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Errata Corrigé

Vol 13 Issue 1, May 2023. On page 24, table 1, in the list of Departments (3rd in the row), Phycology should read Psychology.

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's 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).

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.

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 elite 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).

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).

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 (Bremar 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

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).

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 elite groups in Naples and its Region, I have discussed at length how powerful, tightly networked

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.

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 documentary²³ 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.

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.

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).

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

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 what 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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The Cherries of the Mayor: Degrees of Morality and Responsibility in Local Italian Administration

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Preface

This article originally appeared as a chapter in an edited volume published in 2000 by Berghahn Books.¹ Since this original publication in 2000, I have published several updates on the changes in the Italian electoral system and on new political coalitions.² However, the present republication of the chapter in *Urbanities* has been stimulated by the recognition that the legislative changes and the, at the time “unusual”, political formations analysed here turned out to be precursors of the subsequent major changes that have occurred in the Italian political system, following the so-called *tangentopoli* (kick-back city, or brisbeville) scandals. The events described here, and in particular the analysis on the “double institutionalization of sub-government” are relevant to understanding the continuing turmoil and national government’s instability of post-tangentopoli Italian politics.

Keywords: Political representation, morality, ethics of responsibility, party-rule, *sottogoverno*, Brindisi.

Introduction

This chapter is based on ethnographic material collected in the province of Brindisi between 1987 and 1996. I examine the political changes that occurred during this period and the significance of new laws on administrative decentralisation to local government and politics more generally. I focus on the different responsibilities demanded of the roles of “administrator”, “politician” and “political person” in an attempt to investigate the different loyalties and moralities related to them. This analysis aims to highlight the ways in which the moralities and attitudes to politics of people who occupy public positions have been affected by the central role played by political parties. In particular, a conflict seems to emerge between an impartial, say bureaucratic, sense of responsibility and a committed, political one which in

¹ The original chapter was published as: Prato, Giuliana B., 2000, “The Cherries of the Mayor - Degrees of Morality and Responsibility in Local Italian Administration”, in I. Pardo (ed.), *Morals of Legitimacy: Between Agency and System*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pages 57-82 (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/PardoMorals>).

² For recent analyses see, for example, Prato, G. B., 2018, “On the Legitimacy of Democratic Representations: Two case studies from Europe”, in I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *Legitimacy: Ethnographic and Theoretical Insights*, Cham: Palgrave; Prato, G. B., 2018, “Dynamics of Legitimacy: Formal and Informal Contexts”, in I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *Ethnographers Debate Legitimacy*, special issue of *Urbanities*, Vol.8 (Suppl.1): 9-15 (<https://www.anthrojournal-urbanities.com/vol-8-suppl-1-april-2018/>); and Prato, G. B. 2021, “On Human Stupidity and Economic Policies”, in I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *Urban Inequalities–Ethnographically Informed Reflections*, Cham: Palgrave, PSUA Series.

turn might as well serve a partisan cause or be directed towards the common good (that is, politics in its noblest meaning). In this sense, Italy is not different from other European countries. However, the Italian ethnography clearly reveals how in contemporary democracy the power of political parties may degenerate to such an extent as to go well beyond formal and, at times, legally recognised limits. The use of such a power through hidden practices of government — known as *sottogoverno* (sub-government) — has culminated into the corruption of the representative system, described as *partitocrazia* (party-ocracy). The observer is, thus, faced with a situation whereby the political system, the legitimacy and stability of which should be safeguarded by the law, has in fact legitimised, and then reproduced, itself on the basis of behaviours, choices and moralities that may be licit to the actors involved, but would not be defined as legitimate by the governed, nor would they always be legal.

Some anthropologists who specialise in non-Western societies might find the last remark objectionable from a perspective anchored to assessing the extent of the institutionalisation of law as a means to social order. Nevertheless, in dealing with this Italian ethnography not only should we recognize that Western societies *do* emphasise this aspect of law; we should also bear in mind that here the political sphere is intrinsically linked to, and indeed legitimised through, the formal legal system. A version of legal positivism has thus subverted the problem of legitimacy as it has been addressed by scholars such as Mosca (1923), who challengingly suggested that in a contemporary democracy power should spring from the authority of the people, and such an authority should be based on moral principles. It follows that rulers cannot justify their power merely through domination, it has to have a legal base as well as moral consent. Hence, legitimacy seems to refer more to shared values than to the application of specific bounding procedures such as, among others, political elections and the formal ways in which the legislative, executive and juridical powers are exercised.

Here, my aim is to understand the principles of the legitimacy granted to sub-government and party-ocracy beyond formal law and the ethical dilemmas attendant to such principles. The anthropological tradition, and micro-level investigation, have been the starting points of my analysis; in particular, the debates on the validity of “legal centralism” as a universal category (see, Nader 1965; also Gluckman 1955) and the institutionalisation of norms (e.g., Bohannan 1965). In the light of these debates, I find stimulating Weber’s discussion of how party practices may influence the development of legal norms and his distinction between the ideal and the actual effectiveness of norms (legal, cultural and social); the former being the concern of jurists, the latter being the object of sociological analysis (Weber 1978).

This Weberian distinction points to a fundamental weakness in a trend developed in political anthropology by transactionalists. In an extensive work (1995), I have suggested that, contrary to their apparently neo-Weberian methodology, the transactionalists’ approach has brought to a head the very logic of “rationality” intrinsic in the “objective laws” of positivism. From such a perspective, although not denying that political choices may be influenced by normative motivations, anthropologists such as Bailey (1969) have maintained that such motivations are a justification for basically pragmatic interests and, therefore, we should

concentrate on the “pragmatic rules”; that is, on the ways in which actors organise themselves in order to establish and maintain control over the available resources. In contrast to such a view, I have suggested that, to focus on the actors’ wheeling and dealing would be as simplistic as dismissing sub-government in terms of political clientelism. If we agree that social facts are not “brute facts” (Lukes 1982), we must address the complex motivations of individuals’ actions beyond sterile methodological individualism. Here, inspired by Leach’s (1964) seminal approach,³ I seek to show that we have much to gain from investigating the “intersubjective” meanings, alongside the meanings individuals give to the social and political situations in which they operate. In trying to understand actors’ manoeuvres beyond the study of their practices, we ought to make sense of the “ethics of responsibility” that informs their political actions (Prato 1995; see also Prato 1993).

Of course, given a system of party-ocracy, any analysis of political action cannot ignore party politics and policies. Similarly, we cannot ignore that the present situation in Western European countries such as Italy is undeniably the offspring of the bureaucratisation of the mass parties masterly studied by Weber at the beginning of the 20th century. Dramatic events and changes have occurred since Weber’s times, but I believe that his work remains important in understanding some aspects of the moralities and responsibilities of the politicians of sub-government. I shall address this question in more detail in a later section. Here, let me point to irrefutable evidence. Across Europe, political parties, faced with the shortcomings of present political systems, have tried to renew themselves but, as the Italian ethnography exemplifies, they have basically failed to construct a credible alternative to the old party-organisation. It seems reasonable, therefore, to wonder whether the present parties actually recognise that this model of party-organisation is no longer viable and that they must do much more than refashion themselves, more or less superficially; they must engage in new forms of political action and organisation that are responsive to the new demands of civil society.

A reading of past Italian events shows that, back in the late 1980s, the aura of legitimacy that the political system had granted to sub-government and party-ocracy began to be questioned by some politicians who wanted to bring together public responsibilities and the different degrees of moralities and loyalties underlying the different roles in politics and administration. This attitude, and widespread discontent among ordinary people, have stirred up recent [in the 1990s] changes. I suggest that these very changes have in fact facilitated the institutionalisation of sub-government and the legal legitimisation of its moral principles.

The ethnography that I discuss in this chapter revolves around the case of D’Antonio, a mayor elected to the city council as an independent candidate on the Communist list.⁴ Such an apparent contradiction is explained by the fact that in Italy all candidates must be attached to a

³ I refer in particular to Leach’s attention to the subjective motivations of social action.

⁴ In 1991, the Italian Communist party (PCI) changed its logo and name to Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), later renamed again as Democrats of the Left (DS). A radical fringe renamed itself as Communist Refoundation.

formally registered electoral list.⁵ D’Antonio says that he accepted the Communists’ offer because he loved the city and thought that the solution to local problems could come from good administration of local resources. In spite of a disappointing experience as mayor, D’Antonio remains convinced that he would be a good administrator if only he had the right people around him and could avoid being restricted by party politics and by politicking.

D’Antonio identifies as a major asset in his approach to politics his ability to speak to all parties across the spectrum. His attitude seems to respond more to the role of “political person” than to that of “politician”. In its restricted meaning, the latter can be described as the party bureaucrat, the person of apparatus who lives *off* politics, whereas the political person would rather live *for* politics through personal engagement. These roles, and the attendant ethics of responsibility do indeed conflict. For D’Antonio, personal responsibility should be the foundation of good administration. On such grounds, he claims that, had he to choose, his priority would be a city mayoralty and not a seat in parliament — he feels that, given the system of party-ocracy, as an MP he would be a man of apparatus, the representative of a party, and not the representative of the people who elected him. Significantly, however, not long after his experience as mayor, he was elected to parliament as a candidate for the PDS (see footnote 3) and occupied relevant positions in parliamentary commissions that controlled crucial areas of the enquiries on political corruption. It is, however, his role in local government that raises interesting issues of legitimacy and morality in the political field.

Party-rule and (Hidden) Government in Italy

Since the formation of the Italian Republic in 1946, the major parties (that is, the Christian Democrat, the Communist and the Socialist parties) that participated in drafting the Constitution have supported administrative decentralisation, as a necessary measure to break the centralist tradition of the Italian State established by the post-Unification Jacobean government and enforced by Fascism. The territorial decentralisation of administration (which is regulated by Art. 117 of the Italian Constitution) has been expressed through the formation of secondary institutions — the *Regioni* (regions) — which can, in turn, delegate their administrative functions to *Province* (provinces) and *Comuni* (municipalities).

However, it has been widely argued that the subordination of every aspect of government to political parties’ interests has thwarted genuine self-government. In June 1990, a new law on local autonomies (Law 14-6-1990 No. 142) became effective. Law 142 was part of a wider strategy against party-ocracy. In theory, party-ocracy, intended as a degeneration of the representative system, responds to the historical transformation of the Liberal state which, according to Weber (1978), is inevitably linked to the bureaucratization of mass parties. Power has increasingly shifted from the representative body (the Parliament) to the political parties,

⁵ Each list includes a number of candidates up to the number of seats available in the council. Before the 1993 reforms, these lists also included (independent) non-party members, and the mayor had to be an elected city councillor appointed to the office by the City Council. Now, the mayor is elected directly by the people.

which should democratically regulate the election of such a representative body. MPs have thus ceased to be the representatives of the citizens, becoming instead the delegates of specific party factions, or of interests that are not always strictly political.

In Italy, the relationship between party-ocracy and sub-government is a complex one. Differently, say, from the US model, the Italian situation has been complicated by the system of proportional representation, now operating in a revised form,⁶ and the attendant nature of government coalitions in which minor parties also participated. One observable result of the growing electoral strength of these minor parties in the early 1980s was that the resources to be distributed became a bargaining tool used by political actors to pre-empt opposition. However, very rarely has such an illegitimate use of resources brought about suborning, for very rarely has it been set in simple, asymmetrical relations of power; even at local level, it has been part of a complex situation marked by a negotiated mutual agreement, among parties, in the formation of ruling coalitions. This situation closely reminds us of Weber's (1978) description of how compromise between different interest groups becomes the rule, and each group is likely to obtain benefits. Decision-making then occurs at a sub-government level.

The Italian political scientist Bobbio (1983) has described the connection between “proper government” and “sub-government” as twofold. On the one hand, it has involved what in Italy is known as *lottizzazione* (allotment), that is the negotiated distribution among political parties of key positions in the public sector and also in banks, credit institutions, the media and semi-public corporations. On a more general level, it has also involved the secret funding of the political parties, as a consequence of the dealings of these party-appointed personnel in procuring financial resources for the parties.⁷ Thus, far from being opposed to the rationale of party-ocracy, sub-government has been instrumental in strengthening precisely the power of the political parties, including those outside of government. The latter have benefited from sub-government through participation in parliamentary commissions endowed with legislative power which, since the mid-1960s, have become increasingly crucial to decision-making. Moreover, non-governmental parties may have considerable power and be in the executives of local administrations, including the regional assembly, and the province and city councils. These processes have significantly influenced different approaches to politics and local administration, as well as different — at times opposing — loyalties and senses of responsibility.

Private Interests, Morality and Clean Politics

During the 1980s, apart from recurrent problems of unemployment and industrial redevelopment, Brindisi administrators and politicians were faced with widespread calls for morality in public office.

⁶ The new electoral system of the early-1990s included both majority (first past the post) and proportional selections. Elsewhere, I explain in detail this new system (Prato 1995).

⁷ Following the 1993 referenda, new rules have been introduced on the funding of political parties.

Politicians from major parties argued that unemployment could be solved through the government programme of development of energy resources implemented in the early 1980s, which also extended to the province of Brindisi. In contrast to such hopes, various protest groups opposed the decision to build a power-station in the area. Among these were environmental groups and some Catholics who had long opposed various development policies in the South. Concern with the environment was, they said, only one aspect of the protest; above all, pointing to links between economic policies and instrumental political interests, they appointed themselves as the champions of “clean politics”, in opposition to party-ocracy. Believing that an institutional role would give them a better chance at succeeding in their task, they formed an electoral list named “Catholic and Lay People for Change” (CLC) and, in 1985, won two of the forty seats on the city council. Such an outcome was not totally unexpected, as local events did seem to give them some ground on which to base their claims.

Many Brindisini had bitterly resented the fact that, in 1984, a government commissioner had to be appointed to run Brindisi city council. This practice, known as *commissariamento*, occurs whenever a public or administrative institution (e.g., city council, province council or local health authority) cannot be governed by the appointed or elected body of councillors. In the case of the city council, it is the local prefect (i.e., the state’s representative in the province) who decides whether the appointment of a commissioner is necessary, and then makes a formal request to the Home Secretary. In Brindisi, *commissariamento* followed the arrest of the mayor, who had been accused of abuse of power and embezzlement of funds; among other things, the accusations were motivated by the fact that he had granted the use of city council funds without the necessary approval of the council.⁸ The way in which the city council executive had managed the power-station affair was also questioned with an emphasis on the events that led to an agreement, in 1984, between the executive and ENEL — the State Electricity Board responsible for the construction of the power-station. Following the council’s acceptance of the plant in 1983, protest groups seized the city hall. Undeterred, the mayor and a few *assessori* (members of the executive) went on to sign the agreement with ENEL in a storehouse in the industrial area; political opponents denied institutional validity to the agreement which was labelled as *patto baracca* (the hut agreement).

In those days, D’Antonio did not occupy a political or administrative position; however, on account of his reputation as a highly regarded professional, he had often contributed to the local political debate. Now, he proposed the formation of a “technical” executive that would include representatives of all parties elected to the city council — given the probability of *commissariamento*, in which all would lose out, just for once each party would thus have to be responsible for the administration of the city. He also argued that a councillor who could be regarded as being *super partes* would be the right choice as mayor, and suggested a Christian

⁸ Before the 1993 electoral reforms, the city council was administered through an executive made up of elected councillors, who in theory were appointed to the role of *assessori* (members of the executive) by the mayor. All the actions of the executive had, however, to be approved by a majority of the city councillors.

Democrat politician who, however, was opposed by locally powerful party comrades because of his public criticism of their administrative malpractice. Eventually, Brindisi failed to avoid the *commissariamento*. This encouraged the protest groups to form their own electoral list and motivated the Communists to ask D'Antonio to stand as a candidate on their list, despite their compromised position concerning the power-station, which they had accepted as unavoidable.

Throughout the 1980s the activity of Brindisi city council focused mainly on the construction of the power-station and, to a lesser but significant extent, on the redevelopment of existing industries. The opposition carried out by CLC councillors on juridical and legal grounds contributed to force several changes in the executive.⁹ At the end of 1986, little more than a year after the election, the appointed executive led by a Socialist mayor was forced to resign. The following spring, a new coalition was put together, including Christian Democrats, Communists and Republicans. The exclusion of the Socialists was reluctantly accepted by the Christian Democrats and Republicans. D'Antonio became mayor, but his office was destined to be short-lived.

At that time, the formal procedure still demanded that the mayor be nominated by the city council. He would then form the executive, selecting the *assessori* from among the elected councillors (see footnotes 5 and 8). The actual practice was quite different. In this case, after months of meetings and failed negotiations, the three parties that eventually reached an agreement were determined to choose as mayor a competent person with a high moral reputation. Not only did these three parties need to send a message to the city, they also knew that their coalition absolutely needed the support of the CLC in order to survive. Many saw in D'Antonio the best, though in many ways most problematic, choice. D'Antonio was too independent and, on some occasions, had opposed Communist policy. A way around his independence was to exclude him from the selection of the *assessori*. Of course, the parties provided justification for every single choice, stressing that the proposed *assessori* were all trustworthy people, meaning, as D'Antonio fully recognised, that these people could be trusted to counterbalance his “independence”. As for the CLC, some activists branded the coalition as an expression of political opportunism. However, as the coalition parties had hoped, the involvement of a person like D'Antonio did help to persuade senior members to compromise and give their support, while continuing to preach “morality” and “clean politics”.

