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Between Stereotype and Bad Governance: An Italian Ethnography

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Policies that encourage local entrepreneurialism, urban regeneration and the efficient overall management of immigration from outside the EU are seen to be critical to Southern Italian society. Anthropological fieldwork in Naples and its Region, suggests that this requirement is not met in today' scenario marred by stereotype and bad governance. This article shows that ordinary Neapolitans' entrepreneurialism is both strong and frustrated on the one hand by normative complication and distorted policies, particularly regarding access to credit and therefore capital and, on the other hand, by the double standards applied by a local governance that panders to the selective interests of their constituency, small but vociferous lobbies. In democracy rulers' recognition — in policy and legislation — of the structural value of grassroots culture and actions qualifies both participation and representation. As these two fundamentals remain unfulfilled in this ethnography, the gap between governance and citizenship appears to have become unbridgeable.
Key words: Anthropological research, entrepreneurialism, stigma, misgovernance

Foreword

This essay was originally published in I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *Palgrave Handbook on Urban Ethnography* (2018, Palgrave Macmillan). It is reproduced here, under Springer Nature License No 5645840112024, in light of the growing interest in urban ethnographic research. For a recent analysis of the Italian ethnography, see Pardo (2023).

For Ethnographic Analysis

I am committed to an ethnographically-based analysis because, though wary of narrow empiricism, I share the anthropologist's "natural" aversion to unjustified abstraction (Leach 1977: xvi ff., Harris 1986: Ch. 1). Throughout my professional career I have heeded the methodological *sine qua non* that serious research must address the complexity of real life steering clear of conceptual superimposition and ideological bias. Here, I mean to illustrate this point.

Taking stock of a diachronic view gained through over thirty years of ethnographic enquiry, I recently reflected on the twisted role played by the stereotyping of ordinary people. "Bogging down a stigmatized people in a stigmatized region of Europe"[1] — I noted — such stereotype

> "pays lip service to the tabloid view of Southerners and the attendant rhetoric, which may well help to sell newspapers and make lucrative television viewing but, as is disturbingly suggested by the ethnography . . . it serves the interests of certain dominant groups with critically adverse consequences for a very large part of ordinary Italians" (Pardo 2012: 55).

[1] As an example of the politicking that feeds on this stereotype, see the remarks made by Jeroen Dijsselbloem, Dutch Finance Minister and president of the Eurogroup, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ 2018) and reported internationally (*Financial Times* of 21 March, and *El País* and *Corriere della Sera* of 22 March).

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As a classically-trained social anthropologist, I have direct experience of the unique contribution that the discipline's paradigm can make to casting light on our world and its political, economic and cultural dynamics. I bear witness to its power in deconstructing the stereotypes and prejudices on which political instrumentalism and bad governance thrive, and to its significance to questioning overly structured analyses of relations of power in contemporary society. I testify to its value to informed engagement in public debate. In short, the importance of ethnographic knowledge cannot be overemphasized.

As there seems to be some — unwarranted — confusion in the current literature on the word "ethnography", it might be worth expanding on what I have just said. To me, the ethnographic methodology that characterizes the classic anthropological paradigm has the precise meaning that the fieldworker will become involved in depth in local processes over an extended period of time. S/he will investigate the interactions between the social, the economic, the political and the cultural through the systematic application of the tried and tested methods of participant observation, the in-depth case-study of people, groups, situations and events and, if required, will devise new field techniques. S/he will, in synthesis, engage in a holistic study of the chosen setting.[2]

The foregoing applies to urban as to rural arenas. While I have conducted most of my work in Western urban settings (London, Naples, Palermo, Florence and Prato), I have applied the anthropological paradigm to my research in rural South Italy, and in Kent and Sussex (UK), Burgundy (France) and Latium (Central Italy). Of course, in such diverse settings empirical methods needed to be adapted. The methodology, the paradigmatic framework remained, however, unchanged. With reference to my urban work, this is why I insist on describing myself as a social anthropologist who does research in the city (Pardo 2012).

Like contributions to journals such as *Urbanities* and to the Series on "Urban Anthropology" published by Palgrave Macmillan and Routledge, my own work in the urban West is ethnographically based and holistic. Elsewhere I have discussed in detail important aspects of anthropological fieldwork (1996: Ch. 1, 2012), such as the definition of and entry in the field, the selection of informants and of case studies, the in-depth investigation of links and networks, the problem of cross-referencing information provided by informants, the complex relationship between objectivity and subjectivity,[3] confidentiality and professional ethics,[4] and so on. Here, I will limit the discussion to aspects of my ethnographic journey through an urban situation where ordinary people are diachronically caught between stereotype and a governance

[2] When possible and within ethical limits, s/he will also build a visual and aural ethnographic record of the most significant processes.

[3] Naturally we cannot disengage from our personal experiences and personalities. However, as a Neapolitan doing research in Naples, I have found that this need not inhibit our sense of the problematic. On the contrary, an informed management of this aspect may well help us to fulfil the basic requirement of achieving an empathic grasp of the situation.

