort of reduced schedule. It could be 50% to 92% that's just changing their hours to make it work for them to people who have different workweeks, some 7 to 3 […] I have one that works Monday through Thursday, takes Friday off. The 7 to 3 is at 100%; the Monday through Thursday is 80%. A lot of people will do that, just have unique schedules. What we really encourage is what we call fluidity. What works for me is not going to work for you. […] We really try to be a liveable work solution; everybody's got different responsibilities; everybody's got different pressures. If you want to come in here and work all the time, that's great, but that's not our expectation. […] If you're younger it's a little bit harder because you're brand new and you're learning the trade, so it's important to be around. But as you grow and reach higher levels you can pretty much set your schedule, just let everybody know; we do ask just be available in case a question pops up because you may have the institutional knowledge that someone else doesn't.'

Among the award winners, employee retention, and in one case recruitment, was a common theme for why the organisation offered flexibility options. This was stated explicitly by three of the HR representatives in this category. For example, one said, we're 'trying to keep the workforce stable to where we don't have a lot of transition. We invest time in training; we need to do something to keep you here.' According to another,

'the talent pool is so tough to find and keep that you have to be flexible. The millennials, the way they work, it's just a totally different world. […] We have a […] committee, they tell us when we're falling behind. I love this about this firm. While we're building a legacy, we're trying to shore up the future. We rely heavily on what they want to keep them here.'

Similarly, a different representative said, '[…] the market is tightening up on good talent; […] we do experience more and more competition from other employers for that same talent pool, so in order to keep up with options available to them at other employers […]. we need to be able to offer some of the same options.'

Two also mentioned the nature of their business, including early morning and evening events and work at odd hours serving international clients. One said flexibility is simply a trend because of the demands of busy lives. Another mentioned employee mental health, adding that 'we want people to enjoy their job.'

The Large Louisville Employers

By definition, the large employers were more complex organisations with a greater variety of jobs. While these employers offered flexibility options, they applied to selected positions. All four large Louisville employers permitted remote work in positions, typically office or administrative, that could accommodate absence from the normal worksite. Three of the four also offered flexible schedules for certain appropriate positions. At a large retail company, part-time schedules were the most common form of flexibility for non-administrative employees.

Leaves of absence were also available there. At a health care organisation, flexible workweeks and a special weekend program were available to nurses.

Among this small sample of large Louisville employers, flexibility practices were formalised just four years earlier in one case. In another, longevity varied by union contract with one form of flexibility, leaves of absence, having 'always' been available. Work at home was described as having emerged organically with the spread of electronic technologies. In a third case, reduced workweeks with long daily shifts were 'common' in the industry. Eligibility varied by job position in each case, for example in a hospital setting by nurses, doctors and staff, and in one organisation the only other major guideline was that employees be full time, otherwise supervisors had discretion to grant flexibility (or not). Employee retention was mentioned by one HR representative in this category as a factor in offering flexibility options, who also noted that certain flexibility practices are common within the industry; in another distinctive case, the options were the result of a top-down initiative to make the workplace family-friendly. Although this HR representative did not explicitly mention retention, that theme is implied. Work at home to offset high gas prices (several years before the interview) was also mentioned by this person.

The Large Southern Indiana Employers

Work from home was also the common denominator among the three large southern Indiana employers in positions, typically administrative, that could accommodate it. Flexible schedules were also available in certain positions. Schools, in particular, offered non-teaching staff comp time; intermittent family/medical leave was also available; and had experimented with job sharing. A third organisation offered paid time off and 'make-up flex,' the latter reverse comp time permitting workers to make up missed hours during the same week.

At one of the large southern Indiana employers, some flexibility practices had been in place for more than a decade while others had been added within the last five years. In another case, flexibility practices had developed with electronic technologies over the course of the previous decade. At one organisation, eligibility was based on job classification. One of the three seemed to be resistant to anything more than very limited flexibility and, therefore, did not have a history per se of options. At this reluctant organisation, only salaried employees could work from home, and in many cases this 'flexibility' was work in the evening or on weekends for special projects that could not be completed in the office. This theme was also addressed as a reason for offering flexibility when the HR representative said, 'You know how salary employees work.' The HR representative at another organisation in this category pointed to employees' lives outside work as the main factor in offering flexibility options.

Usage Patterns

Among the award winners, family; other personal reasons, such as recreation, community activity and retirement phase-out; and the nature of work were equally likely to be mentioned by interview participants as factors in workers' use of flexibility options. When the nature of work was a factor, it was because jobs required offsite meetings with clients or attendance at offsite work-related events. The representatives of the large Louisville employers mentioned

family reasons most often. There was more variation among the large southern Indiana employers. While one mentioned child and elder care specifically, another saw no patterns among that organisation's employees. The third said 'varied personal reasons,' adding that 'so much consumerism happens 9 to 5, or 8 to 6.' This representative also commented on the impact of large-scale events on traffic.

The role of technology in facilitating usage was mentioned by eight of the 13 HR representatives; specifically, four of the six award winners, two of the four large Louisville employers and two of the three large southern Indiana employers. An HR representative in professional services summed it up quite succinctly when she said, 'Once technology allowed for all of this to happen, that's how it grew.' Another, in the same industry, said, 'We've got the greatest technology in the world; we can do our jobs from anywhere. We let people work how they want to work.'

Shermageddon

Two Louisville native sons, Michael and David Harpe, inspired by 'carmageddon' in Los Angeles, created a shermageddon website soon after the Sherman Minton Bridge closure, and local media followed suit in naming 'shermageddon' when referencing the commuting catastrophe. Generally, according to media reports, drivers adapted by adjusting departure times, doubling up or carpooling and adjusting routes. At least one local entrepreneur slept at her business when inclement weather threatened during the winter. One couple had an elaborate plan — she stayed with their two sons with a friend in Louisville near their school and her job; he stayed at home in Indiana near his office and where their daughter attended preschool — that lasted less than a month. Then she and the boys adjusted schedules and coped with daily gridlock like so many others (Lord 2012). After several weeks of trial and error, I found my optimal route that reduced my commute from 45 to 35 minutes, normally a 15-minute ride. A colleague shared her optimal route home with me (we had different schedules and did not consider carpooling); I treated this information as a state secret. A cardiologist whose practice required him to cross the river frequently to see patients at hospitals on both sides purchased a 1966 Amphicar that allowed him to cross in four minutes (www.whas11.com). The Transit Authority of River City (TARC) made schedule and route adjustments and put more buses into service. For a time, pedestrian ferry service was available on weekday mornings and afternoons via the Spirit of Jefferson (McAdam 2011). Walking and bicycle riding are always options using the sidewalks on both sides of the non-interstate Clark Memorial Bridge from Jeffersonville, Indiana to downtown Louisville. During the weekday morning commute, one of two northbound lanes of the Clark Memorial Bridge was converted to southbound, thus adding a third southbound lane; the reverse was done in the evening. At the critical interstate juncture of I-265 eastbound and I-65 southbound in southern Indiana about six miles north of the I-65 Kennedy Bridge, the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) added a lane to the ramp to ease congestion there. An experiment in regulating traffic flow, the installation of barriers on the Kennedy Bridge between the right lane for traffic exiting at the south end of the bridge to head east or west and the centre lane for traffic continuing south, essentially failed over time as

drivers knocked them down so they could move from the centre lane to the right lane on the bridge, as they had always done. Although my commute did not require making that lane change, I was caught in the congestion many times, and in observing the experiment fail I supported barrier-free lanes in this instance. There was less congestion without the barriers. Crashes increased more than 20% along one section of I-65 in Louisville and tripled on the non-interstate Clark Memorial Bridge (Lord 2012) during the Minton closure.

When the Minton reopened, one motorist summed up the experience when she said, 'I'm just excited to get the time back' and that the bridge closure complicated her life and required 'a lot more scheduling.' She added, 'I just learned that you had to get in line. Nobody was special. We all had to sit there and wait and we all had to do it together' (Lord and Hershberg 2012).

From four of my interviews:

1: (During the closure — author) I just remember being stuck on the bridge and you could feel it shaking and it made me uneasy. Traffic would be backed up into Clarksville (on the north bank of the Ohio River — author). There were people going down to Brandenburg (43 miles southwest of Louisville — author) then coming back up.

2: Traffic (during construction — author) has been a little bit of a nightmare. We pretty much let people come and go as they want; there's very few that have to be here, maybe the receptionist. The trick is when they change the traffic pattern on you and you don't get much notice […]; probably the hardest was when the Sherman Minton actually closed, but that was because no one could get anywhere.

3: (During construction — author) Right now it doesn't matter if I leave at 4 or 5:30, I don't know if I'm going to hit no traffic and be home in 30 minutes or one day it took me two and a half hours just to get across the bridge and another 45 minutes to get home and barely got home to put my kids in bed.

4: […] downtown has been kind of a mess for a while. Every single day there's people trapped on 64 and 71 coming in, calling in […] so we deal with it every day […] I know myself what time I need to leave the house or I'm in trouble […].

In the immediate wake of the bridge closure, HR consultants and employment attorneys offered advice to help employers establish telecommuting and other arrangements, adjust schedules, organise carpools and create equitable policies and accountability (Ivey 2011). What, if anything, did employers do? Because the award winners already had flexibility practices in place, it would seem that those organisations could adapt relatively seamlessly. One reported no impact of the bridge closure but in this case it appears to have had less to do with its policies and practices and more to do with the geographic distribution of its employees. The other five award winners all reported that employees affected by the bridge closure flexed their hours. One company, however, discontinued its routine of daily morning staff meetings to plan each day's work. Instead, it reorganised by holding only one weekly afternoon staff meeting and calling project-specific meetings as needed. This representative explained,

(During the closure — author) '[…] there were days it would take me two hours to get to work […] the trick of finding the most elaborate route to avoid the stops; there were days you just couldn't. If we've had any issues with our flex, it was when we started doing morning meetings and required everyone to be here […] the owner said no more morning meetings. At first, I didn't like that, but it's really worked out. People know what they're supposed to be working on when they get here; it's already in the system. They're not waiting for me to dole it out.'

Among the large Louisville employers, a variety of adaptations developed, most commonly flexible hours and/or work from home, depending on the position. Employees who could not flex their hours or work from home had to adjust and were expected to correct the problem if chronic lateness became an issue. At one organisation, under the force of a labour union contract, certain hourly employees would lose pay if they were late and they were not permitted to make up the time, although they could request a schedule change a few weeks in advance. Among the large southern Indiana employers, one employer permitted flexing hours and individualised, informal accommodation when the job would permit. The other two organisations expected employees to adjust. One case was particularly interesting in that the HR representative thought an increase in the percentage of that organisation's employees residing in Indiana was a result of residential moves from Kentucky to Indiana. These residential moves could be in response to the bridge closure and/or in anticipation of tolls that would be charged on the Kennedy Bridge (converted to southbound only), the new Lincoln Bridge (northbound only), and the new east end bridge after construction (this construction linking I-265 in Indiana to I-265 in Kentucky where a bridge of any sort did not exist, began at about the same time as that for the downtown Lincoln Bridge — the two bridges were considered a single project, the Lincoln overseen by Kentucky, the east end overseen by Indiana — with the east end bridge completed in December 2016). One school representative discussed the effect of the bridge closure on school bus routes. Among all large employers in Louisville and southern Indiana, any work rearrangements were temporary to be returned to normal when commuting difficulties eased.

Monitoring, Naysayers and General Thoughts
All award winners had means by which to monitor employees in flexible arrangements specific to the type of occupation and industry. Client billing was the check on those with billable hours. Formal arrangements negotiated with supervisors were a benchmark to establish accountability. Co-worker complaints exposed abuse. At one award winner, employees had a set amount of paid time off, and flexibility was utilised within that frame. This organisation also had electronic time tracking tied to specific projects. Among the large employers, monitoring seemed to be less formal, and study participants generally commented that productivity should not decrease. One large Louisville employer mentioned use of an electronic system; one large southern Indiana employer — of all organisations that participated in this study, the most reluctant to offer flexible arrangements — planned to install a time clock for monitoring hourly workers.

The award winners acknowledged that there may be naysayers in their midst, but they thought relatively few. At one award winner with a history of merging with smaller firms, culture clashes developed until merged-in employees became familiar with the company's work-flow technology. At another award winner, any resistance was said to be about how flexible arrangements would be implemented in practice, not the principle itself. One HR representative candidly admitted, 'If anybody […] me,' when asked about naysayers at his award-winning company. He added, 'It drives me crazy . . . when someone's not here […].'

At the large organisations, naysaying seemed to take the form of what one HR representative called 'fence-peeking.' Because they are large, with employees in many different types of positions, flexibility, to the extent it was available, was not available to all or on the same terms. Some employees were said to believe flexibility is 'unfair,' and some 'get upset when they are not able' to use flexible arrangements. Another HR representative commented that 'there are always cynics,' but that generally people understand their different roles.

As might be expected, the HR representatives at the award-winning organisations were for the most part strong proponents of flexible arrangements. One called them 'a great thing,' adding that they were 'a godsend' for her. Another said they are 'a necessity.' Both reiterated that they are valuable recruitment and retention tools. Another said they are 'vital to success.' And another believed flexibility has more effect on morale than financial incentives. The HR representatives at the large organisations were more nuanced in their comments, seemingly driven by consideration of the widely varied job duties of their employees. The general sentiment among them was 'do it when we can' and maintain productivity.

Some of the HR representatives shared personal experiences using the flexibility options available to them. One mentioned family issues that required leaving the office during the day. Another disclosed her own culture shock:

> 'I came from a different professional services background where it was very old school; you had to be there, be seen […]. To walk into this environment was a little bit of a culture shock for me, too, but I can tell you where I am in my life and with my children it's been amazing; the value I get having that flex with my family and the job I love and everything else, I can't put a price on it because it's just that valuable to me. You don't always think about that when you're looking for an employer.'

A third said, 'I recognize the value personally so strongly that I feel like I advocate anywhere that is necessary to allowing other people to make their lives work in the same way whether it is for child care reasons or caring for parents or whatever. […] Everybody has their lives to live.' And a fourth: 'I think [employer] is pretty generous. […] because I'm in this department and have seen it. It's great because it allows people to do things […].'

Finally,

> 'I'm going to speak from both sides. I was an hourly clerk, I've been in store management, now I'm in administration. I've seen all sides. When I was an hourly associate, I've seen the flex get better […]. In terms of store management, I think that's less flex; […] it's the nature of the business; […] if that means working six

days a week, that's what we do; in terms of administration, this is probably the most
flex in the company because we have the option to work from home […] as long as
I'm taking care of business my boss isn't going to question.'

Conclusion

This study investigated work (re)arrangements in the context of reconfigured, retemporalised
commutes associated with a five-month cross-river interstate bridge closure that bled into
several months of disruptive maintenance work on a second cross-river interstate bridge nearby
and an additional two years of disruption associated with construction of a new adjacent cross-
river interstate bridge.

Interviews were conducted with HR representatives from a sample of companies and
organisations that had won flexible workplace awards and large (non-winner) organisations
selected to maximise the likelihood of cross-river worker-commuters. Award winners provided
a local benchmark of flexibility practices, but they were fundamentally different from the large
employers by virtue of their small size. Among the award winners, flexibility options were
available to almost all if not all employees with recruitment and retention concerns being a
common theme. Flexibility policies were generally formalised, and options had been available
five to ten years or more. The large employers were more complex organisations; thus,
flexibility options were available to employees selectively, depending on position and contract
where labour unions existed. Some options had been available a decade or more and were
relatively well formalised; others were newer and informal. As such, innovations occurred on
the margins of formality in cases of expanding options, or informality reigned where few
options existed. These new options often emerged organically, facilitated by electronic
technologies. Family and other personal reasons were common factors in usage of flexibility
options within all organisations in this study, often facilitated by electronic technologies.

My particular question regarded organisational work-time adaptation and innovation in
response to the sudden, prolonged bridge closure. The award winners adapted relatively
seamlessly with little need for change because policies and practices were well established and
most all employees were eligible to use them. The one exception was the company that
terminated its practice of daily morning meetings, substituting one weekly afternoon meeting
and project-specific meetings as necessary. Among the large employers, accommodation
occurred within the limits of existing selective flexibility options and changes were agreed to
be temporary. Workers whose occupations were beyond the reach of their employers' flexibility
options had to adapt personally in whatever ways they could. Surprisingly, the HR
representative at one large employer in southern Indiana speculated that an increase in the
percentage of its employees living in Indiana was the result of residential moves from
Kentucky.

Among the award winners there were few if any naysayers known to the HR
representatives; the large-employer HR representatives spoke of 'fence-peekers,' as dubbed by
one of them, who complained of injustice when flexibility options are available to some but not
others, even when the occupational basis of such different treatment might seem reasonable.

The contradictory position (Wright 1976) of the HR representative became apparent in this study in that they are simultaneously enforcers of organisational policies and employees subject to the same policies. Some were able to avail themselves of their employers' flexibility options, others less so because they needed to be onsite to serve other employees. At what I called the reluctant organisation, where flexibility options were few, limited to use of vacation time, family/medical leave and part-time hours, the HR representative explained her ambivalence about flexibility:

> 'I do think you have to be careful with it. It's a very good thing for employees with the society today, but you do have to be careful to maintain accountability, to make sure they're trustworthy and that you trust them to do the work that they're set out to do. To me, as long as they get the job done, that would be fine with me. But it's all in how people perceive it. If they saw me out on a golf course two days a week and it came back, I would lose a lot of credibility even though I was sitting up most of the night doing my work; especially if you are in a lead role or in a management position, you are always being watched. You have to be careful to be that role model for everyone. I always err on the side of the employer; I will never short-change my employer. As long as people do that, I think it's fine to let them be flexible.'

Yet she could imagine more flexibility in clerical positions:

> 'I think it could be a very good thing for the mothers or fathers who want to spend more time with their children or need that flex to lessen the day care need […] because that is so expensive these days. It's hard for a clerical person just to work. I think it would be good to allow that flex in a lot of cases.'

In this analysis of space-time-process, digital flow literally saved the day among those who could work remotely. For others, to construe decompression as relaxation would be wrong. The difficult commute was frustrating. Normal temporal structures were in conflict with reconfigured, retemporalised space; time was experienced as lost in an era when time-space compression is so tight (euphemistically, the time-squeeze) that daily life cannot absorb a rupture of significant duration without work and/or other rearrangements. The interview quote above suggests that HR representatives, as gatekeepers, could also be advocates for change. More workers are working remotely in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and urban patterns are being transformed consequently. What organisations do and do not permit in terms of flexible hours and remote work will continue to affect workers' employment and life routines and their use of urban space. Human resources representatives will be critical agents in establishing and enforcing workplace policies that facilitate, or not, flexibility; in adjudicating the competing interests of employees among themselves as well as vis-à- vis the organisation; in enforcing employment laws; and, surprisingly perhaps, transforming urbanity.

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The First Wave Covid-19, the European Union and Psychosocial Effects: A Literature Review[1]

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The aim of this study is to review and synthesize the existing literature documenting the psychosocial effects on the general population in member states of the European Union (EU) after the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The methodology followed included the review of research papers, which were collected through the online databases PubMed, Google Scholar, Medline, Academia and ResearchGate about the psychosocial effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the general population after the first wave (July 2020). These effects appear to be: anxiety, fear, psychosomatic symptoms, sleep disturbances, depressive symptoms, suicidal tendencies, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, stigmatization, abandonment and isolation. The assessments of the Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated the need for interventions focused on the individual and his/her specificities, as well as on his/her interaction with the wider social context in which he/she is embedded; this will contribute to a more effective response.
Keywords: Covid-19, psychosocial effects, infectious disease, pandemic.

Introduction

Sars-cov-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome-Corona Virus-2) is the coronavirus responsible for COVID-19. The first case of Covid-19 was detected in the city of Wuhan, capital of Hubei Province in central China, on 1st December 2019 and rapidly spread globally in January 2020, causing upheaval worldwide and eventually becoming a pandemic. A key feature of this pandemic is the challenge of a new reality that humanity has been called upon to face. The emergence of infectious diseases, such as the Covid-19, often has a major psychological and social impact on the general population.

The Covid-19 virus threatens the health and safe living of people globally and its impact appears to be diverse and multidimensional (Pardo and Prato 2022). Governments in all countries have been required to take restrictive measures to prevent its spread. However, the long lockdown periods have caused an increase in physical and psychological problems in the population. The main features of this new reality caused by the pandemic in the current situation are fear and uncertainty about health, economic hardship and social disruption. Compared to others, this virus is not characterised by a particularly high mortality rate but its ability to spread rapidly intensifies fear and uncertainty (Last 2001).

It is noteworthy that throughout human history pandemics have defined the existence of entire societies, influenced the outcomes of wars and wiped out population groups. At the same time, they seem to have accelerated progress in the field of health, and more broadly, on the social and economic level (Huremović 2019). The spread of Covid-19 viral infections seems to have created conditions that worsen existing mental health problems, as well as creating new ones, causing adverse conditions in the general population, which play a decisive role in the development of anxiety, uncertainty, depression and fear. The restrictive

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measures taken by governments in terms of travel, social gatherings and commercial activities to prevent viral transmission have contributed to a climate of isolation. The disruption of social networks, resulting from the suffocating imposition of restrictions, has affected the psychological state of individuals. Specific population groups, such as the elderly, the disabled and marginalized people have suffered most severely the effects of the suspension of supportive social networks. In addition, restrictions on travel and the suspension of commercial activities have had a negative economic impact, resulting in increased unemployment, reduced income and job losses. The pressures on health systems, the focus on organic problems and the difficulty of accessing supportive social and health networks during the pandemic, have diverted the attention of health professionals away from mental health issues and have contributed to their emergence or exacerbation (Hayat et al. 2021).

The main purpose of the present study is to review and synthesize the existing literature documenting the psychological responses of the general population during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on research studies conducted in the general population in member states of the European Union (EU). The methods that we employed included a review of research papers published by the end of the first pandemic wave (July 2020), which were collected through the online databases PubMed, Google Scholar, Medline, Academia and ResearchGate. In researching these databases, we focused on published studies in academic journals, not on reflections or opinions in blogs or webpages. In order to find the literature that meets the scope of this article, we used the following key words: 'psychosocial effects', 'psychological effects', 'social effects', 'Covid-19 first wave', 'general population, 'EU member states'; we combined these key words with the name of each EU member state.

This article also aims to review the international literature based on general population surveys in the EU member states in order to gather data that could contribute to design public health strategies and interventions and to prevent and manage situations resulting from the pandemic which are detrimental to the mental health of the general population.

An Assessment of the Social Impact of the Pandemic

The global spread of the pandemic changed significantly the health, social and economic life of 170 countries, caused more than 6 million deaths and infected hundreds of millions of people (WHO 2022). The pandemic revealed several shortcomings of globalization, such as inefficiency of public health investments in industrialized countries, inadequate financial aid to developing countries and inequality of income and wealth in the welfare states. It also highlighted the need for more efficient containment mechanisms based on re-designing rigorous strategies to achieve common and effective responses (Cutler and Summers 2020).

Welfare states were called upon to reduce socio-economic inequalities during the pandemic, yet it is not clear what kind of welfare system can achieve this. As Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1989) pointed out, welfare states do not always produce the greatest equality and the relationship between different welfare state systems and inequality is more complex than one might initially imagine. Thus, the same welfare system, if applied to different

populations, may produce different levels of inequality because it is determined — inter alia — by the prevailing demographic conditions (for instance, the proportion of elderly, single parents, immigrants, etc.). However, it has been deemed necessary to develop generous social security systems (Pickett and Wilkinson 2021), as well as plan ethical and equitable strategies and social policies that include care interventions based on high-quality scientific evidence in order to minimize the impact on the most disadvantaged population groups (Cutler and Summers 2020).