The Maid and the Cherries. Degrees of Morality, Trust and Responsibility

On becoming mayor, D'Antonio addressed the executive with a metaphorical speech about his expectations of, and attitude towards, a hypothetical maid. He started by saying that if he had a maid, he would expect a basic degree of proper behaviour and honesty from her, for he believed that both parties would benefit from a relationship based on reciprocal trust. On such grounds, if he, for instance, had guests to supper and asked the maid to buy the best quality cherries, he could expect three possible, very different outcomes. First, the good quality of the shopping

⁹ At that time, the resignation of the executive did not necessarily bring about a new election, but usually led to a new agreement that might exclude some of the old allies.

and the reasonable amount of money spent would confirm that he had not misplaced his trust. Second, the maid would, disappointingly, return home with indisputably low-quality fruit and say that she had expensively bought the best on the market. Third, the quality of the shopping would meet his expectation but the maid would claim a sudden increase in price, in fact implying that she had pocketed some of the money. In this last case, though still disappointed, he would consider the possible reasons for such a behaviour before passing judgement. She might have been in need of the money. Of course, she should have talked to him, but he would somehow be inclined to turn a blind eye to the episode if no third parties were going to suffer from her misbehaviour, and if she usually acted in good faith and, more generally, fulfilled responsibly her duties. D'Antonio did not need, nor was he asked, to explain the moral of the story. Some local politicians later commented that they hoped he really had meant what he had said, and did not expect them to act in accord with the first hypothesis in his parable. Given the widespread use (and abuse) of sub-government dealings, D'Antonio clearly took a non-naive view of the gradation of (moral) corruption, beyond the strictly legal definition and was not expecting that outcome either.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he made a point during his mayoralty of showing by his own actions, symbolic and practical, that it was possible to act primarily in the public interest of the city, even though such an attitude would cost him financial losses and have negative effects on his private life.

D'Antonio tried to prove his point in various ways. To start with, breaking with tradition, he and his family did not make a private use of the official car assigned to the mayor. Moreover, having repeatedly been picked on by local traffic wardens, he decided to travel by public transport. Interestingly, traffic wardens are a sort of municipal police and the mayor is their highest superior. D'Antonio had asked for their cooperation in trying to re-establish a relationship of trust with Brindisini. He suggested that the image of the city and the smooth running of its services depended primarily on the way in which the official representatives of the city, at all levels, performed their duties.

What D'Antonio was asking for was a “not-too-high degree of responsibility”, including avoiding unjustified absence from work and providing swift responses to the needs of the city. In return, he kept his promise to listen to people's demands and discontent. Many local politicians, including his Communist friends, criticised his readiness to meet people¹¹ and argued that he did not need to spend so much time in his office. Soon rumours also spread that he was not pocketing the usual 10 per cent kickback that contractors for public works were allegedly expected to pay in order to obtain contracts. After a few months, many Brindisini began to feel that the city had finally found the right mayor. People stopped D'Antonio in the street to congratulate him; the traffic wardens who had initially opposed him began to

¹⁰ This kind of morality was later broadly translated into law with adverse implications in terms of legitimacy which have been addressed in recent works (Miller 1998). On political corruption as a classical issue, see Schafer 1974.

¹¹ Pardo (1993) has analysed this Communist attitude in relation to their administrative experience in Naples.

cooperate. Communist rank-and-file supported him, and senior politicians from other parties made it clear that they held him in high regard. The council executive seemed to cooperate, though not always willingly. Many council bureaucrats, including those who had obtained their jobs through political parties, acknowledged the more efficient running of the municipal institutions. Yet, in spite of such an apparently overwhelming success, after little more than a year, D'Antonio had to resign. Some of the events and motivations that led to his resignation are relevant to our analysis.

Ethics of political negotiation

As I mentioned above, throughout the 1980s the activity of the Brindisi city council focused mainly on the power-station affair. It was inevitable that, as soon as the executive led by D'Antonio took office, the CLC began to press for a meeting with the central government in order to discuss, and settle, that complex situation. After two disappointing meetings with government representatives, it became clear that, in spite of D'Antonio's observable investments in moral authority and good will, his policy was bound to fall very short of the CLC's expectations.

Paradoxically, D'Antonio's stress on his mayoral duty to safeguard the interests of *all* citizens contributed to his moral image as a good administrator, but proved tactically damaging. His non-“political” commitment, his show of competence in tackling complex situations, his integrity, his devotion to the mayoral office and constant relationship with the people and, most importantly, his understanding of their problems also made him a symbolic representative of the city. This granted him legitimacy well beyond his institutional role. For many people D'Antonio represented *Brindisinità*; that is, local historically rooted values and culture. Some of his opponents branded his independence from party politics as a form of (palatable) authoritarianism, but this argument cut little ice among ordinary people. Brindisini had long experienced commitment to party politics in the form of partisan attitudes, political favouritism, party interests overriding administrative duty — all of which conflicted with their idea of legitimacy. Yet, these elements, among others, formed the actual basis for accountability in sub-government. Even the CLC's members, while preaching clean politics, succumbed to the logic of sub-government, stating that they had been betrayed by D'Antonio, the very man in whom they had put their hopes. In their bitterness, the CLC found instrumental support in some politicians across the political spectrum who, having failed to counterbalance D'Antonio's independence, wanted to reinstate a more traditional coalition, one that would work according to the rules of sub-government and party-ocracy.

The resignation of a Republican *assessore* was the first step towards the fall of that executive. This person can be described as a contemporary version of the “amateur politician” (in the sense of Weber's *nebenberufliche*, 1974); he is also a successful entrepreneur who tries to extract non-political benefits from the power that may spring from his political activity. His reasons for deserting D'Antonio are interesting.

During that period, significant changes had been proposed in the presidency of the Apulian Chambers of Commerce (CoCs). Apulian CoCs had traditionally been Christian Democrat strongholds. This *assessore* knew, however, that the national leaderships of the five parties in central government (a coalition known as *pentapartito* and including Christian Democrats, Republicans, Social Democrats, Socialists and Liberals) had agreed that the Christian Democrats would relinquish the presidency of a CoC in favour of the Socialists or the Republicans, and that the Brindisi CoC was the most negotiable one. Such a concession would have to be compensated in some way, and the negotiations would also have to satisfy the other parties involved. A relevant role was to be played by the Socialists who gave priority to marginalising the Communists from local government because the latter had masterminded their exclusion from the city council executive.

The negotiations over the control of the Brindisi CoC evolved around social and political networks which included mainly Socialists and Republicans. It was eventually agreed that in exchange for the presidency, the Republicans would withdraw from the city executive in order to reintroduce a *pentapartito* coalition. A Christian Democrat would be appointed as the new mayor. The Socialists would not only rejoin the executive, but were reassured that they would benefit from the Republican presidency in the CoC. Meanwhile the Communists mounted a vilifying campaign in their local newspaper against the Republican candidate to the CoC presidency. Eventually, the editor of the newspaper was accused of libel and a leading member of the local Communist secretariat was appointed as councillor in the governing body of the Brindisi CoC.

D'Antonio did not feel so much betrayed by all this politicking as by the Communist Party's actions and withdrawal of support. The Communists had always claimed to oppose party-ocracy; yet, at the time of these events many in the rank-and-file began questioning whether the highly praised democratic centralism was itself a form of party-ocracy. Reflecting ordinary's people ideas of legitimacy, during a party meeting, a long-standing member suggested that the party should regard as a party-ocratic practice the appointment of party bureaucrats who were powerful in the party secretariat, to positions of administrative responsibility in public institutions.¹² Predictably, that line of argument found no support among the party notables, who claimed that the decadence of the political system was due precisely to the lack of party discipline, adding that the present situation was largely explained by the too independent, therefore *irresponsibile*, attitude of people like D'Antonio.

D'Antonio concedes that, although he had always tried to act both in accordance with the law and in fulfilment of people's moral expectations, his deeds were denied legitimacy by the parties, which had instead acted in accordance with the moral principles of sub-government. Through his parable about the maid, he had tried to make it clear that he was aware of the different responsibilities faced by individuals who are at once both party bureaucrats and

¹² Abrahams and Bukurura (1993) have addressed this aspect in relation to Tanzania, showing how a Communist-style bureaucracy has led to a predominance of the party leadership over democratic institutions, often at the expense of the elected parliament.

institutional representatives, and that he was aware that different roles demanded different loyalties and moralities. Therefore, he expected conflicts to arise as members of the executive were faced with the choice of being institutional administrators or “politicians”, or, in what he described as the noblest hypothesis, individuals who had chosen to dedicate themselves to politics and to the law in order to guarantee social order and the common good. Of course, he was also aware that the boundaries between such different moralities and responsibilities are not always clearly defined.

In all his will to be a good “political man”, D’Antonio failed to recognise that, in this situation, his stress on independence and *personal* responsibility might well have made him accountable to ordinary citizens but, crucially, it made him broadly unaccountable to the parties that were supporting him. Following Weber (1978), we might suggest that D’Antonio was challenging the stability of an established “convention” which did not need the enforcement of law in order to be legitimate in the eyes of the individuals who practised it. As such a “convention” was recognised as “binding”, it had to be protected against violation or deviation. Disapproval was the initial sanction against D’Antonio. Boycott on the part of his allies was his final punishment. In spite of such ostracism, D’Antonio continued to act in accordance with his conception of morality and personal responsibility, while opposing the ethics of responsibility expressed by the politics of sub-government.

Morality, legality and ethics of responsibility

The new council executive that was formed in 1989 included all the *pentapartito* parties. It lasted with much difficulty until the end of that legislature (March 1990) and was subjected to magistracy enquiries. For instance, in August 1989 the new mayor signed a new agreement with the central government regarding the power-station. Not only did this move fail to deliver what it promised, opposition groups also succeeded in providing evidence to the Regional Administrative Tribunal that led to the prosecution of the mayor and four *assessori* on the charge of pursuing private interests through public office. This added to the ongoing enquiry involving Republican and Communist city councillors who had been accused of having acted unlawfully. As members of the city council building commission, they had signed a building permit for the construction of the power-station, despite having a private interest in the project; they were either owners or shareholders in some of the contracting firms. It was argued that they should also have refrained from attending the city council meetings during which the crucial decisions were taken on the project. It is worth mentioning that the so-called “clean hands enquiries” were yet to come. In this situation, the mayor and the four prosecuted *assessori* did not feel threatened by the enquiries. They did not resign and, in spite of negative media coverage, the following December proceeded to push the August agreement through the city council, arguing that it was their institutional responsibility to do so. At the December council meeting, D’Antonio argued for morally, as well as legally, acceptable behaviour in a speech that was regarded as highly embarrassing not only for those in power, but also for a significant portion of the opposition. The main items on the agenda were the ratification of the agreement

and the resignation of the prosecuted mayor and *assessori*. As time limits were unexpectedly imposed, D'Antonio managed to complete his "long political" and "juridical" harangue only after a right-wing politician, an MSI councillor,¹³ made time for him by giving up his own speech. Having stressed that, in signing the August agreement, the mayor had betrayed the will of the council, D'Antonio pressed on, pointing out that he should also have resigned because other members of the executive were being legally prosecuted. He argued that the action of the mayor and his *assessori* made them either dishonest or incompetent and, therefore, unsuitable to govern. In either case, they had a moral and civil obligation to resign. Instead, they had shown an "undignified attachment to their seats" putting the whole city council into a very awkward position. The council could not press charges against them because, legally, the mayor and the *assessori* cannot act against themselves. On the other hand, should the city council fail to act, it would be legally liable for neglect of duty. D'Antonio's point was that, under the circumstances, a solution could only be found legally, *not* politically, and that this would be possible only by getting round party discipline.

The August agreement was eventually ratified with the support of the Communists, then formally in opposition. Only thirty councillors out of forty participated in the ballot. Eight voted against the agreement; including the three MSI councillors, one CLC councillor (the other had already left, thus weakening the credibility of their opposition), D'Antonio and three Christian Democrats, one of whom had been bitterly opposed by party comrades during the meeting. The Liberal councillor abstained. The reasons given by those who voted in favour and their subsequent actions are most revealing. The Republican group leader pointed out that the ratification had passed thanks to the Communists' support, which he regarded as an act of administrative responsibility. However, he continued, the Republicans would demand an enquiry on the executive's activities and, of course, its resignation. This was an astute move in view of the forthcoming election, because by demanding an enquiry into a coalition of which they were part, they stressed that their *assessore* was a "clean" politician. Less straightforwardly, the Socialists said that they had supported the agreement not because they wanted to support the executive (of which they also were part), but because they felt a moral commitment towards their electors. They would support the Republicans' request for a "political" enquiry but they felt that, as the construction of the power-station would continue regardless of what happened to the present executive, there was no point in causing a political crisis and further disruption to the administration of the city. The Communists did not expand much on the motivations they had given during the debate. They had criticised at length the mayor and the executive, and had demanded their resignation, while arguing that this was not the moment to indulge in "political terrorism" of the kind practised by the MSI and CLC. In particular, they described the CLC's position as political blackmail, cunningly disguised through claims of ethical, political and juridical righteousness. Tellingly, most of the

¹³ Through a process similar to that of the Communists', the MSI (Italian Social Movement) later became Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance) leaving behind a radical fringe, the Movimento Sociale (Social Movement), which was parallel to Communist Refoundation.

councillors who had demanded the resignation of the mayor and the executive began to leave the hall, rather noisily, as the mayor made clumsy attempts to speak. He was therefore forced to declare that the second item on the agenda could not be discussed because the number of attendees was legally insufficient. The second item, we know, was the “no-confidence motion against the mayor”. Thus, while their messages were apparently directed at the public, hinting that they had acted in the interests of their electorate, in fact their speeches and actions aimed at assuring old, and potential new, partners in sub-government that they all shared the same sense of loyalty and responsibility. Very soon, widespread debate on the old party structure would induce a readjustment of some aspects of the system of sub-government. In fact, as we shall see, it seems only to have grazed the party oligarchic power.

Morals of Oligarchy vs Personal Responsibility

This Brindisi ethnography shows that local Communists were not unfamiliar with sub-government. However, they had always stressed that, in contrast to the other parties that lacked internal discipline, their beyond-the-party networks were used — in the terms of sub-government — on behalf of the party, not for personal gains. Thus, the party leadership encouraged ordinary members to develop social networks that were not strictly party-centred and to keep a low profile on the nature of the relations on which they were constructed. Social networks became, however, problematic resources when they escaped the party’s control, as in the case of D’Antonio, who was supported by most rank-and-file and young members, but was “benevolently” criticised by senior Communists.

By the end of the 1980s, young activists had singled out the party’s involvement in sub-government as a main cause of the widening gap between the party and the broader society. It is now known that throughout 1989 and 1990, the Italian Communists debated how to change the party’s name and logo in ways that would reflect changes in their political philosophy.¹⁴ They saw the 1990 administrative election as a testing ground for a new party organisation and for an alliance with non-Communist political actors. Once again, D’Antonio embodied their passport to credibility in such changes. This local trial run concretised in the formation of an “open” electoral list which included the Communists, a number of independents led by D’Antonio, and the Catholic group that had, meanwhile, dissociated from the CLC. In accordance with the new image stressed by the PCI in the 1989 statute, the electoral list was discussed among party members, including the rank-and-file, before it was officially presented to the electorate. In spite of widespread substantial disagreement from the floor, the party leadership imposed its choices.

This is not the place to discuss in detail the way in which the electoral campaign was carried out. It will suffice to say that, while the list was presented to the electorate as the list of the mayor D’Antonio, some party members who were candidates on the same list manoeuvred against him. Not only did such a boycott betray the spirit of the “open” list, it also ran counter

¹⁴ Anthropological analyses can be found in Pardo (1993) and Prato (1995). For an early account see Ignazi (1990).

to the guidelines set in the party's statute, whereby Communist candidates are expected to "conduct the electoral campaign without indulging in personal propaganda" and to "behave loyally towards their comrades in the list". D'Antonio was elected. However, his serious reservations about the Communists' behaviour later concretised in his resignation from the city councillorship. Various attempts were made to persuade him to desist from such a line of action, including the suggestion that he was the list's only possible nominee for an eventual mayoralty. This exemplifies the conflictual relationship D'Antonio has had with the Communist party, and later with the PDS. On the one hand, he says he is dissatisfied with the overwhelming power of party bureaucrats and, now and then, considers leaving active politics. On the other hand, he feels that being a "political man", he cannot help his need to be involved and, identifying himself as basically left-wing, feels unable to sever his link with the party.

In 1992, a momentary peace agreement was established as D'Antonio, now a member of the PDS, was asked to stand as a candidate for parliament. D'Antonio conceded that the proposal flattered his vanity. More seriously, he thought that this experience might be useful in case he ever decided to return to local politics. His candidature was so vehemently opposed by some senior members as to force a general vote. The D'Antonio candidature passed comfortably, but this did not deter his opponents. Fearing the power he might acquire as an MP, they accused him of continuing to act as an "independent" and put forward an alternative candidate, who was more experienced in parliamentary affairs. Other comrades believed, instead, that D'Antonio was the right person to contain the party's loss of consent; with him, the party would have a chance to win "by betting on the person". The electoral results proved them right. Not only was he elected, but his candidature was also instrumental in helping to elect a "truly party man", who was earmarked to serve in important parliamentary commissions but whose attitude and political choices had alienated the support of many Brindisini, giving the party reason to fear that he would not be elected on his own.

In theory, this kind of electoral agreement is no longer possible. Since 1992, the procedures for holding parliamentary and administrative elections have changed several times. These reforms have claimed to meet Italians' desire for real change. However, recent events contradict such a claim. The following section outlines the ways in which the changes introduced after the enquiries into political corruption have in fact institutionalised sub-government, giving a new face-lift to the powers of party-ocracy.

Institutional reforms, or the institutionalisation of sub-government

Among the changes introduced by the post-1992 institutional reforms, there are those related to the election of the mayor and the city council. They are a further development of the aforementioned law 142 on local autonomies of 1990. We know that one of the aims of this law was to guarantee more balanced relations between local administration and central government beyond the parties' control. At the same time, it aimed at safeguarding people's participation in decision-making against abuses of power.

A first law regulating administrative elections was passed in January 1992. According to this, people who had been legally prosecuted and found guilty of crimes related, amongst other things, to corruption and actions against the interests of the state and its citizens could not be elected to public office. It also stated that should such crimes be committed by a politician elected to office, he or she should be immediately suspended. This move met people's expectations in a situation in which politicians' attitudes had also in part changed. As we have seen, only three years earlier, a corrupt officer's staying on was regarded as illegitimate and morally wrong only by ordinary people and a very few politicians. Now, following the enquiries into corruption, many prosecuted administrators would not easily contemplate staying in office, regardless of whether this would constitute a breach of law.