[4] This issue is well addressed by protecting the identity of my informants also, when necessary, through controlled scrambling of identities and situations.

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that, marred by high rhetoric, low delivery and double-standards, lacks authority. Urban ethnography through time helps to illuminate this problematic and its broader sociological significance.

Introductory Remarks

The authoritative Associazione per lo Sviluppo dell'Industria nel Mezzogiorno (SVIMEZ, Association for the Industrial Development of South Italy) has documented in statistical detail South Italy's economic stagnation and has identified key processes for the region's economic improvement (2016). The challenge is to implement policies that encourage local entrepreneurialism and urban regeneration; and the efficient management of immigration from outside the EU.

The anthropological analysis of the situation in Naples and its Region, Campania, has engendered similar conclusions (Pardo 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2009, 2012). I have illustrated how an in-depth understanding of the moral complexity and social value of individual action has helped to gain a better view of current economic processes and, more broadly, of key dynamics of legitimacy and legality in the relationship between citizenship and governance (Holston 2009, Pardo and Prato 2011) in the fields of social policy, legislation, integration and access to rights. Drawing on long-term anthropological fieldwork, the discussion that follows will summarize those findings to offer reflections on the empirical dynamics that make it difficult for the aforementioned challenge to be met in today's scenario. I address the impact of slanted policies and bad governance on local life. I conclude, bleakly, that this adverse combination frustrates local entrepreneurialism and culture, in the process crippling the democratic contract.

The Background: A Summary

Up to the early 1990s, the South of Italy was the object of central government "extraordinary intervention", primarily through the Cassa del Mezzogiorno (literally, Fund for the South). Established in 1950, the *Cassa* was intended to stimulate economic growth through the development of the infrastructure — roads, bridges, aqueducts and so on — and through credit subsidies and tax advantages. However, while large companies (many based in the North) benefited, most local small and medium enterprises did not. The *Cassa* was discontinued in 1984. In 1992 all *extraordinary* intervention ceased, with a view to curbing the perverse use of public resources; this objective, as we shall see, was not achieved.

The Cassa was supposed to address, and solve, what has become known as the "Southern Question"; that is, the economic underdevelopment of the South, which for some, after Gramsci (1966), is to do *also* — many in this camp say *primarily* — with its cultural backwardness. For subscribers to either or both of these views a key part of the "Southern Question" was that corruption in public life was geographically limited to the South, due to the power of the Christian Democratic Party as opposed to the virtuous North, mostly governed by

the Left.[5] Beyond political instrumentalism, spin and fake news, there was a remarkably different and uglier reality, which, as anyone who follows Italian affairs knows only too well, took many years to emerge.

In Italy, the ethnographer's task is notoriously complicated by recurrent reshuffles in the distribution of power and by intense judicial activity. A typical example of both is given by the *tangentopoli* (literally, bribesville) inquiries. Started in the northern city of Milan, those judicial investigations quickly spread throughout the country. Raising issues on significant anomalies in the Italian system (Pardo 2012: 66), they destroyed the political system, leaving untouched what was the largest Communist Party in the West and the tiny, inconsequential right-wing Party.[6] Interestingly, since the early 1990s, most of the South has been ruled by leftist administrations that, like in much of Italy, keep making the headlines for corruption and abuse of office.

What I have outlined should be read in the context of a historically weak, fragmented industrialization which has led to a prominence of non-industrial and post-industrial values. Here, official unemployment is high, reaching 40 percent among the young. It is widely accepted, however, that only a small proportion of the officially unemployed do not work;[7] many engage in activities that account for the economic side of a strong entrepreneurial spirit and, though strictly illegal, are seen as licit by the actors and their significant others (Pardo 1995). Very few get involved in crime.[8]

Local Entrepreneurialism: A Worm's Eye View

I did my original urban field research in the mid-1980s among the *popolino*[9] of a typical *quartiere* (neighbourhood) in central Naples and have since updated my ethnography through periodical 2-to-6-month fieldtrips. Naples, I knew, "confronts the observer with a difficult decision — whether to dismiss it as a chaotic and anarchic place doomed to suicidal extinction through resignation to deprivation, marginality and ruin or to ask whether there is a rationale

[5] Pardo and Prato (2011: 3-9) have deconstructed this Lombrosian view, offering an analysis of the critical literature.

[6] Elsewhere, I have developed a detailed analysis of that affair and of the ratio between the many who were investigated — and publicly disgraced — and the relatively few who were convicted (See also Cionti 2015).

[7] The nature of the informal "sector" makes a quantitative assessment extremely difficult. In 2010, roughly six million southerners in working age were estimated to be involved in the informal "sector" of the economy (SVIMEZ 2010: 8). A 2011 Parliamentary Inquiry (available at: http://it.finance.yahoo.com/notizie/riciclaggio-bankitalia-sommerso-criminale-vale-095243438.html) confirmed these data and pointed out that the informal "sector" is larger in the centre-north.