Worldwide, the restrictive measures against Covid-19 taken by states have imposed unprecedented stress on social protection systems. Working hours fell by 10.7% globally in the second quarter of 2020, potentially equivalent to 305 million job losses, with workers in precarious, 'non-standard' forms of employment severely affected (Spyridakis 2020, Schutter 2021, Pardo and Prato 2022); the female gender is over-represented in the most affected employment categories during the pandemic crisis. In order to cope with the unprecedented economic and social pandemic crisis, governments provided funding schemes to assist workers who had lost their jobs and poor families. Although these measures were extremely important, they had a short-term effect during the implementation of the lockdown or until the economy recovered (Schutter 2021).

Social distancing in medical care and among the elderly appeared to be an effective protective measure in controlling viral transmission (Ladhani et al. 2020, Smith et al. 2020). The information collected on the impact of social isolation on different groups of elderly people was limited; during the pandemic, the elderly were treated as a homogeneous group, while, in fact, they are considerably heterogeneous (Fancourt et al. 2020). Furthermore, the impact of a sedentary lifestyle and lack of regular physical activity among the general population, especially among the middle-aged, has not been sufficiently analysed (Enders et al. 2020). Inadequate data collection has limited the identification of failures and the development of actions aimed at designing and implementing effective social intervention programmes, particularly regarding minority/ethnic groups, socio-educational level and domestic violence (Menezes et al. 2020). In order to design appropriate interventions, it would be important to include aspects which influence the development of the pandemic, such as human behavioral factors, including resistance to compliance with public health recommendations, post-quarantine relaxation, lack of support for vulnerable population groups (Riley et al. 2020).

Some studies have suggested that statistically the increased risk of transmission and the greater likelihood of severe symptoms is significantly associated with ethnicity (Martin et al. 2020, Niedzwiedz et al. 2020). Even among healthcare professionals, black or Asian doctors and nurses seem to have an increased risk of becoming infected and becoming severely ill (Cromer et al. 2020). These views were reinforced by social media, through which false and dubious information was spread, as they replicated the hatred, humiliation and social rejection of minority racial groups. The information was sometimes based on real social conflicts and seemed aimed at promoting xenophobia and creating greater social inequalities. Addressing

racism through the Internet, which is the responsibility of the whole society against stigmatisation, may include highlighting inadequate political representation in public institutions, inadequately addressing their needs and encouraging direct support and follow-up by psychosocial services (Uyheng and Carley 2020).

Social isolation as a measure to cope with Covid-19 pandemic also constitutes a major public health problem that can lead to social crises and to an increase in interpersonal and domestic violence (Mittal and Singh 2020). Economic insecurity and lack of resources, job loss, family burdens and inherent stressors can contribute to increased stress in the family context, increased suicide rates, and increased risk of gender-based violence and child abuse (Lawson et al. 2020, Sidpra et al. 2021). Moreover, research studies have confirmed the increase in hospital admissions due to the physical abuse of minors (Guessoum et al. 2020) and the deterioration of adolescents' mental health during the pandemic (Bryant et al. 2020). Furthermore, several gaps have emerged in the data reported from some countries on care and social intervention, suggesting the need for greater institutional and policy transparency to minimize social and economic costs in future viral challenges.

Review of Studies in the General Population of EU Member States

The main feature of the Covid-19 viral infection is not mortality, but its rapid transmission, via airborne droplets that infect the upper respiratory tract and can persist for hours (Subbarao and Mahanty 2020). The Covid-19 virus also affects organs other than the lungs, such as: the heart, liver, kidneys, gastrointestinal tract, spleen, lymph nodes, skin and placenta in pregnant women, causing microvascular damage (Peiris et al. 2021, Tabary et al. 2020).

According to epidemiological data, the high rate of coronavirus infection was observed to be strongly associated with gender (women), race, weaker socio-economic class — the poor, the unemployed, the migrants, the residents of deprived areas, the mentally ill, and so on — and nationality, due to limited resources and infrastructure. Although the coronavirus has spread indiscriminately, regardless of race, culture and language, it was shown that the response to the pandemic has been ineffective among vulnerable or deprived social groups due to the structural and socio-economic discrimination that takes place on a daily basis (Prato 2020, Pawar 2020). Therefore, in 2020, the WHO recognized the problem stating that the virus is easier to detect if socioeconomic and cultural factors are considered risk factors (Komalsingh and Nässén 2020). However, it should be noted that the statistics provided by the WHO about infections and deaths do not accurately account for the broader picture about the effects of the pandemic in different countries where the authorities have used different methods and strategies for collecting and interpreting the data (see also Prato 2020: 6). This shortcoming in terms of monitoring the real effects of the pandemic has not been appropriately addressed by the WHO and by regional authorities such as the EU.

Several studies have demonstrated the strong impact of the pandemic on the mental well-being of the population, noting that individuals affected by emotional, behavioural and psychiatric disorders tend to outnumber those infected with Covid-19. Specific social groups,

such as health professionals, the elderly, children, students, the homeless, the unemployed, farmers, migrants and the mentally ill, were at increased risk of experiencing psychological problems (Holmes et al. 2020, Khan et al. 2020). The emotional stress caused by the pandemic also triggered pre-existing psychiatric disorders and exacerbated their symptomatology (Yao et al. 2020). It is noteworthy that the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to the stigmatization and discrimination of various population groups, such as health care workers caring for Covid-19 patients, low socioeconomic groups and those with religious and racial particularities, as well as reinforcing the existing stereotypes on certain socioeconomic groups (Sahoo et al. 2020).

Following the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Asia in the first months of 2020, Europe, the USA and gradually all countries worldwide experienced an increase in infectivity. Thus, several studies were conducted to identify the psychological impact of the pandemic in the European Union (EU) Member States.

Italy was the first European country to experience the exponential transmission of the viral infection. Gualano et al. (2020) conducted an online survey of 1515 individuals in the general population during the last 14 days of the first lockdown in 2020 to identify the potential impact on the mental health of the respondents. The data were collected using the Patient Health Questionnaire-2, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 and the Insomnia Severity Index (to identify sleep disorders). The survey indicated that 24.7% of women and 23.2% of men experienced symptoms of anxiety, while 17.4% experienced sleep disorders. Women and people with chronic illnesses were more likely to have a mental health problem.

In the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain experienced a huge epidemiological impact. In 2020, Rodríguez-Rey, Garrido-Hernansaiz and Collado (Rodríguez-Rey et al. 2020) studied the psychological effects of the pandemic's first phase on 3055 respondents from the general population of Spain. They conducted the study using the Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R) and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21). The online survey indicated that 36% of respondents experienced moderate or extensive psychological problems, 25% experienced anxiety, 41% experienced symptoms of depression and 41% experienced stress. Women, young people and those who became unemployed due to the health crisis experienced the greatest psychological problems. Most respondents worried about the economic impact of the pandemic, while proper information, leisure activities and positive perceptions of the health situation were inhibiting factors for the occurrence of the reported psychological problems.

In Germany*,* Bendau et al. (2020) carried out an interesting study among the general population in order to identify the impact of disease-informed social media use on the mental health of participants. The online survey involving 6233 respondents during the first phase of the pandemic (27 March-6 April 2020) was done using a structured questionnaire focusing on issues of anxiety and depression. It emerged that the use of social media for information regarding Covid-19 was significantly associated with an increase in psychological distress, particularly among respondents with pre-existing phobias. The frequency, duration and

variety of social media use, combined with pre-existing phobias, exacerbated psychological distress (anxiety and depressive symptoms).

Traunmüller and colleagues (Traunmüller et al. 2020) conducted an online survey among the general population in Austria. They interviewed 4126 people aged 16 years and older. The Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R) and the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21) were used as data collection tools. The results highlighted the effects of the pandemic on mental and physical health and documented the prevention methods adopted by individuals. Notably, 37.7% of the respondents reported a severe impact on their mental health, while 1 in 10 esperienced severe depression, anxiety and stress. Women, the elderly, citizens with a low educational level, those with family problems, those who only used the internet for information, students and people with pre-existing health problems were strongly associated with a higher likelihood of psychological problems.

In Cyprus, Solomou and Constantinidou (2020) conducted an online survey involving 1642 respondents among the general population. They used tools such as Quality of Life (QOL), Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9). The results showed that 48% of the participants expressed anxiety about the economic impact of the pandemic, 66.7% reported changes in their quality of life, 41% reported mild levels of anxiety, while 23.1% reported fair to high levels. It is to be noted that 48% reported mild symptoms of depression and 9.2% reported fair to very severe symptoms. As in other similar surveys, the women, the unemployed and people with a history of mental health problems had a higher risk of anxiety and depression. People aged 18 to 29, students and those who reported negative changes in their quality of life also had a higher risk of anxiety and depression. The research also indicated that higher levels of compliance with preventive measures were associated with lower levels of depression, while higher levels of anxiety related to maintaining personal hygiene.

Parlapani and colleagues (Parlapani et al. 2020) investigated online the occurrence of mental disorders and behaviours among 3029 individuals from the general population in Greece during the pandemic. Four psychometric scales were used: the Fear of Covid-19 Scale (FCV-19S), Brief Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) depression scale, Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7) and Steele's Social Responsibility Motivation scale. The results show that 77.4% of participants reported anxiety, while 35.7% reported fear related to Covid-19 and 22.8% reported symptoms of depression. It was found that females had greater problems than males, while individuals under 30 had lower rates of fear and lower incidence of depression symptoms.

Bartoszek and colleagues (Bartoszek et al. 2020) studied the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental well-being (depression, loneliness, sleep disturbances, and feeling of daily fatigue) in the general population of Poland. Their study involved 471 respondents. The survey was conducted online using the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI), the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), the Revised University of California, Los Angeles (R-UCLA) Loneliness Scale and the Daily Life Fatigue scale (DLF). Confirming the findings of several similar

studies, the results indicated that women had higher rates of depression, loneliness and feelings of daily fatigue. It was also observed that an increase in alcohol consumption occurred among people who were active at work before the pandemic, as opposed to student drinkers. Participants who lived alone showed higher levels of loneliness and feelings of daily fatigue. More broadly, the research indicated that rates of depression, sleep disturbances, loneliness and feelings of daily fatigue increased during the first lockdown.

Lorant and colleagues (Lorant et al. 2020) conducted a survey among the general population in Belgium focusing on the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic during the first wave. The survey, involving 20792 respondents, was carried out three days after the start of the first lockdown using the GHQ-12 scale (to investigate psychological distress), the Social Participation Measure, Short Loneliness Scale and Oslo Social Support Scale for social activities. The findings indicated an increase in psychological distress in the early days of the first lockdown, while the prolonged period of confinement seems to have led to an increase in psychological distress. It was found that women and younger people were at greater risk of psychological problems, in contrast to older people and those with Covid-19. Psychological distress appeared to be enhanced in the field of employment and in cases of reduced social activities. The psychological stress index that was at 2.16 in 2018 rose to 2.45 during the first days of the lockdown.

McCracken et al. (2020) studied the psychological effects (depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance and their association with risk and vulnerability factors) of the pandemic in the general population of Sweden. The survey was conducted electronically among 1212 respondents using a weighted questionnaire based on the aforementioned mental health factors during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings indicated that the prevalence of depression was 30%, anxiety 24.2% and sleep disorders 38%. The main correlation factors were the health status of the respondents and a history of mental health problems. These symptoms were significantly associated with anxiety about the financial situation due to the health crisis and maintaining good health status.

A large-scale study in *Western and Northern Europe*, regarding factors related to the mental health of citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, was conducted by Varga and colleagues (Varga et al. 2021). Data from seven time-series studies conducted among a total of 205,084 respondents during the first wave of the pandemic (March-July 2020) were analysed for anxiety, feelings of loneliness and concerns about preventive measures in Denmark, the Netherlands, France and the UK.[2] While only 7% of respondents in the Netherlands reported high levels of feeling lonely, the percentages were almost three times higher in Denmark and France. In all the countries examined, younger people and those with a history of mental disorder had higher rates of feeling lonely.

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[2] The UK has not been part of the EU since 31 January 2020. It is referred to here only because the cited study compared it with the other three EU member states. However, it is not included in our analysis as it is not in the scope of the study.

From the review of the aforementioned research studies, it is evident that the new conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, such as protective containment measures, social distancing, economic uncertainty and job loss, had a psychological impact on the general population and contributed to the occurrence of:

- Anxiety and fear of possible virus infection.
- Uncertainty about how the pandemic may develop.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety that occurred after the epidemic wave had passed, under the influence of stressors.
- Generalised stress events, with diffuse anxiety and generalised discomfort.
- Panic attacks, with an intense fear of losing control, a sense of being out of touch with the environment and somatisation of anxiety.
- Depressive symptoms, pessimism, lack of satisfaction with daily life, withdrawal and isolation. Sometimes accompanied by obsessive thoughts of suicide and death, leading to self-harming tendencies.
- Obsessive-compulsive symptoms, excessive preoccupation with cleaning, meticulous house cleaning, ritualistic hand washing, and so on.
- Stigmatisation and isolation, especially among people living in areas where the pandemic was concentrated, people whose family members were Covid hospital workers and people who suffered from Covid-19.
- Breaking of social ties, particularly among elderly, disabled and marginalised people; the limited use of support networks, as a consequence of the restrictive measures, led to a breaking of social ties.

The occurrence of the aforementioned psychological effects of Covid-19 was significantly associated with:

- Gender: women showed an increased rate of psychological symptoms compared to men.
- The level of education: there was a lower rate of COVID-19 mental health problems among individuals who held a higher degree (masters, doctoral degrees).
- Place of residence: people residing in cities that were the epicentre of the pandemic experienced a higher psychological impact than those who lived in rural areas.
- Income: individuals with a low economic income were more vulnerable to the onset of mental illnesses.
- Employment status: unemployment, suspension of work and business activities and economic uncertainty contributed to an increased incidence of the psychological effects of the pandemic.
- Family situation: divorce, widowhood and lack of children in the family intensified people's psychological responses.
- Knowledge about the virus, attitudes and behaviour: people who were less informed about the virus, how it spreads and how to implement protection measures were more vulnerable to psychological responses.

- Individuals' self-perceived health status: individuals who perceived their immune system to be underactive, fearing greater susceptibility to infection by the virus, showed an increased rate of psychological reaction.
- The quarantine: suspected or confirmed cases who were placed under mandatory quarantine were more psychologically vulnerable than those who were not placed under confinement.
- Age: there was a dichotomy in terms of the age groups that had the greatest psychological burden during the pandemic. Some studies found that older people had an increased psychological response to the virus compared to younger people, while other studies found older people to be less vulnerable than young people.
- Chronic physical and mental illnesses: chronically ill patients with physical and mental health problems showed an increased rate of psychological reaction against the virus.
- Domestic violence: members of dysfunctional families who experienced domestic violence showed increased psychological responses to the virus because of the prolonged cohabitation with abusive family members during the pandemic.
- Alcohol and substance abuse: alcohol and substance abuse by individuals, in an attempt to control the anxiety caused by the pandemic, led to an increase in psychological symptoms.

Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed a huge global challenge to the physical and mental health of the general population. It has challenged the sustainability, resilience and preparedness mechanisms of health systems and, at the same time, has threatened social cohesion and individual and family boundaries. It has disrupted the everyday life of various population groups, with the risk of overturning the hitherto established concept of life.

A thorough review of the international literature and general population surveys in EU member states has yielded useful data that could contribute to designing public health strategies and interventions and to helping prevent and managem situations, like those resulting from the pandemic, that are detrimental to the mental health of the general population. Factors that have aggravated the mental health of the general population were highlighted, thus offering useful information for future health policy planning.

According to the literature review of the first pandemic wave, the negative psychosocial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the EU seem to include anxiety and fear of possible virus infection, uncertainty about how the pandemic may develop, depressive symptoms, pessimism, lack of satisfaction with daily life, withdrawal and isolation, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, excessive preoccupation with cleaning, meticulous house cleaning, ritualistic hand washing, stigmatisation and isolation and breaking of social ties with negative consequences for the most vulnerable. Additionally, the occurrence of the aforementioned psychological effects of Covid-19 was significantly associated with gender, education level, place of residence (with a higher psychosocial impact on urban residents), income,

employment status, family situation, knowledge about the virus, attitudes and behavior, individuals' self-perceived health status, the quarantine, age, chronic organic and mental illnesses, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse.

This particularly infectious virus has highlighted the importance of further development of Primary Care Facilities, online therapeutic interventions by mental health professionals and psychological support hotlines for the immediate treatment of psychological crisis situations and for the decongestion of hospitals. At the same time, the importance has emerged of vaccinating the population and preventing the infectious spread of the virus, which needs to be further investigated in the future in terms of how this may contribute to mitigating the psychological impact of a pandemic.

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Narrating Waste Chronicles Through Urban Ethnography:
A Tale of Bhubaneswar[1]

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With growing urbanization, the attention of researchers has focused on urban problems, including those linked to municipal solid waste. Municipal solid waste generated at household level can be understood as a socio-environmental phenomenon that has multiple social repercussions. If we view the urban system as a human body, then we see a metabolism among all its aspects all the time in terms of social processes. The problems linked to municipal solid waste arise from such metabolism and appear as hybrid phenomena associated with invisible micro-level conflicts. This calls for a political ecology approach that helps us to understand the conflicts that lead to hybridity. This article draws on urban ethnography to offer context-specific insights on these processes in the urban area of Bhubaneswar, India.
Keywords: Urban ethnography, municipal solid waste, urban metabolism, hybrid phenomena, political ecology.

Introduction

Urban spaces are dynamic in nature. Currently, more than half of the world population in western and non-western countries is living in cities, which makes it pivotal to study the urban space (Pardo and Prato 2012). In recent years, there has been a growing attention to the environmental aspects of urban spaces and to the attendant issues. In particular, among the environmental and health aspects of urban geographies, waste and the problems linked to it have attracted the interest of urban researchers.

Waste is not just an environmental issue. Waste problems do not simply result from a high level of industrialization, urbanization and population growth. Also, the seemingly apolitical nature of waste masks a complex reality of urban existence and movements. Waste, we stress, is not apolitical; it is highly political in nature and continuously shapes urban lives and geographies. It is a major aspect of the new kinds of political, environmental and social challenges faced by contemporary urban societies, the study of which requires the use of diverse ecological research paradigms (Little 2007).

The present discussion delves into the social problem of waste, particularly municipal solid waste among the households in the urban space of Bhubaneswar, in the State of Odisha, India, through a political sociological approach supported by urban ethnography. The study of urban settings in India sparked some controversy after Pocock's research (1960) claimed that, here, urban spaces are just the continuity of rural spaces. Yet, Indian urban settings have their unique relevance and identity, calling for detailed study by researchers and policymakers. From time immemorial, cities have provided meaning and identity to people (Bell and Shalit 2022). As they are transformed in the global economy and the local government is decentralized,

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urbanization continues to grow (Niti 2021). In this context, we argue, the empirical study of micro-level processes, their socio-economic and political connections with macro processes and their impact on the life of individuals and the entire community (Prato and Pardo 2013) contributes to a better understanding of a given urban social reality (Pardo and Prato 2012).

The history of research in the modern urban spaces traces back to eminent social scientists, such as Ferdinand Tönnies (see his work on Gemeinschaft and Gesselschaft, 1887), Emile Durkheim (see his ideas on anomie in his work on suicide, 1897), Georg Simmel (1900), Max Weber (see his work on bureaucratization, 1958) and Alexis de Tocqueville (his analysis of democracy in America, 1945), who studied urban settings extensively. The Chicago school initiated empirical and theoretical research in American urban society. Cities were recognized as complex settings that were large-scale, heterogeneous and highly populated, which impacted people's behaviour, mindset, separation, regrouping, collaboration and competition (Imilan and Marquez 2019).

In the early 1980s, there emerged a strong interest in ethnographic research in urban areas. Pardo's pioneering research in Naples (1989, 1996) based on participant observation and case studies reinforced urban ethnography, developing insights into ordinary people's views of and approach to the social, economic and political system in the city and beyond (Prato and Pardo 2013). Directly significant to the focus of this article, Pardo's work (2011, 2022) on the public health crisis in Naples, Italy, caused by uncollected rubbish and by the illegal rubbish trade has brought out both the inefficiency of the governing bodies to manage waste and the import of citizens' protest against the local government inaction. We shall see that the mismanagement of the waste issues in Bhubaneswar highlights how the interests of a privileged few are fulfilled by the local governing bodies and the state at the expense of the underprivileged many. Here, the mismanagement of waste strengthens the inequality between the higher and lower classes in the city and has a significant impact on the degradation of the environment and of public health. In the process, the rich become richer and acquire the power to tackle the waste issues and the poor become poorer and are deprived of the capacity to handle those issues.

Conducting ethnographic research in urban setting gives the researcher a deeper insight into issues not understood earlier. Ignoring socio-environmental problems and the conflicts shaped by the everyday lives of the people living in that very environment would be a great mistake (Zimmer 2010). Addressing the empirical issues around urban waste with the help of political ecology helps to unravel ecological adaptation among the local communities and to gain insights into culture-specific use of productive systems and technologies, social practices and conflict. It also helps to clarify the exploitation of natural resources by certain social groups, and the stories and ideas put forward by these social groups to justify adaptation and complacency (Little 2007).

An Urban Political Ecology Approach

Cities have become hubs of cultural and socio-political expressions of urban life and everyday practices (Low 1996). They hold the key to understanding the complexity of modern societies. The urban environment and the social changes that take place in it determine each other and

partake in the 'metabolism' of the city. The analysis of these dynamics in Bhubaneswar shows how urban political ecology may help to develop an integrated and relational approach that unmasks interconnected economic, political, social and ecological processes, bringing to light uneven urban spaces and uneven social relationships between various actors (Heynen 2013).

We shall see that in the latent conflict between the social groups that marks this ethnography, it is the upper class that benefit and the lower class that suffer. Due to a lack of resources, the latter are unable to improve their surroundings and, for instance, manage the accumulated waste.

The importance of developing an understanding of 'urban metabolism' has been put forward by Swyngedouw (1996), who addressed the ideological, material and representational aspects in the uneven power relations through this concept. As Smith points out (2006: xiii-xiv),

> 'The notion of metabolism set up the circulation of matter, value, and representations as the vortex of social nature. But, as the original German term, 'Stoffwechsel', better suggests, this is not simply a repetitive process of circulation through already established pathways. Habitual circulation there certainly is, but no sense of long-term or even necessarily short-term equilibrium. Rather, 'Stoffwechsel' expresses a sense of creativity [...] The production of urban nature is deeply political but it has received far less scrutiny and seems far less visible, precisely because the arrangement of asphalt and concrete, water mains and garbage dumps, cars and subways seem so inimical to our intuitive sense of (external) nature.'

Urban metabolism as an approach that combines techniques from different disciplines can offer comprehensive insights that can help urban planners to reduce the production of waste and improve the treatment and reutilization of wastes in cities (Zhang et al. 2015).

Urban political ecology has underlined the notion of the interrelationships and interconnections between the socio-natural processes and their unequal (uneven) configuration in urban settings. Urban metabolism is a dynamic process leading to the formulation of new socio-spatial entities, the intertwining of the materials and the collaboration of the social and the natural, which are possible only through the interaction between human social practices and non-human processes (Zimmer 2010). This introduces the concept of hybrid interaction. Latour (1993) first used the term 'hybrids' intended as 'mixtures […] of nature and culture'. Hybrids are tangled assemblages of different entities that cannot be divided into opposing poles. In this sense, municipal solid waste is a hybrid, for it is a result of nature and culture, in terms of people's way of life. The concept of hybrids allows us to develop a new perspective on 'matters of concern' (Latour 2004) that include humans and non-humans, as well as the producers of assemblages, and brings out the implications of individuals' inability to control the impact of the hybrid on themselves and on the larger community.