Another relevant change was introduced by the law passed in March 1993, regulating the direct election of the mayor. This new law, along with law 142, gives almost absolute powers to the mayor and to the executive, now no longer composed of elected politicians. While in the past the *assessori* were chosen among the elected councillors, now the two roles are incompatible; in the event that a city councillor is appointed to the executive, he or she has to relinquish the councillorship. This rule is meant to avoid conflict between a position that is still inevitably linked to a political party, and an office that is supposed to be beyond party politics and that should bring about that sense of responsibility so dear to people like D'Antonio. However, the reality of the present situation is very different from the theorised model. Before looking again at the ethnography, let me point out some aspects of the new law that are relevant here.

This idea of an independent executive could make one wonder whether, as some new mayors have claimed, the office of mayor should also be regarded as having purely administrative status. In fact, the position is inevitably political, as the new law demands candidates to the mayoralty to be linked to one, or more than one, electoral lists. These lists, in turn, can be made up by established or newly formed political parties. In order to be elected, a candidate must obtain an absolute majority. In the event that no candidate manages to do so, the two candidates with most votes go through a second ballot and are allowed to seek the backing of other lists in addition to those that had originally supported them. The party, or coalition of parties, that supports the winning candidate gets 60 per cent of the council seats. The remaining seats are distributed among the lists or coalitions that obtain enough votes to elect at least one councillor, and their unelected candidates to the mayoralty are entitled by right to the councillorship.

Given these new rules, on the occasion of the 1994 city council election, Brindisi experienced the formation of fifteen different electoral lists. There were nine candidates to the mayoralty, most of whom had formed their own electoral list after failing to lead those of established parties or of other newly formed political groups. In many cases, these people knew that they would not be elected as mayor, but hoped to get enough votes to become city councillors. The PDS formed a coalition with a conservative fringe of the Catholic electorate, thus forcing its previous Catholic partners to split and return to the old alliance with the

environmentalists. D'Antonio did not present his candidature either as mayor or as councillor. The PDS had initially proposed him as candidate to the mayoralty. However, the idea was abandoned during the “preparatory” (read: bargaining) meetings with the new Catholic allies, in which he was made to play a very marginal role. During these meetings, the point was stressed that the candidate needed to be a respectable and capable professional but also someone perceived by the people as being outside politics. In particular, the Catholics wanted someone young, who could not possibly have a long political history. D'Antonio turned down the support of other lists, some of which had been formed by splinter members of the PDS, vaguely explaining that he did not want to campaign against the PDS. The candidate of the PDS-led coalition was elected as mayor after a second run ballot against the candidate of Berlusconi's newly formed party, Forza Italia, which in Brindisi was initially a rather disorganised group.

As an immediate advantage, the new procedure would appear to guarantee a certain stability of the executive — which is expected to last until the end of the legislature — and therefore a smooth running of the administration. In the past, it could take months to form the executive and, should it resign, more months would elapse before a new one would be formed. Now, its formation must be accomplished within a restricted time limit and, in the event of resignation, a new election must be called. As a consequence, all the agreements that in the past were taken at a sub-government level are now bargained in advance, but the logic and rules seem to have remained the same. The main difference would be that, apart from being regarded as morally legitimate by the political actors involved, the pre- and post-electoral compromises are also given an aura of legality.

Thus, sub-government has become, in a sense, institutionalised. Bohannan's hypothesis (1965) of the double institutionalisation of norms may help to understand this new Italian situation. For Bohannan, as for Weber (1978), the diffusion of a conduct among a plurality of individuals will inevitably lead to a consensual understanding. For Weber, however, such a consensus is not by itself law. From the Weberian perspective, the necessity to introduce new rules of law is mainly explained with the emergence of new lines of conduct that challenge the established consensus; in our case, we think of the attitudes of people like D'Antonio (for other forms of “challenging activities”, see Prato 1995). In such a situation, there may be individuals who would favour change either to protect their interests, thus altering the external conditions in which they operate, or to promote them more effectively under existing conditions (Weber 1978). The Italian changes seem to be a result of the first possibility envisioned by Weber. More interesting, however, Bohannan (1965) has argued that a shared conduct becomes institutionalised, and therefore “legally” binding, when such a conduct starts losing consensus. Taking Bohannan's analysis further, we could say that, although sub-government was certainly not losing consensus among political parties, the moral opposition to it expressed in civil society seriously threatened its survival. Thus, while political parties start to preach “revolutionary changes” (which the “clean hands” enquiries were supposed to bring about), the rules of sub-government have eventually been enforced by law, thus becoming institutionalised. In any case,

as recent events in Brindisi and throughout Italy show, local administrations continue to experience a high degree of instability.

As soon as Brindisi's new mayor was in office, he made choices that ran counter to his allies' expectations. The compromise that led to that alliance also involved the appointments in the executive. The mayor, however, did not entirely conform to the agreement and, as soon as the executive was formally appointed, the PDS councillors started their opposition. After repeated mayoral resignations and their subsequent withdrawals, in January 1996, the executive was dissolved and a new election was called for the following June. D'Antonio now decided to present his own list. Following the events surrounding the 1994 election, he had become determined to set up what he calls a "movement of political training". He had cultivated this idea for a long time, and now felt that the right moment had arrived to put it into practice. The movement, he said, was meant to "discuss" politics, rather than "simply act" in the political arena; it aimed at involving people in the street, not just intellectuals, the ultimate goal being to influence public opinion towards a moral approach to politics which, however, remained undefined. An ear of wheat was adopted as the logo for the movement in order to stress the individuality of each member — symbolised by the kernels — while suggesting that unity (of the spike) could be achieved only through the common effort of all individuals. It would therefore be a "movement of democratic unity".

In spite of his conflictual relationship with the PDS, D'Antonio was confident that, eventually, the party would support him, not because it would feel morally compelled to do so, but because it might just feel compelled by a sense of political responsibility. Should such support not materialise, D'Antonio envisioned three possibilities. He would win at the first round. The candidate of the right coalition would, instead, win at the first round (a likely possibility in the changed political climate of Brindisi). Finally, he and the right-wing candidate would have to ballot the candidature at the second round. The first and second possibilities left little space for manoeuvre and, D'Antonio said, should he win, the only responsible thing the PDS could do would be to support him in the city council — their opposition, he envisioned, would further damage their image because many in Brindisi deemed them responsible for the city administrative and political crisis. The third possibility, concerning a second ballot, would put the PDS in a more complex situation; at such a juncture, the only way for them to come out morally clean would be to support him, for, should they fail to do so, they could be blamed for the victory of the right. Eventually, the PDS supported D'Antonio's candidature, but the candidate of the right won the election. To many Brindisini, the "democratic unity" of D'Antonio's movement was too closely reminiscent of Communist "democratic centralism". Moreover, while the parties of the right capitalised on previous experience and supported a single candidate, those of the left presented different candidates, ending up fighting each other. In Brindisi, many believed that fragmentation among the Left, and the PDS's policies and shifting alliances across the political spectrum, at local and national levels, provided powerful explanations for this recent electoral result.

Distortions of Responsibility, Trust and Accountability

It has been suggested that a system of proportional representation such as Italy's leads to the rulers' loss of sense of responsibility because in such a system it is difficult to distinguish between those who, nominally, govern and those who, nominally, are the opposition. While for a long time these parties have been formally out of government, they have participated in sub-government, thus strengthening the "negative power" of the parties; that is, the power of blocking action. In such a scenario, the morals of politicking seem to prevail over those of responsible, and trustable, politics.

In our analysis of a system that is said to have changed from a parliamentary democracy to a party-ocracy, we should ask which ideals of state and representation Italian politicians bring into existence through their actions. If we agree with Weber (1974) that the politician's action is characterised by partisan spirit, we ought also to agree that responsibility towards a particularistic cause would be the ultimate guide of such action. Moreover, if we accept that a major inner satisfaction in politics lies in the sense of power, we might as well suggest that, apart from the acquisition of personal power, in a party-ocratic system developed in response to the original weakness of the parties, the cause to be served is the acquisition of power — electoral and political — for one's own party. In Italy, as the power of the executive body (i.e., the government) is constitutionally subordinated to the parliamentary representatives (who in fact are party representatives), the observable outcome of such an approach to politics has been that the rules of sub-government have become dominant.

Perversely, politicians who dutifully serve "the cause" tend to justify their actions by ethical guidelines according to which if they do not act as required by the rules of sub-government someone else will, and such *other* persons might well happen to belong to a different (probably opposite) party. Politicians of sub-government gladly fulfil their duties, not only because a different course of action would be disadvantageous to them but also because, as Weber makes us note, "its violation would be abhorrent" to their very sense of duty (Weber 1978: 31). Thus, the stability of the system seems to rely on the awareness of the individuals involved that as long as the people with whom they interact continue to uphold those rules and conform with the attendant ethics, disobedience will bring about sanctions and inconveniences. Thus, it is deemed to be proper, "responsible" behaviour to act accordingly and serve the cause of one's party, of one's allies and, maybe, also of one's electorate. Thus, not only does the party system seem to have blurred the separation of the three fundamental powers of contemporary democracy — executive, legislative and juridical powers — (see Pardo 2000); it has also affected the very idea of a political system based on civil rights. Political power should promote, respect and safeguard these rights; paradoxically, the party power seems to be directed against these very rights.

Here, we have seen that responsibility to one's party (or faction) and its allies in sub-government is an essential aspect in this party-ocratic system. Furthermore, we know that party-ocracy has extended the control of the political parties over public affairs. In this situation, the bureaucratic and administrative structures seem to have failed to become separated from the

processes of public political competition; thus, such a “political responsibility” had to be extended to these arenas too. This is important because, contrary to what is prescribed by the Constitution, in this party-ocracy civil servants, especially in ministerial offices, cease to be at the “exclusive service of the nation” (Italian Constitution: Art. 98); and, as they are appointed by the parties in accord with the allotment procedure, they are restricted in guaranteeing “the good performance and impartiality of the administration” (Italian Constitution: Art. 97). As the ministerial office increasingly becomes an important step into a high-level political career, “bureaucratic responsibility” becomes an empty concept and the office holder becomes responsible in the party-ocratic sense that I have described. Reminding us again of the Weberian analysis, these processual distortions of responsibility have produced a situation whereby bureaucrats who maintain a moral standing of “impartiality” are in fact regarded as “irresponsible politicians”. They become, in this sense, “politicians of low moral standing” (Weber 1974: 95), and therefore unaccountable and untrustworthy. Their “impartiality”, like the ethics of responsibility claimed by the “political person”, is denied legitimacy and, we have seen, can be branded as leading dangerously to authoritarianism. However, in the present Italian climate, the observer is tempted to suggest that it is rather the abused power of some mayors elected under the new law that might lead to such an authoritarian outcome (Pardo 1997). Their princelike behaviour might well have legitimacy in sub-government, but obviously lacks moral legitimacy among the people.

Conclusion

This Brindisi ethnography suggests that the ethics of responsibility based on personal engagement appears to be in significant contrast with that of the politicians of sub-government. The actions of the “political person” seem in fact to point to the corruption of political representation and a strengthening of the system of party-ocracy and its corresponding ethics of responsibility. This person might well have facilitated a new, fresh approach that would acknowledge *personal* responsibility, in particular before society. Crucially, however, in doing so, he or she becomes irresponsible before, and unaccountable to, the party system.

The contemporary situation leaves the observer with a sceptical feeling about the changes that have recently occurred in the Italian political system. Time will tell whether such political persons will be able, in Weber’s words, to “arm themselves with the stoutness of heart” that makes them say “but still” (1991: 225), and whether they will be allowed to do so from a position that makes them accountable to their electorate and to the broader society. I am not suggesting an idealist, utopian future. Of course, the fight for power is bound to remain a central aspect of political competition. However, legitimisation is necessary for any management of power to be long-lasting and effective. Political parties must acknowledge that they need more than legal face-lifts for legitimacy to be socially ratified, and political obligation maintained. It is widely accepted that in contemporary democracies the realm of legitimacy cannot be confined to the legal system and to the power of making and applying the law, as suggested by legal positivism. The empirical situation ultimately reminds us that the rulers cannot justify

their power only with a *de facto* domination (whatever form that might take); instead, they need justification both on legal *and* moral grounds.

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***A Curious Article:
Touring Multipurpose Venues in Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire¹***

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Elusive objects require elusive methodologies. This article is a description of the urban and the ways in which the urban condition impacts anthropological research. Through the author's reflection on her own ethnographic practice in an elusive urban environment in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, curiosity takes centre stage. The discussion accounts for the author's personal experience being curious about multipurpose venues in Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire and curious with Tchanbi, who is the tour guide. And just like the researcher, the readers are taken on a tour. However, readers do not have to follow a linear storyline provided either by the author or the tour guide, rather readers get a chance to follow up on their own curiosity by browsing links and signposts, skipping sections or digging deeper into them. How and to what extent does the city impact the way in which research is conducted? And how can ethnography do justice to the city's demands? The article curiously explores the relationship between those people who constitute these very concepts, namely, city dwellers and researchers of the urban and, thus, points attention to the ways in which the two inform each other.

Keywords: Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, curious anthropological research, multipurpose venues.

Introduction: Doing Anthropological Research in the City.

The city is everywhere; thus, we want to know about it (Werthmann 2014). The city is complex; thus, it is an ongoing challenge for research (Amin and Thrift 2017, Pellow and Sheld 2023, Prato and Pardo 2013). So, the question is how to research the city.

There are numerous descriptions of particular cities and city spaces as well as theorizations thereof (see for instance Prato and Pardo 2013, Werthmann 2022). Providing a case of doing research in the city, this article is a description of the urban and the ways in which the urban condition impacts anthropological research. It problematizes the relationship between those people who constitute these very concepts, namely, city dwellers and researchers of the urban. In its refusal to pick sides of either "anthropological research in an urban setting" or "urban anthropology" (Prato and Pardo 2013), the article points attention to the ways in which the two inform each other and, ultimately, adds the notion of *research with* the city (Swanson 2020).

To engage with the urban means dealing with "a research field constituted by elusive objects" and requires researchers "to constantly reflect on what makes it possible for us to know" (Macamo 2018: 7). But how? The urban condition is characterized by its instability, both produced by and dealt with by its people and we need our methods to account for that. Elusive objects require elusive methodologies. If an object is impossible to grasp, and if we do not want to be trapped in our own delusion, our objective cannot be to grasp it, but to look for alternative ways to engage with the object. I stick with ethnography — and its relationship with the city — and ask: How and to what extent does the city impact the way in which research is conducted? And how can ethnography do justice to the city's demands?

¹ I am grateful for the comments and criticism given by the Editorial Board of *Urbanities* and the anonymous reviewers. This final version of the article has significantly benefited from their input.

There are two distinctive streams of approaches to urban research in Anthropology. The first one sticks with what is called “the good anthropological method” (Herzfeld 2013) and the second one is “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995, in Prato and Pardo 2013: 96). Both of them face the same criticism of being too superficial to account for the complexities of the urban condition, but for different reasons. Whereas multi-sited ethnography is limited in depth, the good anthropological method is limited in scope. Now, I take this discussion as an opportunity to reflect on my own ethnographic practice in an urban environment. I realize that I am just as urban in my practice as city dwellers are described to be. It is revealed how the urban and ethnography inform each other. The physicality of the urban (Feuchtwang 2013) draws my attention to surface matters and my particular practice guided by curiosity. The first part of the article is an attempt to translate this experience of curiosity into writing. The second part, suggests that just like the urban population is adapting to the urban condition (Fischer and Kokolaki 2013), ethnographers do, too. In doing so, it accounts for one possible way in which this can be done without losing sight of the “good anthropological way”.

This Article is Curious

The discussion accounts for curiosity both in the process of conducting explorative research in the field and in the relationship between the city and ethnography. This article is an invitation to an urban experience being a tour along multipurpose venues in Yopougon², Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire.

The story sets out as the author’s personal experience being curious with Tchanbi, who is the tour guide. And just like I am taken on a tour as a researcher, so is the reader. However, readers do not have to follow a linear storyline provided either by the author or the tour guide, rather readers get a chance to follow up on their own curiosity by browsing links and signposts, skipping sections or digging deeper into them.

The first part is an account of a trip in the field on the relationship between anthropological research and the city. This is about me doing research curiously. I do research in the field. I analyze how I do research. And look at what my particular research approach adds to the particular findings of my research. The data I provide makes up for a case of doing curious research in the city. The second part is a reflection on curiosity within that relationship between anthropological research and the city.

And again, my simple point here is this: Curiosity matters in doing anthropological research. And this written piece is here to celebrate that curiosity.

Curiosity

In my own process of researching with the city, I stumble clues I was not looking for, and I realized I did only months later in my office chair. This is what the city does, and this is what curiosity supports. Curiosity does not settle, it is characterized by a “restless questioning, the

²With a population of almost five million Abidjan is one of the five largest cities in Africa. Yopougon is Abidjan’s most populous and most densely populated commune, with more than a million inhabitants (Institut National de la Statistique 2015, 8). Hosting bars, restaurants and nightclubs, the quarter is known to be “la cité de la joie” (the capital of joy).

untiring dialectic that accidentally produces systems and then projects them towards a horizon of fresh truths” (Hountondji 1983: 53, in Okyerefo 2021: 10).

This article is a non-comprehensive but encompassing account of my curious gaze and what escapes it. Whereas the first part of this article accounts for my experience of curiosity in the field, the second part of the article guards that spirit by keeping the curiosity alive. My practice is essentially about exploration guided by curiosity. Curiosity is sparked and maintained through exploration, which entails the uncertainty “about who one is and with whom one is being curious” but at the same time, the freedom “to allow one’s interests to be captured by another” (Swanson 2015: 33).