[8] I have explained that here criminals are disliked and generally avoided (Pardo 1996: Ch. 2 and Ch. 3). The size of criminal employment is highly debatable and, in my view, far from justifying the over-inflated headlines that sell books, newspapers and television programmes.

[9] This is how ordinary Italians are often called. Traditionally, my informants thus describe themselves, rejecting the word's derogative meaning (Pardo 1996). Now, having learned of their stereotype through the media, they say they proudly identify as *popolino*.

for its appearance that might explain things differently" (Pardo 1996: xi). I thought that a sociologically-rooted ethnography could help to address this conundrum.

As per disciplinary tradition, before going into the field I conducted a thorough study of the existing literature, reputable media reports and statistical and documentary sources. This armchair phase detailed a stereotype of southern Italians that met a certain rhetoric of power. Promoted since the unification of the country (1861), it has been endorsed by generations of Italian and international writers, underscoring more or less implicitly, I have explained (Pardo 1996: Ch. 1), the critical opposition between independent analysis and analysis that is *organic* to vested interests.[10] According to much of the literature, bogged down by lack of trust in each other and by their "amoral familism", southerners are politically and socially backward individualists who lack social responsibility and cannot be trusted. In particular, the *popolino* have been collectively described as amoral and ungovernable people, dubbed as a dangerous underclass — a deprived and oppressed *sottoproletariato* (lumpenproletariat), as they were called in dominant Marxist parlance.[11] Even at that initial stage I was suspicious of a view that carried such ugly classist and racist undertones. My suspicions proved justified, as a very different picture of life and culture in central Naples emerged from anthropological field research. A few basic considerations are needed.

What smacked — to me — of cultural determinism has been convincingly exposed as obnoxious to reason and reality by countless events. Yet this stereotype continues to undermine southerners' citizenship in a scenario where the general economic and financial crisis combines with an enormous public debt (over four fifths of the annual regional budget). It continues to drive the approach of influential élite groups to important processes of inclusion and exclusion and to justify expedient legislation, lack of investment and adverse credit policies that punish local business, particularly at micro and small level.

Once in the field, I adapted classic anthropological methods to my research setting and developed some new techniques. For example, alongside participant observation, specially devised network and affective diagrams and diagrams for the construction of structured work- and life-histories helped to map activities, exchanges and informants' significant moral and social universes. That field research emphasized that the application of the anthropological paradigm in Western urban settings can produce findings that have broad theoretical relevance, endorsing my earlier point that a holistic analysis and attention to the relationship between micro- and macro-processes raise no question on the validity of traditional fieldwork (Pardo 1996).

If one is lucky, in the field — wherever that may be, including the urban West — one will meet one's own "Doc" (Whyte 1955), as I did soon after I started my research. My Doc,

[10] 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.

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

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whom I have called Lino, was a locally well-connected, formally low-educated, highly intelligent micro-entrepreneur born and bred in the *quartiere*. Like many other local people, he had a formal job and ran a profitable stall in a local street market, registered in an officially unemployed kin's name.[12] Having taken his time checking and assessing me, Lino kind of adopted me and my research task. From there, my local network and the research findings snowballed, initially slowly but gradually growing in quality and quantity. Lino patiently helped me throughout the 20 months I spent there, motivated — he said — by his curiosity and by a "growing respect" for my commitment and aims. We have met regularly ever since during my up-dating trips to Naples and the new fieldworks, both enjoying our exchanges and friendship.

My fieldwork was geographically focused. I spent most of my time in the *quartiere* as it was there that most *popolino* informants lived and carried out their economic and social activities. However, I also followed many of them as they worked, shopped and socialized across the city and beyond. In this simple sense it could be said that part of this fieldwork, like part of those that I later carried out among the élite, was "multi-sited". As I became accepted in the local society, I participated in my informants' socialization and economic activities.

Anthropological fieldwork is a full-time, full-immersion affair. It was through intense, long-term engagement that I gradually built an in-depth, articulated picture of local life that disagreed substantially with the established views. The ethnography of ordinary Neapolitans' entrepreneurialism, their hard work within and mostly without the domain of formal employment, their morality and culture firmly nudged my analysis onto uncharted territory.

I found that here the ethics of work, family and neighbourhood exist in complex relationship with the power and limitations of law, bureaucracy and government. Many of the officially unemployed aspire to a secure public-sector job for obvious reasons, but also because they identify such employment as allowing free time to pursue informal "side-activities". I also found that my informants are bearers of a culture of *sapé fa* (literally, cleverness) that emphasizes pooling *all* personal resources in the pursuit of goals and of betterment — 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 cannot be dismissed as casual *arte di arrangiarsi* (art of getting by) or summarily cast in the simple logic of maximization of profit, explained as driven by a predatory instinct, a proneness to succumb to corruption and clientelism.