Developing and industrialised countries and their cities have traditionally been the focus of urban political ecology (Keil 2005). The growing socio-environmental problems that mark megacities, small and medium towns and peri-urban settlements demand attention (Zimmer 2010). Waste is one of these problems. Urban political ecology looks at socio-environmental

issues that affect marginalized sections in industrialised countries but have not attracted sufficient attention among scholars (Heynen 2006). It recognizes that, as part of nature, waste may seem to be unproblematic but is, instead, a major problem. In line with the process by which in cities everything is hybridised (Zimmer 2010), the dynamics of 'hybridity' and 'metabolism' underlie the socio-cultural relationship between waste and people. In this study, we have used urban ethnography as a qualitative tool to collect relevant data in an attempt to understand these processes in Bhubaneswar.

The Study Area
Located on the eastern coast of India (see Figure1, left), with a population of 41.9 million, the State of Odisha occupies an area of 155,707 square kilometres as per the Census of India (2011). It is the tenth-largest state in India in terms of area and the eleventh in terms of population size, accounting for 5% of the country's geographical area, and 4% of the country's population. According to the 2011 Census, there are 223 urban centres in Odisha and 103 statutory settings, including 5 Corporations, 35 Municipalities and 63 Notified Area Councils (Anand and Deb 2017).
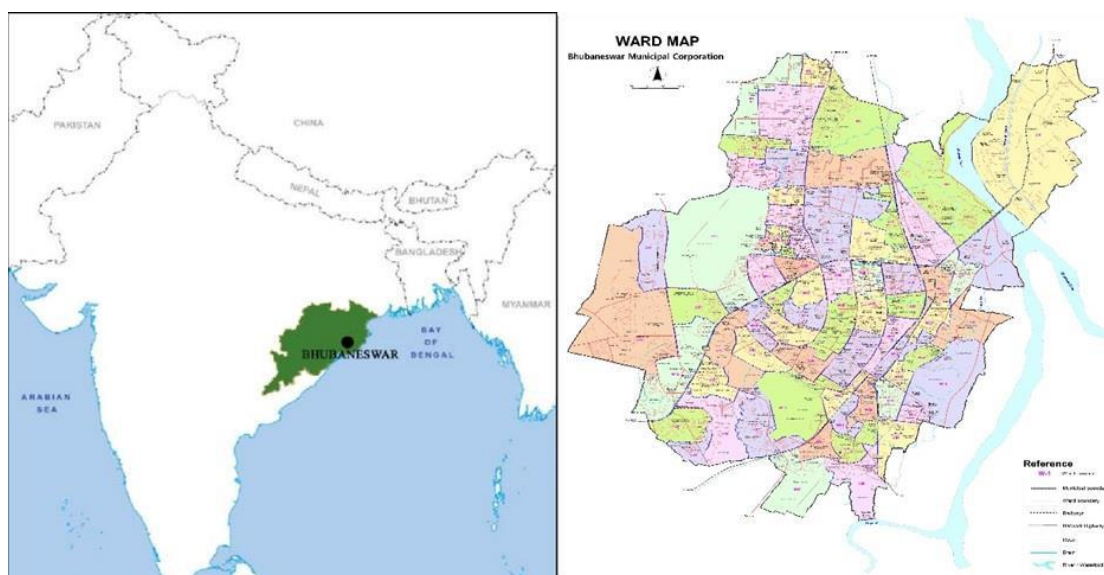
Figure 1. Left: The State of Odisha; source: Saha and Banerjee (2018). Right: The City of Bhubaneswar; source: Bhubaneswar Development Authority.

Located in the Khurda district, Bhubaneswar became the capital of Odisha in 1949. It was designed by the renowned German architect Otto Königsberger in 1946. Bhubaneswar is surrounded by the Daya river in the south and the Kuakhai river in the east. The Chandaka wildlife sanctuary is located on the western side. The average altitude of the city is 148 ft. The Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) is the local administrative body with jurisdiction over an area of 135 square kilometres, covering 67 administrative wards (see Figure1, right). The BMC was established in 1994. In the 67 wards, citizens elect corporators for five years. The officials are the mayor, the deputy mayor and council members who make important decisions about the city, whereas the Commissioner of the city handles all the executive functions. According to the 2011 Census, the city's population amounts to 885,363 people,

163,983 (18.5 %) of whom reside in slum areas (Anand and Deb 2017). In 2011, there were 445,233 male inhabitants and 392,504 female inhabitants. The decadal growth rate of the city is 45.9%. Literacy rates stand at 95.69% for males and 90.26% for females.

Methods

Our research intended to study in depth the problems people face in relation to waste in Bhubaneswar. We did our ethnographic study from March 2020 to April 2022 relying on qualitative research methods; specifically, we used semi-structured interviews and gained relevant insights from participant observations. Before starting the fieldwork, we visited Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) office to obtain permission to interview local people. We also obtained permission from the Institutional Ethics Committee for Human Research of the National Institute of Science Education and Research at Bhubaneswar. During that phase of the research, we studied the official data on waste produced by various government sources with particular reference to the city of Bhubaneswar.

The *Badu Sahi* (ward No. 54) and *Sriram Nagar* (ward No. 59) near the world-famous *Lingaraj Temple* were randomly chosen as setting for our study. Our research objectives were explained to the 20 participants and interviews were conducted at mutually convenient times. Albeit semi-structured, the questions were designed carefully to investigate the problem of littering, its causes, people's waste segregation behaviour and the impact of the *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* (Clean India Mission launched by the Government of India in 2014) on the littering behaviour of the residents. With a view to penetrating the socio-cultural and environmental context of waste management in the city, the interviews and discussions were conducted, transcribed and analysed qualitatively. The analysis included keyword analysis (Russell 2011), development of common themes, categories and appropriate thematic inferences. The social groups involved and their interests and perspectives were mapped to understand views, conflicts, resolutions and intentions (Meltzoff 2013).

A Brief History of Waste Management in the City

The BMC is responsible for waste management in the city. The 74th Amendment of the 1993 Constitution, the Orissa Municipal Act of 1950 and the Orissa Municipal Rules of 1953 govern the constitution and functioning of the BMC. Yet, the power to call for information, conduct inspection, give direction and even dissolve the urban local body remains in the hands of the state government. The obligatory functions of the BMC include maintenance of roads, street lights, sanitation, water supply, registration of births and deaths, public immunization and regulation of buildings. The discretionary functions include construction and maintenance of parks, schools, hospitals and libraries.

The management of the solid waste generated in the city is among the obligatory functions of the BMC. However, there are problems caused by the improper disposal of waste, lack of treatment facilities and inefficient collection systems. Poor management of hazardous and bio-medical waste is an additional concern (Mohanty et al. 2014). There are many legislations at national, state and local levels which govern the local management of municipal

solid waste. They include the Orissa Municipal Corporation Act of 1950; Hazardous Wastes (Management and Handling) rules established in 1989, the Bio-Medical Waste (Management and Handling) rules established in 1998; the Municipal Waste (Management and Handling) rules established in 1999, the Manual on Municipal Solid Waste Management of 2000; the Plastic and Other Non-biodegradable Garbage Ordinance of July 2000; and the Solid Waste Management rule established in 2016.

Initially, in Bhubaneswar there was no systematic waste collection and management of the waste. It was only with the establishment of the local bodies that the problem of waste was recognized. and rules and regulations were drafted on how the waste collected from households should be treated and managed. However, for many years the improper disposal of household waste has been practiced in the city.

Results and Discussion

Urban spaces cannot be described as clean if they look clean only on the outside. Having clean roads does not make a city clean and devoid of waste. The reality lies in the neighbourhoods and the lanes where the residents live their daily lives and deal with waste. The municipal corporation of Bhubaneswar has strived to collect waste daily through door-to-door collection but the issue has not been solved, as it is linked with the waste-related behaviour of the residents. Waste keeps accumulating at multiple sites all the time. Many kinds of solid waste can be seen unattended and unnoticed both by the authorities and by the people who live there.

A large part of the local waste-related problems can be understood by investigating the perception and belief of the residents on waste. The *Old Town* is regarded to have poor waste management. Conducting an ethnographic study in its neighbourhoods of *Badu Sahi* and *Sriram Nagar* has helped us to gain a better understanding of the underlying problems. The residents never talked about the problem of waste in their locality but, when asked, they did express their views on the issue and the related matters. During our study, we did not observe any effort by the members of the local community to bring a change in the deplorable local living conditions and in their waste-related behaviour.

The simple, often ignored issues of waste dominate the lives of the residents, who do not seem to be aware that the objects that they discard have started taking control of their lives. For them, things no longer useful need to be turned into waste; yet, simply discarding an object is not the solution as it becomes part of the problem. When asked their views about waste, some accepted their life with waste; living with waste, surrounded by piles of garbage seem to have become their way of life. Many seemed unconcerned with this problem. For them, waste is normal; it is a mundane and obvious thing. The removal and management of waste does not matter to them. They do not think about it.

However, some class-based differences have emerged in the residents' attitudes and in the social perception of waste. While wealthy families maintained cleanliness and were more conscious about the disposal of waste, we did not observe a similar attitude among families belonging to the poorer socioeconomic categories. The latter were worried only about their food, clothing and other basic needs. They had no time and luxury to even think about the waste

that they produced and about its management and impact on the environment. The very act of maintaining cleanliness and being conscious of the waste generated, we noted, was a source of conflict between the wealthy families and the poor families. The former blamed the latter for generating more waste and not maintaining cleanliness in the area. On the other hand, the poor families blamed the wealthy for throwing waste from the top floors in the streets. Interestingly, however, this conflict has developed only in a latent form. Chinamyee, a 37-year-old woman who lives in *Badu Sahi* remarked:

> 'Nobody likes waste. Nobody wants to see waste. I burn my litter, never throw it in the street. We should ask people not to litter but who will listen? I don't say anything to litterers. If the BMC waste collectors collected waste daily, then the waste problem could be solved. Waste is also creating conflict here, as people quarrel about throwing waste in each other's areas. I think everyone should be responsible for cleaning everything. Because of lack of education, people don't know the proper way to dispose of waste. They litter, which harms the environment.'

The present condition of the city is strongly determined by the social practices and daily lives of the city dwellers. Rasmita, a woman aged 38 who lives in *Badu Sahi* said, 'I think people litter because they want to litter and they do such acts according to their will'.

The living conditions of the residents have degraded considerably. The education of children has been hampered and economic conditions have deteriorated. There is also a gender dimension in the waste issues that needs attention. Women are expected to dispose of the household waste in the dustbins that are situated outside their homes and are to be emptied by the BMC. Women are expected to do all the disposal-related work even if men participate in the generation of waste.

Notably, what is observed and understood by us as a problem may not be a problem for some local people. In the neighbourhood, the views on waste and healthy living conditions and on the level of pollution varied greatly. In spite of the observable presence of waste-related problems in the area, when residents were asked about these problems, some responded that they never faced any problem and they were fine with the situation there, suggesting that they are accustomed to living in such conditions and, unaware of the existence and ramifications of the waste problem, have no complaints.

In this sense, solid waste has turned into a hybrid in the urban space. In Bhubaneswar, the impact of solid waste on the lives of the residents is evident. The relationship between the residents and waste exists from the time of its production to the time of its management by the governing bodies. The class conflicts in the city bring out diverse aspects of the metabolism between waste and the city residents. The generated waste functions as political object in the form of a 'hybrid', shaping the relationships between various social groups and individuals.

City Dwellers' Predicament

It is important to understand the needs and problems of the residents before formulating a policy of waste management. Policy decisions are not democratic if the needs of the residents

are not addressed. It is essential to engage the residents in the policy formulation, as such engagement helps to take into account the local socio-cultural environment.

For example, we have seen that residents complain about people dumping waste near each other's houses. Some living on the top floors discard their waste by throwing it in the street below, soiling the vehicles and the homes below. In some cases, the problem became so serious that tenants had to leave their homes. Another conflict between owners and tenants involves them blaming each other for the unhygienic conditions of the neighbourhood. Moreover, a tussle has developed between two well-off classes; that is, the wealthy who own their homes and are permanent residents and the middle-class who do not own their house and are not permanent residents of the city. The ownership of the resources makes a group more powerful and, as a result, they raise their voice and exert their power.

Leftover food is often disposed of in the street. Some of it is eaten by the wandering cows and stray dogs, the rest is taken away by the BMC waste collector the next day. In spite of the foul smell that it emanates in the heath, the residents appear to ignore the problem as they go about their daily lives. They say that the BMC waste collectors have a duty to collect the waste. As there is, however, a scheduled time for waste collection, some believe that for the rest of the time, the residents should take responsibility for keeping their streets clean and disposing of waste properly.

As the relationship between waste and humans also affects non-humans, there are some additional complications caused by animals that need attention.

The bull. Being a temple city, Bhubaneswar is home to many bulls, especially in the oldest area of the city. Bulls are considered sacred in the Hindu faith because a bull is the mount of Lord Shiva. Not seen as polluted, they stand undisturbed near the big dustbins in search for food. Many times, we observed bulls eating the food thrown by the residents along with polyethylene and other harmful objects. This reminds us of the interdependency between different species in the urban ecosystem and underlines the concept of waste as a hybrid phenomenon that not only affects humans but also, animals and other creatures living in that system.

The dog. Dogs are the only creature about which all the residents complained. They felt disgusted by undomesticated, stray dogs eating from a trash can but would not generally do anything about it. They could do two things: they could feed the dogs or could dispose of their waste properly, away from the dogs' sight and reach; yet, we did not see people doing either. Of course, dogs were not responsible for the waste generated locally; in fact, their only fault was to search for food in the trash cans. However, as they roamed the areas in large numbers, they were deemed to be entirely responsible for scattering the waste all around and making the area unclean. The notion of pollution is associated with these dogs by the residents, who would not touch them out of fear of infection. This does not apply to bulls and cows which also scatter waste in the city; they are regarded as purer than dogs and are not accused of polluting the city. While dogs are often beaten by the residents, this does not happen with bulls and cows. This link between purity and pollution, living beings and non-humans, and sacred and profane, suggests that the hierarchy created by humans in their lives and the associated meanings extend to animals.

The bird. Birds are believed to be the most innocent creatures populating this area. Although pigeons and crows are often spotted near the garbage piles, moving slowly, collecting food and flying away, they are the local animals least affected by human discrimination and are exempt from the opposition between purity and pollution. Being small, it is believed, they cannot scatter the waste. Not only do they remain outside the human-animal conflict, but they seem well adapted; for instance, during the fieldwork, we observed that birds were well adapted to the urban setting, finding their home on light posts instead of trees.

The rat. Rats troubled the residents the most. They live near the waste mounds, close to the human settlements. Rats are associated with filth, disease, disgust and poor living condition. Yet, there was no action to address the rat menace.

While residents recognised the problems caused by the animals living in their ecosystem, they seemed to be powerless in controlling the animals' behaviour. Samprati, a 61-year-old woman who lives in *Badu Sahi*, said:

> 'Solid waste is not at all good for our environment. There is a foul smell, due to this. The dogs pollute more. There is the breeding of mosquitoes and flies causing diseases. They are dangerous to us. Moreover, waste does not look good. Dogs eat badly disposed waste and die because it contains harmful materials. Cows and bulls get their tongue cut while chewing food. Most of the time, glass objects which are harmful to animals are thrown out. Polythene and other plastic materials have also caused harm to all these animals. The dogs, bulls and cows feel great pain and die when eating these things as their belly swells.'

As we have mentioned, during the study, we observed that many residents seemed unaware of the import of the local waste problems and did not consider these problems as important. We also noticed some women throwing household waste near the *Bindusagar lake* situated near *Badu Sahi*. The lake was not being cleaned properly. On several occasions, we noticed big rats in that dump yard. The residents complained about the mosquitoes and the rats but did nothing to address the problem.

Although the waste collectors of the BMC worked regularly in the area,[2] the collection was ineffective as some residents would forget to hand over their waste to them and did not bother about the cleanliness of their neighbourhood. The collectors also failed to collect waste door to door. Some residents said that the sweepers did not do a proper job; others complained about irregular waste collection; yet, we saw waste collectors doing their job every day. This contradiction reflects residents' general dissatisfaction with the government service providers. Food waste from the entire locality was being given as food to the cows and plastic and other types of waste were thrown in the lanes.

Things were not helped by the absence of public dustbins. Sila Rani, a 54-year-old woman who lives in *Sri Ram Nagar* stated, 'There is no dustbin in our locality. Even if the dustbins are provided, people will throw waste outside not inside the dustbin. They are lazy'. In the absence of dustbins in the locality, residents kept their waste in buckets and polyethylene containers. Even

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[2] Generally, waste collectors are male, while sweepers are female.

when waste items are kept separate, once people hand their waste over to the collectors to be carried away, the latter would mix all types of waste. While residents would not admit that they litter, they would nonetheless litter in front of us. Yet, they did not seem to recognize the inconsistency between what they said and what they did.

We did not register any significant impact of the central government's awareness programme *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*. Residents opined that government policies made no impact on people's behaviour. We found, however, that people's economic background played a role in determining their opinions, voices and perspectives on waste management, littering and government policies. Aparajit, a 42-year-old man living in *Sri Ram Nagar*, said:

> 'Bhubaneswar has a waste problem. We face the problem of dogs scattering waste all around. Walking in the road is difficult. Even after the BMC workers clean the roads, people still litter and throw waste. Our *Sahi* (colony) is the most polluted. People are not concerned. Children suffer from water-borne diseases, due to unhygienic living conditions. The pipes leak. Sewage water mixes with drinking water. There are skin diseases as well. The BMC is getting benefits from utilizing waste. Through privatization, the BMC and private bodies involved in waste handling are getting the benefit. What they are giving people in return? Waste gives a lot of benefits and is very useful. If recycled properly, it gives a lot of benefits. The rag pickers make a living out of selling the water bottles. Without any investment, they are making a profit.'

Urban production and consumption lead to changes in the spatial formation and point to the urban metabolic force (Smith 2006), conflicts and struggles. The interplay between people, urban space and things (Heynen 2013) brings out a break in the dualistic view of urban space and of the relations of power between different social groups and between nature and social groups.

As an indication of the political aspect of waste collection in Bhubaneswar, during our fieldwork, we observed a change in household waste collection immediately after the local election and the subsequent appointment of corporators in the various wards. Initially, the BMC waste collectors carried a cart and collected waste from door to door in the early morning; they would blow sirens to signal to the residents that they should hand over their waste. This practice changed after the election, as the BMC workers were replaced by '*Saphei Gadi'* (waste collection vehicles). While the song '*Mu Saphei Bala…*' (I am the cleaning person) played on loudspeakers, four to five men collected the waste in two separate places designated as collection points for 'wet waste' and 'dry waste'. Daily, the song acted as a reminder to the residents that they were to hand their waste over to the collectors. Ironically, the '*Saphei gadi*' were there before the election but were not used to collect waste. Then, only a few lanes were serviced and individual workers would collect the waste.

Practices Adopted to Address the Problems of Waste

As we have pointed out earlier in this discussion, during our fieldwork, we collected information on individuals' perception and awareness of waste. We gained knowledge on the local cultural significance of waste, public perceptions of rubbish and current waste-disposal

practices. From the respondents, we gained a view of the role of political ecology in the prevalence of interest groups related to the management of waste in the city. Many negative perspectives also came to the fore. As we were not considered foreign to the city, respondents felt able to express themselves fully, bringing out their true perceptions, practices and beliefs regarding waste production and management. The community was clearly concerned with the health and wellbeing of its members but did little to address the issue. The separation of dry and wet waste was generally absent, as most local people lacked knowledge about dry and wet waste and threw away the waste indiscriminately.

We also registered a lack of cooperation and coordination among the residents, and in some cases a latent conflict, in dealing with the waste problem. Nobody likes waste. People recognize the existence of waste-related issues and that the presence of waste in the surroundings is not ideal. However, they do not want to be identified with the waste they generate. Here, the association of humans with waste is evident but unacknowledged by the respondents, which plays a role in preventing the residents from taking action and even discussing waste. It is worth repeating that, even if a willingness to resolve the issues was there, no action was taken, and there were no shout-outs, strikes or social movements.

Local people generally hesitate to speak about waste, which helps to explain why most respondents do not stop those who litter or improperly dispose of waste. So, the blame game goes on and the problem remains unresolved. Meanwhile, ordinary people live with the consequences of this situation, pointing to the importance of integrating an understanding of the local socio-cultural context into the waste management plan in order to make it more effective (Fruitema 2015). The existing conflict is evident from the statements reported below.

> Sila Rani Makaddam, a 54-year-old woman living in *Badu Sahi*, said: 'We always ask children to dispose of waste properly but do not ask this of the neighbours and the outsiders.'

> Chinmayee Makaddam, a 54-year-old woman living in *Badu Sahi*, said: 'Everyone takes photos but there's no serious attempt to clean the city. *Swachh Bharat* means to make India clean but if all clean seriously there will be no waste. People are keener on being acknowledged as social workers than meaningfully contributing to the cause. If every individual does their duty of cleaning the areas, then there will be no problem with waste at all. We create all the problems. The temple nearby has been made dirty. The residents throw waste on temples.'

Some families did not consider waste as a problem in that area. They say they do not need the dustbins to separate the dry and wet waste.

> Charulata, aged 57, living in *Badu Sahi*, said: 'We don't separate the waste. We will not do so. We throw all the waste. We don't need dustbins as we produce less waste […] We don't have any problem due to waste. We don't litter. We are permanent settlers; we have lived here for a generation. We are priests of *lord Lingaraj* and we don't have any sort of problem. We don't say anything to those

who litter because the spaces and areas belong to all. Tenants have the problem of waste, which we don't have.'

The city residents believe that the policies formulated by the central government and the state governments, such as those of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Swachh Bhubaneswar Abhiyan, have not been effective. They, local people note, may have served to gain political mileage, but have not contributed to the betterment of the city. Their effect has been cosmetic, they say, as residents have temporarily cleaned their surroundings in order to take photographs and share them on social media.

These social processes contribute to the production of hybrids in this urban setting and are evident through the vulnerability, interests, actions, strategies and power relations of the actors involved. Our study found that poor families are more vulnerable to the impacts of waste in terms of poor health, hygiene and sanitation. They lack the resources to reduce their vulnerabilities. On the other hand, wealthy families have better access to resources, which they use to avoid (and ignore) the immediate impact of the generated waste; yet, they are unable to root out the problem, for the metabolic process between waste and people affects every individual living in the city.

The blame game goes on between different social groups, who refuse to accept responsibility for the production of waste and its safe disposal, and are in conflict with each other (for example, the relationship between the tenants and owners). In such a situation, political parties benefit from managing waste at their convenience.

Conclusions

The invisible life of a city is made visible because of constant production of hybrids (Zimmer 2010). The ethnography that we have discussed in this article has met the point that hybrids are formed by various biological, physical and cultural factors, and by people's social practices and relationships (Swyngedouw et al. 2002, Swyngedouw 2004). The analysis has contributed to show how the three important aspects of hybrids — the material, commodified and constructivist dimensions — are mediated through human social relations and the relationship of humans with nature (Becker and Jahn 2006).