Curiosity characterizes my research approach both in the field and at the office desk in the following ways:

1. Curiosity guides my research; in the field, my curiosity is captured by Tchanbi and at the office desk curiosity allows for new questions to emerge from the data rather than stick to the questions I had in mind prior to starting my research in the field.
2. Curiosity redirects my attention and, curiously enough, I still end up with findings, which both contribute to the question I had in the first place and the question that emerged later in the research process.
3. Curiosity structures this article in a sense that it encourages the readers to follow their curiosities.

Dear Reader

This article is curious. It somehow starts with my personal experience of exploration in researching multipurpose venues in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. Just like I am being taken along on a tour, I take you along. However, you do not have to follow us, namely, me and Tchanbi, or my curiosity. You can take turns whenever you feel like it (navigating by clicking the respective links and arrows → continue/back/...), you can decide to skip passages and you might not even come across certain sections. That is alright, because this attends to your curiosity, not everything triggers everybody’s curiosity.

Abidjan, Yopougon, 9 October 2018

Tchanbi is here already. Suuusiii!, he is shouting standing on the other side of the road. It is only a few minutes after eleven. Happy to see him, I cross the four driving lanes of Boulevard Principal de Yopougon, which has sometimes even six lanes. We walk a quarter of a round around Ficgayo, talk about our weekends and enter the space next to where the toilets are. I ask him, if we are going to take a seat. “Bon, I thought I might introduce you to several places around: Ficgayo,³ CP1 and l’espace Jesse Jackson”. “Awesome! I’d like that!”.

→ continue

Ficgayo

Today, there are two soccer matches being played on Ficgayo. The goals consist of two car tires each. The two terrains are not physically separated from each other or the rest of the space. And yet, people crossing Ficgayo do not cross the soccer terrain. The cars of the driving school move

³ For more information on Ficgayo, see Ludwig 2021.

around in circles. Always turning left. Tchanbi says the kids playing soccer attend a school where there is no soccer field, so they come here for their physical education. When they arrive, they install the car tires, and once they leave, they put them back where they found them. I spot a car wash next to the parking lot. Next to the toilettes, there is a little tent advertising “traditional medicine”. We are standing here talking. In fact, it is him talking. I ask questions or mention things I see. “There is quite a lot of police here”. “Yeah, they show their presence. Right next to Ficgayo, are the main roads into Yopougon, and that is why the police is needed here”, he says, “The Boulevard Principal was once the only road into the quartier, but today, there are more ways to access Yopougon”.

Tchanbi says Ficgayo is a social, economic and strategic place. Social, because the space is owned by the population; strategic, because it administrated by the mayor’s office and, therewith, directly connects with the population; economic, because of its relevance to people doing business. Friday is funeral day, oftentimes more than one at a time; Sundays are for church and Saturdays for concerts. He went to Ficgayo twice already, one time to watch an Africa Cup game. “We all came together to support our team. Plus, there was beer for free.” He lives in Cocody, so he does not pass by Yopougon on a regular basis. Every once in a while, there is a promotion event at Ficgayo. Sometimes there is nothing at all going on. There are public schools executing their physical education lessons at Ficgayo. Driving schools use the space for their students first attempts, before they drive in real traffic. The actual driving exam again takes place at Ficgayo. Our conversation is interrupted. A guy collects money to buy school bags for kids living around Ficgayo. The list of people who have already contributed is a scam; it says that every person donated 10000F CFA or more. Clearly a fraud. Tchanbi notes the quartier named on the papers is not even close to Yopougon. He tells the guy that we would have brought money, had we known they are collecting money for school kids in need today. We did not know, so, of course, we did not bring much money along. Merci. And the guy is gone. I tell Tchanbi that I met the head of the neighbourhood organisation yesterday. He is the one responsible for keeping Ficgayo clean. “Well, everyone has their own definition of clean”, he responds. Back to the details required to understand Ficgayo: Tchanbi says that there are several parties in charge of the space. The mayor’s office, the population and the neighbourhood organisation. I have no idea what a neighbourhood organisation is or does. The head of the neighbourhood organisation was elected by the people in the quartier and he is in touch with the population and the mayor’s office. The two are in a dialectical relationship, without one of the two, there is no event going on at Ficgayo — at least not legally. The two need each other. The mayor’s office does not pay the neighbourhood organisation, they just encourage them with a small expense allowance for their work and efforts, when they do as they are told. Mostly, it is about cleaning up the space. Tchanbi says that the population does not like the construction of the supermarket across the street and, of course, they do not, because the people working there are not the kids of the one’s living around the area. This disrupts an equilibrium, he says. Ideally, spaces are administered in a way that benefits everyone around. Everybody eats. As soon as the food is denied to any one of the parties, it’s trouble. Tchanbi wants to crack on.

Meanwhile, the kids are gone. New cars cruising on Ficgayo. One of them cut off right

in front of us, the tires/soccer goals are still there and pedestrians cross the space from every direction. Always relaxed, always straight across the terrain. We are off to CP1. We just walk the Maquis⁴ street, turn right, past a little market and straight ahead. A five-minute walk.

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CP1

Abidjan, Yopougon, 9 October 2018

CP1 is about one sixth the size of Ficgayo. “CP1, c’est cloturé” (it is enclosed), which means there is a brick wall all around it. They did so maybe because it is small and people play soccer, Tchanbi thinks out loud. Ficgayo does not have walls around it. During concerts though, they install some mesh around it in order to be able to control the audience. Right now, people are preparing an election campaign, again for the current mayor of Yopougon Kafana Koné candidate of the RHDP⁵. Two sides of the rectangle are closed by walls: one long the other one short. There is a soccer goal on each side. The other long side is closed by the back of houses with people living inside. There are windows announcing services potentially useful to those using the space, a chair and a tent rental and a little boutique selling candy and all kinds of necessities. On the other short side of the space, there is a public toilette, which just received a fresh paint, and several little restaurants. We are standing on CP1 for a little while and Tchanbi explains that CP1 is administered by a neighbourhood organisation, which consists of members of the four neighbouring areas. The president of the quartier lives right over there, he says, we can just swing by and see, if he is around. Maybe he is not the president anymore, but at least he can share some of his experiences with us. Off we go. Right across from CP1, there is a huge, grey, metal door leading to a tight, obscure hallway. We walk through it, say hi to a few people, and eventually get to the inside of the block. There is sand and two trees, a few palm trees. It is clean and it looks a bit like a little village. Children are playing and all I can hear is their voices, later on, there is a little boom boom music playing, then again just the kids playing. On a little plateau in front of the entry door of a house, there are two elderly men sitting on comfy metal chairs, underneath the shadow of a tree. Both men are grey-haired, both in extravagant boubous, one thin, the other one with quite a belly. We walk towards them. Tchanbi greets the corpulent one wearing an orange boubou. If he remembers him, “comme ça fait longtemps” (It has been a while), Tchanbi says. “‘Bon’, like you said, it has been a while. Well, I am Tchanbi [...]” Chairs are coming up. The thin man leaves.

Tchanbi takes a seat right next to the elderly man. I sit on the left, where there is a chair already. That was unfortunate, because during the course of our conversation, the man, who speaks in French, but very softly, turns his head from one side to the other. So, whenever he speaks to Tchanbi, I do not understand a word. In the beginning, he seems rather reserved, but that changes quickly as the conversation moves along. Tchanbi asks a few questions. Exactly the questions I would have asked, even though we did not talk about this prior; slowly and with patience. When the man in the orange boubou is done talking, Tchanbi summarizes what he

⁴ A maquis is a restaurant-bar.

⁵ Rassemblement des houphouëtistes pour la démocratie et la paix.

understood for the man to confirm or correct. CP1 used to be somewhere else. First, it was him over there to administer the space. The elderly man points to a house to our left. Then there was a Lebanese, who bought and used the space, which we know as CP1 today. The truth is that half of the original CP1 is covered by his house. He points to our right. Later on, he was the president of the quartier, but he is not anymore for quite a while now. The money they make by renting out CP1 feeds the quartiers needs. That is how we maintain the area. That is why we have three doors here in sector three. We close them at night. Security. There is only one door missing, one right next to the house of the Lebanese over there. Oumar is the head of the neighbourhood organisation here now — “Un jeune” (A youth). “Mariam, Oumar, is he around?”, he asks a girl suddenly standing right behind me.

She immediately checks. The younger generation is responsible today. They have an office and negotiate with the heads of the other sectors surrounding CP1. The money they earn through their activities is administered by Manou, the treasurer. They are very well organized. Oumar always reports to him, the elderly man, after their sessions, Tchanbi assumes. “Hmmm”, the man nods his head. So, if I want to organize an event at CP1, the first thing I do is ask for the president of the quartier and I will be sent to Oumar. I will then present my ideas and it is on him to agree or disagree. Only if he agrees and signs my request, I am eligible to present it to the mayor’s office. I pay the mayor’s office officially, but I also pay the neighbourhood organisation. Everybody eats. Oumar is not around today, but I can come back anytime or just ask him, the elderly man says. He is always there to help me. “On demande la route” (We ask for permission to leave.). “Il n’y a pas de problème” (You’re good to go.). We leave, walk past the secured door. I take a few pictures of CP1 as we walk past it. Tchanbi says that he sensed some generational conflict. The man does not seem to agree with the way in which the younger generation handles the business. The fact that there is one door still missing to secure the sector shows that there is something left undone. He assumes that the younger generation uses the money for its own purposes. He repeats the process to me and keeps emphasizing that there are negotiations taking place on every step of the way. Some of them institutionalized, you cannot leave out one stop and if you do, it means trouble. Not sure what he meant by trouble though. We arrive at our next stop: Jesse Jackson.

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Jesse Jackson

Abidjan, Yopougon, 9 October 2018

The sun is scorching hot. The space is completely surrounded by a two-meter brick wall. This is a space for sports. Kids are playing soccer and basketball. There are many fields. One handball terrain, and a basketball court and a soccer terrain. And then there is a soccer field with artificial turf; it is surrounded by metal wires. We are watching people doing sports. This seems to be uniquely about sports. The kids we see are waiting for the physical education classes to start. They just arrived early, Tchanbi explains. The lessons restart at two. It is quarter to two now. We keep walking and watching. We respect visible and invisible marks of the sports terrains. I have to pee. We walk towards a maquis. There are no toilettes. Tchanbi hands me a Kleenex. I will find a solution. The kids watching me walk back to where I came from say

“elle va pisser” (She is going to use the bathroom.). Well. Once that is taken care of, I walk back to the maquis. They have Beaufort. We share one and another one. We talk about life and careers. Tchanbi is 34. During the crisis, the university was closed for two years for renovation, but that was just a poor excuse. During those years, he sold several products and worked for an NGO. It aimed at improving students’ French, so they set up events and playful competitions for the kids. Tchanbi’s task was to promote these events and talk to people. This is where he learnt the most for what he is doing today: present ideas, listen to people, find arguments and speaking in general. Back then, he was in his first semester at the university, so “Le gout de la recherche” (the essence of research) had not quite kicked in yet.

Susi

Leipzig, 6 January 2022

I am a social anthropologist with an interest in practice, space and chance. Through university graduates in Bamako, Mali, I encountered “*la chance*”, which means “luck” in French. As a concept it accounts for graduates’ everyday knowledge production in uncertain contexts in Bamako. In life-courses — it seemed — *la chance* can only be articulated and accessed in retrospect, which made me wonder about instances in which *la chance* is visible and, therefore, observable in the present. I reached out to multipurpose venues, which are material infrastructures based on a past vision of multiple future purposes, or, as I put it: possibilities; they are there to be maintained and transformed in the present for future purposes, namely events. The event gives a multipurpose venue its tangible purpose. As new relations, trajectories, identities and histories emerge, “nowhere” is transformed to “now here”. And it is precisely the space between the two concepts that I find so intriguing.

During my PhD, I met a fellow doctoral student working on food restrictions in Côte d’Ivoire. His name is Koné. For almost two years, we wrote on our thesis sitting across from each other in a shared office space, thoughts, ideas, food and lots of laughs. So, two years after we last saw each other in Switzerland, we met again in Abidjan, where he lives and works and I set out to explore multipurpose venues.

At the time of my field trip, I was employed as a post-doc on a fifty percent one-year contract at an African Studies Institute at the German University. In this position, my task was to teach four hours a week and develop my own research project. I also had the immense pleasure to participate in a professional, yet, privately organized retreat in the Swiss mountains, in which the readings and the discussions shaped my thinking significantly. In this professional environment, I benefited from the fact that my curiosity and ideas were supported by my colleagues and that my three-week explorative field trip (that includes the flights, visas and accommodation at a friends’ place) was funded by the University after a smooth application process. Being able to basically fly into West Africa for free with the mission to explore is definitely a luxury. However, there is no denying that there is pressure involved, for instance, concerning the necessity to find a phenomenon worth exploiting within the context of a potential future research project required for the continuation of my career in science. The circumstances I find myself in promote my curiosity: At the institute, I was encouraged to pursue my current interest in multipurpose venues and provided with the financial means

necessary to freely wander and investigate. Precisely because I am an early career scholar supposed to broaden and expand the expertise gained through previous work, I am free to follow my curiosity within the limits set by the purpose of developing a research project. So, what is at stake here is nothing more and nothing more than my career in science. And yet, this is a contested thought, since no one really knows in advance what does or does not matter in pursuit of an academic career. I think curiosity might matter.

Going to Abidjan, my mission was to explore an abstract idea of possibilities materializing in an urban setting. One could argue that I did know what I was looking for prior to finding it, but I did not know what it would look like. I was looking for a material setting that would allow me to best investigate an idea; i.e., *la chance*. In my previous research, I learnt about the materialization of possibility (*la chance*) in life-courses, which university graduates in Bamako were able to account for retrospectively. I wanted to know more about the nature and the temporality. So, the idea was to observe the materialization of possibility as it happens in a concrete urban setting. Being in Yopougon for the first time ever, my mission was not to find answers to my questions right away, but to explore.

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Koné > Abidjan > Yopougon > Maquis

Abidjan, 2 October 2018

At the airport, I queue for the entry until I am sent back to get a visa first. My vaccination card is checked by a guy wearing a doctor's overall. Health authorities. At the visa office, I take a number. I smile throughout the entire process. However, the official could not care less about my cheerfulness. The fact that I speak Bambara a bit has always been a door opener in Mali; French is nothing special, it is rather the mistakes I make when I speak French that make me seem somehow special. At the exit, the first thing I see is Burger King. There is nobody waiting, just a vendor selling sim cards and phone units. I spot Koné. He seems proud. We greet each other with a handshake hug.

- "Koné! Je suis à Abidjan!... Et il fait chaud, deh!!"
- "Ouaaaais, on est en été! On est toujours en été!"⁶

Both of us happy. He says me visiting him here is the fruit of the friendship we grew back in Basel. A friendship we keep cultivating. He owns a green Opel Astra. We put on the security belt. No hesitation. And leave the parking lot. A woman asks him for his parking ticket, only to put it in the slot of the machine, which then opens up the gate for us to pass. Koné does not even look at her. I tease him about his bossy behaviour. "Elle doit même pas être là!" (She is not even supposed to be here.) We continue our ride. Akwaba. Welcome. That is Akan. On towards the city. "Les embouteillages sont la merde" (the traffic jams are the worst), Koné says. We pick up friends of Koné's, who live in the same neighbourhood as he does. Lots of talking on the phone to make sure we find each other. We stop. Koné tells me about his first journal publication. So awesome! He buys me some water. He remembers my green water bottle I

⁶ "Koné! I am in Abidjan! ... It is hot here!" "Yeah, it is summer! It is always summer here!"

frequently used back in Basel. Memories. I look outside the car window. People are busy. They do not look at me. I am smiling, rarely does anyone smile back. We meet Nixon and Maxim. Both IT-guys working in Marcory. Another two hours of traffic until we get home. Past a construction site. Lots of traffic. Koné explains: Cocody, where the rich ones live. The guys joke around saying that Koné is a rich one, too. Maxim was in Morocco recently in order to study some new printing technology; he shares a few observations. People know how to enjoy themselves there, he says. Every day, he takes the boat taxi to get to work. Like I said, a lot of water here. Men have to work harder in Côte d'Ivoire, because what causes more pity? A poor man or a poor woman? A woman can still marry a rich man, but what is a man going to do? Will a rich woman marry a poor guy? Never ever, he says. The sun is setting. It is getting dark at around six in the evening. We are traversing the de Gaulle Bridge. There is another one named after the first president of the Côte d'Ivoire, Felix Houphouët-Boigny. Everything is named after him, it seems. We continue past the Plateau, the city's administrative centre, with skyscrapers and neon lights. "In a few years, this is going to look like a real global city. C'est le boum", Koné says. "Après la crise, c'est le boum" (This is the boom! After crisis, there comes the boom!). We are arriving in Yopougon. Remember Aya? Koné locks the car. "I always do that", he says. Didier Drogba's face is on every billboard. Koné wants to know about my current research. I try to explain my interest without using the word "multipurpose venue", because I am curious to find out how he is going to label the idea. "Ah! Les salles polyvalentes", he says. We stop in the middle of an intersection for a few minutes. He wants to turn left. We leave the paved road and enter Koné's hood. On our way, I asked Koné which area in Bamako his part of town resembles. Koné is driving slowly. A few traffic lights illuminate the bumpy, plashy road. We stop in front of a complex of two connected five-story buildings. "On est arrivé!" (We have arrived.) Maxim is still with us. We dropped Nixon somewhere along the way. Koné lives on the fourth floor. Koné's sister Blandine is at home.