This last point in particular deserves expansion, considering that in Italy all too often the administrator and the bureaucrat (especially when connected with political bosses) prevail over the office. Thus, frequently both the office and relations with citizens are personalized, privatized, which goes a long way to explaining why rights are turned into privileges. We also need to understand, however, that among the likes of Lino the knowledge that "contacts with saints will get you to heaven" is firmly underscored by the commitment, "I don't want to be subject to anyone" and the belief that "If you behave like a sheep, you'll become a wolf's meal".

[12] Later, he opened a shop in his wife's name (Pardo 1996: Ch.2).

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Knowing this, I found it hard to believe that local people's actions should be inevitably manipulated by patrons (or patron-brokers) who held financial power and useful contacts, extending to government agencies at the regional and national levels. This would make it necessary to treat command over resources and benefits and command over people and actions as a single category. Maintaining, instead, the separation of these aspects of power helps to make sense of their actions. It helps to make sense of an approach deeply rooted in the rationality of a *strong continuous interaction* between material (money, possessions, the body itself) and non-material (encompassing the moral and the spiritual, the mundane and the supra-mundane) aspects of their universes, between the symbolism of personal identity and the ethics of entrepreneurial management of existence. This is a key point because this interaction distinctly qualifies the social, cultural and political makeup of local life (Pardo 1996: Ch. 1). It "profoundly informs the actors' sense of the relationship between action and results in all spheres of their lives, with an emphasis on the role of the significant others (living and dead, through belief in a relationship of mutual influence) in the individual's entitlement to feeling worthy and therefore fulfilled in the broad sense — non-materially as well as materially — and in the long term" (Pardo 1996: xii).

It was in this light that I took on the challenge of a normative understanding of work and entrepreneurship (Harrel 1985, Pardo 1996, Williams and Round 2007) beyond the unlikely (Breman 1994) "dual economy" view. My empirical experience has demanded attention to the relationships between the formal and the informal (Pardo 1996, 2009, 2012) and a healthy distance from a naïve distinction between work and employment. It has brought out the weakness of viewing informal work activities as a separate mode of production or, most important, as belonging to some "casual economy".

Over time, the study of local people's informal economic activities and of their engagement with what scholars have called the "moral economy" of work (Murphy 1993) produced good analytical dividends. Parry and Bloch's insights (1989) on the interaction between the moral and the monetary and Wallman's (1984) on the importance of resources such as contacts, information, time and identity were helpful at the start of my journey,[13] as was my belief that superimposing categorical distinctions on the empirical situation may give a neat look to our production but is misleading. I knew that to stay true to my ethnographic experience I needed to heed my instinct and stay away from pointless classification and sub-classification of moralities and behaviours.

At risk of labouring the point, let me insist that I have found no dichotomy between morality and interest in the way in which my informants negotiate their lives in this complex and changing urban environment. Their outlook points to the significance in today's world of the blurring of the boundaries between the categories of the modern organization of labour and between the formal and the informal. Their approach embodies the important concept that "individual-oriented" does not necessarily mean individualistic. An astute analysis must avoid

[13] There is a growing literature on these issues. See, for example, Portes et al. (eds 1989) and Spyridakis (2013).

confusion between individuality and individualism in the economic sphere, and beyond. [14] This greatly helps us to understand that, contrary to pessimist claims, controlled forms of trust (Pardo 1996, 2001; Pardo and Prato 2011) do mark the lives and careers of my informants through enterprising modes of exchange — often, most significantly, long-term oriented.

Their ethnography has brought out gradations of entrepreneurialism that draw on access to community resources beyond official definition and allocation, in defiance of attempts of the state to regulate, control and extract revenue from the production, circulation and consumption of goods. The "informal" activities that I have documented may not always be strictly legal and may not always agree with the "laws" of market capitalism, but they must not be misread as evidence of marginality or of an anti-market culture.[15] As the opposite is the case, it is critical to recognize that this grassroots entrepreneurialism is frustrated by normative and bureaucratic complications that combine with a distorted banking system to make access to credit — a basic right of citizenship (Marshall 1950, Barbalet 1988, Bulmer and Rees eds 1996) — exceedingly difficult for ordinary people. It is ironic that in a city where efficient micro-credit measures to combat usury (Monte di Pietà) date back to the mid-1500s, small and micro entrepreneurs' access to credit should today be frustrated by overpriced banking services, property-based guarantees demanded by credit institutions, comparatively higher interest rates on banking loans and dubious dealings.[16] Let me be specific. In order secure a bank loan, entrepreneurs must prove ownership of private property, the value of which is set against the loan. In the south, interest rates are between 2.5 and 5 percent higher than in the centre-north. These difficulties and restrictions combine with more ordinary problems people usually face in starting, running or expanding a business. When my informants cannot buy money officially, they borrow at low or no interest from friends and family. Only in desperation will they consider borrowing from loan sharks. Here, the considerable risks implicit in usury are recognized across the social spectrum (Pardo 1996: Ch. 5; 2000a) and, whether illegal (loan-sharking) or legal,[17] they are identified as such and avoided whenever possible. Caught in a context marred by the practical ramifications of the aforementioned stereotype and exclusion both from the formal "sector" of the economy and from important rights of citizenship, ordinary Neapolitans have long had reason to feel that they are treated as second-class citizens. This feeling finds justification in other forms of discrimination, too.