Cities are, without doubt, complex centres of cultural and ethnic interactions which establish the ideal setting for achieving sustainable development (Prato and Pardo 2013). This goal is regarded as central both by the United Nations and by individual countries, and depends on urban policies resulting in peace, justice and prosperity for all. In many cases, it has been elusive because urban policies have failed to take into account the historical, social, cultural and political trajectory of the cities under consideration, and have consequently failed to address critical issues, including socio-economic disparities, security and serious environmental and health problems issues (Pardo 2011, Pardo et al. 2020). As shown by Pardo's ethnography on uncollected rubbish in Naples (2022), the effective management of waste is one of these critical issues. The case of Bhubaneswar exemplifies how this issue is intricately related to better health care, economic and social equality and the protection of the rights of all citizens. Addressing this interaction and the underlying views, values and identity

of the people on the ground is a priority that qualifies broader policies and governance that respect fully democratic principles and the rights of citizenship (Pardo et al. 2020).

To work effectively, a democratic country needs a good relationship between governance, citizenship and the law, and, for this to happen, governance and the law need to abide by fundamental democratic principles and refrain from following selective interest (Pardo 2011). During our ethnographic study we did not participate in the local social conflict. Instead, we tried to understand what was going on from the perspective of the residents and find out the nature of the waste issue, the class conflict associated with it and the connections among the various social groups involved in this conflict. Ineffective policies need to be revisited and appropriate changes need to be made with the participation of the residents for the development of the city. Negotiation and coordination among all the relevant stakeholders are essential to resolve this issue. Key actors in this process are the lower-class residents, so far marginalised and without the power to change the waste narrative. We hope that, as our research findings on waste and the associated conflict make visible latent aspects of the waste problem and of local power relations that were previously invisible, they may contribute to an understanding of this situation. We also hope that they may enable policy advocates and social activists to question governmental bodies and other authorities about the effectiveness of their policies and actions.

Urban ethnography is an established approach to tracing the evolution of the urban world and its political, economic and cultural dynamics (Pardo et al. 2020). We suggest that the ethnography of urban waste can contribute to this key field by offering an understanding of urban political ecology. Waste is an integral part of human life. There is nothing dirty and unclean about waste. Cleanliness and uncleanliness are subjective and culturally idiosyncratic and interdependent concepts. The concept of uncleanliness itself carries within the concept of cleanliness. The clean state of mind and the clean spaces that humans are searching for are there, within the waste, the dirt, the trash, the rubbish. What may seem as a paradox is a reality.

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Preface

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This Special Section—Part 2 includes two revised papers that were presented at the panel on *Power Games and Symbolic Icons in Evolving Urban Landscapes* convened by Giuliana B. Prato and Subhadra Channa at the at the 2021IUAES Congress (Yucatan, Mexico, virtual mode). A detailed outline of the panel's aim and topics was presented in the 'Introductory Note' to the Special Section–Part 1 of the May 2022 issue of *Urbanities* (Prato 2022: https://www.anthrojournal-urbanities.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/6-Prato-Introductory-Note.pdf). Part 1 included three articles that addressed the symbolic and ideological dimensions of urban heritage and the legitimacy of urban change, drawing on ethnographic cases from Ecuador (Rumé 2022), India (Channa 2022) and post-Soviet Georgia (Komakhidze 2022); see https://www.anthrojournal-urbanities.com/vol-12-no-1-may-2022/. Two more papers originally presented at the 2021 panel are currently under revision and will be published separately at a later stage.

The two articles that follow focus respectively on Brooklyn, New York City, and the planned city of New Town in West Bengal. Drawing on his visual approach to vernacular landscape (Krase 2012), Krase analyses the historical changes around the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn and the attendant 'morals of legitimacy' (Pardo 2000), pointing to conflicting visual representations that emerged from the changing identities of the area. With reference to a key theme of the panel, *legitimacy* (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2018, 2019), Sarkar discusses how the State-led urban planning of New Town aimed at placing the city on a global scale while enacting the Bengali identity in order to legitimise the development projects and the ruling party.

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Symbolic Icons: Conflicting Visions of the Gowanus Canal

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The four-hundred-year history of Brooklyn, New York, has provided opportunities to observe many conflicts and competitions over how neighbourhoods are symbolically presented and represented which significantly affect the lives of local residents and businesses. In recent years, conflicts and competitions over representation have resulted in heated public discourse such as over historical place names, and monuments. One of the most contentious of these discourses has been about gentrification and displacement in and around the Gowanus Canal. Over the centuries the area has changed from a primitive uninhabited marshland to its current actively developing urban neighbourhood. In each epoch, changes have been captured in images, and those images have impacted the area itself. This article will employ multi-modal methodologies to explore these changes and how they have been locally contested in print and digital media in three sections: Historical Images, Pollution, and Gentrification.
Keywords: Vernacular landscape; pollution; public discourse; gentrification; displacement.

Introduction

The 'Super-Diversity' of Brooklyn, New York's almost three-million residents, and its contentious four-hundred-year history, have provided an opportunity to observe the many conflicts and competitions over how neighbourhoods are symbolically presented and represented. These images have significantly affected the lives of local residents and businesses. In recent years, some of these conflicts and competitions over representation have resulted in heated public discourse such as over historical place names and monuments that some regard as racially biased. (Jelley-Shapiro 2021) One of the most contentious of these territorial or spatial discourses has been about gentrification and displacement in Brooklyn (Krase and DeSena 2016, Krase 2022) and, ironically, around the highly polluted and territorially stigmatized Gowanus Canal. This article will employ multi-modal methodologies to explore these changes and how they have been locally contested in print and digital media in three sections: Historical Images, Pollution, and Gentrification.

As might be expected, over the centuries the area has changed from a primitive uninhabited marshland to its current actively developing urban neighbourhood. Starting with the Dutch colonization and resultant displacement of Native Americans from the territory in the 17th century, almost every change resulted in conflict and/or competition between, and among, public and private interests which also have challenged the then current notions of legitimacy. Concrete historical changes have also been accompanied by changed visual representations that have had impact on the past, present and future identities of the area. Historically, these representations have impacted the lives of residents in the past as well as newcomers well beyond those defined as 'minorities' and 'marginalized' communities. It must be noted as to these 'morals of legitimacy' (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2019, Krase and Krase 2019) that poor and working-class immigrant Irish and Italians who populated the area from the second half of the 19th through most of the 20th centuries have been scrupulously overlooked in most commentary today on both the past pollution and current gentrification in the area. In part, this is because so many of those had been poor not only improved their socioeconomic status before the invasions of gentry but, as residential and business property owners, they benefitted by it.

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The Importance of Seeing

Because Brooklyn is familiar to many due to its media popularity, studies about its neighbourhoods are often seen as parochial. However, as major segment of a global city, it is a paradigmatic site for visual and symbolic competition. As noted by Saskia Sassen (2001), they are sites for the contradictions of the globalization of capital where both the powerful and the disadvantaged are concentrated in which they compete for contested terrain. According to Kieran Bonner '…globalization is not just about the movement of capital by global corporations, but also about the movement of people who are often in contest with such economic developments' (Bonner 2007: 277). John Brinckerhoff Jackson had also called us to look at what '[…] lies underneath below the symbols of permanent power expressed in the Political Landscape' (Jackson 1984: 6) because what ordinary people do in a particular physical territory and how they use objects therein are critical for understanding the space.

Robert A. Beauregard and Anne Haila note that postmodernists tend to '[…] portray the contemporary city as fragmented, partitioned, and precarious, and as a result, less legible than its modernist precursor' (Beauregard and Haila 2000: 23). However, they argue that a distinctly postmodern city has not displaced the modern one. Rather they find there is a more complex patterning of old and new, and of continuing trends and new forces that result in different kinds of segregation and different logics of location. Especially important is the uneven spatial competition that lower class immigrants face with more privileged members of society. In this regard, Roland van Kempen and Peter Marcuse (1997: 4) also argued that uniform patterns cannot be expected and they offer contemporary residential community forms in the 'citadels of the rich', gentrified areas, middle-class suburbs, tenement areas, ethnic enclaves, and what is to them a 'new type' of ghetto. Relatedly, Anthony King (1996) speaks of cities as 'text' to be read. Vernacular landscapes are crucial to that reading. Sharon Zukin also noted that the emphasis of urbanists had been on competition over access and representations of the urban centre. 'Visual artefacts of material culture and political economy thus reinforce — or comment on — social structure. By making social rules "legible" they represent the city' (Zukin 1996: 44).

In discussing Henri Lefebvre's 'Spatial Practices', David Harvey noted that those who have the power to command and produce space are therefore able to reproduce and enhance their own power. It is within the parameters outlined by these practices that the local lives of ordinary urban dwellers take place. For Harvey (1989, 265) 'Different classes construct their sense of territory and community in radically different ways. This elemental fact is often overlooked by those theorists who presume a priori that there is some ideal-typical and universal tendency for all human beings to construct a human community of roughly similar sort, no matter what the political or economic circumstances'. Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 188) noted that the production of such symbolic capital also serves ideological functions, because the mechanisms through which it contributes 'to the reproduction of the established order and to the perpetuation of domination remain hidden'. Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus' or practices that produce, in this case visible, regularities is also helpful in this regard (1977: 72-95).

For Lefebvre the visual was central to the production and reproduction of social space of any scale. 'People *look*, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of

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papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images. Sight and seeing which the Western tradition once epitomized intelligibility, have turned into a trap: the means whereby, in social spaces, diversity may be simulated and a travesty of enlightenment and intelligibility ensconced under the sign of transparency' (Lefebvre 1991: 75-76). In sum, vernacular landscapes reflect the battle between large and small interests and the outcomes are usually the designs of powerful forces often beyond even the knowledge of local people.

As noted by Krase, urban regeneration and policies of urban change are reflected in vernacular landscapes and these changes can in turn facilitate further gentrification by making the areas more visually attractive (Krase 2012: 221. See also: Krase and DeSena 2020a, 2020b, 2016).

Gentrification's history of higher status invaders displacing lower status residents remains closely tied to the process defined by Ruth Glass. (1964) Since then it has been described progressively grander prefixes: 'Super' (Lees 2003); 'Hyper' (Shaw 2008); and 'Planetary' (Lees et al 2016). In general, analyses of gentrification fall under two general types: Political Economic, following Neil Smith (1979), and Cultural Consumption, following David Ley (1996). The literature on Gentrification describes it as ruthless force that destroys communal nostalgic urban neighbourhoods, and replaces them with individualist and consumer-driven ones. Gentrifiers are often viewed as (neo)colonizers, appropriating working and lower-middle-class lifestyles (de Oliver 2016). Most studies focus on sections where displacement was most likely to occur such as poor and working-class areas (Slater 2003). However, in the Gowanus area, recent luxury development projects are also pressuring middle-class residents to leave, as rents rise and buildings with affordable apartments are razed to make way for luxury ones. Another more subtle contributor to gentrification that is critical for the polluted Gowanus Canal area is 'green gentrification', which according to Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis (2016) is a process of improving the environmental qualities of more and less depressed areas either as preparation for gentrification or improvements that occur after the gentrification begins.

My direct involvement in the current upscale redevelopment of the canal, began in the early 1980s when I consulted with the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation (GCCDC. Krase and Greenblatt 1981). In that study I conducted a photographic architectural survey of the properties along the west side of the canal to facilitate development grant applications. The GCCDC was created by local activists to combat housing and business deterioration in the area. Decades later, I became a member of its Board of Directors and then its President in 2012. This experience was crucial in providing a close-up view of how business and political élites, along with other pressure groups used or constructed symbols in order to legitimize their positions and gain popular consensus. In this regard, easily manipulated symbols such as 'greening' and terms like 'affordable' housing continue to make local democracy precarious by confounding public discourse.

Gowanus History in Brief
The Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn, New York, is almost two miles long and borders, or runs through, the well-known neighbourhoods of Red Hook, Carroll Gardens, Gowanus, Park Slope, Boerum Hill and Cobble Hill. Although the area around the canal had been settled by Europeans in the 17th century, and long before that by Lenape Native Americans, the Gowanus Creek as

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it was then known, was not developed into a canal from the tidal marshland fed by freshwater streams until the mid-19th century. By the turn 20th century, local industries had drained large amounts of pollutants into the canal. Over subsequent decades, attempts to remedy the problem failed miserably; even after the 1950s when most industrial uses ended. By the 1990s, it was recognized as one of the most polluted bodies of water in the United States. However, despite the pollution, due to its closeness to Manhattan by public rapid transit and nearby desirable Brooklyn neighbourhoods, powerful developers became interested and used their considerable political influence, and also courted local community groups, to call for environmental remediation. As a result, in 2009 the Gowanus Canal was designated as a Federal Superfund site and work to clean the canal began in earnest in 2013.

Historical Imagery

In the course of its four-century history the area and the canal itself has been represented by visual and textual imagery. The area's early settlers named the waterway 'Gowanes Creek' after *Gouwane*, who was the chief of the local Lenape tribe of the Algonquian linguistic group that dominated the Northeastern United States. The Lenape farmed along the shores of the creek until being displaced by Dutch settlers from 1630 to 1664, who built a tobacco plantation and tide-water gristmills in the area.

Figure 1. Lenape Village in Gowanus, Brooklyn New School Native American Museum. 2016 by Jerry Krase. Every year the Brooklyn New School, a public grade school, organizes a Native American Museum in which students create exhibits about the Lenape who lived in the area. In this cropped photo, students pose around their model of a Lenape village.

The creek and its outlets into New York's Inner Bay were also locations for other farms as well as clam and oyster fishing. In 1700, Nicholas Vechte built a farmhouse of brick and stone which is still in use and called the Old Stone House. The house and the wider area were important in 1776 during the Battle of Long Island during the American Revolution. Maps drawn during the British colonization show New York City as 'Part of Nassau Island', later referred to as Long Island on which, at its most western end, Brooklyn is located. (See http://bklyn-genealogy-info.stevemorse.org/Map/1766.Vill.Bklyn.html). A map of the Battle of Long Island, part of which took place in Gowanus, shows how Lord Stirling lead an attack against the British in order to buy

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time for other troops to retreat at the Battle of Long Island, in 1776. (See: https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14969025).
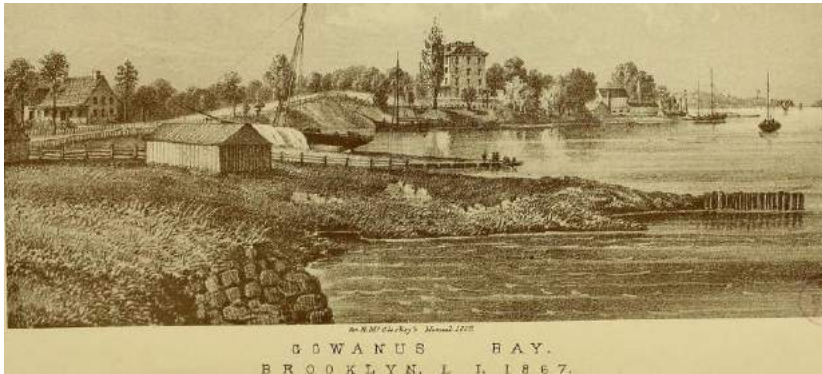

Figure 2. Sunset at Gowanus Bay in the Bay New York (1851) by Henry Gotten.
Originally drawn by George Hayward, an image of the Gowanus Bay from the 1867 manual of the Brooklyn Common Council. On the left is the former home of Simon de Hart, known as the De Hart or Bergen House.
Source: Courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library.[1]

The image of the area around the Gowanus Canal radically changed as industry invaded in the 19th century. These changes are expressed in text, photos and maps in the Gowanus conservancy's Hall of Gowanus Digital Library: 'Exploring the History of Gowanus, Brooklyn through Material Culture'. Relatedly, Proteus Gowanus is a gallery and reading room located on the banks of the Gowanus Canal that links the arts to other disciplines and to the community. In 2011, The Hall launched this Gowanus Archive for those interested in the past and future of the canal. The digital archives contain over sixty-six gigabytes of maps, GIS data, photos and digital sediments accumulated by the community. (https://issuu.com/proteusgowanus/docs/gowanus_history_presentation_final_lowres; See also: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/629c46b2651f4ceab0f4678250dfbbc2).

The maps in the archive visually document the changes in Gowanus from the old roads and farm field lines in1880 to how the flourishing Canal was engulfed by the rapidly expanding Park Slope area, as the last remnants of the Gowanus Marshes were filled in for the Red Hook Port in 1897. A 1924 aerial survey photo shows the future Carroll Street Subway Station, two large gas works (See Figure 3) and the Brooklyn Trolley Dodgers Stadium. The 1942 map, drawn by The United States Army Corps of Engineers, is an inventory of industrial businesses along the Canal, when barged coal was the fuel of choice for the Canal Industrial Zone. The City of New York's Aero Service Aerial in 1951 shows the Gowanus area fully developed, with the now third generation of houses being torn down and others built such as the Gowanus Houses public houses. Finally, the 2004 New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications colour aerial photograph, highlights some of the sites being considered for new residential and commercial development at the time such as the currently existing upscale Whole Foods supermarket.

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[1] This work is in the Public Domain. The Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library can provide a copy of this work free of charge.

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Figure 3. Citizens Manufactured Gas Plant 1924.
A network of Manufactured Gas Plants, operated by numerous individual companies, powered the New York Metro Area. This site housed the Citizens Manufactured Gas Plant, built by the Citizens Gas Company. It was part of a cluster of three such plants around the Gowanus, suppling energy to Brooklyn from the 1860s to the 1960s. After delivery to this plant, coal was heated to produce a gas that could be used for lighting, heating and cooking. The gas was cooled, cleaned and stored on site in large holding tanks. At the time, there were no environmental laws and some by-products remained. Source: Courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library.[2]
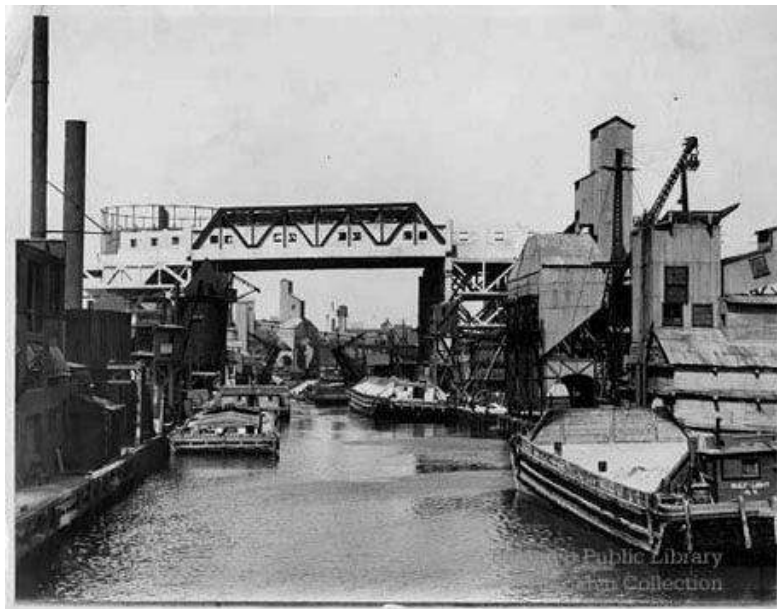
Figure 4. Gowanus Canal Traffic 1920s.
This photo shows the barge congestion along the Gowanus Canal. Source: Courtesy of the Brooklyn Public Library.[3]

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[2] This work is in the Public Domain. The Center for Brooklyn History at Brooklyn Public Library can provide a copy of this work free of charge.

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Pollution

By the middle of the19th century, the Gowanus Canal had evolved into an active commercial shipping centre for Brooklyn. This location attracted noxious industries such as coal to gas and sulphur manufacturing plants, tanneries, chemical plants and paint factories that polluted the canal as well as the surrounding area. Closed at one end, with no water to flush out the toxins, the navigable water took on a reddish-purple colour for which it later earned the name 'lavender lake'. A residual 'black mayonnaise' also accumulated on its bed. The pollution was so bad near the end of the century, that a New York State commission suggested the closing of the canal entirely but business interests prevailed and it remained open. Attempts at reducing the effluence resulted in a long list of failures. An early 20th century building boom increased sewage drainage into the canal and new sewer lines conveyed sewage from other neighbourhoods into the canal. By 1910 a flushing tunnel was built but that also failed, which was the first error in a series that continued for fifty-years, as the canal became a dumping place. With a large Italian American population in the area, rumours that lasted for decades spread that the canal was a body dumping ground for the Mafia. In this regard, it must be noted that some bodies and human remains have been found. By 1993, only one company used the Canal for shipping and currently most barges carry fuel oil, sand, gravel and scrap metal for export.

As would be expected, the image of the Gowanus Canal and surrounds radically changed. As to popular images, Thomas Wolfe described it as 'huge symphonic stink' of the canal which was 'cunningly compacted of unnumbered separate putrefactions' in his 1940 novel *You Can't Go Home Again*. (1940) As to the popular Mafia legends, a character in Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn* (2000) refers to the canal as 'the only body of water in the world that is 90 percent guns'. As to contemporary poor taste in mass media, an episode of the 2009-11 TV show *Bored to Death* was titled 'The Gowanus Canal Has Gonorrhea.' (See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1650079/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1). In 2014, a comic book series *Tales of the Night* entitled 'It Came from the Gowanus Canal', was published about a toxic sludge monster living in the canal who takes revenge on a gangster who once dumped bodies there. A frightening poster by Larry Antal was sold at the Gowanus Souvenir shop that sells trinkets, nick-nacks and novelties crafted by local artists in celebration of the neighbourhood's famed toxic waterway. Most relate to the many weird tales about the canal such as 'Gowanus Swim Team' T-shirts, poison bottles labelled with various toxins found in the canal, and handcrafted mutant action figures (Mixson 2015). There was also a 'It came from the Gowanus Canal Again: Comic Release Party at Gowanus Souvenir Shop' in 2017 and as reported in a local online paper:

> ' *"It's not the water you should fear. It's him"*. We know that there is plenty of coal tar at the of the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn. We know that raw sewage flows into it during heavy downpours, compliment of the City of New York. Occasionally, a whale will lose its way and swim into the polluted waterway to die. According to Tales of the Night, a comic book series published by so What? Press, there is something even more sinister lurking in the murky waters of everyone's favourite EPA Superfund: the Gowanus Golem, 'Brooklyn's most toxic monster'. Golem made his first appearance in the 2014 'It came from the Gowanus Canal' issue. Now 'he is back in Issue 7, a

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follow-up of one of the series' most popular tales. In 'It came from the Gowanus Canal Again', the monster is after a couple of thugs who are responsible for the death of a young boy. Barista and blogger Nora and her roommate Charlie come to the rescue to put an end to the supernatural activity.' (PMFA 2017, See also: Tyler 2016)
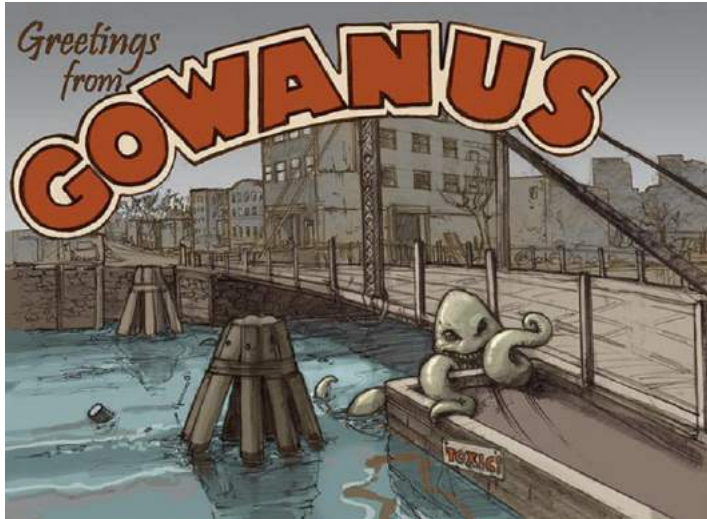

Figure 5. 'Greetings from Gowanus Canal', 2014, by Simon Fraser/Eugene Lehnert.
Artwork created for novelty postcards such as those sold at the Gowanus Souvenir Shop. Source: By Simon Fraser: si@simonfraser.net and Eugene Lehnert: euge04@aol.com - Artwork commissioned by Eugene Lehnert., CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40234126[4]

Cleaning the Gowanus Canal and Its Image

The 1948 Federal Water Pollution Control Act (1948), the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970 and the Clean Water Act (1972) provided a base for more effective efforts at remediating the extreme environmental degradation of the canal. Consequently, in 1971, the city held hearings on a Gowanus Industrial Urban Renewal Project, but did not support it with funding. In 1974, the Gowanus Canal's water was tested for bacteria and found typhoid, cholera, dysentery and tuberculosis. Another assessment found an almost total absence of oxygen, raw sewage, grease, oil and sludge. The Red Hook Sewage Plant was completed in 1987 to divert more sewage input and a repaired flushing tunnel began operating in 1999. In 2002, the United States Army Corps of Engineers and the DEP conducted an Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study of the Gowanus Canal area. The DEP also initiated a project to meet the city's obligations under the Clean Water Act.