There is a grey L-shaped couch in the centre of the living room. Koné jumps on the couch and instantly falls in a comfy position: "This is my spot!". There are a few cushioned chairs with armrests arranged around the walls of the living room. Four. The TV is huge and running quietly, too quiet for me to understand what people are saying. Everyone is staring at the screen right now. The news. The candidates running for the elections introduce themselves. Elections coming up on the 13th. Placed right next to the wall, there is a small dining table surrounded by four chairs. And there is another little table with a surface that just fits a laptop and a tiny notebook. And a tiny, tiny plastic kids table with two blue chairs. Koné give me a tour: There is no running water; not enough pressure to get it running all the way up here. Blandine shares the room with me. Koné's master bedroom is spacious and tidy. We walk up on the roof. Both the view and the breeze are amazing. The lights are orange and I do not recognize a single landmark we passed on our way here. Koné introduces me to the neighbour, who is looking forward to receiving some Swiss chocolates. I did not bring any though. Dinner time! Cucumber, tomatoes, onions with an oil, vinegar, mayonnaise, Maggi cube dressing. Rice with sauce legumes. Nice and spicy. Papaya for dessert. We talk about the upcoming elections and about the fact that every candidate is talking about change — "le changement". "The

opposing party has to do that, otherwise: why vote for them?”, says Koné laughing. After dinner, the guys chill in front of the TV; Blandine and I have a nice little chat. She is 30, lives in Korhogo and came to Abidjan to participate in the concours in order to work as a teacher. She does that every year. In the meantime, she works as a technician for a satellite TV provider in her hometown up North. She enjoys being a mom, though it is a bit exhausting. Her daughter Mayeline is four years old and she carries her pink kindergarten backpack like a boss. “Allons-y. C’est l’occasion!” (Let’s go! It is time!), Koné decides that we are going to have a beer. Right by the maqui in front of the building. We sit in a non-illuminated space, surrounded by brick buildings. The tables and the chairs are wet from the rain, but the waiter dries them up right before we sit down. We get cups and later on the Ivoire beer in 0,6 litre bottles. The bottles are a statement. We have him take back the cups, we drink from the bottle. We talk about Basel and Morocco and Côte d’Ivoire and about how open spaces are used in cities. The maquis here is an open space, which has become the neighbourhood’s meeting point. It is just a piece of property somebody owns, but did not start using yet. Now, somebody else built a small metal cabin on it. With a TV and some light and a few crates of beer and that is how it is being used in the meantime. The guy across from this space runs a copy shop, but he also offers money transfer. Orange money is just twenty meters away. “chaqun a son clientèle” (Each of them has their clients), Koné says. The waiter picks up a chair and has a seat right in front of the cabin. All of a sudden, Koné seems restless. Time for us to leave. The owner wants to close. I do not finish my beer; we are headed out. We drop off Maxim at his place. It is 11pm by the time we get back home. I am beat. I get the WIFI passcode and a shower and some low volume Jimmy Fellon with French subtitles.

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A couple days later, Koné has an appointment with one of his supervisors to discuss his thesis. They meet at a private research institute in Cocody. I accompany him. As soon as they start their conversation, I sense that this is going to take a while, so I decide to go for a walk.

Tchanbi > Public Green Spaces > Ficgayo

Abidjan, Cocody, 4 October 2018

The exit door is locked, but then a guy in a black button-up shirt opens it for me. Tchian Bi. Enchantée (Pleased to meet you!). “Je peux t’accompagner?” (May I join you?). “Bien sûr” (Sure!). Cool. We tour around the block and then continue going on for an extended round. He is a doctoral student in sociology. He submitted his thesis already and is now waiting to defend it. He is working on public green spaces in Yopougon during the 1970s and 1980s. He is interested in how people used, negotiated and defined these urban spaces. He explains a lot; I listen. The conversation is in flow. I am only partly noticing the surrounding area. We walk downhill past an old telephone booth which now serves as an advertising column, but actually not anymore either. We walk past a market and a giant red restaurant, through a housing area called “cité du Bonheur” (Capital of Luck). I take a picture of the sign that says so. There are also garbage bins that say “I want to keep my city clean” or “Feed me with garbage”. Of course, I take pictures of these, too. I am offered a napkin. I decline. I do not have a runny nose. We

walk a few more steps and he is taking a napkin himself to wipe off the sweat on his forehead. Now I get it. It is about noon right now and the sun keeps buttering. Tchanbi worked on ten green spaces within social housing projects built and administered by the government and rented out to the population. Back then, there was staff responsible for the maintenance of those green spaces. Ten years in, the houses' worth was revaluated and by paying their monthly rent, the houses slowly passed into the ownership of the people living in them. Concurrently, the areas' administration was taken care of by the population itself, neighbourhood organisations were formed and as things changed, so did the green spaces.

Back at the institute, Tchanbi opens his laptop and shows me some pictures illustrating how these spaces have changed. They were turned into soccer fields, maquis and restaurants, businesses, gas stations and pharmacies. Basically, there are several phases of change, he explains: First, there is an open space ready to be used. This is when people start inhabiting it, for instance, by using it as a space for a business. This is legal. The state officials will come around and collect taxes. It is important though that the business is of provisional nature or else it will be shut down directly. Provisional means that the business can be removed quickly at any given moment, so that the area can be used differently. However, it is through their businesses that their owners then begin to make friends with people in the neighbourhood — they establish themselves in the neighbourhood and become a part of it. As the businesses grow, people of the surrounding houses are employed and the temporary wooden or sheet metal structure of the little business cabins are replaced by bricks. This is still not legal before the state, but the consent of the residents weighs heavier. Thus, business owners are slowly appropriating the space they do not own legally.

I show Tchanbi a picture of the square in front of Koné's apartment building. With just one glimpse, he analyses: the guy with bar has brick walls, so it must be the oldest of all the businesses there. The small shop is of sheet metal set in concrete. The maquis has a lockable storage space for the beverages, tables and chairs. All other businesses use temporary structures, so they are more recent.

Once we are done going through his pictures, he talks about Ficgayo — “un espace polyvalente” (a multipurpose venue) in Yopougon. Plenty of things happen there: soccer matches, funerals, politics, markets and fairs. I am hooked. This is where I want to go next.

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Ficgayo

Abidjan, Yopougon, 4 October 2018

We drive past Ficgayo. That is what I have been looking for. Huge open space in the centre of Yopougon, one of the most densely populated areas in West Africa. Surrounded by stores, maquis and a gigantic mall in construction right across from it. Right now, it is a soccer field. The sun is about to set.

Abidjan, Yopougon, 5 October 2018

We drive past Ficgayo on our way back. “There is nothing”, a friend comments. I take a few pictures. Boys are playing soccer. The space is empty. The fact that everything around it seems

cramped turns its emptiness into a thing. The guy knows Ficgayo. A week ago, he attended a funeral there. There were several funerals running at the same time. “The actual name is Ficgayo. The c is silent, but it is there. Foire industrielle, commerciale, gastronomique de Yopougon (Fair of industry, commerce and gastronomy of Yopougon)”, he says.

Leipzig, Südvorstadt, 13 July 2022 – 18 April 2023

My interest was captured by Tchanbi through the practice of curious anthropological research in the following ways:

Tchanbi's Curiosity.

One could argue that going to Abidjan, I did know what I was looking for prior to finding it, but I did not know what it would look like. I was looking for a material setting that would allow me to further investigate an idea I learnt about in previous research. That idea is about the materialization of possibility (*la chance*) in life-courses, which university graduates in Bamako were able to account for retrospectively (Ludwig 2023). Now, I wanted to know more about the nature and temporality of possibility and, thus, to observe how possibilities materialize in an urban setting. Being in Yopougon for the first time ever, my mission was not to find answers to my questions right away, but to explore and be curious with what there is to explore in relation to my questions. For me, exploration also meant to focus on focusing, rather than focus itself. Exploration is characterized by a constant “looking around”, “moving on” and allowing curiosity to take the lead⁷. On our tour around Yopougon, clearly Tchanbi takes the lead; he introduces me to curiosities I did not anticipate prior. For instance, I expected the tour to be centred around Ficgayo; Tchanbi had three different spots in mind, his curiosity leads us further behind the huge metal door. He guides our movement in space, but also our movement in time beyond the now, for instance, by referring to a week at Ficgayo or his personal history with the space. Tchanbi and I are observers, commentators to the action until we are addressed by a person collecting money at Ficgayo. All of a sudden, we are part of an action I did not even notice at first. Similarly, Tchanbi's understanding of what constitutes CP1 takes me across the street from the actual spot, behind a huge metal door and into a neighbourhood.

My gaze is guided by questions of orientation such as “Where am I?” and, thus, I focus on the tangible structures that make up for the place I find myself in (a carwash, restaurants, toilets, walls, streets [...]) or “What is going on?” And, thus, focus shifts to what people currently do (playing soccer, driving school lessons, campaigning, doing sports).

On the Good Anthropological Method.

The “good anthropological method”, Michael Herzfeld (2013) insists, requires “time and intense dedication” in order to be able to demonstrate the “achievement of intimate relations with informants, regardless of the kind of site involved” through “the anthropologist's writerly

⁷ Even though Tchanbi was not a designated field assistance, I do want to acknowledge the research and reflections on the significance of local collaborators in the field. On this, see further Kaiser-Grolimund et al. 2016, Gupta 2014, Middleton and Pradhan 2014.

skills at depicting minute details as expressing encompassing social and political processes” (Herzfeld 2013: 119).

I end this article with three open ends discussing the effects of the urban on “the good anthropological method” based on three considerations: (1) the city is the primary informant and (2) researchers are city people and (3) on the relationship between time and intensity.

1 The City is the Informant.

The urban condition shapes ethnographic fieldwork and that has been widely acknowledged: “In urban contexts it is clear one has to use samples in the form of cases studies, surveys and selective participant observation. The best one can do is to collect fragments of experience, social relations and the city itself” (Fischer and Kokolaki 2013: 114). And there is a thin line between collecting as well as relating fragments and being at risk of “pointless butterfly collecting” (Leach 1961, in Prato and Pardo 2013: 87). A combination of the two approaches might do the trick. Let me explain: The practice of butterfly collecting is about finding and capturing living beings, but it does not have to. The task might also be to first experience, follow around and fly along with the living being and in a second step capture, pin down and map out that very experience and not the living being. The result then is not a colourful framed collection of stabilized butterflies, but a colourful account of lived experiences. This image is particularly useful to describe the urban condition, because in an urban environment you never know for how long you will be able to focus on one butterfly. I focus on curiosity, rather than on a fixed topic or question and suggest to adapt the way in which we ask our research questions to the demands of the urban: be flexible, moving, becoming. The idea here is not to capture parts of phenomena within the swarm of butterflies, but to account for being surrounded by and part of the swarm. Now, when it comes to accessing the urban condition, the city is the actual informant and, thus, impossible to disregard. *The Streets are talking to me* by Maria Frederika Malmström (2019) is a great example of this. Inspired by Brian Massumi’s (2002) take on affect, vivid insights to the transformation of Cairo during and in the aftermath of the revolution are revealed. Malmström renders links and connections between living and non-living matter and, thus, the city of Cairo itself over time visible to the reader.

2 Research People are City People.

“African urban settings erase the distinction between observer and observed, and heightened sensitivity does not translate into less feeling towards others. Rather, taking the other into account becomes the condition of possibility of life in African urban settings” (Macamo 2018: 7).

I spent most of my adult life in cities. Thus, my everyday practices are shaped by that long-term experience. I am a city dweller myself, an African Studies researcher with a particular research interest in the urban. So, when I do research, I can awe about the adaptive skills of people in urban Africa, but I also have to acknowledge the fact that I am myself subject to adaptation, both as a person who lives in the city and as a researcher who researches the city. This matters because it shows that the ethnographic method is not something out there to use, but that it is shaped by the people who use it, by people who are themselves shaped by the surroundings they are inevitably part of. I tell myself that I am doing participant observation in the field, but what are we actually

participating in? I participate in this flexible, adaptive, moving practice city life is characterized for and I do so as a researcher and, thus, practice an ethnographic exercise that accounts for the qualities of the city. Simply put, just like the urban population is adapting to the urban condition (Fischer and Kokolaki 2013), ethnographers do, too.

3 On Time and Intensity.

Time and its meaning are crucial when it comes to the production of ethnography (see Pandian 2012). The pursuit of newness in “contemporary anthropology depends less on the objects of our investigation and more on the temporal and affective relations we nurture with them” (Pandian 2012: 567), and I would add that time does not equal affect. In other words, the quantity of time spent does not necessarily indicate affect or the quality of time spent. Three weeks in the field cannot substitute three months or three years; the warrants of different amounts of time spent in the field vary. Early periods in fieldwork are characterized by a lack of familiarity and routinized ways of making sense of what is around us; early periods in fieldwork are intense. Long periods of fieldwork are intense, too.

I believe the concepts of quality and superficiality do not contradict, but need each other. When there is no hierarchy of knowledge, no normative judgement of what counts as deep and superficial knowledge, everything happens on the ground. Bottom line: Surface matters. Surface research is proper research. The way in which the city affects us affects the ways in which we do ethnography. The urban calls for research in which surface matters, that means research that is guided by diversive curiosities. In other words, the urban requires research that privileges exploration as opposed to explanation. To be very clear, this is neither an excuse to take shortcuts, nor an argument for fast fieldwork, instead this is an attempt to describe the conditions in which fieldwork takes place, namely, within short and intense periods of time. My point here is not to dismiss the warrants of long-term fieldwork in cities, but simply to add to the toolbox by exploring what is possible between depth and surface. And this is where curiosity picks it up.

Curiosities are different in nature: Whereas specific curiosity digs deep into one issue, thereby covering no ground, diversive curiosity cares about many issues and operates on a surface level, covering lots of ground (Engel 2015: 131).

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Stories of Survival During and After Covid-19: A Study of a Slum in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India¹

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Urbanization often becomes problematic in the underdeveloped and developing nations with a huge population burden, like India. It produces shanty areas, both in the urban centres and in the periphery, which are marked by slums, squatters and extremities of poverty and uncertainty. In the case of Kolkata in Eastern India, the urban expansion is linear, mostly towards the northern Nadia district, through North 24 Parganas. This process is simultaneous to the haphazard growth of slum areas, especially adjacent to the railway lines. The railway stretch along Barrackpore via Barasat includes significant connections between the city's central business district and the suburbs. Kolkata, once the most populous Indian city with commercial, industrial and intellectual importance, experiences growing areas of urban activity and continues to have a strong influence on eastern India. North 24 Parganas, one of the densest districts of West Bengal, is linked to the Kolkata metropolitan area through the slums that continue to grow along the routes of transport networks. This article examines the findings of an empirical study carried out in one such slum area in the North Dum Dum municipality in order to understand local people's livelihood and the effects of the pandemic that jeopardised people's very existence.

Keywords: Slum, urbanization, wellbeing, Covid-19, unemployment.

“What matters most to the ordinary man and woman is their own well-being and the well-being of the people they love. In ethnographically varied settings, we find that the mismanagement of healthcare and public health is the ultimate litmus test for the legitimacy of the authority to rule” (Pardo and Prato 2022: 4).

Introduction

Whitehand (1992: 619) argues that “The suburb has been the focus of much physical change during the twentieth century — firstly in the development of new forms of extensive low density urban landscapes. Also, changes have been either at the small scale of personalization or the intermediate scale of housebuilding in the back garden”. In developed countries like the UK, the suburban landscape has been a subject of exclusive protection and management through legal restrictions on land use, building specifications and prescription on architectural style. In developing countries, suburbs became central to the city planners' decentralization efforts, paving the way for slums and illegal settlements.

A good administration is meant to manage efficiently land distribution and demarcation, be it in Delhi National Capital Region, in a city in California or anywhere else in the urban world. The management of Calcutta's urban activities, especially land use, has been used several times as an example since 1961.² At that time, small entrepreneurs were forced to locate

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to the Board of *Urbanities* and the anonymous reviewers for their criticism and comments and to the students of my college who formed a team in order to carry out this study; without them the study would be incomplete.

² In 2001 the name Calcutta was changed to Kolkata. In the text, the name “Calcutta” is used when referring to the pre-2001 situation, and the name “Kolkata” is used for the post-2001 city.

their businesses in lower cost margins areas, as they could not afford the better central locations that offered the cumulative advantages of transport, power infrastructures and access to the largest wholesale market in the country. However, in 1961, suburban Calcutta had some of the highest productive areas benefiting from expanding good roads, railway lines, electricity connections and good labour supply (Dasgupta 1981). Therefore, these areas became primary locations for the rapid growth of suburbs, leading to the unplanned spread of slum areas.

The word “slum” was used for the first time in the early-19th century to describe certain locations of London that were known for their poorest quality housing and unhygienic conditions, and as breeding grounds for criminal activities and drug abuse (UN Report 2018). Slums may have been unwanted parts of the urban set up, but they soon became integral parts of cities worldwide, leading to the co-existence of rich and poor settlements. Slums soon became the focus of research; in particular, the concentration of urban poverty in these areas and the consequent deprivations, which are often associated with residential crowding, exposure to environmental hazards like fire outbreaks and water logging, and a proneness to social fragmentation and exclusion (Wratten 1995). Globally, access to safe drinking water, shelter, sanitation, proper sewage, education and space for children to play are some of the many unfulfilled needs in the urban slums (Dube 2015). As it is also powerfully exemplified by the case of contemporary China (Shin and Chen 2015), in Asian cities, slum areas are always marked by haphazard and rapid urbanization. In sharp contrast with other growing city areas, they lack the social amenities and physical infrastructures that are generally considered to be basic requirements for human wellbeing.

Indian cities include some of the world’s largest slums. Like Mumbai, which has its Dharavi, contemporary Kolkata has its Belgachia. As cities expand, local neighbourhoods come under the direct influence of urban plans that in many cases result in the development of pockets of slum areas in the suburbs. In other words, slums seem to be the unavoidable consequence of the failure of urban development to address the needs of those who move to the city during rural to urban migration peaks. Moreover, suburban expansion often promises better urban facilities at subsidized price to these dwellers but fails to address the greater distance these people have to travel. Most important, slums grow as informal settlements and, as they keep mushrooming, the word “shelter” acquires a special meaning in connection with “slum” and “squatter”. These informal settlements with temporary houses and little or no access to the basic necessities of everyday life are highly compromised in terms of durability, security, hygiene and aesthetics. The slum shelters are cubicles usually built with temporary materials like plastic sheets, old banners, sheets of old advertisements, etc. There, the unhealthy living conditions are distressing.