Over the past thirty years, growing immigration from outside the EU has crystallized added complications. Case studies and participant observation among native Neapolitans and

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[14] See, for example, Parry and Bloch (1989), Harris (1986), Pardo (1996).

[15] See Pardo (1996). Jane Schneider (2002) has convincingly challenged such a dichotomy.

[16] Some bank officials refer unsuccessful applicants to private credit agencies that grant credit easily and at high interest (Pardo 2000a). Informants describe official attempts to address this situation as weak.

[17] Some banks and other financial institutions practice more or less "hidden" forms of usury (Bortoletto 2015). Officials of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena, a northern-based bank, and of the southern Banca della Campania, are on trial charged with the crime of "banking usury" (Law 108/96, art. 44). They are accused of imposing usurious interest rates in the south (*Il Giornale*, 22/03/2017; *Corriere del Mezzogiorno,* 22/03/2017).

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immigrants, their dealings through the city and beyond, their interactions with each other and with the wider system have brought out informal processes of integration and revealed that it is in the context of the failed full integration of native people that the broader integration or failed integration of many immigrants must be understood (Pardo 2009).

Double standards in the exercise of power exacerbate this problem. On the one hand, heavy fiscal demands, bureaucratic complications and the strict imposition of rules are applied to formal businesses (workshops, shops and stalls). On the other hand, illegal workshops thrive and a blind eye is turned on the illegal street-vendors and peddlers — most of foreign origin — who are omnipresent in ever larger numbers across the city.

My field notes document how these double standards are breeding conflict in a social, economic and cultural context traditionally oriented towards hospitality and tolerance; how they are turning grassroots Neapolitans' traditional welcoming of "the other" into toleration and, lately, growing intolerance. Lino and I once discussed this issue over lunch, in a *trattoria*. We were overheard and rapidly joined by several other people who were eating there. Lino pointed to a weakening of ordinary people's right to justice (Marshall 1950; Dahrendorf 1996) as he remarked, "every day we have to contend with the authorities' laissez-faire attitude towards immigrants' illegal practices, their punishing application of the law to us Neapolitans and their sly (*furbo*) manipulation of its loopholes when it comes to the rulers' and other big shots' (*pezzi grossi*) own criminal convictions". "Well", the 32-years-old son of another informant said, "the powers-that-be live in the *quartieri bene* (wealthy neighbourhoods) and see immigrants only on TV. Their friends write the Law and its loopholes. If they are caught, they can afford the sneakiest, cleverest lawyers or can easily bribe their way out of trouble, can't they?" The group, now including the proprietor and his daughter, nodded in agreement and some joined in, their own similar experiences.

The focus gradually shifted to the "reality of making a living in today's Naples", as a recently married young couple put it. Their remarks brought to mind the activities of Lello, a local trader in his late fifties whose career I have followed ever since we met in the 1980s. Inviting reflection on a classical theme in economic anthropology (Smith 1989: 309 ff.), they, like Lello and most micro and small entrepreneurs whom I have met, including some of foreign origin, said that they operated informally (therefore, "semi-legally" or illegally) but would like to move "into the sunlight" because informality is too costly, monetarily (the need of engaging in bribery was recurrently cited as a considerable drawback), morally and in time and worry. In their case, the informal aspect is limited to fiscal matters; in other cases, it extends to employees, including immigrants.[18]

The case of Lello is typical. He was thirteen when he left school and started working (illegally, of course) as an all-round assistant in a local clothes shop. Later, he found regular employment in one of a chain of large shops where his sales skills and good relationships with suppliers were soon noticed by the management. While staying in formal employment, Lello used the contacts he had made through this job to start a small business on the side, which he

[18] Italy, traditionally a country of emigration, is experiencing ever-growing immigration.

ran in the evenings and over the weekends, selling ever larger quantities of informally-produced good-quality clothes to shop- and stall-keepers across Naples and the region. He dealt in cash to avoid paying tax on transactions, which suited him and his suppliers and clients. Within five years, he left formal employment to open a small shop in Naples. There, he sold legally produced clothes, keeping the informal part of his business sufficiently small to escape the attention of the law. Later, Lello invested his savings in larger premises and involved his wife in the expanded business. All along, he continued to travel throughout Italy. As he raised sufficient capital, he started in a tourist resort a second shop run by his children, who speak several languages. Lello has recently employed trusted assistants in the Naples shop (a Pole and a Ukrainian), to be free to invest time and money in starting a third up-market shop specializing in luxury clothes. It took him three years to raise the necessary capital, for he could not borrow from banks.[19] The increasing presence of immigrants and changes in the market have played a key role in his new venture. Chinese products have played a similarly important role.