The biggest boost to the cleanup came in 2009, as the EPA proposed a 'Superfund' designation that would allow it to clean up the contaminated site and force '...the parties responsible for the contamination to either perform cleanups or reimburse the government for EPA-led cleanup work' (EPA https://www.epa.gov/superfund/what-superfund). However, the Mayor of New York City at the time, Michael Bloomberg, and the GCCDC stepped forward to oppose the listing. The City offered to produce a plan to match that of the EPA and to do it faster. Bloomberg had been promoting his 'Luxury City' idea for the future of New York City that encouraged luxury development and an upscaling rezoning agenda. According to Greenberg, the Bloomberg

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administration sought to refashion the city in order to appeal to global elites '[…] by attracting high-end retailers, hotels, stadiums, and residential towers […]' (2010: 131). He, and the GCCDC, which had real estate professionals, as well as local business and property owners on its board, felt the designation would seriously stigmatize the area even further and discourage investment. For example, the city had earlier granted a zoning change to a developer, who abandoned their project when the canal was declared a Superfund site. In the years since the designation many local residents and organizations have questioned the EPA's cleanup methods fearing the spread of toxic waste onto nearby public areas. In contrast to upscaling, a richly illustrated plan, 'Reconsidering Gowanus', that would not displace local residents was offered in 2010 by the Steven L. Newman Real Estate Institute Research and Development Department at Baruch College, CUNY. (https://issuu.com/proteusgowanus/docs/2010_reconsidering-gowanus_steven_n).

As to autoethnographic insight, after occasionally consulting with the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation since 1981, I was invited to join its Board in 2008 and rose to its Presidency in 2012. I also served on the local Gowanus Canal Advisory Committee. Along with other GCCDC Board members, at a meeting with the EPA in Brooklyn, I argued that the designation would harm local residents and business because of the Superfund stigma. The EPA representative replied that since the canal already had a terrible reputation, the designation couldn't make it worse. The Superfund designation resulted in competing visions for the future of the canal. As reported by Joseph Berger in *The New York Times*,

> 'This is the tipping point for Gowanus', said Jerome Krase, a professor emeritus of sociology at Brooklyn College and a former president of the Gowanus Canal community Development Corporation, a neighborhood group. 'What's going to be interesting is to see whether it's going to contribute to a kind of middle- and upper-middle-income neighborhood in between gentrified Carroll Gardens and highly gentrified Park Slope. What's unusual about this project is it's being done in the middle of the wasteland.' (Berger 2012)

Since its founding in 2009, the local environmental group, the Gowanus Conservancy, had been advocating for a greener development for the area that included extensive parkland and open spaces as well as restoring the vitality of the canal by partnering with the EPA and the New York city Department of Environmental Protection. This is how it describes itself on its website:

> 'Gowanus Canal Conservancy is dedicated to facilitating the development of a resilient, vibrant, open space network centered on the Gowanus Canal through activating and empowering community stewardship of the Gowanus Watershed. Since 2006, we have served as the environmental steward for the neighborhood through leading grassroots volunteer projects; educating students on environmental issues; and working with agencies, elected officials, and the community to advocate for, build, and maintain innovative green infrastructure around the Gowanus Canal.' (https://gowanuscanalconservancy.org/about/)

As previously noted, the Conservancy also provides an elaborate illustrated history of the Gowanus area which has informed some parts of this article. Its Hall of Gowanus Digital Story Map explores maps, photographs, timelines and tools for personal reflection that are unique to

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the Gowanus neighbourhood that are well-worth exploring. Although the Conservancy would not think of itself as advocating displacement of the most vulnerable residents of the area, as previously noted by Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis, improving the environmental qualities of depressed areas can, accidentally or purposely, prepare for it (Gould and Lewis 2016).

In 2013, the EPA approved a $506 million plan to clean the Gowanus Canal to be completed by 2022. There were three steps: dredging contaminated sediment from the bottom of the canal; capping the dredged areas; and implementing controls on combined sewer overflows to prevent future contamination. Most important for the visual appeal of the canal involved excavating and restoring approximately the shoreline along the can. Subsequently, this beautification project has been enhanced by both public and private funds. The public restoration was to be paid for by the 'responsible parties' for the pollution designated by the EPA. The Superfund cleanup began in 2017. However, there were concerns by local groups such as the GCCDC that some of the clean-up activities could pose a health risk by disturbing and spreading water and air pollution. Recent articles in the press have proved that the concerns were well-merited. For example, Voice of Gowanus, a local advocacy group reported that the New York City Department of Environmental Conservation confirmed the release of toxic vapours at levels that triggered an emergency alarm and work stoppage on July 27th at a worksite adjacent to EPA's massive Gowanus Canal Superfund zone. The worksite is part of the former Citizens Manufactured Gas Plant (MGP), which is currently undergoing partial remediation and toxic containment under the supervision of DEC, an effort that has been widely criticized by the EPA and the community for its inadequacy. Children who had been playing at a playground directly across from the site reported smells to local political representatives who demanded an explanation from the EPA and DEC. Weeks after the incident, the DEC reported 'that at the same time the children were exposed to noxious fumes, the on-site air monitors at the former MGP site had exceeded the warning level for Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs), thereby triggering a work stoppage. While helpful to the construction workers, nobody else in the area was told of the incident or warned of the potentially harmful chemicals in the air' (Seth 2022).

Figure 6. Public Place, 2022. By Jerry Krase.
The city government took over this site at Smith and 4th Streets in 1975 and designated it a public place for use as 'public recreation space'. Despite the legal standing as a 'Public Place', developers have continually proposed developing the site for other uses. National Grid is accountable for cleanup of the massive pollution from coal gas manufacture. Upon completion it will be turned over to the New York City Parks Department.

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In a related vein, Kirstyn Brendlen had reported that the federal EPA was concerned that New York State's plans '[…] to clean up the heavily contaminated Public Place site are insufficient and would leave behind dangerous chemicals that could present health issues to the surrounding neighborhood […]' The agency's director Superfund and Emergency Management had reported in February of 2022 of '[…] the potential for dangerous chemicals and contaminated groundwater to 'migrate' into the Gowanus Canal and the soil, which could lead to "soil vapor intrusion", wherein hazardous gasses leech upwards into buildings.' (Brendlen 2022).

Gentrification

As in other depopulated and deteriorated NYC neighbourhoods such as Williamsburg, Brooklyn and SOHO in Manhattan, as early as 1980, the Gowanus area had attracted artists and musicians and other members of what Richard Florida called the 'creative class' (2002). The real and virtual appearance of art studios, bars, restaurants and other businesses associated with hipster or gentrification culture made the area even more attractive to both patrons, new and old residents and, of course, developers. Local politicians and organizations collaborated to make the neighbourhood more attractive to newcomers and discourage old-timers from leaving. For example, in 1999, the GCCDC was given $100,000 to produce and distribute a bulkhead study and public access document. The next year it got $270,000 from the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation 'Green Street' program to construct three street-end open spaces along the Gowanus Canal. New York States Governor George E. added an additional $270,000 to create a revitalization plan in 2001. In 2002, $100,000 in capital funds were allocated for a pilot shoreline project and, in 2003, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez allocated another $225,000 for a comprehensive community development plan. These plans and pilot programs led in to the area east of the Gowanus to be rezoned in 2003 and 2009 for high density residential use with a strong commercial component. At about the same times, plans to rezone Gowanus itself were in process.

Redevelopment Sites

In the late 1990s real estate values were surging in neighbourhoods near the canal such as Carroll Gardens and Park Slope and interest in the Gowanus area increased environmental risks. Groups concerned with the possible loss of jobs and affordable housing in the area pressured local elected officials to create a 'Gowanus Manufacturing Zone'. These groups also believed that the zone would spur the creation of manufacturing and related employment which never materialized and the cleanup itself enticed speculation into Gowanus. Given this failed hope, in the summer of 2016, the rezoning process restarted. Officials planned to reveal a more comprehensive plan in 2018, including rezoning a 43-block area and requiring developers to reserve 25% of the new units for 'affordable' housing. It must be noted that the term 'affordable' is misleading. For example, in most local residential developments in upscaling neighbourhoods like Gowanus the 'affordable' apartments are essential reserved for Moderate-income units are set aside for households with income between $85,920 and $128,880 and middle-income units are affordable to households with income between $128,880 and $177,210 (Bhat 2022).

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In June 2017, the Gowanus Canal Conservancy also began the process of designing a redevelopment plan for the area which can be found on its website noted previously. Another visioning project was conducted by the Clemson University Graduate School of Architecture's in collaboration with the GCCDC during its 2010 New York City summer seminar. Its ideas and related events were quite prescient as to the future of the area; which is the present as I write this.
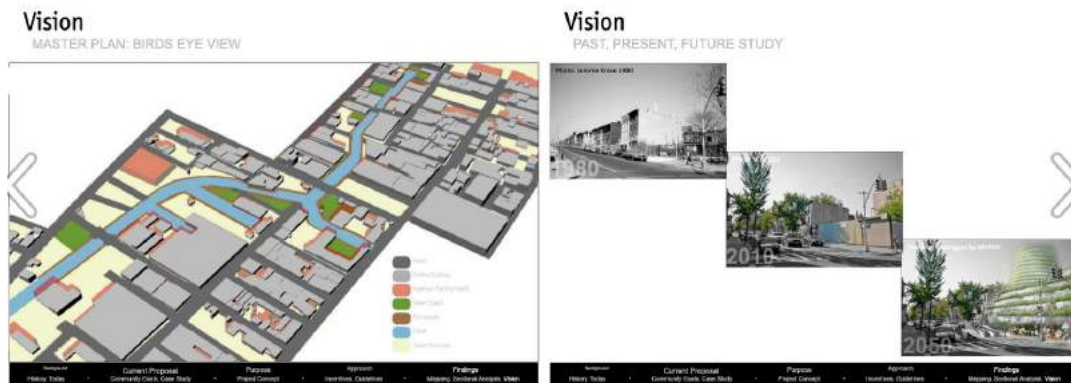

Figure 7. 'Vision: Past, Present, Future Study', Clemson University NYC Summer Studio, 2011.
This image combines the 1980 and 2010 Repeat Photographs by Jerome Krase of Bond Street near the Gowanus Canal and a 2050 Vision of the students in the Clemson Summer Studio. Source: Rediscovering Gowanus: Zoning Research Project, A presentation formed as a collaboration between students of Clemson University's NYC Summer Studio, 2011, https://issuu.com/lena319/docs/gowanus.

By late 2017, although this area had gentrified rapidly, some residents and community groups continued to opposed vigorously the new developments. For example, at a public hearing about Gowanus rezoning in 2019, the local Assemblywoman Joanne Simon did not see how the city can expect it '[…] to become a model green neighborhood without taking into account the CSO problems we have' (Wong 2019). Since then, several upscale developers have bought abandoned or little-used waterfront sites along the canal. As the greening continues, this has expanded well beyond the canal.

'Brooklyn Utopias: Along the Canal', was a public outdoor exhibition that asked artists to consider what a 'Utopia' would look like for the neighbourhoods bordering the Gowanus Canal. At the indoor and outdoor venues which opened in April 2022, artists presented works about the utopian visions of others as well as their own in the form of printed banners hung on the fences surrounding J.J. Byrne Playground in Park Slope and Coffey Park in Red Hook. The artists were asked to comment on one of the above neighbourhoods and address the following questions:

- What does a 'Brooklyn Utopia' look like for you, specifically in the neighbourhoods bordering the Gowanus Canal?
- How can this area's unique history, as well as current developments, inform its future?
- What is the role of artists in creating a more 'Utopian' Gowanus?

Many expressed ideas for improvement and more positive neighbourhood futures, as they addressed: equity, diversity, political and social structures, environment, gentrification, and poverty (https://ioby.org/project/brooklyn-utopias-along-canal).

I, and some of my students, visited the exhibition on May 22, 2022. With their permission, I present some of their comments below.

Armyda Escobar
'Overall, I enjoyed this small class field trip. I had never been to Gowanus or had been aware of the canal until taking this class. I did not take any images of the gentrification you described on the different sides of the street, but that moment of the trip has stuck with me since. It's unbelievable to think that one side of a street could be entirely gentrified, while the other street is not. However, I feel that this could also be said about the canal itself. Whole Foods' side of the canal has been beautified, yet the other side remains the same. It's crazy what money can do to one side of a street/canal.'

Royta Iftakher
'The trip to the canal was very interesting in the sense that I've never really explored an area of the city so different from what is conventionally associated with taking a field trip. The canal was gritty, dirty, and full of promises and expectations for what the neighborhood could one day become. I'm glad I was able to go because now I can say I understand a part of the city that is more than just an opportunity for a quick photo op. The canal, the gentrification, the exhibition at the old stone hone house, and the conservancy were crucial in putting together a landmark of the city. The canal somehow holds the past, the present, and the future within it. The past is represented by the lingering pollution and undeveloped land, the future being the construction.'

Vanchi Ly included some photographs in her report and commented on what she thought were the points the artists were trying to make.
'Photo 3: Artwork depicting a utopian Gowanus canal, clean of trash and full of life. I thought this reflected what people hoped the reformed Gowanus canal could become. It reflects how bad the pollution has become in the current canal. Photo 4 and 5: The Gowanus Blue Schools Design Challenge, a part of the Gowanus conservancy exhibit. I thought it was pretty insightful and innovative to have children in schools plan out eco-friendly design plans relevant to their neighbourhoods. Photo 6, 7, 8: The park included in the Whole Foods parking lot. I thought it was a big contrast to have this lavish Whole Foods, complete with the park when the overlooking Gowanus canal was littered with trash and pollution. There were murals across the canal, and I thought that added some colour to the dreary environment.'

Summary
In this article I attempted to demonstrated the many ways that social, economic and political competitions over urban places and spaces are symbolically presented and represented. I also

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tried to make it clear that these often conflicting socially constructed images significantly affected the lives of local residents and businesses. In the recent case of Gowanus, the most contentious of these territorial or spatial discourses has been about gentrification and displacement in Brooklyn (Krase and DeSena 2016, Krase 2022) and, ironically, around the highly polluted and territorially stigmatized Gowanus Canal. To provide a solid foundation for understanding the contemporary battles over the future of the community, a visualized history of the area over the centuries was also presented and enhanced by digital and virtual sources due to the limitations on figures in this publication.

I hope that the readers and viewers will recognize how concrete historical changes have been accompanied by changed visual representations that have in turn been actualized and impacted on the past, present and future identities of the area.

Historically, these representations have impacted the lives of residents in the past as well as newcomers well beyond those defined as 'minorities' and 'marginalized' communities. It must be noted as to these 'morals of legitimacy' (Pardo 2000, Pardo and Prato 2019, Krase and Krase 2018) that poor and working-class immigrant Irish and Italians who populated the area from the second half of the 19th through most of the 20th centuries have been scrupulously overlooked in most commentary today on both the past pollution and current gentrification in the area. In part, this is because so many of those had been poor not only improved their socioeconomic status before the invasions of gentry, but as residential and business property owners, they benefitted by it.

Appendix: Methods
This article has employed multi-modal methodologies to explore the visible changes in the Gowanus Canal area, and how visions of the present and future have been contested in print and digital media. Principal among these have been visual ethnography, which Donna Schwartz suggests is '... best fitted to the research scene and most useful for humanist sensibilities' (1989: 152). A portion of the article is autoethnographic, which as noted by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner 'describes and systematically analyses personal experience to understand cultural experience' (Ellis et al. 2011: 1). To add depth to the changing appearance of the area, images from historical archives have been searched. *Wikipedia* provided an excellent outline of the history of the canal (Wiki 2022). Searching for visual archives and references to the Gowanus area were conducted judiciously via digital and virtual ethnography. As noted by Daniel Dominguez et al., ethnography via the Internet, 'maintains its own dialogue with the established tradition of ethnography and formulates its relation to this tradition in different ways' (2007: 1). In several places, are the fruits of my own visual ethnography. For Sarah Pink, ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced (2009: 8). In its visual iteration methodology the ethnographer's sensing body is placed amidst the multisensoriality of social encounters or interactions. One case, Figure 7, is an example of repeat photography. As noted by John Rieger 'Perhaps the most reliable way we can use photography to study social change is through the systematic visual measurement technique of 'Repeat Photography' or, simply, "rephotography"' (2011: 133; See also Doucet

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2019). Also included, were recent comments by student who visited the area on a field trip supervised by the author, and other unique visions of Gowanus.

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'A city to look at' and 'presenting the world to the city': 'Worlding' New Town, West Bengal[1]

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Through a reading of two spatial configurations, the Biswa Bangla Gate and Eco Park, in New Town, West Bengal — a planned city being developed east of Salt Lake City, east of Kolkata — this article argues that a lack of engagement with the designed and planned spaces promoted by the state has led to New Town being framed within a 'dystopic' and 'ghastly' register. The article contends that such architectural punctuations are the state's concrete interventions in the urban fabric to mark its arrival on the global stage while simultaneously legitimising the urban development process and the ruling party. The discussion addresses the Biswa Bangla Gate — an elevated viewing deck and cafe maintained by a state-owned limited company — and the Eco Park — which houses miniature versions of the seven wonders of the world—as architectural interventions to assemble 'a city to look at' and to 'present the world to the city'. Through a reading of the above two spatial configurations, the article conceptualizes the aesthetic field of New Town as a field that spectacularizes the cityscape to assemble networks of affective, material and discursive linkages from the urban to the global through its peculiar worlding practices.[2] The development of New Town links the global with the urban in a particular way by enacting Bengali identity with global aspirations and claims, staging the arrival of the twenty-first century urban in West Bengal.
Keywords: New Town, West Bengal, urban, global, architecture, worlding.

> 'This society which eliminates geographical distance reproduces distance internally as spectacular separation.' (Guy Debord 1977: 167)

Introduction

New Town is a planned and developing city east of Salt Lake, east of Kolkata. As one traverses New Town, whether to visit it or to enter Kolkata or Salt Lake City, one is greeted with broad roads punctuated with various kinds of state-sanctioned installations, sculptures and architectures. Among a seemingly scattered and thinly populated town, these state-led designed spatial punctuations stand out as markers of intent to develop and transform the landscape into a particular form of urbanity. This article focuses on two such spatial punctuations in New Town, which are planned and managed by state bodies: the Biswa Bangla Gate (Global Bengal Gate) (see Figure 1) and the miniature replicas of the seven wonders of the world in Eco Park (see Figure 4).

Such state-sanctioned spatial punctuations are not a novel phenomenon but have been characteristic of planned cities in India, which is clearly visible in Chandigarh, the paradigmatic planned city of postcolonial India. What differs across these postcolonial cities is the precise

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[2] Worlding is the 'art of being global' (Ong 2011b: 3). In urban studies 'worlding' is evoked to shed light on the limitations of the conception of 'world cities' which foreclose a study of various other claims to or processes mobilizing the local and the global. To that extent, 'worlding is both an object of analysis and a method of critical deconstruction' (Roy 2011: 314).

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configuration of such designed spaces and how they invoke certain values to ground the legitimacy of postcolonial urban projects. Postcolonial urban projects in India have had diverse trajectories. As urbanisation and urban planning of new cities in India is an ongoing process, new planned cities are legitimised through certain discursive, material and affective configurations. For example, the Open Hand Monument in the Capitol Complex, in Chandigarh, evokes a precise relationship between the new city and the world by evoking the value of altruism (Moos 1977, Kalia 1999). In the case of New Town, the spaces and built environment under consideration spectacularize urbanity and globality while evoking a Bengali cultural past to announce universal fraternity.

In both contexts, the values espoused by the ruling political parties and their leaders are mobilized to legitimise the planned urban development. In the case of Chandigarh, the Nehruvian Indian National Congress legitimised both the secular paradigm and the city of Chandigarh (Kalia 1999). In the case of New Town, the Left Front's neo-liberal adventurism in the 1990s and 2000s was replaced by the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) and its leader Mamata Banerjee's left populism, which reconfigured New Town as global while being resolutely Bengali.

Figure 1. View of Biswa Bangla Gate from the road. January 2019. Source: Author.

New Town was planned and developed on agrarian land acquired under the stewardship of the Left Front government. This transition of New Town has been argued to be a process of primitive accumulation, in the sense described by Bhattacharya and Sanyal as 'the transformation of non-capitalist means of production into capitalist ones' (2011: 42). This shift from a subsistence agrarian economy to a service economy has been 'reshaping and restructuring urban space in post-colonial societies' (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011: 42). Land acquisition for New Town met a different fate than land acquisition in other parts of rural Bengal. While the Left Front government's demise was sealed by anti-land acquisition protests led by the leader of AITC, Mamata Banerjee, the victory of AITC did not mean halting the

planning and development of New Town. Instead, as we shall see in the following case studies, New Town emerged as a site to legitimise a particular form of urbanity by punctuating a text by Mamata Banerjee at a central monument of New Town.

Pardo and Prato (Pardo and Prato 2019: 9) note the necessary distinction between legality and legitimacy calling for 'a sociological analysis of its diverse sources…everyday-life apperceptions…of legitimacy'. They note that 'apperceptions of legitimacy are not static, but are subject to constant change…due to changes in the values, norms and needs within a specific socioeconomic and cultural context at a specific historical juncture' (Pardo and Prato 2018: 4). In the case of West Bengal, the demise of the Left Front government which ruled the state for thirty-four years and the rise of AITC signified a radical reorientation of state legitimacy.

Mamata Banerjee and AITC's construction and production of legitimacy invoke a range of disparate concerns; as Chaudhury notes, 'Banerjee's populist self-making claims legitimacy by combining her performance of political asceticism with other cultural constructs, such as nativist political rhetoric and Hindu religious iconography' (Chaudhury 2021: 6). While Chaudhury's analysis is valid, it misses out on AITC and Banerjee's legitimacy-making that also invokes the global in a particular manner while simultaneously drawing on nativist constructs across time. Such a diverse mobilization of cultural constructs and morals reflects Pardo's cautionary remark that 'morality and legitimacy […] is often informed by, or interacts strongly with, complex frameworks of thought and beliefs — religious, political, legal, etc.' (Pardo 2000: 3).