It is important to mention here that the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals (2023) include urbanization and its management. Urban centres are growth engines, but it is important to strike a regional balance that takes into account those at the margins alongside the management of land use and building planning (Hanson 2014). Notably, the aforementioned problems in the Indian slums extend to women’s security and access to medical facilities during

medical crises. For instance, in the slums, the situation deteriorated during the Covid-19 epidemic and in its aftermath, as the precarious lives of those living there worsened significantly.

The Rationale of the Study

Kolkata is one of the most significant cities in West Bengal, given its cultural background, historical political standing and administrative expertise. West Bengal occupies 2.7% of the total land area of India and is the fourth most populous state in the country, with a population of 91.3 million, a fifth of which are still poor. By 2021, West Bengal's population recorded an additional 10 million, making it a "100 million" state. This high population density raises numerous challenges in terms of access to and quality of services.

In the post-colonial period, Indian cities witnessed the relocation of administrative functions from the centre to the periphery and the annexation of counties and areas of growth potentiality, leading to unplanned human settlements in industrial and commercial sites. West Bengal has experienced waves of migration since 1947 — initially, following India's independence and the emergence of East Pakistan; then, when the then East Pakistan gained independence and a newly formed country called Bangladesh was formed. The influx of migrants and the consequent settlements continues today, though the process is now gradual. This takes place in a situation marked by spatial inadequacies in the urban centres and in the peripheries and by the uneven growth of slums with poor basic services. There is an urgent need to address such pockets of disparity and ensure quality services for the slum dwellers and, importantly, for the wellbeing and development of women and children. The UN argues that, by the year 2030, 60% of the global population will be living in cities, and that in the coming decades 90% of urban growth will take place in the middle-income countries. It is reported that 95% of such growth will take place in urban areas, where more than four billion people will have to find accommodation, thus making shelter the most demanding issue (UN Report 2020).

Especially in highly populated states or regions, slums usually develop in areas with potential adequate access to public transport and well-designed urban facilities, including walkable (and bike-able) streets. In order to be effective, I argue, urban planning measures need to be inclusive. From this perspective, I studied with a team of researchers a slum area named Sharda Para, ward number 18, in the jurisdiction of Uttar Dum Dum municipality of North 24 Parganas district of West Bengal with specific reference to two major issues. First, we wanted to understand the socio-economic conditions of the local dwellers. Second, we wanted to understand how they had coped during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This kind of empirical study is important also in view of worldwide interest among researchers in understanding how the marginal population is coping in the post pandemic phase. It might be objected that several studies have been conducted and the question may be raised as to whether there is any requirement for further research. In my view, however, it is important

to focus on the conditions experienced by economically challenged communities during medical emergencies.³

Indian slums are always a topic of discussion when looking at failed urban planning and at the social initiatives undertaken by the government. Notably, although the suburban land area of Kolkata city enjoys road and railway networks, the haphazard urban growth remains untamed. Slums are often considered the products of failed policies, bad governance, corruption, inappropriate regulations, growing population and, of course, of economic imbalances with multi-level disparities. In the case of Kolkata city, there are around nineteen wards marked as “no-slum areas” plus, concerningly, fringe areas dotted with slums and haphazard squatter settlements. It could be argued that a micro level study like that conducted on the livelihood of slum dwellers in Shardar Para may help to draft comprehensive measures that would help to address the problems on the ground.

Historical Facts

Calcutta (now Kolkata) was a commercial city with flourishing trading activities, where both Europeans and Bengalis (specifically, Indians) made their fortunes in the late-18th and early-19th Centuries. With the expansion of the textile trade, the East India Company identified Bengal and Calcutta as areas with great investment potentialities. The major items of trade were granaries, muslins, silk yarns and saltpetre. Back in 1698, the city evolved with the transfer of zamindari rights (land revenue rights) of the villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kalikata to the British. Sutanuti was predominantly a small market centre for trading cotton and yarns (Suta means yarn). Gobindapur was a small village named after the temple of Gobinda or Vishnu. Kalikata was a place of trade and pilgrimage linked to the goddess Kali, a black-skinned deity (Roy 2019). Since then, the city has witnessed an urbanization evolved out of villages, hamlets, estates, gardens, and sites near rivers. The dominant, abrupt waves of urbanization that swept the “not-urban” areas were more prevalent during British colonization of Asian cities (De Meulder et al. 2014). For most of the 18th Century, the rural economy in India was uneven and substantially marked by political disorders. This was prominent in the Bengal region, which witnessed the dominance of the Mughal empire and was the place of trade for the English East India Company. Murshid Quli Khan, a Mughal officer, established the autonomy of Mughal power, increasing the revenues collected at the provincial level. Later, the urban development efforts made by the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization included pioneering ventures like the Bustee Improvement Scheme in some specific wards (Alavi 2007). Similar plans for slum areas exist today to provide water taps, sanitary toilets, drainage, street electricity, bank loans for small non-institutional producers and special nutrition programmes.

Kundu (2003) classified the Indian slums into three groups. First, the older slums, which were established around 150 years ago and are mostly located in the central part of the city. Second, the slums that arose as a result of the rural to urban migration in 1940s and 1950s, soon

³ Channa (2020 and 2022) points to significant urban inequalities that emerged in Delhi during the Covid-19 lockdown.

after the partition of eastern segment of India, and that were located close to the industrial sites and transport networks. Third, the slums that emerged after 1947 in empty areas along roads and canals. This third category is the concern of the city planners.

The Study Area

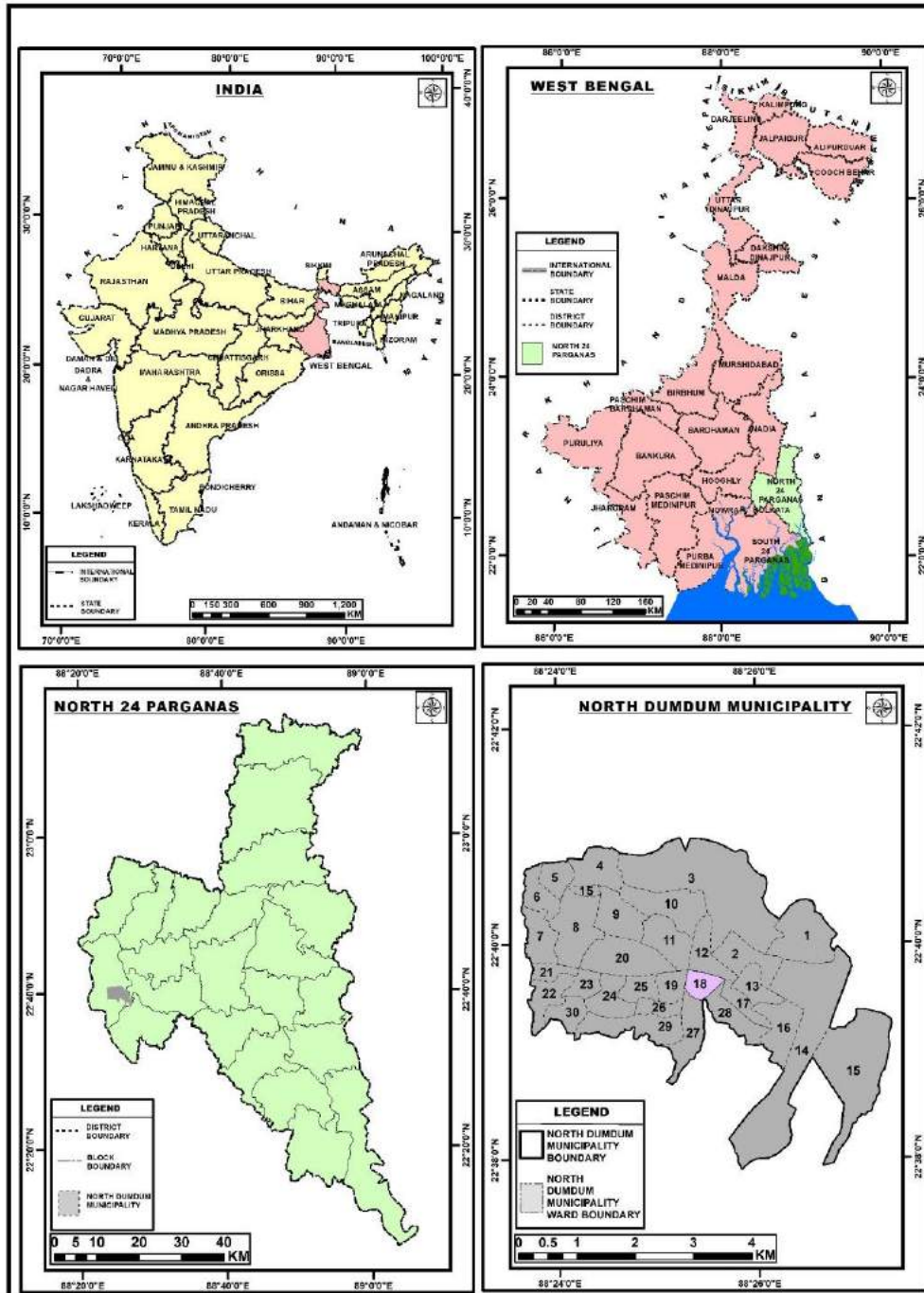


Figure 1. Location of the Study Area

As mentioned earlier, the slum where this study was conducted is located in the North 24 Parganas Municipality; that is, the ward 18 adjacent to the railway tracks off the Barasat segment. The district of North 24 Parganas stretches between latitude $22^{\circ} 11'$ north and $23^{\circ} 15'$

north, and between longitude 88° 20' east and 89° 05' east (Figure 1). Barasat is the district headquarters and the most prominent urban centre in West Bengal. North 24 Parganas is the most populous and the tenth-largest district in West Bengal, and is the second-most populated district in the country, after the Thane district of Maharashtra (Census of India 2011, Paul and Chatterjee 2012). When India achieved its independence in 1947, the Calcutta metropolitan area had a large number of slum areas, due to a large migration of people from Bangladesh. At that time, Calcutta sheltered a large number of manly male migrant labourers (including white collar employees) from the western and eastern hinterland (Ramaswamy 2023).

Methodology

The present study included three phases. During the first phase, the area of study was chosen. This was a challenging task. The plan was to survey an area where marginalized people would be the primary respondents, with special reference to how they adapted to the challenges of the pandemic. This would form an integral part of the study. The chosen slum area is adjacent to the railway tract situated in the North Dum Dum municipality jurisdiction. Once the study area was chosen, some secondary level data were gathered, including the latest census reports — that is, the Census of India of 2011. Then, the forthcoming research was organised and scheduled, and the structure of the in-depth study of the slum dwellers was drafted and explained to the team. These two phases marked the pre-fieldwork study. The next stage was conducted in the field. We collected the answers to an array of questions alongside opinions and discussion of key issues with the local dwellers, which threw light on many concern areas, including the problems that they faced during the pandemic. Explorations were also conducted in order to understand from within the land use in the slum area and the living conditions in relation to basic parameters of hygiene, safety, security and gender related privacy.

The concluding phase of the research was post-fieldwork, involving the categorisation and in-depth analysis of the empirical material. This phase was challenging for two reasons. First, the data gathered in the field demanded a proper assessment of the findings and the identification of the most appropriate analytic tools. Second, different from the quantitative gathering of data, during the interviews that marked the qualitative part of the fieldwork several problems faced by the respondents came to light. This suggested that a better understanding of the findings in this slum area would require careful consideration in combination with the analysis of the statistical data.

Results and Discussion

Sir Brian Berry (1964) developed his view of urban activities with the assumption that there is a close association between the level of economic development of a country and the degree of urbanization in that country. This association is mirrored by the growth of haphazard slum areas and squatter settlements as evidence of ineffective urbanization.

During the first part of our study, when we mapped the demographic conditions of the area, we found that 6000 people resided in the Ward 18 of Uttar Dum Dum Municipality

(Census of India 2011). We also found that, according to this source, those living in slums account for almost 29% of the total population of North Dum Dum municipality. Following this, it may be inferred that around 1700 residents in this Ward are slum dwellers out of which around 8% slum population are surveyed (Plate 1).



Plate 1. Households in Shardar Para Slums

We carried out a detailed study as we believed that it was important to grasp the composition of the slum population before going into the field. As statistics on the slum population were not readily available, we surveyed around thirty households and studied over 100 local people. The surveyed population included a more or less equal proportion of male and female individuals. Also, there has been reportedly equal distribution of general population and of those belonging to Scheduled Castes. Most of the families under study belonged to the Hindu religion. A few were Muslims. The majority of male and female residents fall in two age groups: 15-30 years and 30- 45 years; there are few male and female dependants younger than 15 years and older than 60 years. Those younger than 15 years were predominantly female.

We also recorded people's occupation, education level, access to education during the pandemic, access to internet and possession of a mobile phone, a television, fans, etc. The majority of slum dwellers live in small semi-permanent houses with single to double rooms, and they use both LPG and wood as their source of fuel for cooking and heating. Wood is indeed frequently used here, including during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is very important to note, because using firewood may increase the risk of fire-outbreaks. The study area included 130 respondents residing in 27 households, meaning that around five family members would reside in less than two rooms in clear breach of the norms of social distancing imposed during the pandemic.

As we moved to the second phase of our research, focusing on the situation during and after the pandemic, we found that each respondent had much in common with fellow slum dwellers. Each had a story to tell, each experienced utter distress, many lost their jobs and lost people close to them. Many local people are toto (E-rickshaws) and rickshaw pullers, who complain about having little or no passengers during lockdown. Rakhi Mondal, who is 22 years old, says that

“[her] husband was a daily paid worker in a roadside small restaurant. He lost his job during lockdown [...] then, he occasionally pulled the rickshaws of one of his friends [...] However, losing his job made him depressed, alcoholic and disturbed.”

Rakhi, though, was too shy to admit that she was also brutally tortured by him both mentally and physically. She is now pregnant with her first child and fears that she would not know what to do if such a situation should happen again. The family hardly used gas as fuel; instead, they used cheap wooden logs for cooking and other purposes.

During lockdown, many local dwellers who worked as domestic helpers faced loss of jobs and salary cuts. This worsened their situation because, as they are mostly educated at primary or secondary levels, they found it hard to find alternative employment opportunities. While women generally work as domestic helpers, men are engaged in activities like rickshaw pulling and selling goods in rented shops or small garages. Many are employed as occasional workers by seasonal vendors.

Women are prominent in tailoring activities, working in tailor shops during festivals and doing stitching and embroidery work. Women also occasional work as cooks in several roadside hotels. Such irregular employment became worse during the pandemic, leading to further deprivation and poverty. Fatima Biwi, a 32-year-old woman who worked in a small tailor shop near Birati railway station, has received little or no stitching orders for the last two consecutive years, even during festivals. She, a mother of two, works also as a vegetable seller. In her own words,

“Every morning, I woke up at 4:00 AM [...] collected water in two big drums from the tap for domestic uses, then cooked rice for my children [...] and left to get vegetables from the trucks and vans near Birati station. I carried the vegetables to the moving van and sold them in neighbourhood. However, I constantly worried about my two daughters, Rihana (who is 16) and Munni (who is 11), who were left behind.”

We found that the local sanitation facilities are mostly privately owned, few are public. However, only 63% are well built and permanently structured while quite a few are poorly built with roofs made of plastic sheets tied together with plastic ropes (Table 1 and Plate 2). Such plastic covers are suffocating.

Sanitation Facilities	Kutchha (Poor-built)	Pacca (Well-built)
	10(37 %)	17(63%)
Ownership	Private	Pubic
	18(67%)	9(33%)

Table 1. Sanitation Facilities and Ownership of Toilets



Plate 2. Public Toilets

Each family in the slum had mobile phones and the majority of households had internet connections. Further studies were conducted to correlate by age groups the ownership of mobile phones with access to internet connection. This was an important indicator of the local situation about education. We found that 30-45% of local children (between 0-15 years) had access to mobile phones and almost 50-60% accessed internet connections using the phones of their parents or guardians. This helped them to gain access, and get used to, the online education provided by the schools that they used to attend before the pandemic. However, it should be remembered that the online classes did not take place regularly. The schools gave weekly assignments through chat messages; the assignments were then submitted for assessment at regular intervals. One family confirmed that their children made irregular visits to the school to collect homework and books. The children of another family took the online assignments and also visited their school. However, three families mentioned that they did not use any of these facilities and seldom pursued education for their children. Today, although schools have gone back to normal, many children do not attend regularly due to their families' financial crisis (Table 2). It should be noted that the findings of this study not only highlight the cases of children who were unable to continue their education during pandemic, but also bring out situations like that of those three families that could not afford their children's education due to financial crisis or lack of commitment. This problem at the micro-level often remains unattended.

Social Amenities	Phones	Internet Connections	Television	Fans
Families	25	21	19	27
Slum Children availing education during Covid-19				
Students	On-Line	Weekly visit to School	Hybrid	Did not Attend
Families	22	1	1	3

Table 2. Amenities and More

There is, among some respondents, a mildly positive correlation between monthly income and expenditure, pointing to an increase in expenditure corresponding to an increase in the income. However, it should also be noted that an increase in monthly income does not always lead to an increase in expenditure and that the most respondents belong to the low-income expenditure group. In spite of local people's generally low income, they managed to survive during the pandemic thanks to the aid provided by the government at municipality level.

When social distancing was imposed, it was almost impossible for local people to follow the rules. There is a single water tap located in the slum's central area. The Poisson distribution of the round the clock single day data reveals a large number of dwellers gathering near the tap to collect water. Of course, water tap maintained by the municipality are life savers for the slum dwellers and access should be available both during and after the pandemic. Clearly, however, during the pandemic it was impossible to maintain social distancing. The distribution also shows day-long queues, with an average 18 people visiting the water point each hour. Similar stories were common in the Asian slums; Sharda Para is no exception (Plate 3). During the pandemic, all the slum areas of Kolkata were particularly vulnerable and were declared zones at high risk of virus transmission, especially in light of the fact that social distancing was unlikely to be maintained. Regular checks of body temperature and sanitation were among the few preventive measures undertaken (MIT Report 2020, TOI Report 2020).