Lello's *sapé fa*, contacts and knowledge of the market made him quickly aware of key changes. He saw an opportunity to raise money through the expansion of his informal activity. Having met what he describes as "reliable and hard-working immigrants", Lello bought several vans and employed (informally) two Ukrainians and a Pole to deliver to his expanding custom of shops and stalls. Having diversified his suppliers, Lello now meets the demand of two different sections of the market. He sells good-quality clothes in his Naples shops but, having found that stall-keepers especially struggle with keeping up with the demand for cheap clothes, he has established profitable relationships with a number of Chinese entrepreneurs who run workshops in the periphery.[20] Modified versions of the better quality Chinese-produced merchandise find their way in his shop outside Naples and to traders throughout Italy.[21] Thus, Lello has managed to accumulate the sufficient funds to start his new up-market shop.

Let us now look in more detail at a second order of inhibiting processes.

Ruling by Double Standards: The Decay of the Democratic Contract

In other works, I have examined a local style of governance that has at once engendered and thrived on the blurring of the dividing line between what is legitimate and what is not legitimate in public life. Drawing on the extensive field research undertaken since 1991 among élite groups in Naples and its Region, I have discussed at length how powerful, tightly networked

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[19] He and his wife and children do not own property and cannot provide the guarantees demanded by the banks.

[20] The large number of Chinese enterprises is obvious. According to the Association of Chinese Commerce, around 15000 Chinese people are active in Naples, of which 3000 operate in the centre and a similar number trade wholesale at the immediate periphery. Resonating with central themes in the literature (Harrel 1985), the rest operate in workshops located in the province. Many of these workshops are illegal.

[21] Like other entrepreneurs, Lello has this merchandise modified in a local workshop in order to meet his customers' tastes.

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groups inspired by an elitist philosophy of power have been hard at work to gain and keep power, while losing trust and authority.

Here, political power has long been observably obnoxious to ordinary people's culture and way of life. A typical example is given by Naples' leftist rulers' repeatedly using the stereotype that southern companies are unreliable and corrupt to justify their choice to allocate contracts for public works to companies based in the politically friendly centre-north. These "virtuous" companies have, then, regularly proceeded to sub-contract the actual work to local firms (Pardo 1996, 2012). Moreover, as the general economic crisis has gradually translated into joblessness for many traditionally unemployed hard workers (Pardo 1996: Ch. 2 and 2012a; SVIMEZ 2015: 6-12; ISTAT 2016), local rulers have practised an interesting combination of selective actions and targeted inaction which has further penalized local economic activities and further discredited governance.

A short field research conducted in 1991 on socialist rule in Naples in the 1970s and 1980s (Pardo 1996 and 2001) engendered a long-term project, as it brought out ethnographic ramifications that deserved to be investigated more fully (2012: 61 ff.). Motivated by an interest in investigating empirically the legitimacy of governance in light of the complex relationship between power and authority (Weber 1978), I have since carried out ethnographic research among people who are prominent in important "sectors" of society (note: I use this word for want of a better one, for "sector" implies a kind of insularity that does not, of course, apply here): politics; the judiciary; small- and medium-sized businesses; the trade-unions; the media; the banking, medical and legal professions; and the intelligentsia. I wanted to study the morality and behaviours of people within these (naturally porous) "sectors", with the aim of gaining new knowledge on how dominant groups, particularly in the public realm, manage power, how they deal with responsibility and accountability and how their rhetoric and actual behaviours are received in the wider society. My primary interest was in the relationship of their actual practices to ordinary people's culture and actions.

I did my research in phases, group by group. Each fieldwork (ranging from 12 to 14 months) focused on one specific group, naturally extending, in a controlled fashion, to their relevant networks, including through kinship, marriage, godparenthood and membership of professional and leisure associations. These complex networks extended, of course, into other groups, and following the threads engendered a productive snowball effect.[22] Throughout, I used a combination of research on documentary[23] and quantitative sources,[24] observation, prolonged semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with key witnesses. When

[22] As, of course, most prominent people are networked nationally and internationally, my ethnography expanded accordingly.

[23] I studied relevant speeches, historical documents, briefs, media and judicial files, as well as unpublished material, such as research reports and private archives.

[24] This included demographic and other statistical data, census returns and surveys.

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possible, I participated in relevant events, formal and informal, private and public.[25] Seldom applied to the study of the élite, such a combination has produced good ethnography.