The process of legitimacy-making in New Town mobilizes a set of worlding practices; that is, practices that are 'constitutive, spatializing, and signifying gestures that variously conjure up worlds beyond current conditions of urban living' (Ong 2011b: 13). As it will become evident through the case studies, 'they articulate disparate elements from near and far; and symbolically re-situate the city in the world' (Ong 2011b: 13). In his study of Bogotá, Montero (2017) notes the link between processes of worlding and legitimacy. Montero argues that in the case of Bogotá, worlding manifested 'through the elevation of a particular urban policy or planning mechanism to the category of international "best practice".' (Montero 2017: 112). This reflects an invocation of the international or the global to legitimise local urban policies in the post-colony; as Montero notes, 'world recognition…legitimizes certain models as appropriate ways of governing, organizing, and managing urban space' (Montero 2017: 112). Likewise, Pardo and Prato (2019: 2-3) indicate 'international legitimacy' as one of the sources of state legitimacy.

The case of New Town demonstrates the entanglement of legitimacy-making and worlding processes in a particular manner. Manifesting spectacle is central to this entanglement. Through the spectacular spatial configurations in New Town, a particular relationality of urban and global is enacted, worlding New Town and legitimising New Town, the ruling party AITC and its leader.

Debord (1977) conceived 'spectacle' as a *separation, through representation, language, images, party, urban, etc.*, wherein they come to attain a life of their own and in the process

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determine the matter they emerged from in capitalist modernity. As we shall see below, this separation opens up a space for the mobilization of a range of affects, discourses and materialities. The spectacular architectural punctuations in the urban landscape of Asian cities promoted by the state mobilize a range of discourses, materialities and affects which announce the arrival of Asian cities on the global stage. Ong argues that a

> 'dynamic approach to spectacular cities…shows that the stakes in urban spectacles go beyond mere capital accumulation to include the generation of promissory values about the geopolitical significance of the city and the country that it stands for in metonymic relation. The skyscraper megalomania of Asian cities is never only about attracting foreign investments, but fundamentally also about an intense political desire for world recognition.' (Ong 2011a: 209)

It is important to stress the phrase 'never only' in the above quote. This is not to suggest that spectacular architectures are not assembled to attract capital investment. As Malzer (2020) notes in the case of Yinchuan, the Chinese state assembled an Islamic city to attract capital from the Middle East. It is important to point out that accompanying this desire to attract capital was the desire for 'domestic and international recognition' (Malzer 2020: 147).

The role of capital and the invitation for further capital investment does not exhaust the affective, material and discursive mobilizations in a city such as New Town where state intervention in punctuating the urban landscape with architectural designs is considerable, especially on the Major Arterial Road. It is important to note that 'worlding cities are mass dreams rather than imposed visions' (McCann et al. 2013: 585). By focusing on spaces designed by the state, I am not suggesting that the state is an actor above and beyond the social (Latour 2005).

This article is about two state-sanctioned spatial configurations, Biswa Bangla Gate (Global Bengal Gate) and miniature replicas of the seven wonders of the world in Eco Park, developed over and along the Major Arterial Road in New Town. The article reads these spectacular spatial configurations as sites of worlding where urbanity and globality are spectacularized. By doing so the article challenges existing literature on New Town, which frames New Town primarily within the registers of the 'dystopic' (Dey et al. 2016) and 'ghastly' (Roy 2011). The article argues that if one considers the intent of state-led designed spaces in New Town, there is a necessity of breaking away from scaffolded narratives of New Town that paint it in a 'dystopic' and 'ghastly' register. Through the above two architectural and designed punctuations, New Town links the global with the urban in a particular way, enacting Bengali identity with global aspirations, announcing the arrival of the Bengali urban in the twenty-first century.

A growing body of literature on New Town has been published in recent years. These works have approached New Town from a range of perspectives ranging from concerns of land acquisition (Mallik 2018, Dey et al. 2016, Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011), place-making (Kundu 2016), the information technology sector (Mitra 2013), state-market relationship (Sengupta 2013) to the concern of primitive accumulation (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011). Due

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to a lack of precise readings of state-sanctioned architectural and landscape configurations, the dominant articulation paints the town as 'ghastly' (Roy 2011) and 'dystopic' (Dey et al. 2016) without engaging with the intent of state-led planned and designed spaces.

In this article, I deploy the worlding lens to make sense of these state-sanctioned punctuations to move away from the static and rigid notions of world-class cities. To approach a city through the worlding lens is to unpack the discourses, practices and aspirations that are mobilized to construct and produce global city futures. However, as Connolly (2019) notes, the existing literature on worlding requires a significant amount of nuance and specificity to chart out various particular strategies. Recent literature deploying the worlding perspective has followed this trajectory of unpacking specific worlding practices while retaining a comparative spirit (Connolly 2019, Beier 2019, Burte and Kamath 2017, Nkula-Wenz 2019, Ruez 2021). The spectacular has also emerged as a significant mode of worlding accompanied by re-articulation of history and anxiety over cultural identity (Chu 2015) and with the 'ascendance of the experience economy' (Chu and Sanyal 2015: 400).

By doing a material-semiotic reading of the above two spatial configurations, the article conceptualizes the aesthetic of the visual field in New Town as being a field which functions by spectacularizing the cityscape to create networks of affective, material and discursive linkages from the urban to the global. Here, aesthetic is a process which foregrounds certain processes and effaces others (Rancière 2004: 12-19). New Town's aesthetic is that of a city to look at from an elevated deck, foregrounding the landscape of high-rise apartments and the mobility of automobiles and the metro (see Figure 2), while at the same time foregrounding the presence of the world in the city. By locating the above assembling of spectacle, it becomes possible to locate worlding processes and legitimacy-making that accompany spectacle such as above.

Figure 2. View of the road heading towards Action Area I from Biswa Bangla Gate. July 2019. Source: Author.

Before moving on to a reading of the spaces, some clarification is due regarding Bengal and its specific relationship to culture to make sense of the architectural interventions. Also, a short history of New Town is provided to locate and contextualize the sites.

Of Bengal, Culture and New Town

The presence of spectacular configurations in a contemporary city can be read as sites of marketing to attract capital, an obvious feature of 'world-cities' (Gordon 1999). However, following Ong (2011), I noted before that it is also important to locate these spectacular configurations within the discursive and affective realm; specifically, the symbolic role that these spectacular configurations play. This distinction allows the possibility of mapping the emergent urban imaginary and the range of discursive and affective mobilizations that scale (Sarkar 2021) these urban landscapes. The lens of 'worlding' (Ong 2011a, 2011b; Roy 2011) allows for the possibility of opening up particular processes of claims to 'instantiate some vision of the world in formation' (Roy 2011: 312); that is, as Roy and Ong explain, 'such experiments cannot be conceptually reduced to instantiations of universal logics of capitalism or postcolonialism. They must be understood as worlding practices…the art of being global' (Roy and Ong 2011: xv)

The literature on New Town, be it the book-length work of Dey, Samaddar and Sen (2016) or remarks made by Roy (2011), frame the city within an affective register of the 'dystopic', 'standing still' and 'ghastly'. These writings are based on fieldwork, visits or reports of New Town from close to a decade before my fieldwork. This feeling of desolation that the above authors allude to can be one of the ways of making sense of New Town but they fail to grasp the role of the spectacular configurations such as Biswa Bangla Gate and the miniature replicas of the seven wonders in Eco Park play. Though New Town remains relatively unpopulated which has also resulted in it not attaining municipal status, the New Town that Roy writes off is a far cry from what exists there today.

> 'Today, New Town is described as a "nightmare without an end" — bad roads, dirty water, poor drainage, insufficient electricity. In many of the housing complexes, there is no water supply or no connection to the power grid. Residents are quickly moving out and the area is becoming deserted. Those who remain survive in the ways in which slum-dwellers and squatters do in poor, informal settlements — by buying water from vendors, using diesel generators, and making do with unpaved streets (Mitra and Chakraborti 2008). New Town is the ghost town of homegrown neoliberalism, one where the ruins of the suburban middle-class dream are starkly visible.' (Roy 2011: 275)

Roy's description of New Town reads like a time capsule from another era. New Town today registers a significant number of business parks housing various service sector organizations, universities, think tanks, art galleries, etc.; it is now well connected with the larger urban agglomeration with buses and a metro system is under construction.

One finds a different New Town when one focuses on the state-led designed architectures. These architectural configurations, following Ong (2011a), are not particular to New Town but

are a feature of emerging Asian cities. In order to read these architectures and the peculiar mode in which they mobilize certain affects and discourses, it is important to locate how the idea of 'culture' has played out in Bengal.

Bengal is not just West Bengal in its territorial extent since the very idea of 'Bengal' has far exceeded a territorial notion over the years and has become a linguistic sphere which can aptly be evoked by the term Banglaphone (Bose 2018). This move away from the territory to a linguistic sphere (which is also undoubtedly exclusionary) can be linked to a range of processes by which the Bengali identity has been reshaped through migration, partition and also its peculiar relationship with colonialism and capitalism. Despite this broader notion of Bengal, the spectacular architectural configurations which concern this article are concrete acts that display the intent of the state of West Bengal in marking out, enacting and evoking a particular configuration of the urban imaginary in the twenty-first century. Among the generic architectures of the residential buildings, business parks and more mundane infrastructures of roads and lights, these spaces stand as intents of marking out difference by evoking a particular relationship to 'culture' and its relationship with the 'world'. This is in no way to suggest that the other sites of New Town do not display processes of 'worlding'. It is rather to suggest that it is in these spectacular configurations developed and planned by the state that one can unequivocally map the intent of the state and the range of affects and discourses mobilized to engender the processes of 'worlding' New Town.

Bengal's relationship with the category of 'culture' has been a fraught terrain with engagements and articulations situated in a conservative imaginary, a cosmopolitan imaginary and a Marxist imaginary (Sartori 2008, Roy 2014). In Bengal, 'culturalism' — that is, the elaborate manoeuvres to articulate and signify 'culture' — emerged in the late-nineteenth century as a response to the failures of liberalism and its precise interaction with capitalism in the colony. Sartori argues for a rather non-intuitive classification of the post-Swadeshi moment (1905) as the 'post-colonial' in Bengal; specifically, the power and the possibility of certain formulations, articulations functioning in Bengal with or without the presence of the colonizer. For example, Sartori argues that 'the conceptual structure of Tagorean cosmopolitanism would largely be unaffected by the fact of British withdrawal; and the same could certainly be said of M. N. Roy's Marxism' (Sartori 2008: 230). Sartori's argument is fundamentally premised on articulating 'the cultural as socio-historically constituted subjectivity' wherein the 'culture emerges […] as a subjective moment of capitalist society' (Sartori 2008: 233).

There is another story to tell which is not elaborated here and which Sartori keeps open. It is the role that culture comes to play in Bengal with the shift of the capital of British India away from Calcutta to New Delhi and the later movement of economic activity from Calcutta to Bombay. It is within this context of deindustrialization that Calcutta has often come to be painted in a narrative of decay in the late 20th century (Majumder 2018). It is within this narrative of decay, of loss of stature, however, that Calcutta becomes Kolkata, and West Bengal has been trying to become Bango or Paschim Bango. This process of regionalization is parallelly accompanied by violent land acquisition drives of the Left Front government for

creating world-class cities and special economic zones (SEZs) and its eventual demise followed by the rise of a left-populist government of All India Trinamool Congress.

What does 'culture' become in this moment and how does it position itself within a 'worlding city'? Through the following two case studies, I argue that the Bengali cultural past from the 'Bengal Renaissance' onward is reframed within a register of cosmopolitanism and is also spectacularized, that is, it is separated from its initial moment to re-articulate an assemblage of an 'urban' in New Town where a city is unequivocally assembled to look at while also presenting the world at home. This evocation of the Bengal Renaissance is not particular to New Town but is a broader tendency 'to redefine a "new Bengal" — one that draws on the nineteenth-century tradition of Bengal Renaissance, religious tolerance, and local pride' (Basu 2019), which is accompanied by other configurations evoking globality through a replica of the Big Ben and a comparison of the Kolkata waterfront with London's waterfront.

To evoke the tired Tagorean phrase, the city is 'the home and the world' (Chakraborty 2016) both near and far. This configuration of the home and the world is achieved through concrete governmental interventions and the state's planning apparatus by assembling architectures and landscapes where flow, mobility and the rising skyline coupled with the symbolic and material presence of the world contribute to the worlding of New Town.

Context: A short history of New Town

Post-1990s, there has been an eastward expansion of the urban agglomeration of Kolkata. This is not to suggest that developments did not take place in the south or north, but there has been a concerted shift of the planning energies eastward during this period. East of Calcutta, east of Salt Lake were and still are filled with swampy lands which go by the name of East Calcutta Wetlands. These regions remained for much of twentieth century a natural boundary of the city of Calcutta but, following Salt Lake's execution, the eastward expansion of the city slowly began (Chattopadhyaya 1990), with the construction of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011) that connect the northern and southern parts of the city by going around the city and with the development of smaller townships such as Patuli and East Calcutta Township (Roy 2002).

A smaller settlement by the generic name of New Township had already been planned in the early 1980s east of Salt Lake City (Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority 1982). A concerted mobilization of intent began in the mid-1990s. A New Town was proposed in 1996 by the Department of Housing, Government of West Bengal. By 1999, a state-owned private company West Bengal Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (WBHIDCO) was set up to plan and execute projects and the process of land acquisition began at the turn of the millennium. The land acquisition process led to wide mobilization and protests by the villagers and the civil society; however, it could not mobilize public support or capture the public conscience in the same the way as the land acquisition in the hinterlands had led to the electoral defeat of the Left Front in West Bengal and the rise to power of the All-India Trinamool Congress (Samaddar 2016, Dey et al. 2016).

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The new town was supposed to be named after the longest-serving chief minister of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Jyoti Basu, as Jyoti Basu Nagar — this would be akin to the official name of Salt Lake City as Bidhannagar, after the former Indian National Congress chief minister Bidhan Chandra Roy — but the electoral defeat of the Left Front in 2011 led to the place being named with the generic signifier of 'New Town' (Dey, Samaddar and Sen 2016). New Town has a distinct morphology compared to the older planned city of Salt Lake. The city is divided into four 'Action Areas', three of them are under development at the moment. The city houses various Information Technology (IT) and business parks dotted across the city with a large density in the Central Business District (CBD). It displays certain characteristics of compact cities with multiple-intensive land use, which results in a mix of residential, commercial and industrial complexes in close proximity (Lau et al. 2006).

New Town displays a poly-centric topography with the Major Arterial Road housing key cultural centres but curving in and out of New Town to provide it with a distinct structure. As I have indicated earlier, New Town caters to the service sector by attracting and housing service sector workplaces, financial institutions, universities, think tanks, research institutions, art galleries, hospitals, and so on.

Biswa Bangla Gate: A City to Look at

'A group of young friends are taking a selfie. After being unable to frame the gate and themselves in one frame, they settled for a picture of themselves with the larger gate in the background as a fragment.

A family takes its picture more traditionally where one of the younger ones is asked to take the picture of the group under the gate.

One of the girls adjusts her hair while looking into the selfie camera.

One of the boys sits on the grass and poses for a picture to be taken by a friend with a camera on a tripod.

Cameras are everywhere. People want to be seen, and see this place. They want to see and present themselves here and in this place. Landscape pictures are rare. The developers/architects know what an important role selfies play; hence, they have designated signs for selfie zones anticipating the act, 'knowing very well the spectacular function that this piece of architecture and the landscape behind would play.'[3]

Before I began my fieldwork, on my visits to the New Town to get a sense of the spatial structure of the city in early 2017, an acquaintance who worked for one of the corporations housed in an information technology (IT) park in New Town made a passing remark that a 'skywalk' over the Narkel Bagan intersection in New Town was being constructed. The Narkel Bagan intersection in many ways is the locus of New Town. This locus might not be the mathematical locus of the town but symbolically it remains the centre of the town as it is at the centre of the three Action Areas, three major modules of the planned city. The very thought of a skywalk in New Town intrigued me, so the following day I took a bus to visit Narkel Bagan

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[3] Fieldnotes, 25th July 2019.

to see how the construction was progressing. A 'skywalk' brought to my mind the elaborate network of skywalks in Mumbai that connect various local rail stations with the neighbourhoods and particularly the roads and intersections around it (Harris 2018). In New Town, the metro was nowhere near completion and the town was still sparsely populated so it sounded odd to me that a skywalk of any sort would be constructed at this point.

When I visited Narkel Bagan, I noticed large white tubes and various other parts of the structure and construction equipment lying around. The construction work in no way resembled a skywalk. Faced with disappointment, I forgot all about it until I returned for my fieldwork in 2018.

It is important to note that the structure that was eventually erected and named Biswa Bangla Gate went through a series of planned locations in many different parts of Kolkata before finally being erected at the Narkel Bagan intersection. It was previously planned to be erected on the VIP Road that services the Airport; then, in another spot in New Town, and also near Chinar Park, on the way to the Airport. All these proposals were scrapped due to legal problems of land, logistical concerns of not having enough space on the road, considerations of elevated metro corridor and flyovers and aesthetic concerns about what the view from the elevated viewing deck looked like. In older designs, a globe was supposed to hang in the centre of the circular viewing deck which met with an accident and the plan was eventually scrapped.

The Gate is managed by a state-owned organisation, West Bengal Housing Infrastructure Development Corporation (WBHICO), which also played a key role in its development. A state-owned café chain known as Café Ekante provides catering services inside the structure.

I first visited the Biswa Bangla Gate in mid-2019 towards the end of my fieldwork. During my period of fieldwork through 2018, the Gate was always a towering structure, which acted as the counterpoint to ofttimes mundane everyday life and the generic buildings and apartments that crowded the residential neighbourhoods. The Gate is visible from quite a distance when approaching the intersection of Narkel Bagan, whether travelling in private vehicles or public transport; the future, elevated metro route that will pass and curve close to the Gate is meant to provide a view of the Gate to the metro users, at the same time, the visitors at the Gate will be able to view the metro run pass on the corridor.

I visited the Gate by booking an afternoon time slot in mid-2019, towards the end of the monsoon. To gain access to the viewing deck, the visitors must pay and book one of the available timeslots other than lunch and dinner time. The lunch and dinner slots are priced much higher and include buffet services for the customers. At 100 INR or 1.3 USD), visitors are allowed to walk around and observe from the viewing deck for 45 minutes. 100 INR is a significant barrier to entry for most working-class people for a casual visit. A significant number of visitors that I encountered were either tourists or had travelled from nearby suburbs. The visitors were mostly accompanied by friends and families.

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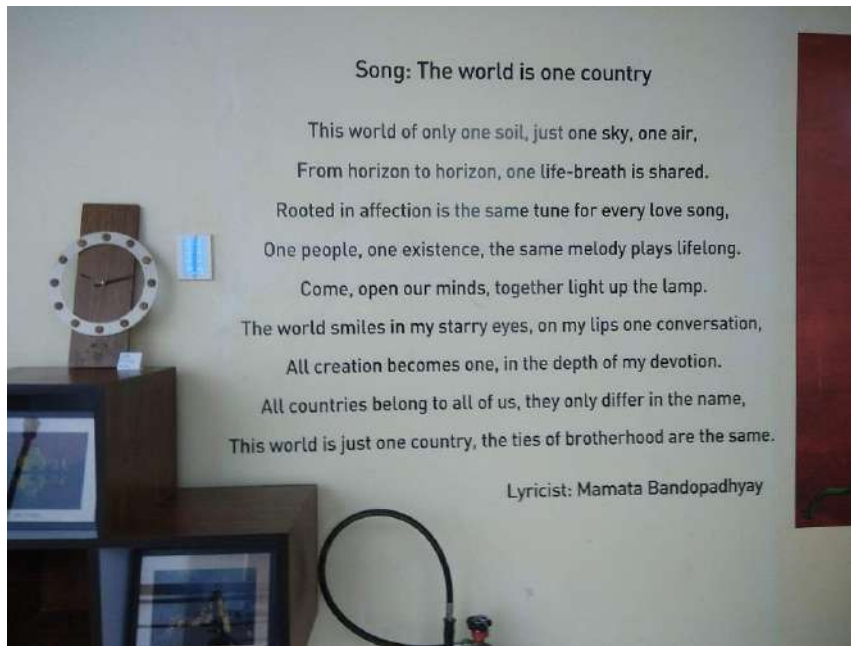© 2022 Urbanities

Figure 3: The view when one enters the viewing deck of Biswa Bangla Gate. A poem by the current chief minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee (in English). A Bengali version of the text is also displayed next to it. July 2019. Source: Author.

Much like buying a seat at a cinema hall for a right to view the screen from a certain angle and distance (Raqs Media Collective 2002), the Gate provides an elevated view of the skyline of New Town, the intersection underneath and the four roads running into the distance, and a view of the elevated metro corridor. When one takes the elevator to the viewing deck, one is instantly greeted with a poem written by the current chief minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. The poem proclaims an internationalist outlook and the solidarity of mankind (see Figure 3).

Along the interior wall of the viewing deck, portraits of nationalist public figures, historical people from the Bengal Renaissance and other personalities associated with Bengal are displayed. Aphorisms and quotations by Tagore, Ram Mohan Roy, Sarojini Naidu, Vivekananda, Netaji, Ramkrishna and the likes are printed on the walls all around the viewing deck.

Thus, the viewing deck (see Figure 2) provides a view of the roads underneath heading to-and-fro the intersection, a view of the skyline and the elevated metro structure while framing the experience with texts and aphorisms which are meant to convey to the visitor a certain understanding of Bengali modernity with aspirations for the global.

Eco Park: Presenting the world to the city
Eco Park is a large park located on the Major Arterial Road connecting Action Area I and Action Area II. The park is located to the north of the Narkel Bagan intersection. Unlike the parks in Salt Lake and Kolkata, which are open to the public, the park charges an entry fee of 30 INR or 0.4 USD per individual. The park has various attractions ranging from theme gardens to varied simulations of ecological zones and recreational areas. For most middle classes 30

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INR is not a significant amount, disposed of without thought, but for a substantial number of working-class people the amount is exclusionary, which means a visit to the park is seen as an event rather than a casual visit. During the times that I visited the park, I witnessed large groups of friends and families visiting the park across classes, some having travelled from distant suburbs.

The plan for the Eco Park was prepared by Bengal Urban Infrastructure Development Limited (BUIDL) and Pradeep Sachdeva Design Associates, and was commissioned by West Bengal Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation (WBHIDCO). The park is currently maintained by WBHIDCO.

The northern part of Eco Park is in a small enclave that requires an additional entry fee of 30 INR. It houses miniature versions of the wonders of the world, such as the Taj Mahal, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, Christ the Redeemer (of Rio), Easter Island statues, the Colosseum and The Lost City of Petra. On the website of Eco Park, the design intent of the wonders of the world is articulated in a language of time-space compression. 'Internet can make the world so close and small', it argues; hence, 'Eco Park and HIDCO Authority is also ready to make the people traveller (sic) of world tour through Eco Park Seven Wonders zone near by (sic) their home at New Town, Kolkata' ("Prakriti Tritha" n.d.).

Figure 4: View of the wonders of the world section of Eco Park with the Taj Mahal and the Colosseum in the same frame. June 2019. Source: Author.

This section of the park is relatively small compared to the overall size of the park, thus, it feels denser compared to other parts of the park, which tend to be thinly populated with people. In a small area, one can glance across the replicas from various parts of the world, with the elevated metro corridor under construction in the background.

The presentation and erection of miniature versions of the wonders of the world link the urban to the global, the local and the global in a condensed manner. The fact that the representation of the monuments and ancient wonders is kitschy is beside the point, because

representational adequacy is not the concern of such a designed space. At a tactile level, for example, the replicas feel like cheap imitations made out of plaster where it represents clay, marble, or stone. It is the mobilization of a range of flows, of affects that frame and allow the city to present the world locally and, in the process, announce the city and the state's arrival on the global stage.