Plate 3. Gathering near a Water Source

We put to the respondents a series of open-ended questions which highlighted the problems that they faced. It emerged that all the surveyed households experienced a combination of serious problems. We know that this slum, like others in Asian countries, lacks many basic amenities like access to potable water, good sanitation facilities, living areas, and long-term housing and security of tenure. The Covid-19 phase exacerbated these problems adding further uncertainties. People were forced to adapt to the distressful changes caused by the break out of Covid-19 in the country. To sum up, all respondents reported salary cuts and unemployment as a consequence of the pandemic. They also faced an inadequate supply of staple food, clothing and experienced medical and health emergencies. As they lost their jobs,

they switched their occupation and became temporary sellers and those who owned rickshaws and E-rickshaws used them to transport the goods. The slum area lay opposite multi-storied residential houses. Because of the implementation of pandemic-related safety measures, most female slum dwellers who previously worked there as domestic helpers lost their job; many shifted to work as vegetable sellers. As rightly stated by Prato, the “Pandemic Ruptures” are deeper than they actually appear and long healing period may be the only way out (Prato 2022).

Challenges and Limitations of the Study

During the study, we encountered several challenges. Initially, there was a low response from local people, who were reluctant to cooperate. It took time and effort to communicate the need and purpose of the study and gain local acceptance. The slum dwellers were also sceptical about the schedule of the interviews. Gradually, these challenges were sorted out but there remained a lack of response regarding certain aspects of the questionnaire; particularly, the income status of the surveyed families. However, we later managed to quantify this aspect using parameters like housing status, occupation types and ownership of amenities. We also re-disintegrated at data point level the income and expenditure-based data, which were grouped for the initial analysis in order to gauge local people’s economic situation. These difficulties complicated and lengthened the process of analysis.

Recommendations

For planning and especially social purposes, the micro-level approach offers a clear and in-depth picture of the area under study and its problems; the major drawback is that a micro-level study is time consuming and geographically limited. Yet, it must be considered that the slum that we studied houses a considerably large number of people who are classified as *marginal* and struggle daily for their existence. Of course, each slum area has a story to tell, but most share issues of low job guarantee, inadequate medical facilities and lack of access to online education during the pandemic. Problems like low school attendance both online and in person could be addressed directly by government officials, especially in view of some local families’ unwillingness to send their children to school. As we have seen, the major problem is access to water for drinking and other purposes, given the limited number of water taps provided by the municipality. In view of what happened during the pandemic, when it was impossible to keep social distance at the overcrowded water collection points, it is imperative that an increased number of water collection points should be put into place; especially, in order to avoid the risk of congestion in case of future medical crises. Also, during the summer, the water table hits rock bottom and tube wells become useless.

Biswakarma Das, who is 65 years old, has lived in this slum for the past 20 years. He used to be a construction worker, who came to Kolkata from Puruliya (an underdeveloped district in West Bengal) to earn money. He lives with his wife Niru (54). He said,

“during lockdown, it was too tough to wait in line for hours to collect water [...] my wife has severe knee pain (it may be osteoporosis), and queueing there was beyond her ability”.

Biswakarma Das lost to Covid-19 his only brother, who resided in a nearby slum area.

The interview extracts from this slum of suburban India resonate with the case of an Italian stall keeper who said, “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!” (Pardo 2022: 20). What an irony! The story is same: people suffered, they endured, they stood against all odds with the fear of falling apart.

Table 3 below shows some observations in a summary sheet. We see that amongst the 123 respondents the minimum monthly income is as low as 100 rupees and the maximum income is around 5000 rupees. The monthly expenditure is recorded from low to high. As I have mentioned, there is a positive correlation between the respondents’ income and expenditure. More than 50% of the respondents are rickshaw pullers. The mean age of the slum dwellers is 24, including people who could be brought under several government schemes of skill development and technical training, which would lead to well-paid jobs. Take the case of Bablu, a 23 years old man who before the pandemic worked at a nearby petrol pump. Then, he remarked, life was simple but, as Covid-19 hit, he lost his mother from the infection, lost his job and spent the whole day doing small chores like delivering oxygen cylinders from the clinics and pharmacies to the houses of the affected, risking his own life in the process. He is now working as a security guard in a nearby apartment block and plans to take part in governmental (or private) hands-on training courses as a hospital assistant.

Indicators	Count/Values	Description
No. of Observations	27 Households	Sample
	123 Persons	
Minimum (Monthly Income in INR)	<100 (Often Nil)	Variable
Maximum (Monthly Income in INR)	5000	
Minimum (Monthly Expenditure in INR)	300	Variable
Maximum (Monthly Expenditure in INR)	6000	
R (Correlation Co-efficient) between Monthly Income and Monthly Expenditure	0.50	Moderately Positive
Major Occupation Category	52.00%	Rickshaw Pullers
Maximum Respondents Count	22	(15-30) Years
Mean Age of all the Respondents	23.4(24)	Youth

Table 3. Some Observation Summary

In the aftermath of the pandemic, any kind of slum development project should take into account the importance of establishing good connections with the rest of the city and of creating opportunities through in-situ infrastructural provisions. Opportunities should be created for income generation by enhancing local employment, social security and the proper management

of land tenure. These would be some necessary measures that would help to transform these slums into viable, vibrant and peaceful neighbourhoods (UN Report 2021). As Prato (2020) has aptly observed, “the pandemic has not only revealed how disparities rendered some people more vulnerable than others, but has also aggravated existing inequalities and generated newer injustice.” (Prato 2020: 4; see also Pardo and Prato 2021).

Conclusion

When writing an article, the concluding section is often the toughest. As an author, I believe that, where appropriate, one should engage in suggesting ways to improve the situation under study. Thankfully, in this case, the situation has improved in the post-pandemic scenario and the local residents are regaining their confidence, though they worry about what will happen, should a similar medical emergency occur in the future. They know that they would be the first and worst hit and express their fear that a second period of intense suffering would be beyond their endurance. Such an occurrence would, however, be made less dramatic by government initiatives at central, municipality and ward level to bring, say, water facilities throughout the local settlement, provide training for jobs like para-medical care giving, etc. Such initiatives could have two objectives. First, to put local people in a position to switch seamlessly to employment compatible with lock-down regulations. Second, to implement training for such jobs before the occurrence of medical emergencies, when the demand would be higher.

Our empirical study has shed light on the daily struggle of the marginal population. It seems strange that architects, geographers and planners work separately, which ends up aggravating the problems faced in urban areas. It has been pointed out (Larkham 2006) that, as the demand for land in the peripheral part of Kolkata increased, so did the pressure on built-up areas, raising issues of infrastructure, water sewage, ground water, road networks and natural resource (Kanaujia 2015). This is further indication that slums, their growth, urban infrastructure, the provision of cheap housing and environment conservation cannot be bundled together. In Indian cities the utmost priorities are, on the one hand, engaging in sustainable efforts to bring about a balanced urban development that includes a minimum number of slums and, on the other hand, providing basic services to those who live in the existing slums.

A city's resilience is measured by how its people are protected from calamities; where the collective word ‘people’ includes not only the *rich* but also the marginals (Carbone 2022). Planning for sustainability, creating liveable, equitable and economically viable communities in a city structure is not an easy task (Wheeler 2013). The Sharda Para slum is not an exception; it exemplifies a story widespread in the Asian slums. The combination of excessive growth of population in already distressed megacities and inadequate planning has produced unsustainable conditions. As Caldararo (2020) has argued, Human society has been significantly affected by the social isolation regulations, the lockdowns imposed during the pandemic, the associated economic instability and by the inability of many nations to provide healthcare and effective response to the pandemics.

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IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar on Urban Ethnography and Theory: Report and Research Abstracts

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In today's increasingly urbanised world, the ethnographic study of life in urban settings is urgent and important. Recognizing the pressing methodological and theoretical questions raised by the multifaceted contemporary urban changes and challenges, the International Urban Symposium-IUS has convened for the second year a Field Training School and Research Seminar in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany, Italy on 21-27 July 2023 (<https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2023-field-training-school/>). The working language was English.

This IUS School was organised in collaboration with an international group of senior scholars from British, French, Indian, Israeli and USA universities.¹ The event brought together doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars from Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Poland, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, Ukraine, UK.

The primary aim was to engage junior and early career scholars in the “art” of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory. The interactive learning environment encouraged productive discussion on the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates.

Over 7 full days, the activities developed through 14 interactive Teaching Seminars, 2 targeted Observational Field Trips in the medieval hamlet of Montecatini Alto and in the city of Montecatini Terme, followed by a full day discussion of participants' reports on their fieldtrips; private Study Hours, dedicated to reading selected literature — which had been circulated before the start of the School — and writing up the fieldtrips presentations. The School concluded with a full day Research Seminar during which students presented their own work and engaged in academic debate benefiting from expert feedback from the teaching staff, including advisory guidelines on how to revise oral presentations for publication.

The Teaching Seminars focused on methodological and theoretical debates. Drawing on the teaching staff's wide range of ethnographic and theoretical expertise, the discussions addressed interrelated topical issues — specifically, governance, stereotype and stigma; legitimacy and legitimation; informality; urban diversity and resilience; sport mega-events; violence and risk; aging; urban protest; vernacular landscape, public space and heritage.

¹ They were, in alphabetical order, Gary Armstrong (City University London, UK); Subhadra Mitra Channa (University of Delhi, India); Jerome Krase (City University New York, 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).

Social events benefited from the centrality of the location and its world-renowned SPA iconic establishments.

The School's participants became part of an international network, establishing connections with both other participants and the teaching staff.

Below are the abstracts of the papers presented at the Research Seminar. Revised and expanded versions of select papers are in preparation for publication either in this journal or in edited volumes for the series "Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology".

The Research Seminar Abstracts (in alphabetical order)

Marie Bertrand, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland.

Title: *What credibility can the researcher-elected politician claim? A methodology of action-research through citizen participation.*

Abstract: Action-research originated from the desire to reconcile two approaches: the political approach (acting to bring about change) and the scientific approach (knowing, in order to analyse change) in order to respond to the need of a large French city to make the lifestyles of its inhabitants more compatible with climate change through local citizen participation, as an innovative construction of public policies. To question such a decision-making process, it seemed interesting to implement this method while the researcher is herself a deputy mayor in the city identified as the field of study. Not only does this position question the posture of the researcher in the research process, but also that of the elected politician in the process of citizen participation. The paper examines the idea of the action-research device adapted to the research field. It defends the need of a partnership strategy by identifying the methodological constants while mitigating the scientific and political risks by a mapping of the actors and interests involved. This epistemological reflection opens up the reflexivity between political commitment and scientific commitment.

Christoph Hedtke, University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Germany.

Title: *How emotions impact the research process and its outcomes. The example of researching nationalist, regressive movements.*

Abstract: Since the Emotional Turn in the social sciences, emotions have increasingly become the subject of research interest. For decades, feminist researchers in particular have emphasised the ethical responsibility associated with them and the importance of reflexivity in the research process. It is all the more surprising that the emotional experience of the researcher still receives very little attention in research practice, although it has obvious implications for the research process; e.g. how we move in the field, how we inquire about and interpret certain statements, and last but not least, how we deal with our emotions and how these experiences affect future research. A special challenge seems to be posed by research on nationalist, authoritarian actors and regressive movements, investigated in marginalized and peripheralized contexts. A certain degree of empathy

is the basis of any interview situation. But what does this mean for research in anti-democratic contexts? While marginality usually evokes sympathy and agency of social scientists, with heuristics explaining the production of marginality, stigma and the like, researchers working on this topic are confronted with actors' practices and values they feel alien and even hostile to. This impacts the research process in a number of ways. During interviews, one's own political position is undeniably present and influences any communicative situation. Negative emotions like anger, rejection, even disgust mix into the communication on both sides. Furthermore, established ways of interviewing are called into question by the fact that we as scientists and our science itself are questioned by the field. This paper draws on focus groups with researchers and my own research experience in this field. It aims to show the interconnection of emotions, one's own political positioning and activity as well as normative and analytical perspectives.

Halyna Herasym, University College Dublin, Rep. of Ireland.

Title: *Between Tradition and Modernity: Funerals in the Irish Urban Landscapes*".

Abstract: The paper presents the result of the fieldwork conducted on the body disposal process in the modern Republic of Ireland. The processes of rapid urbanisation and secularization, and changes in the social fabric that follow in Ireland began rather late in comparison to Ireland's European counterparts. The paper explores how the timing of these processes affects the funeral process in three Irish cities: Dublin, Cork and Limerick. The text argues that, unlike in many European countries that had to reinvent the ways of dying and body disposal, which were tailored to the individual needs of the families and the dying people, this process had been made smoother in Ireland through the preservation of the informal bonds in the tightly-knit communities.

Mia Jaatsi, University of Turku, Finland.

Title: *Labour, life, and the question of justice in urban public space.*

Abstract: This paper combines ethnographic research methods and theories of urban justice in the context of public space in Helsinki, Finland. It uses ethnography to follow the daily manoeuvrings of a man who collects bottles for his work. Despite being known for welfare structures, Finland, too, is subject to urban inequalities and those outside of the securities of the state and formal labour. From the bottom-up, this study investigates the struggles the man encounters as he labours through public space. The ethnography reveals that life on and of the street is not secure nor idle: it consists of strict schedules, competitive territories, self-management, learning of space and time, and seeking for quick solutions. The empirical study demonstrates that while for some urban public spaces are sites of leisure and optimism, for others, they unfold as sites of precarious work, informality and scepticism. This on-going paper invites to discuss on the interplay between theory and empirical work, that is, between the micro-geographies of lived urban space and broader questions related to justice in the city.

Selima Sara Kabir, BRAC University, India.

Title: *Love is Blind; Online Dating is Holds a Magnifying Glass: Exploring the role of online dating in shaping identities among young people in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Abstract: There is very limited scholarship, particularly qualitative studies taking an anthropological approach, on how dating apps are used by young people in South Asia. The paper aims to unpack what young people are seeking in terms of relationships and connectedness from dating apps. Moreover, we seek to explore how this impacts their personal identity in terms of self-worth, understanding of emotions and self. We will contrast their innermost desires and expectations of relationships from these apps to the ways they choose to present themselves online through their pictures and “bios”. Through in-depth interviews and dating profile analysis, this study aims to take a focused ethnographic approach to understanding the experiences of Bangladeshi youth using online dating apps like Tinder, Bumble and Hinge. Our respondents are expected to share stories of their “firsts” on these apps — the first time opening their profile, their first match and their first date from the app; as well as first disappointments and heartbreaks from the app. We aim to understand their emotional journey over time since these firsts, whether they feel any different to “real life” connections and how they impact their perceptions of love, romance and themselves.

Jin Myoung Lim, City University of London, UK.

Title: *How creative hubs can be used to cultivate sustainable cultural ecosystems.*

Abstract: Creative hubs are physical spaces that bring together artists, creatives entrepreneurs and cultural organizations to collaborate and create new work. They play a critical role in the development of sustainable cultural ecosystems and the growth of the creative economy. The paper provides a literature review on the current state of creative hubs and their impact on the cultural and creative industries. The review emphasizes the importance of creative hubs in creating a supportive environment for the growth of the creative economy and sustainable cultural ecosystems. The paper also presents case studies of successful creative hubs from around the world, highlighting their unique features and the ways in which they have contributed to the growth of their respective cultural ecosystems. The case studies provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of developing and sustaining creative hubs, as well as the strategies that have been successful in achieving this goal. The paper concludes with a framework for cultivating sustainable cultural ecosystems through the development of creative hubs. The framework outlines the key components of a successful creative hub and the strategies that can be used to support its growth and sustainability. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and a supportive policy environment in achieving sustainable cultural ecosystems. In summary, this paper highlights the critical role of creative hubs in cultivating sustainable cultural ecosystems. It provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of developing and sustaining creative hubs and outlines strategies for their growth and sustainability. By creating a supportive environment for the growth of the creative

economy, creative hubs can contribute significantly to the development of sustainable cultural ecosystems.

Erin E. Lynch, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

Title: *“It Must Be Something in the Water”: A Comparative Sensory Ethnography of Urban Spa Atmospheres.*

Abstract: From signature aromas to lilting soundscapes and “natural” textures, the sensory design of spa atmospheres deliberately appeals to all the senses. Using sensory ethnography, and informed by my previous research on spa atmospheres in the context of pandemic culture (where atmospheres of wellness bumped up against the overarching atmosphere of contagion), the proposed paper would compare the sensory design and experience of the prototypical Scandinavian/Nordic-style spa in North America to that of the thermal baths in the Italian spa town of Montecatini Terme. On the one hand, the comparative approach of the proposed paper would give insight into the way that varying cultural and touristic ideas of wellness are expressed in the sensory design of these spaces. At the same time, this paper would explore how atmospheres of wellness in a “spa town” are interconnected with a variety of other drivers of the so-called experience economy in the city. My overarching aim is to illuminate both the curation of (branded) atmospheres of wellness in the city and the precarious, uneven, and thoroughly multisensory experience of co-producing these atmospheres and spaces with others.

Nils Julian Meiß, University of Cologne, Germany.

Title: *Making sense of the imaginary in practice as an approach to urban futures,*

Abstract: In urban research, which favours the city as an epistemological object, the engagement with imaginaries is not very widespread and only visible in marginal areas of urban theory. In anthropological research, the systematized analysis of imaginaries is also undeveloped and can sometimes be found through the nexus of habitus and the city. In this context, the reference to imaginaries often has fictional notes and exhibits ontological fuzziness. With Lefebvres’ and Castoriadis’ notions of the imaginary, two variants are available — albeit each theorized and placed very differently in the authors work — and are fruitful for the synthesis of current debates in practice theory and anthropology of the future. Lefebvres’ and Castoriadis’ notions of the imaginary meet, first, in materialistic-embodied practices of the everlasting creative subject, and second, in the forward-looking temporality of the possible. Building on their works, methodological facets of the imaginary are to be confronted with positionalities in the ethnographic co-production of knowledge. Using the empirical case of a “traffic experiment” in Cologne, I will examine how social imaginaries and everyday life rhythms complement the governance of infrastructure projects. Identifying the urban as an imaginary of collective practice opens ways for a different production of space.