I found it interesting that I should be lucky to meet and establish strong relationships with "Docs" also among many of the listed élite groups. I have described in previous publications some of the close cooperation that gave me access to highly valuable information. For example, a judge whom I have called X (2000b) played an invaluable role in my understanding — again, through participation, observation and the construction of several case-studies — of key dynamics, beliefs and behaviours among the judiciary, and of their networks, reaching far outside the strictly defined professional circles. Again, X's collaboration in my research and introduction to his wide network snowballed, producing remarkably dense findings. Similarly, when I engaged in fieldwork among other élite groups, I found invaluable help among the medical and legal professions, business, politics, banking, the trade unions and the media (see, for example, 1996, 2001, 2012). Each fieldwork yielded in-depth material also on problematic dynamics, as for example those linked to illegal and legal corruption in settings — such as the health service (Pardo 2004) — that are fundamental to our associated life. Each fieldwork pointed to Naples' problematic version of the difficult relationship between politics, civil society and the law that in Europe marks the gap between rulers and the ruled, critically between citizenship and governance.

The study of local rule over almost three decades has highlighted a serious *crisis of legitimacy* (Weber 1978: 213). I have observed how power without legitimacy becomes power without authority as rulers' approach is received as unjust and morally illegitimate in the wider society. A review, however rough, of the long story of bad governance in Naples ought to address at least two major issues. First, the dichotomy between ordinary people's entrepreneurial spirit and the Left's interest in the formalization of social relations which was supposed to find implementation through the industrialization of the south and the consequent proletarianization of southerners. Second, the bias generated by central-government assistance implemented through local potentates: to the resentment of many southerners, when public funds have not been misappropriated through corruption, they have been systematically used for instrumental short-term goals; they have been largely used for assistance, as opposed to structural investment (Prato 1993, Pardo 1996). Large funds, recently also from the EU, have been used to implement weak development schemes, contributing to official poverty while fuelling cleverly revised forms of clientelism and corruption. Systematically practised by the Christian Democrats (also well-versed in using "organic intellectuals") in the 1960s and 1970s, such tactics have been later perfected by leftist administrators (Della Corte 2007, Di Feo 2008), who have nurtured clienteles among powerful sections of society. Local rulers have consistently responded to Gramsci's argument that popular culture should be taken seriously, investigated and, then, uprooted, to be replaced (ideally, with its bearers' cooperation) by a superior,

[25] Informants' concern with confidentiality found a satisfactory answer in my promise (and proven practice) to use fictitious names and, when necessary, controlled scrambling of the most recognizable situations.

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enlightened conception of the world (Gramsci 196: 216-218). While rhetorically opposing assistance and clientelism, and practising both (Della Corte 2007, Demarco 2009), they have pursued selective policies and have misappropriated public funds through corruption, for which they are on trial.

To the unbiased eye, ordinary citizenship remains under the undue pressure of bad governance and ruling by double-standards. It is hindered by a ruling style that delivers little of substance for the city's associated life and, substantially undermining the democratic contract, panders to the selective interests of small but aggressively vociferous and well-organized groups. In a context of considerable municipal deficit,[26] some contrasts strike my informants across the social spectrum as unacceptable. High-fliers in public office, they note, get their overblown salaries regularly paid and employees who are trade-unionists make the headlines (Roano 2017) as they (legally) use the system to get paid full salaries while working a fraction of the time. On the other hand, employees in the public sector — like transport workers, rubbish collectors and street cleaners — are often on strike because of unsafe working conditions and delays in getting paid. Ironically, the 2016-2018 municipal plan included cuts for 130 million euros across the social services and the 2017 budget disregarded the poor and the most vulnerable (Discepolo 2017).

Life in Naples has become notable for three, connected, reasons. It is dangerous; it is polluted, as I have indicated, by administrative double-standards, rubbish and vermin; and is marred by a "bread, circus and gallows" approach to rule (Pardo 2012: 67-68).

Shootings and deadly gang-fights take place across the city with alarming regularity and bag-snatching is on the increase. The surface of most roads is hazardous, scattered with pot-holes (many very deep and large) that are procuring huge business opportunities to local garages and headaches to insurance companies. Pieces of badly maintained public and private buildings keep falling on pedestrians. Walkways in the city centre and the periphery are broken or uneven. ER personnel tell of countless gunshot wounds and mugging injuries. Their colleagues in the orthopaedic departments of local hospitals have to deal daily with broken bones resulting from accidents in public spaces.

Displacement of responsibility in public office appears to be entrenched. Obnoxious problems are engendered by the manipulation of rules to fit spurious interests and by double standards in the exercise of power. Alongside those described earlier, one such problem is that arbitrary, unfair actions are undertaken that belong to a general pattern of personalization of politics and legal but — in the eye of my informants — illegitimate use of public office and resources to the advantage of the radical organizations and fringe interest groups that account for much of the rulers' constituency. Public money is legally but illegitimately allocated to friendly interest lobbies. Radical groups' illegal occupation of public buildings — including buildings of historical value — is tolerated (Fazzo 2017). In some cases, it becomes legalized

[26] In 2016, the Corte dei Conti (Auditing Office, Report No 13, February 2016) found substantial irregularities in the official financial accounts of the Naples Municipality, which is assessed to be close to default (*Il Denaro*, 25 March 2017, p. 9).