While the Biswa Bangla Gate presents the curated wall, the urban skyline and the mobility of the roads from a particular perspective for a price, the enclave of the seven wonders present metonymically the world to the city of New Town by assembling representations of certain wondrous architectures and monuments for a price. Through a condensed experience of travelling the world in New Town, the contemporary urban in West Bengal is enacted as resolutely global.

It is worth noting that these architectural replicas are visible ephemerally for the vehicles passing by on the Major Arterial Road, especially the replica of the Jesus Christ of Rio, and the back of the Eastern Island statues. The wonders will also be visible from the elevated metro, which will pass over the Major Arterial Road. Though the sites themselves have an entry fee, their sheer presence in the landscape means that the sites and architecture assembled exceed that quantified price of the experience by doting the landscape with spectacle for the passers-by.

Aesthetics of New Town

The above architectural interventions punctuate the urban landscape with a particular visual economy for consumption and production. The visual infrastructures function as sites where the urban is aestheticized in a particular manner. Infrastructure has emerged as a central driving force of contemporary imaginations and discourses, which produce fields of desires and imagination. This is why infrastructure must be seen not just as a field of politics but also of aesthetics, of poetics, wherein the signifier does not necessarily refer to some direct signified (Larkin 2013).

As assemblages that are ordered spatiotemporally in a certain way, the two visual infrastructures described above assemble a range of affects, discourses and bodies linking the time and space in a particular configuration, aestheticizing the urban in contemporary West Bengal in a very particular manner. The cities of Kolkata and Salt Lake had their share of global histories and linkages from the pre-colonial mercantile era to colonial and post-colonial. New Town remains steadfast in mobilizing a global-urban linkage explicitly by visualizing it and crafting a commodity out of that visual experience.

The Biswa Bangla Gate's walls mobilize the nationalist and modern Bengali history while at the same time announcing the universal fraternity of mankind. While the wall acts as curation and celebration of mankind through a deployment of a particular arrangement of Bengali personalities, the viewing deck opens up to the city's landscape, displaying the skyline of the city with buildings and the elevated metro corridor. Similarly, the deck provides a particular viewing angle above the intersection which allows for a view of the mobility of bodies; in

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particular, the vehicles on the roads. The gate, in turn, is a marker in the landscape for the moving bodies and vehicles on the road. The Biswa Bangla Gate then locates itself in the visual field of New Town in a very particular way, wherein it is an architecture *made to look at* and *to look from*. The Biswa Bangla Gate is then a conduit of aesthetic mobilizations which foregrounds itself at the Narkel Bagan intersection while foregrounding the skyline and the mobility of vehicles from the perspective of the viewing deck.

The miniature replicas of the wonders of the world, instead, *present the world to the city*. While, on the one hand, the visitor to the city or a resident of New Town is invited to look at the city from the framing of the Biswa Bangla Gate, the city also offers the residents and visitors another framing where the world is presented in the city, accessible and nearby.

The function of these architectural interventions challenges the dominant framing of New Town as 'dystopic' (Dey et al. 2016), which, as I mentioned earlier, fails to capture the intent of state-led planning and how it mobilizes a range of affective, discursive and material flows with concrete architectural and designed punctuations in the landscape of New Town. The 'worlding' of New Town is a process, which is sustained and operationalized by such precise punctuations in the landscape of New Town.

The 'separation' (Debord 1977) between the city and its economic undergirding ― what Dey, Sammadar and Sen (2016) call the logistical grid ― and its re-framed representation of itself through Biswa Bangla Gate and the miniature replicas is the space where state-led planning mobilizes a range of processes, worlding the city in its own particular and vernacular framing of the global, mobilizing the art of being global; a worlding that dissolves the distance between the home and the world, the urban and the global, the far and the near through precise punctuations in the landscape.

Conclusion

Following the process of primitive accumulation that marked the inaugural moves of New Town (Bhattacharya and Sanyal 2011), the above-described architectures today mobilize a range of affective, material and discursive linkages to ground the city of New Town within a register that marks the entry of West Bengal's urbanism into the twenty-first century.

Though New Town's history has remained contested, because of the land acquisition drive in its initial years, these configurations allow the ruling party and the state to grant legitimacy to the urban development process that is still underway in New Town. Granting legitimacy to New Town remains an important concern because of AITC's central role in the anti-land acquisition movement in Bengal that led to the ousting of the erstwhile Left Front government. At a time when throughout India cities are being renamed to mark revivalism of 'lost histories', New Town bears its generic English name while enacting a particular form of Bengali identity; an identity that has assembled a city to look at while presenting the world to the city. By enacting such an assemblage, New Town locates itself firmly within a global history of urbanism where the city and the world are intimately linked and the world is only a step away.

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Special Section (Part 2): *Power Games and Symbolic Icons in Evolving Urban Landscapes*
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IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar on Urban Ethnography and Theory: Report and Research Abstracts

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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 is urgent and important. Urbanisation proceeding at such a pace has meant increases in the number and size of cities but also continues to alter the social fabric of urban centres, sometimes in profound ways, leading to new policy priorities (such as the globally encompassing Sustainable Development Goals). 'States of emergency' (prompted by violence, pandemics, crises) add a further layer of complexity.

Aware of pressing methodological and theoretical questions raised by these multifaceted contemporary urban changes, we convened a Field Training School and Research Seminar in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany, Italy on 18-26 July 2022. The working language was English.

With the collaboration of an international group of high-calibre scholars[1] and the financial and organizational support of the International Urban Symposium-IUS, this event brought together 25 postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral scholars from around the world. It offered an interactive learning environment and extended opportunities to discuss in depth the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates. Students had the opportunity to present their own research and receive feedback from leading scholars; and to engage in team work and networking.

Over 9 full days, the activities developed through 21 interactive Teaching Seminars, for a total of 38 hours; a 1-day targeted field trip followed by 6 hours discussion of students' reports; and an 8-hour Research Seminar during which students' presentations were discussed by the group.

The Teaching Seminars focused on methodological and theoretical debates, benefiting from the leaders' wide range of ethnographic, methodological and theoretical expertise to address interrelated topical issues, including urban diversity; migration; informality; legitimacy and legitimation; governance, stereotype and stigma; sport mega-events; rituals; crisis, emergency and conflict; public space, vernacular landscape, heritage, identity.

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[1] They were, in alphabetical order, Gary Armstrong (City University London, UK); Subhadra Mitra Channa (University of Delhi, India); Ebru Kayaalp Jurich (Yeditepe University, Turkey); Jerome Krase (City University New York, USA); Marcello Mollica (University of Messina, Italy); David Nugent (Emory University, USA); Italo Pardo (University of Kent, UK); Giuliana B. Prato (University of Kent, UK); Michel Rautenberg (University of St Etienne, France); James Rosbrook-Thompson (City University London, UK); Liora Sarfati (Tel Aviv University, Israel); Manos Spyridakis (University of the Peloponnese, Greece); Adeem Suhail (Yale University, USA).

A key aim of this exercise was to train junior scholar in the 'art' of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory. The in-class work was supplemented by structured city walks and focused observational field trips on which students produced field reports.

With a view to honing and developing junior scholars' skills as future professionals, the School culminated in a Research Seminar that gave participants the opportunity to present their work, engage in academic debate and benefit from expert feedback from the teaching staff. This was a promising exercise. Below are the abstracts from their work. Revised and expanded versions of selected papers are in preparation for publication in this journal.

The Research Abstracts
(in alphabetical order)

Flaviana Astone, University of Messina, Italy, flavy21095@gmail.com
Title: *Sicilian Identity as an Instrument of Political Vindication.*
Abstract: This study aims to reveal the ideological nature of the name given in 2008 to Sicily's heritage authority, which became the Department of Cultural Heritage and Sicilian Identity. The move was desired by the autonomist movements, adopting a clearly critical stance with regard to national policies. I start with a critical analysis of the definition of Sicilian identity, as it is constructed by public institutions and ordinary people of the island, by foreign intellectuals. The aim is to analyse what Sicilian identity is, not as a substantial material heritage, but as the result of the construction of a system of ideas. In many cases this system of ideas hides economic interests that intend to promote goods that are or appear to be part of a cultural identity. We are convinced that Sicily has always been the crossroads of various civilizations, but it could also be remembered for its vineyards, citrus groves, gastronomy, and sea. We may also be convinced that the island's basic identity is made up of many typical features, such as the *Carretto Siciliano*, the *Opera dei Pupi*, the Holy Week processions. Even today we feed this construction work, preserving and nurturing a myth, resulting from the need to label everything, creating stereotypes, to give historical depth to everything. We refer to literature, cinema and photography as means of creating cultural identity. Some particular cases will be examined that can highlight the great role of these artistic activities. The Sicilian community becomes an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2018), in which the Sicilians themselves think they are made the same way. In a contemporary and urban society, it is completely misleading to speak of belonging to a community made up of equals, sharing a 'Sicilian identity'.

Reference: Anderson, B. 2018. *Comunità immaginate. Origini e fortuna dei nazionalismi*. Rome: Laterza.

Giulia Bitto, University of Messina, Italy, giulia.bitto@unime.it
Title: *The Autobiographies of Mafia Inmates in the Catania Bicocca Prison: Reflections on an Almost Impossible Ethnography*.
Abstract: The ethnographic project I carried out with mafia inmates in the Catania Bicocca Prison, consisting of the guided writing of life stories in the early months of 2022, represented a considerable ethnographic challenge. This work aims to examine the difficulties of entering the penitentiary, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and by a slow bureaucracy; the ethnographic experience

conducted inside, during which I was able to observe the commitment and availability of the school teachers but also the hostility of the police towards educational projects; the almost forced choice of using the autobiographical medium and the questionnaire as an ethnographic method, considering the restrictions imposed by the prison administration; the questions raised by the analysis of these writings, since the detainees are incarcerated under article 416 bis of the Italian Criminal Code, which condemns someone only for belonging to a mafia organization without the need to have committed another crime, and for this reason it is heavily criticized. The representation that the inmates give of themselves appears very interesting, since this crime consists of behaviours and attitudes that are closely related to subjective perception, in cultural contexts where intimidation, subjugation and silence are practices considered lawful in relationships with friends, relatives and colleagues. The focus of the work consists in the application of the categories of subordination, invisibility, locality and finally representation; thus, a complex and particular social reality emerges, living on multiple levels of marginalization, which build and shape life, experience and thoughts of the prisoner.

Tofie Briscolini, University Lumière Lyon II, France, t.briscolini@outlook.com
Title: *Understanding Intersection of Urban Accessibility and Subsistence Work Through Daily Mobility.*
Abstract: I examine 'The right to the city' (Lefebvre 1967) from the perspective of persons with mental health disorders, physical disabilities, or addiction in the context of metropolisation by observing their daily mobility. Beyond their diverse situations, these people share the commonality of having experienced homelessness or poor housing and they are living in collective social housing in Lyon agglomeration. To study this I am referring to the double acceptance of accessibility (Peltier 2021). First, accessibility of the city like the possibility to negotiate a way, a path, a route in the sense of Ingold and Lee (2006), so the possibility to go to one place and create familiarity. In addition, according to the second sense, accessibility like the possibility to access to rights and resources, an issue that occupies an important place in this social housing. This leads me to question the intertwining between the accessibility of the urban environment and the 'work of subsistence' and how this contributes to producing spaces and places (Collectif Rosa Bonheur 2019). Moreover, to understand this, I take into account the situation (administrative, health, etc.) of persons I am working with, their life course and the role of social work in this process. In a play of scale, I also focus on urban planning — influenced by metropolisation policies — and how it contributes in everyday motilities for these persons. Thus, accessibility seems to be a multifactorial acceptance and relational process. Finally, through the understanding of their practice, I seek to take a critical look at the production of urban space. First, I follow the everyday mobility in the urban environment. Second, I involve people in my project and create an opportunity for them to express their experience of everyday city life.

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Kenton Card, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, and University of California, Los Angeles, USA, kcard@marlboro.edu
Title: *Disrupting Neoliberal Policymaking from the Streets to the Statehouse: How Tenant Movements Impact Housing Policy in Los Angeles and Berlin.*

Abstract: This paper compares rental housing politics in Los Angeles (USA) and Berlin (Germany) between 2008-2020 by way of each city's episode of contentious politics, and what political processes influenced policy outcomes. The paper serves as a case of the emergence, escalation, and impact of tenant power. Tenant Movement Organizations employed five mechanisms to impact policymaking: (1) making demands, (2) forming coalitions, (3) promoting people's referendums, (4) engaging in collaborative dialogue with government officials, and (5) transferring agents into government. The paper draws on multiple data sources, including interviews and participant observation over ten years. The cities witnessed policy episodes with four parallel characteristics: (1) progressive local reforms, moderate regional ones, (2) shifting from defensive to offensive, (3) shifting from particular to universal, and (4) signs of a breakthrough beyond neoliberal housing policymaking. The findings suggest that the rise of tenant movements and their allies help drive policy change via multiple channels — including money power and people power — exhibiting both similarities and differences across cities.

Proshant Chakraborty, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, proshant.chakraborty@gu.se
Title: *City as Method: Repair, Maintenance and the Production of Urban Spatiotemporality in Mumbai.*

Abstract: This paper is based on an anthropological study of Mumbai's suburban railway network, which are popularly known as 'local trains'. Between 2021 and 2022, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at the oldest car shed in the city and also turned an autoethnographic lens to my experiences as a commuter. Thus, my project is situated at intersections of urban studies, science and technology studies (STS), and repair studies, and examines the interrelationships between the repair and maintenance of urban public transport infrastructures and how commuters and other inhabitants experience the city as a whole. In particular, my presentation attempts to frame the city in both epistemological and methodological frameworks. While agreeing that urban anthropology *is* anthropology (Prato and Pardo 2013), my work suggests that the city can be an *object* and *analytic* of anthropological investigation. I approach this problem in two ways. First, I build on the critique of 'methodological cityism', which looks at cities as bounded and isolated spaces (Angelo and Wachsmuth 2014); instead, the study of urban public transport reveals how cities are embedded in circuits of planetary urbanism and transnational capitalism (Brenner and Schmid 2015; Fisch 2018; also, Bear 2020), which congeal and arise through processes of materialisation and mutation (Martínez 2020). Second, my empirical focus on repair and maintenance foregrounds how entanglements of human and nonhuman agencies, including technical objects and local ecologies, are vital in producing urban flows (Anand 2019, Henke and Sims 2020). As complex sociotechnical assemblages, Mumbai's local trains are exemplary infrastructures for such an investigation. The preventive and corrective maintenance of trains forestall not only technical failures, but also breakdowns that could threaten the mobility and safety of over 8 million commuters. By studying both maintenance and commuting, city as method shows how repair is vital in producing urban spatio-temporality and mobility.

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Merlin Gillard, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research & Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium, merlin.gillard@liser.lu
Title: *Public Transport Policing and Fare Transitions.*
Abstract: My research interests are articulated around two objects. On one hand, I investigate social and spatial aspects of policing and surveillance, and what security policies do to public spaces. On the other hand, I am interested in urban governance and policies, in particular mobility policies. For me, these two areas of research are also strongly linked to right to the city approaches. In my PhD dissertation, I aim to combine them in looking at the power relationships in public transport, in the particular context of Fare-Free Public Transport. In the past, I also conducted research on the policing of events in public space (such as festivals and demonstrations).

Peter Habib, Emory University, USA, phabib@emory.edu
Title: *Spatializing Humanitarianism: Adopting Topology as a Frame of Analysis.*
Abstract: Most studies of humanitarianism focus on its institutions and practices: the range of NGOs and political organizations committed to alleviating human suffering, and the variety of tactics adopted toward this effort. Less attention has been granted toward understanding the spatial arrangements of humanitarianism — that is, how the institutions of humanitarianism fit in relation to other actors, and how this spatial arrangement in turn shapes humanitarian practice. Such an effort, I argue, reveals otherwise overlooked or obscured dimensions of humanitarianism, and thus proves valuable for understanding questions of power, change, and connection among humanitarian and political actors and institutions. This paper first presents the customary 'topography' of humanitarianism, understood as a hierarchical and horizontal framework that represent the actors and institutions involved in humanitarian practice. It then offers a series of ethnographic vignettes and discussions which reframes this expected spatial topography through a consideration of 'topology', which preferences the malleable and flexible nature of power relations over rigid hierarchies. Topology allows us to examine how institutions and structures of power are ultimately rooted in relations that are prone to bending, stretching, shifting, and even rupturing within a specific temporality, and can thus account for complex and seemingly contradictory relational dynamics. Through topology, we can explore how humanitarianism operates in contexts of contested and emergent power relations, particularly alongside state (in)action. This paper

draws from fieldwork conducted during 2019 in Lebanon's urban Bekaa Valley, in addition to written ethnographic accounts of Lebanon's humanitarian landscape.

Steffen Hornemann, University of Oslo, Norway, Steffen.Hornemann@gmail.com
Title: *Moving Meals, Moving Bodies: An Anthropological Approach Towards Urban Food Delivery Work in the Platform Economy.*
Abstract: While increasing urbanization inspires efforts towards more sustainable cities, our lives are increasingly mediated by digital technologies. The gig economy is on the rise. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has only fuelled some of these trends. Against this backdrop, brightly-clad workers for digital food delivery platforms have gained a strong visible presence in cities around the world. Urban dwellers digitally order food through the platform's phone app; the platform's algorithm then assigns delivery couriers to transport these meals across the city by bike, car, or other means of transport. While the platforms purport to provide a smooth technological solution, physical human labour is integral to their functioning. And they have a notable impact on city life: They foster new work regimes, forms of urban mobility, sociality, and engagements with technologies. So how does the food delivery platform come together on the ground through delivery workers' practices and interactions with their social, digital, and material environments? And how do we approach this urban phenomenon anthropologically? In this paper, I sketch a framework for studying how digital food delivery platforms materialize in the urban environment. Theoretically, this outlook is grounded within the anthropology of infrastructure, of the body and embodiment, as well as design anthropology. It is: 1) to help make visible the embodied labour and mobilities that enable the infrastructural network of food delivery platforms, and 2) to develop an appropriately complex understanding of the relations between the platform's social, material, and digital dimensions. I discuss the methodological implications this perspective has for an ethnographic study of urban food delivery work. Finally, I tentatively apply the framework to insights from ongoing fieldwork with food delivery workers in Oslo, Norway. In doing so, I consider how this anthropological approach might tell us about changes concerning technology, space, and labour in an urban context at large.

Sasha Killen Tycko, Emory University, USA, sasha.killen.tycko@emory.edu
Title: *City in a Forest: An Ethnography of Abandonment.*
Abstract: At the edge of Atlanta, Georgia grows one of the largest contiguous tree canopies in the urban United States. In April 2021, the city of Atlanta announced a plan to clear-cut this 381-acre forest to build one of the largest police training facilities and movie soundstage complexes in the United States, a plan that is actively contested by an anarchist encampment, local environmentalists, and city residents. How and why does a forest in a Southern U.S. metropolis archive the entanglement of urban policing, plantation agriculture, capitalist entertainment, and feral ecology? In this paper, I argue that using the forest to train police and produce big-budget films falls in with a genealogy of practices that have mediated relationships between urbanity and wilderness, bondage and freedom, and pleasure and security. The very shape of this forest — its terrain, its flora and fauna, its topography — bears the imprint of other such projects: a 20th-century city prison farm, Civil War trench warfare, topsoil extraction for landfilling, and more. The forest also bears the trace of the abandonment of these projects: a crumbling prison covered in algae, soil erosion where a cotton field was once tilled, and a pine barren growing on formerly terraced farmland. The paper

draws on ethnographic study conducted in the forest since June 2021 amid ongoing political struggles, as well as archival research on the history of the forest and the prison farm it once housed.

Sandra King-Savic, University of St.Gallen, Switzerland, sandra.king-savic@unisg.ch
Title: *Labels and Categories: The Making of Diaspora*.

Abstract: In this project, I try to understand the intersection between 'integration' in legal terms and how 'non-citizens' (Anderson 2013) situate themselves in terms of belonging vis a vis the genealogy of this legal structure that renders individuals at once inside and outside of the normative power structure that constitutes a body politique. More specifically, how do labour- and forced migrants from former Yugoslavia negotiate 'integration' in Switzerland in legal and social terms? Former Yugoslavs constitute not only a comparatively large number of 'non-citizens' in Switzerland. Individuals connections to this community also embody numerous labels and categories of migrant that statistical databases, the media, and legal practices attach to them. In an effort to illustrate the fluid character of how labelling and categorizing 'non-citizens' affects belonging empirically, this article builds on the theoretical reflections by Rebecca Hamlin, Patricia Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, Engin Isin, and Cecilia Menjívar. Key findings in this paper illustrate a two-tiered narrative: 'non-citizens' maintain their pursuit of not attracting attention to their persona — a strategy that lets individuals disappear within the larger society. At the same time, and in conjunction with the tightening legal basis of belonging to the Swiss body politique during the 1990s, interlocutors do not simply highlight discontent with the exclusionary legal practices 'non-citizens' experience. Instead, interviewees actively built Swiss-wide diaspora connections and networks to aid each other when legal and administrative questions arise, but also to influence actively the political and legal landscape in Switzerland.

Reference

Anderson, B. 2013. *Us and Them? The Dangerous Politics of Immigration Control*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Danielle Hynes, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, danielle.hynes@unsw.edu.au
Title: *Imaginaries of the Future City: Neoliberalism and Social Housing*.

Abstract: This paper analyses a case study of public housing in Sydney, Australia to explore the question: What are the social justice implications of competing imaginaries of the future city? Stable, safe and secure public housing is a vital resource, providing stability and increasing quality of life for those on very low incomes. Through an analysis of the competing imaginaries of public housing in Australia I argue that the current dominant imaginary of the city is neoliberal. The methods informing this case study are a media analysis of over 700 newspaper articles mentioning public housing published in 2020, 16 semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the public housing sector, and discourse analysis of 13 key policy documents. The analysis explored visions of the present and future of social housing expressed by various actors within the political-economic hierarchy. Within the neoliberal imaginary public housing is a stigmatised tenure type that is increasingly defunded. The withdrawal of the State from the provision of stable, secure housing serves to further marginalise those who rely on this type of housing. If this imaginary remains dominant, this trend will continue. Through exploring spaces of resistance to the dominant neoliberal imaginary and engaging with alternate visions of the city, I argue that it may be possible to broaden the collective imagination towards a more just city.

Katharine Lindquist, Emory University, USA, katharine.mary.lindquist@emory.edu
Title: *Middle-Classness as an Urban Aesthetic in Kampala, Uganda.*

Abstract: Through an examination of official state discourse, public visual culture, and original ethnographic research, I consider what middle-classness as an urban aesthetic both produces and obscures as it becomes increasingly more hegemonic in cities across Africa. Taking Kampala — the capital city of Uganda — as my vantage point, I explore how the promotion of middle-class aesthetics through state development policy has reconfigured economic and political ecologies in urban Uganda, creating a new form of urban citizenship. Specifically, draw attention to the temporality of middle-classness in Kampala. For many Ugandans in Kampala — from small shop keepers to business owners — middle-classness is future-oriented — an aspiration and commitment to a Uganda of the future. I argue that it is this temporal orientation that makes middle-classness as an urban aesthetic a dynamic space of inclusion and exclusion. Ugandans from many different walks of life can lay claim to a middle-class status of the future. Expressing middle-class aspirations thus opens up new forms of political alliances and mutuality, while of course obscuring some of the very real barriers for many to achieve such aspirations. This paper seeks to outline some of the arenas of contest and conflict around middleclass expression in Kampala and in the process suggests that middle-classness as an urban form is a key ontology of many contemporary African cities.