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through *ad-hoc* municipal decrees that overemphasize the moral relativism of law (Pardo 2000b, Pardo and Prato 2011). The case of the Asilo Filangieri makes a good example.[27] This important historical building was restored at public expense to be used as a venue for international cultural events. It was, however, illegally occupied by radical groups and has since deteriorated (*Il Mattino*, 12 March 2016).[28] Recently, a Municipal decree has turned those illegal occupants into legal occupants (*Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 4 January 2016).

This depressingly degraded scenario stands on a shallow but effective consensus-building tactic that, in a revised version of the approach examined earlier, treats ordinary Neapolitans as immature people easily pacified by the provision of free fun. Local critics note that, despite several years of control over this large city's administrative machine, material resources and extensive network of power, local rulers continue to wallow in an anti-establishment rhetoric that rides ordinary people's pervasive sense of grievance. [29] This may be paradoxical and may have corresponded with little or no change in the difficulties of everyday life experienced at the grassroots, but it has produced sufficient electoral support for its practitioners to gain and retain power.

Accordingly, the local dominant élite lose no opportunity to utter politically expedient platitudes for the benefit of their supporters — among others, NGOs and associations that receive public funding to look after immigrants.[30] Their environmentalism is exemplified by highly symbolic but empty claims and actions. Let me give three examples, among many, that my informants have asked me to note. Causing significant problems of circulation, the seaside promenade was initially closed to traffic — the rhetorical claim was that it had been "given back to citizens"; three years later a small area remains traffic free. During the 2011 electoral campaign the appealing promise was made to achieve 80 percent recycling across the city within two years; today's reality shows little or no recycling. Public funds have been used to draw bicycle pictograms on unlikely roads, walk-sides, under outdoors restaurant and bar tables and even on stairs throughout the city, amid rubbish and vermin.

Conclusion

Current events in Naples graphically mirror a Europe-wide problematic. Perhaps predictably, the implosion of the powerful governance that hegemonized the local scene from the early 1990s to the early 2010s has not resulted in the end of power without authority. It has resulted, instead, in a cleverly revised version of a management of power that skirts the precise responsibility that defines democratic governance, rides roughshod over the instances of

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[27] While ad hoc changes in rules and regulations are legal, the arbitrary allocation of public premises to friendly groups and the political manipulation of public contracts are the object of indictments across Italy. For a current case in Naples, see *Corriere del Mezzogiorno* (24/03/2017) and Festa (2017).

[28] In many cases, these illegal occupants do not to pay rent and utility bills.

[29] Since the electoral campaign of 2010-2011, Naples has experienced claims of an "orange revolution", the scope and aims of which remain interestingly elusive (Chiocci and Di Meo 2013).

[30] Some of these associations stand accused of misappropriating public money for private gain (see *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 23/05/2015 and *Il Mattino*, 24/05/ 2015).

citizenship and delivers little — but survives nonetheless, standing on a shallow rhetoric and a well-managed concoction of questionable actions and spin.

It is ethnographically interesting that in the absence of credible political programmes such power without authority has been achieved by default. Italy is traditionally known for a high turnout at the polls. Yet, replicating wat happened in 2011, in 2016 only 50.37 percent of Naples registered voters cared to vote. The new mayor was thus re-elected by 65 percent of those who did vote; a little less, that is, of 33 percent of the total electorate. Two factors played a non-negligible role in this political debacle. On the one hand, most citizens' justified disillusionment with politics and distrust of key democratic institutions materialized in a very low electoral turnout. On the other hand, reaping observable benefits, small groups and lobbies have staunchly supported the present establishment electorally and through vociferous, even aggressive actions of various kinds. Underscoring a serious problem, this trend has continued in the 2020s.

Informants from all walks of life intensely wish but despair to see the end of the stereotype on Southern Italy and its ramifications, and their city restored to the sobriety and productivity of responsible rule, in policy and legislation. This condition of democracy qualifies both participation and representation, two fundamentals in the relationship between the individual and the system. As both remain unfulfilled in today's Naples, the morphology of the growing gap between governance and key instances of citizenship raises the question whether such a gap has become unbridgeable.

The Neapolitans whom I have met struggle to manage the increasing difficulty of their urban life. We have seen that most no longer vote. As an anthropologist and a democrat, I find it depressing that the Linos, the Lellos, their wives, their children, like many among the élite, should have reason to lose faith in "the system".

As recent events across Europe worryingly indicate, the implications and ramifications of the kind of grassroots disillusionment and distrust that we have studied in the Naples case reach far beyond the implosion of some specific élite group. Their empirical understanding sheds light on the danger they pose to the democratic order. This Italian case exemplifies the unique contribution that anthropology has to offer, suggesting that there are indeed good reasons — theoretical and practical — to stay committed to an ethnographically-based analysis.

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