Sana Malik Noon, Emory University, USA, snoon@emory.edu
Title: *The Politics of Women's Rights Activism in Urban Pakistan.*

Abstract: In the new millennium, social transformations in the Muslim world have been characterized by a growing youth consciousness of social justice and human rights, animated by new media forms, transnational alliances among activists, and global movements such as #MeToo. Analysing the practices of two women's rights organizations in urban Pakistan, this paper reflects on how human rights discourses are translated, vernacularized, and mobilized by activists while lobbying for women's political representation and inclusion in the public sphere. Women's Action Forum (WAF) was established in Pakistan in 1981, by professional women advocating for women's legal protection. Girls at Dhabas (GaD) was formed in 2015, by young, middle-income women lobbying for women's safe access to public spaces, as a civic right. This essay contends that contradictions in practices, institutions, and discourses of women's rights create myriad possibilities for political action and activism in Islamic polities over time. Contemporary anthropological literature of the Muslim world has presented women's pious agency as an alternative to liberal, autonomous subjectivity. This paper explores a 'third way' between the analytical binaries of secular/religious agency, by studying urban women who constantly strategize, innovate, and reorganize their practices in response to changing socio-political conditions. In doing so, they create possibilities for alternative, gendered, and plural public spheres in Islamic nations — inclusive of women, minorities, and other social actors. Using ethnographic examples from urban Pakistan, this paper suggests that women's agency, and broader shifts in women's movements, can be understood through a close study of evolving organizational practices and discourses.

Leone Michelini, University of Messina, Italy, leone.michelini93@gmail.com
Title: *'I brought an angel to Lucifer': Malayali Migration, Religion and Care Work in Messina's District.*
Abstract: The ethnographic fieldwork carried out during this year in Messina district, both in urban and peri-urban contexts, focuses on religion driven trajectories of inclusion and exclusion in the labour

market of Malayali population from the southern Indian State of Kerala. The aim is to understand how religion intersects migration paths and experiences and how it shapes the access to a certain type of 'right to the city' and the construction of diasporic identities in Sicilian society. In particular, the belonging of migrants to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, combined with specific socioeconomic factors and with the mobilization of cultural stereotypes of ethnic-religious matrix, favours the incorporation of migrants into the highly informal, religious and moral system of domestic and care work. The important role played by local parish priests, by employment agencies based both in Rome and India and by active informal intermediaries define precise constraints and limits of these processes. First of all, working on fieldwork evidences grounded on participatory observation and non-structural interviews, we want to map the Indian migrants' presence on the territory and their forms of social, religious and working organization. Furthermore, through the collection of life stories and migration biographies, it becomes possible to problematize a universalizing view of migratory phenomena. Specific dynamics lead to creative and different re-combinations, from below, of religious and ethnics ways of belonging. Within an intersectional anthropological approach, variables such as gender, age, class and ethnicity become as important as categories of marginality, religion or informality.

Greta Rauleac, Cenral European University, Austria, Rauleac_Greta@phd.ceu.edu
Title: *Collective Life in the Linear Metropolis: A Case Study from the Romagna Region.*
Abstract: Researchers agree that public space has been in dissolution for a while. Without a doubt, the proliferation of multiple public spaces, their privatization, commercialization, and policing contributed to empty public spaces. In their everyday life, people usually 'cross through' public space, and only gather when events are staged in public spaces. This picture is confirmed by my ethnographic observation of youngsters' social life in Emilia-Romagna, Northern Italy. As many Mediterranean urban areas, the Romagna sub-region in particular has changed following an America style of growth: cities and towns have extended in low-density residential areas where public space is never pursued. As traditional public space is emptied, my ethnographic observations show that youngsters often choose to socialize in spaces which are in between the private and the public. I focus on a public park and a community-centre inside it, to show how it has become a meeting point for youngsters from across the town and beyond. With concrete observation of everyday use of the space, I consider how events changed youth's collective imagination of the space and contributed to a shared identity; I reflect on how private and public stakeholders' intervention onto the space reshapes its power-dynamics and collective imagination of the area; finally, I consider the effects of such ongoing transformation on youth socialization and identity formation. This paper aims to contribute to current debates on public spaces by considering the role of stakeholders and collaborative planning models of development in defining public space, and the consequences of their interventions.

Aline Silva Santos, University of São Paulo, Brazil, paisageira@gmail.com
Title: *Garden and Bereavement: Contributions from São Paulo Cemeterial Spaces.*
Abstract: Cemeteries and crematoriums could be considered as places where the bereaved not only homage the loved ones that passed away but also communicate with them. In São Paulo, Brazil, in some public cemeteries and in the municipal crematorium, the bereaved utilize the open spaces to construct personalized little gardens: in cemeteries, there are gardens made over the graves, directly in the soil; and

in the crematorium, people build gardens on its lawn and woods to localize the exact site of the ashes scattering. These gardens have a lot of elements that indicate the connection between the dead and the bereaved, showing congratulations for birthdays, gifts, ornaments with dead preferences, and messages of love, for example. Assuming grief as a process and considering that death does not represent the break-up of bonds, this research aims to discuss how the cemeteries and crematorium gardens express continuous bonding. There is a tie resignification between the bereaved and deceased, and those gardens could be a mediator of this. Establishing São Paulo as an empirical field, we are using an ethnographic approach, as well as interviews, and a literature review. It is relevant to emphasize that this research is in progress.

Kirsty Stuart Jepsen, Cardiff University, UK, stuartkf@cardiff.ac.uk
Title: *Challenges Faced During a Pandemic: Remote Ethnography and a Re-negotiation of Ethics.*
Abstract: The introduction of the pandemic lockdown deferred the majority of face-to-face services, and substance-use services reduced to essential on-site personnel or re-located online. This created a barrier to traditional access of participants and challenged researchers to re-think research strategy. Substance-use services began to occupy remote meeting spaces, such as Zoom, allowing the service to provide real-time connection and support. This enabled the development of a new research strategy using remote participant observation. This restructuring was not a simple transition from physical place to remote space. Drawing on established digital and ethnography procedures, the ethical implications of ongoing consent and visibility are considered along with risks of inadvertent lurking. This novel provision of remote support both created barriers and provided opportunities. Remote meeting spaces require knowledge and access to technology which excludes many individuals, and assumptions of a 'safe space' are challenged when someone is physically in their own home. However, remote groups improved access to those living remotely, and allowed potentially less stressful exposure via the use of a microphone and camera to participants who may experience anxiety. Finally, the 'field' is considered in context to the online domain. Research participants live in both online and offline spaces, with overspill or contradictions occurring in the presentation of the self. Researchers often do not draw distinctions between the two domains yet this is an important consideration when conducting remote ethnography.

Thalles Vichiato Breda, Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil, and Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany, thallesvbreda@gmail.com
Title: *The Dismantling of Social Housing in Brazil and 'New' Strategies to Access Housing: From Lulism to Bolsonarism.*
Abstract: The Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) programme was created in 2009 by then President Lula. Focused on the production of Social Housing (for the low-income population) and Market Housing (for the middle class), it had contracted about 5.5 million housing. Being the only federal program and present in the most diverse Brazilian cities, it has become a model of urban development. After the coup d'état in 2016, with the ousting of President Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party), the MCMV was drastically reduced until its extinction in 2020, under the Bolsonaro government. In the last six years, some laws and regulations on social housing and urbanization have been created. The hypothesis of this research indicates that these frameworks have updated the forms of production of the territories of poverty, the dispute for urban space, the forms of production of housing demand, and the relationship with the State and different agents in the access to social housing. This research aims to

understand: (a) the institutional changes related to social housing and access to urban land in Brazil over the last decade at the national level — with the creation of the MCMV as a landmark, the creation of laws and regulations carried out in the Temer (2016 - 2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019-) governments; (b) the forms of popular organization and production of collective demand in the search for social/popular housing within land occupations; (c) which agents and scales are involved in these occupations and what are their relations with the State and civil society. The methodology is based on an ethnographic analysis of 3 land occupations (2014, 2016, 2020) struggling for home ownership in São Carlos (São Paulo), on literature review, analysis of legal documents, and housing policy performance.

Prem S. Vivek, University of Mumbai, India, psvivek318@gmail.com
Title: *Public Spitting: An Investigation into the Embedded Practice in Culture, Traditions and Lifestyle Issues in India*.
Abstract: Spitting is, quite simply, an emotive issue for many and unacceptably deviant. Today, of course, spitting is a comparatively rare and mildly deviant type of behaviour in the so-called 'advanced' or 'developed' nations of the West. The change happened slowly at first and spitting was resilient in many sectors but acceleration occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. I have attempted to situate and understand the nature of the risk and the attributed deviance that produces it in terms of its public display, that continue to have prolific public spitting, coexistent with high-profile anti-spitting campaigns. Although Elias describes such practices as a trend toward 'progress' in manners and the ability to restrain from such practices, it is important to note that while the elite and middle-class attitudes changed, spitting remained widespread among many for years. It must be noted that patterns of cultural taste are entangled within complex interacting forms of social and cultural power, and should not only be understood as connected to the aesthetic but as matters of moral, ethical and communal sensibility. Spitting is a widely practiced and embedded behaviour for a great many people in India (and indeed numerous other Asian countries), but it manifests each in totally different ways. In understanding the regulation of spitting, as a wider process of cosmopolitanism by an inclusive international culture, there lies a valuable explanatory power in deconstructing spitting as a public health risk. It concludes that public spitting may slowly diminish in the global South, but it should be recognised that it is neither inherently progressive or civil nor necessary for the prevention of disease. It will diminish because of the way its elite citizens impose their views on the many until it is the many that reimagine what is acceptable and preferred behaviour.

BOOK REVIEWS

Agbiboa, D. 2022. *They Eat Our Sweat: Transport Labor, Corruption, and Everyday Survival in Urban Nigeria.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This book focuses on corruption in informal transit in Lagos, Nigeria, and how it implicates all participants: vehicle owners, workers, and passengers. Particular attention is paid to the informal system of minibuses (*danfos* in Yoruba, the principal local language) and motorcycle taxis (*okadas*). The book makes several significant arguments about corruption.

First, the author shows that grand corruption — at the highest levels — and petty corruption — that is found in daily life and among street level bureaucrats — are not separate, but are in fact closely linked to one another. Bribes are demanded at checkpoints and bus stations from touts, who work for a system that not only provides them a living but also offers income to the highest levels of the *National Union of Road Transport Workers* (NURTW). This 'trickle-up' disproportionately benefits those at higher levels of the hierarchy. At the same time, income gained through high-level corruption creates precarity in everyday lives of the entire population, which people sometimes address by their own corrupt actions.

Second, passengers and drivers fully participate, because refusing to pay can cause significant delays and even physical danger — especially if the touts become violent. Thus, passengers collude in encouraging bribes; they also urge drivers to pursue non-legal strategies to speed up, such as driving the wrong way down one-way streets.

Third, despite the involvement of virtually all in a corrupt system, Nigerians generally are against corruption; however, the only reasonable way to act is to comply with demands for payoffs. Not doing so can lead to economic, psychological, and physical harm. In other words, 'corruption is not embedded in Nigerian "culture" but is in fact shaped by popular efforts to manage precarious lives in transit by bending the rules' (p. 213). In this situation, the author argues, it is more useful to think of corruption as a 'collective action-social trap' problem, rather than one simply animated by well-placed agents desirous of increasing their wealth and status. Although collective action could lead to a better system, conflicting interests discourage people from acting together; individual action does bring short-term benefits but negative long-term consequences create a social trap. Finally, although the transit system may be informal, it is highly structured, fundamentally hierarchical, and well-integrated into the social and economic life of the city.

To develop and support these arguments, Agbiboa examines corruption in the different presidential regimes, both military and civilian, from the 1980s through about 2015, providing an excellent context for understanding grand corruption in Nigeria. Subsequent chapters present data on three crucial parts of the transit system: 1) *danfo* drivers, their passengers, and the conductors they engage to take fares and keep buses running; 2) *okada* drivers and their attempts to cope not only with touts, but also to protest attempts to restrict the areas in which they can work; and 3) the

NURTW, especially as understood through their street level touts, the *agberos*.

Nevertheless, more complementary information on the overall structure and function of the Lagos public transit system would have helped situate the reader who does not know Nigerian or African cities well. What are all the different elements of the system and how do they fit together? What are the major routes, and how are they determined? Do minibuses always have recognized stops, or do these stops exist only in built-up areas? How do drivers of privately owned vehicles make decisions about which routes to cover? What hours of the day do buses run? How are fares and baggage charges calculated? Do fares change with the distance or time of day? How long might it take to get a particular distance?

Although we are told much about the role of *agberos* in the NURTW, the reader learns little about the formal interactions between the NURTW leadership and the drivers — in principle, the members served by the union. Even if it was not feasible to do direct fieldwork, data in public sources such as news outlets or social media could have offered some insights. The grassroots organisations of *okada* drivers get more attention, in light of their court actions to reduce restrictions on when and where these vehicles could be used. The author mentions that he collected data from court cases, for which access was 'complex, lengthy, and costly' (p. 170), however, it would have been useful to know more about the cases. For example, what kinds of arguments were made in court? What language was used to make them? On what basis did the judges rule? What uses did

drivers and their associations make of the court decisions?

The author sometimes undermines his own arguments. He begins Chapter Three on informal transport with a statement that there has been little research on the transport sector (p. 99), a statement that he returns to in the Conclusion (p210). However, Chapter Three itself discusses, with voluminous references, significant work on African informal transport. These data support the ubiquity of informal transit throughout the continent, the low income of its workers, the stress illnesses they suffer, and the negative stereotypes attributed to them. Moreover, it considers the role of transport unions as agents of both order and violence, and the ubiquity of corruption. The author laments the essentializing of African culture at various places, but Chapter Two on the ubiquity of eating as a metaphor for corruption throughout Africa risks taking the reader in the same direction. Agbiboa also emphasises the general poverty of drivers, but then mentions an *okada* driver with more than one wife and several children in university (p. 200); in much of Africa, this suggests a middle-class household.

In spite of these minor drawbacks, this book provides an in-depth understanding of key parts of the informal transit system in Lagos, as well as new insight into the everyday corruption that exists in many parts of the world.

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Murray, M. 2022. *Many Urbanisms: Divergent Trajectories of Global City Building*. New York: Columbia University Press.

In *Many Urbanisms: Divergent Trajectories of Global City Building* (2022) Martin J. Murray offers a clearly written, erudite synthesis of contemporary urbanism, through a realignment of the well-established 'global city' paradigm within urban studies.

Opening with a robust critique of 'template cities' which 'act as the template against which all other cities are judged' (p. 23), whereby producing a dichotomy between 'good cities' and those who 'lag behind to eventually "catch up" by emulating those globalising cities' (ibid.), Murray argues what is required is a means of interpreting 'how distinctive cities with historically specific characteristics can share common features with otherwise very different cities' (p. 38). Another critique concerns the assumption within urban studies research that cities are 'powerless' against the forces of globalisation and neoliberalism, thereby creating a 'convergence' and, as a result, homogenous cities (p. 46). The problem with this assumption, according to Murray, is the glossing over of divergence developed through 'local cultural, geographic and institutional dynamics' (p. 53) and the privileging of structural forces over the 'capacities of local actors' (p. 54).

The Global North origin of these perspectives has led to the development of a 'Southern theory', which inverts the position of researchers to see the city 'from the vantage point of the South [enabling] us

to destabilise existing mainstream urban theories by questioning the rigid underlying premises guiding scholarly research and writing' (p. 59). However, as is argued within (p. 61), relocating the perspective of the researcher from the 'Northern' to the 'Southern' does not address the underlying issue with the former.

To counter this tendency, Murray proposes four pathways that characterise cities today — the bulk of this text. The first are 'globalising cities with world-class aspirations', which adopt neoliberal practices to city building and privilege entertainment focused 'regeneration' schemes (p. 71). These post-industrial cities have been successful in developing 'growth machine politics around the promotion of cultural industries and attractions [with] their competitive advantage [being] derived not from manufacturing and industrial production, but from service industries, cultural amenities and place identities' (p. 75).

However, not every city has been able to shift into a postmodern economic model. These cities comprise the 'struggling post-industrial city in decline' pathway, populated by, amongst others, the cities of America's 'Rust Belt' and post-socialist Eastern Europe. These cities are characterised by a range of factors (p. 93), often falling under the term 'urban shrinkage' (p. 100), yet Murray questions the use of 'shrinkage' (amongst other semantic categorisations), describing such terminology as 'conceptually hollow, analytically vacuous and lacking in explanatory utility' (p. 123), instead calling for a shift from 'an outcome-oriented approach toward a process-oriented research

agenda' (p. 123). The author continues to state that 'urban decline refers to episodic, cyclical and locally specific circumstances that arise from cyclical patterns of urban development [whereas] shrinking cities syndrome consists of a permanent and seemingly irreversible downturn in socioeconomic fortunes' (ibid.).

The third type concerns 'sprawling megacities of hypergrowth'. These cities, located in the Global South, are primarily defined by what they lack (p130), with Murray stating that 'looking at these cities in their own right [...] offers an opportunity to revise our understanding of urban development not as a staged trajectory moving inexorably toward a common endpoint, but as a complex process with multiple pathways toward indeterminate outcomes' (p. 135). The megacity is often equated with the 'slum' (p. 138) and the 'informal economy' (p. 153), categorisations that reinforce previously critiqued binary perceptions of the urban, with Murray arguing that 'it is more fruitful to treat informal practices as a constituent of the dynamics of city building on a global scale' (p. 155), arguing that informality is, in fact, produced by the processes of state action or inaction (p. 161).

The final pathway is that of the 'instant city' (Dubai, Doha, or Songdo in South Korea), which constitute examples of 'utopian urbanism', 'a kind of futuristic escapism only possible through the information age of hypermodernity and neoliberal globalisation' (p. 177). These cities are 'corporate-led urban enclaves', emerging 'as aspirational epicentres for privileged stakeholders striving for

commercial success in the highly competitive circumstances of global capitalism' (p173). The term 'instant' does not only refer to the rapidity of their construction, but also the detachment of these cities from a sense of historical development ─ the absence of the 'layered accretions of the historical past and collective memory which shape and characterise conventional urban settlement patterns' (p. 185) — leaving an 'artificial tableaux' in its place.

This absence of temporal development hints at a major argument within this text, namely, these four pathways each have their own 'time-frame'. According to Murray, the *globalising cities with world-class aspirations* exist in 'linear time, marching expectantly forward toward the as yet unrealised goal of achieving world-class status' (p. 207), yet *the struggling post-industrial city in decline* can 'never escape from what they once were' (p. 208) — occupying the past. The *sprawling megacities of hypergrowth* are in 'a time warp, locked into an eternal present [in which] the future beckons but never arrives' (ibid.), whilst the *instant city* '[occupies] the surreal instantaneous realm of pure spontaneity' (ibid.).

These four 'chronotopes' serve as a fascinating, process-oriented, means of interrogating the similarities and differences *between* cities, yet, whilst this text impressively covers such phenomena at a global/regional level, there is scant consideration of the different pathways *within* a city. Cities do not follow a trajectory as a homogenous whole, rather, certain neighbourhoods, communities or

jurisdictions exist within different chronotopes. Although such a step down to the intra-urban scale may have been beyond the scope of this text, it is of importance to understand the emergence of the cities under consideration. Perhaps this endeavour would be best tackled by the urban ethnographers of this world.

Ultimately, Martin J. Murray has produced a fantastic and thoroughly enjoyable book. The call for a focus on process, rather than outcome, with the implicit consideration of temporality within the urban realm, is as well made as it is urgent. This, alongside the breadth of sources and insight, renders this text as invaluable to any scholar fascinated with the nature of contemporary global urbanisation.

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FILM REVIEW

Hengdian Dreaming, Directed by **Shayan Momin**. 2020. 57 min. Colour.

Nothing is as it seems in Hengdian and Shayan Momin, as it subtly drives this point home by alternating shots of a seemingly typical-looking city and the characters he interviews. But Hengdian is no ordinary city; it is the home of the largest studio in the world, where the Chinese film industry produces most of its historical dramas. The main characters of Momin's film are but mere extras in this alternative Hollywoodian productions. The 'drifters' arrive here in search of a better life, and what they end up doing is also inventing new trends in the form of short digital productions for their own social media channels. The film thus investigates contemporary means of material and social capital production through smart phones, while also offering a commentary on media and performativity in a Hollywood for the masses type of city.

Hengdian constitutes itself as a chiefly commercial city where social relationships are underpinned by a mercantile dimension. It attracts large investments for period dramas, tourists willing to spend their budget to visit sites they have seen on television, as well as people who flock there to earn a living as an extra, which they argue, does nt make them enough money at all. To supplement their living, they script and direct their own digital productions which they then livestream on the internet (while also performing live for the tourists visiting the studios); and it is on these live streams that

they openly ask their audience for gifts or remuneration, having quickly learned that digital spaces are means of production that can be monetized, that digital busking is no different to the physical one.

The few scenes that the director offers as snapshots of a normal city are deceiving; what seems to be a typical urban settlement reveals itself as a fairyland where dreams still wait to come true; to underline this point further, Momin only briefly invites us into the home of one of his characters, where we can witness the living conditions which are generally obscured by the performativity nature of the city, of its inhabitants. It is symbolic that the mini digital productions that the characters engage in are performed in the artifact which in Lefebvre's conception (2003) animates urban life, the street. As if by purposefully embodying Lefebvre's argument that the street is 'a place to play and learn', a space for creativity to roam free, the 'drifters' inhabit these public spaces more than they seem to inhabit any private ones. These arenas for co-creation also become shared spaces of solidarity and cooperation in the artistic act.

The last 10 minutes of the film are an adrenaline-filled stream of consciousness, where every character exhibits their talent on an interplay of street neon lights, once the sun has gone down. Echoing a point expressed earlier by one of the characters who, in his invitation to Barack Obama to star in his production, claims that Chinese culture has successfully integrated the socialist and the capitalist ideologies. The dizzying spectacle of the performers with their phones and cameras, and replicas of

the live audiences in front of them do question what role socialism can still play in the fabric of contemporary urban life.

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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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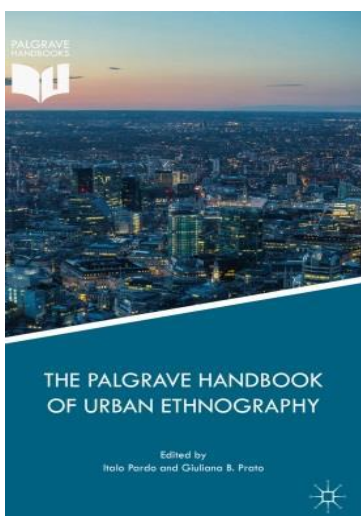
Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*
1st ed.: November 2018, pp. XIX, 575, 26 illus
ISBN: 978-3-319-64288-8. DOI: 10,007 / 978-3-319-64289-5.
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- Presents a range of topics, such as work, employment, and informality; everyday life and community relations; marginalization, gender, family, kinship, religion and ethnicity; and political strategies and social movements in historical and transnational perspectives
- Encourages reflection on the significance of the anthropological paradigm in urban research and its centrality to mainstream academic debates
- Points to new topical debates and charts new theoretical directions

These ethnographically-based studies of diverse urban experiences across the world present cutting-edge research and stimulate an empirically-grounded theoretical reconceptualization. The essays identify ethnography as a powerful tool for making sense of life in our rapidly changing, complex cities. They stress the point that while there is no need to fetishize fieldwork—or to view it as an end in itself —its unique value cannot be overstated. These active, engaged researchers have produced essays that avoid abstractions and generalities while engaging with the analytical complexities of ethnographic evidence. Together, they prove the great value of knowledge produced by long-term fieldwork to mainstream academic debates and, more broadly, to society.

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