Cecile Poullain, Independent Scholar, France.

Title: *How smartphones influence our ability to perceive our urban environment.*

Abstract: Drawing on recent research, this paper revisits in the digital age some of Kevin Lynch's work in his book *Image of the City* to discuss how smartphones influence our ability to perceive our urban environment. The data were collected through a questionnaire (over 200 respondents) and a series of workshops on the impact of smartphones over urban spatiality and visual perception of cities. Outcomes were greatly interesting: with the use of smartphones, new navigational norms seem to emerge in the way people practice their urban environment and it also creates new ways of understanding our cities.

Ipsita Pradhan, SRM University, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Title: *The Shopping Mall as Work-Place: An Understanding of Layered Space(s).*

Abstract: The paper studies women employed as retail shop-floor employees in a shopping mall in Hyderabad, India. It is an attempt to understand the shopping mall as a work space, instead of only a site of consumption. In doing that, it uses the concept of "layered space" to understand the nature and processes of stratification and exclusions that the shopping mall produces. The concept of layered space is useful in understanding the characteristics of a space that is shared by people of different social strata, yet there are differences and hierarchies in the nature of their relation to that space. The layers formed, as a result, are fluid with varied acts of constructing physical and social boundaries, under the overarching structure of the rules of the mall. These are manifested in the relationship that the retail shop-floor employees have a) with the customers, visible in the starkly different customer areas and employee areas within the mall, b) amongst themselves on the basis of position in the job hierarchy, caste and gender. Talking from the perspective of women's experiences as employees in the shopping mall, the paper shows the gendered nature of the layers within the space of the mall as well as the larger space of the city where the mall is located.

Yvann Pralong, Université de Jean Monnet à Saint-Étienne, France.

Title: *Heritage Through the Digital Prism: Doing Online Fieldwork.*

Fieldwork's importance within social sciences has been discussed numerous times and is at the centre of this seminar. However, is fieldwork only a thing of the "physical realm" or could we extend it, in a way, to the non-material one that constitutes the digital network? While working on heritage through online initiatives and representations, I had to walk through the online research field, collect data and conduct online interviews and surveys. What should be considered before collecting data and how usable are these data? What are the similarities between those two fields? In what way do they differ? Using separate research experiences, one revolving around Lyon's heritage and the other one on Saint-Étienne, this paper aims to develop a discussion around online research not unrelated to physical fieldwork.

Francesca Ru, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Title: *Market gentrification pandemic: an ethnographic research of Turin's Mercato Centrale.*

In recent years, the profile of many working-class neighbourhoods has changed as new sophisticated businesses have opened. This change can trigger gentrification and foodification processes. One example is Mercato Centrale in Turin, an indoor market opened in 2019 in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. Its main feature is the offer of expensive, typical Italian dishes. This paper explores whether the opening of this market is not only a commercial initiative but also a catalyst for commercial gentrification and foodification processes. Between October 2020 and January 2021, I conducted qualitative research, a content analysis of the Mercato Centrale website and an analysis of 41 articles published in three newspapers; thirteen semi-structured interviews with people working in the market; a period of participant observation. The market is presented as a meeting place on the website and in the articles analysed. The interviewees divided the clientele into two groups: Café visitors and restaurant visitors. The first group consisted mainly of Maghrebians who consume almost exclusively coffee. The second group consisted mainly of Turinese and tourists. Finally, participant observation revealed that the main customers during the pandemic period belonged to the first group. The opening of the Mercato Centrale is an urban regeneration action carried out by a private entity. Although it is presented as a place of encounter, it excludes rather than includes. However, with the pandemic, tourism came to a complete halt and the clientele changed, making the Maghreb population the main customers of the Mercato Centrale.

Karolina Dziubata Smykowskam, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland.

Title: *Attitudes to Climate Change in Rural and Medium-Sized Urban Environments on the Example of Intangible Cultural Heritage Practices.*

Abstract: The pilot research I am conducting responds to the issue of the relationship between climate change and local practices around intangible cultural heritage, which has not yet been sufficiently explored in Polish anthropology. The research will allow a preliminary analysis of the impact of the climate crisis on traditionally established rituals and customs related to the growing season, the annual snow cycle (cf. Bolin 2009) and surface water level. The ethnographic research sites are phenomena in rural and medium-size urban environment selected for their connection with the natural environment and included in the National list of intangible cultural heritage. The planned research will help strengthen the sense of empowerment of local communities, who have the right not only to be informed about the consequences of climate change — they are also capable of generating concrete solutions. The research also aims to reflect on the strategies taken by people in the context of the climate crisis. What do people do with their tradition in the face of hydrological draught? What do they think about yearly rituals that no longer correspond to the growing season? The paper is embedded in the currents of ethnoclimatology, climate ethnography and anthropology of folklore.

Insub Song, City University London, UK.

Title: *What does it mean to be “Itaewon people”? A study on young-generation South Koreans visiting Itaewon, Seoul.*

Abstract: This study investigates the ways in which Itaewon, a multicultural neighbourhood in Seoul, is being consumed by its major clientele of young generation South Koreans. For this, 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with regular visitors to Itaewon are used as data. The findings suggest that while multicultural consuming experience is commonly discussed as key motivation for visiting Itaewon, what is being pursued by majority of the participants at deeper level is the distinction of oneself from the Confucius, conservative and nationalistic tendencies of Korea as who can appreciate and adapt to cultural differences. I argue that the symbolism of Itaewon needs to be understood not as a one-way construction by various types of migrants and their cultures, but as what has been sustained and reconfigured by the cultural resistance materialised by the young generation Koreans, who emerged as dominant clientele in the last 10 years, through consuming its multiculturality. This study is expected to contribute, particularly, to the local scholarship by presenting an empirical study on what it means to appreciate multiculturality within the Korean society, and by recognising the critical role of consumers in the production of Itaewon, whom have been unattended by the scholarship.

***IUS International Conference on
Forms of Inequality and the Legitimacy of Governance***

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This 4-day International Interdisciplinary Conference took place in the SPA town of Montecatini Terme, Italy, on 28-31 July 2023. We convened this meeting on behalf of the International Urban Symposium-IUS (<https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2023-2/>). The Conference brought together 35 scholars from the social sciences from around the world, who presented their work based on ethnographic knowledge to address the nature and interconnections between different forms of inequality and investigate the major forces combining to create inequalities.

Mainstream publications have recently addressed inequalities in health, income, education, labour market and competition, and the gaps between different parts of a country — often worsened by the effects of stereotype and stigma. While concern with inequalities stays at the forefront of today's public and policy debates, worldwide, equality of opportunities, of access to resources, to compete continues to be a utopia. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed pre-existing inequalities, often bringing out graphically the ramified ways in which they — individually or in combination — threaten the very fabric of the economic, social and political system.

The Conference recognized that our analysis needs to address the nature and interconnections between different forms of inequality and investigate the major forces combining to create inequalities. The discussions addressed variations of inequality across the world, the socio-economic, fiscal, legislative and political forces that determine them and the efficacy and legitimacy of the policies implemented to tackle them.

In view of the fundamental distinction between equality and levelling argued comparatively in “Urban Inequalities: Ethnographically Informed Reflections” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), the papers presented at the conference focused on key topics in this field, including communal governance, informality, urban violence, post-pandemic inequalities, residential patterns, urban space and the impact of tourism and gentrification, stereotypes and stigma, education, politics of migration, natural disasters, memory and heritage. Papers were based on ethnographies from, Albania, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Czechia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mali, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Korea, the Netherlands, Turkey, UK, USA. A list of the papers is given below.

The Conference began with a welcome address from the local authorities at the historical Montecatini Terme's Town Hall, followed by a buffet reception at the Hotel Corallo.

Socialising events throughout the conference included visits to historical SPA establishments and evening concerts, which facilitated informal exchange and networking.

A collection of revised papers is in preparation for publication in two edited volumes in the Series “Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology” (<https://link.springer.com/series/14573>).

The Papers
(in order of presentation)

Italo Pardo & Giuliana B. Prato (University of Kent, UK), *Notes on Forms of Inequality*.

Dolores Koenig (American University, Washington, DC, USA), *Now We Are Poor: Communal Governance and the Instantiation of Inequalities in the Commune of Bamafele, Western Mali*.

David Karjanen (University of Minnesota, USA), *Changing Informal Urban Economies in the US: A Response to Changing Systems of Accumulation, Technology and the State*.

James Rosbrook-Thompson (City, University of London, UK), *Governing Through Risk in the Field of Urban Violence: Inequality, Actuarialism and Public Health*.

Liora Sarfati (Tel Aviv University, Israel), *Inequality as Extreme Suffering: The Hell Chosŏn Discourse in South Korea*.

Anna Romanowicz (Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland), *Individual Choice? Intimate Relationships Among Indian Urban Middle Class*.

Karolina Moretti (National Technical University of Athens, Greece), *The Aesthetics of Chaos*.

Khatuna Kacharava (Caucasus International University, Georgia), *Challenges Posed by the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Era to the Higher Education System in Georgia*.

Subhadra Channa (University of Delhi, India), *Mapping Differences and Inequalities on the Urban Residential Patterns*.

Bernardo Emmanuel (Institut national de la recherche scientifique, Canada), *The Other Public Space: Retracing Social Representations of the Place Under the Paulo De Frontin Overpass in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil*.

Smoki Musaraj (Ohio University, USA), *Mediterranean Urbanism: Governing Tourism and Real Estate Booms in Saranda (Albania) and Barcelona (Spain)*.

Matthew Rosen (Ohio University, USA), *In the Market for Old Things: The Tirana Used Book Trade as an Index of Urban Inequality*.

Ana Millan Esteinou (University College London, UK), *Social Moral Dilemmas: A Case Study of Exclusion, Dehumanization and Stigma*.

Jeongha Hwang (University of Glasgow, UK), *Desiring Contemporaneity: Urban Politics and Hidden Actors in Dongdaemun*.

Gary Armstrong (City, University of London, UK), *Football -A Level Playing Field?*

Kees Terlouw (Utrecht University, Netherlands), *Challenging the urban perspective on legitimacy: the shift from the relational to the territorial perspective*.

Xuyi Zhao (Boston University, USA), *Citizenship as Reward: City-Making and the Spatiotemporal Politics of Migration in Southwest China.*

Ardi Sugiyarto (Queensland University of Technology, Australia), *Public Service Performance in Lagging Regions in Indonesia: Trend And its Determinants.*

Manana Shamilishvili (Tbilisi State University, Georgia) & **Eka Tkhlava** (Caucasus International University, Georgia), *Development Perspectives of Georgian Regional Media Schools in the Light of Digital Inequality.*

Svetlana Hristova (South-West University “Neofit Rilsky”, Bulgaria), *The Ukrainian Refugees in Bulgaria: Attempts to Domestify the Displacement—Unplanned Participatory Observation.*

Ebru Kayaalp Jurich (Yeditepe University, Turkey), *Disaster, Risk and Housing in Istanbul.*

Elif Ebru Yılmaz & Deniz Halman Tomaka (Kadir Has University, Turkey), *Beyond the Disaster: Vulnerability of Governance in the Turkey-Syria Earthquake.*

Hana Cervinkova (Maynooth University, Ireland) & **Lotar Rasinski** (University of Lower Silesia, Poland), *Publicness, Education and the Legitimacy of Governance.*

Alžběta Wolfová & Olga Gheorgiev (University of Economics in Prague, Czech Republic), *Educational Inequalities as an Embodiment of Social Deprivation in the Czech Republic.*

Inga Shamilishvili (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Georgia) & **Lile Kobaliani** (LCC International University, Lithuania), *Principles of Creating and Implementing Educational Programs based on the Examples of American and Georgian Educational Models.*

Tadashi Saito (Yamaguchi Prefectural University, Japan), *How Should Place Memories Be Expressed?: A Study on Value Judgment of Historic Monumental Buildings.*

Maria Manuela Mendes (University Institute of Lisbon and University of Lisbon, Portugal), *Ciganos/Roma and Housing: The Continuum and Difficult Access to Decent Housing in Portugal.*

Nóra Teller (Metropolitan Research Institute, Hungary), *Once-in-a-lifetime (Dis)investments into Housing Precarity: Urban and Rural Housing Regeneration Programs in Roma Segregated Neighbourhoods in Hungary.*

Stefánia Toma (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities and Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania) *Imported super-diversity: Rurbanization, Remotization and Social Inequalities in Romania.*

BOOK REVIEWS

Björkman, L. ed. 2021. *Bombay Brokers*. Duke University Press: Durham and London.

Bombay Brokers is an impressive and engaging volume that delves into the lives and practices of “people whose material and practical expertise animate the everyday workings in and of one of the world’s more dynamic cities, but whose labours are simultaneously (and paradoxically) subject to much moralizing and hand-wringing” (p.3). The book adopts the specific yet open-ended idea of brokers or brokerage to explore such mediating practices, what Björkman, in the Introduction, calls the “morally fraught but socially necessary work of transgression, translation, and transborder navigation” (p.16). The thirty-six individual chapters in this book are profiles or portraits of the titular brokers — Mumbaikars who work across dizzyingly varied industrial and economic sectors like electoral politics, social work, labour contracting, real estate, food and catering, waste recycling, urban transport, to name just a few — which makes this volume a unique work of urban ethnography. These chapters are innovatively structured across six parts, each of which contains about five to seven profiles, and includes an introduction that traces thematic and ethnographic convergences or comparisons between the profiles/portraits. These parts are respectively titled: Development, Property, Business, Difference, Publics, and Truth.

In her introduction, Björkman starts by focusing on four interrelated aspects of

brokerage: material-practical work, knowledge and resources, moralizing talk, and the historical and ethnographic specificity of these practices (pp.3–4). She then provides an in-depth historical and political account of mediation, especially its ambivalent and paradoxical nature, which exemplifies the book’s focus on the “necessary-yet-suspect character of such ‘local expertise’” (p.10). The rest of the introduction further explores the very nature of mediation, including a critique of methodological nationalism, and the “material dimensions” and “embodied character of expertise” (pp.14–15); contemporary discourses of corruption, where the “stability and coherence of things such as state, law, and identities of all kinds is invariably a temporally distal outcome of the very sorts of mediations that are held to be corrupting of those same formations and framings” (p.23); and the generation of value, including the “normative presumptions that animate these value-creating activities, as well as the moralizing critiques that are levelled against these activities and those who perform them” (p.29).

The profiles in Part I: Development showcase “the expertise of the people ... in materializing the city’s built environment — physically bringing the fabric of the city into being” (p.48). While most of the people profiled in this section broadly deal with various aspects of civic and infrastructural development, like real estate or labour contracting, the portraits themselves are rich explorations of themes like gender and kinship (Kamath, Chandra), artisanship (Baitsch), and networking (Björkman,

Searle). In Part II: Property, the profiled individuals “demonstrate the vast array of claims-making practices and legitimating idioms within which the institutionally and ideologically empowered language of ‘property right’ finds its rightful place as one among many” (p.109). The thematic convergences in these profiles include the arbitrariness of idioms like illegal/legal (Truelove, Banerji) and the intersections between neighbourhoods and caste- and sex-based notions of purity (Kundu, Vachani).

Part III: Business looks at individuals “whose labors not only facilitate market exchanges but also bring those markets into being”, where people are “fundamentally engaged in a variety of value-generating activities, operating at multiple territorial scales” (p.164). These include food (Bedi, Kuroda), reproduction (Deomampo), transnational value chains (Cheuk), local real estate (Björkman), and development aid (Rangwala). The evocative profiles in Part IV: Difference is devised to “unmoor us from settled understandings of how identifications and representations of difference and belonging operate within a city like Bombay” (p.234). These include forms of aesthetic labour and politics that both critique and reproduce hierarchies of gender and caste (Paik, Swaminathan), mediations between religious/linguistic/ethnic identities, secular cosmopolitanism, and urban survival (Strohl, Finkelstein), and forms of historical and linguistic labour that chart out Bombay’s unique identity (Simpson, Pemmaraju).

The stories in Part V: Publics “call attention to some of the changing ways in which practices and technologies of mediation, social imagination, and self-making are animating new forms and formations of social collectivity and their representation” (pp.297–298). The fields in which these brokers operate are both well-defined, like electoral politics (Chauchard, Bagchi) or the Hindi and Bhojpuri film industries (Shivkumar, Hardy), or diffused and affective, like building and sustaining social relations (Korgaonkar, Gandhi). Finally, Part VI: Truth explores the work of people who either “display ... mastery in duplication or disguise” or engage in ‘investigation and truth telling” (p.355). These truth-making or truth-seeking practices, thus, include investigations or critiques of familial or social rumours (Basu, Udupa), affective, embodied but also precarious practices of deceit (Sen) or communication (Kusters), and practices of datafication in Mumbai’s knowledge economies (Shetty and Gupte, Bhide).

The individual portraits in this book provide a sense of ethnographic intimacy and immediacy, thus grounding readers in the lives and dynamics of its protagonists. At the same time, Bombay Brokers provides an expansive ethnographic scale from which one can survey the urban — in this case, we are able to see Mumbai/Bombay as the megapolitan behemoth it is. However, having read the book in a somewhat linear manner, the introductory parts felt too long and gave away too many rich details of the profiles that were to follow (in fairness, the Introduction does encourage a non-linear

reading of the book, which I think readers might find more fulfilling). The book also comes with a glossary that includes a list of linguistic terms, bureaucratic acronyms, and important political and historical figures that are peppered throughout the book, which might help readers navigate the city's urban colloquialisms.

I also read this book as a “native” Mumbaikar who has lived, worked and studied the city, and has therefore had a fair share dealing with (and studying) brokers — NGO workers who care for survivors of domestic violence, commuter associations who strategically liaise with politicians and Railway bureaucrats, and precarious labour contractors who perform the vital care of urban infrastructures. On account of this insider/outsider position — being a native ethnographer, as it were — I could both appreciate the book and identify some of its flaws, like the tired anthropological exoticizing gaze (e.g., Kamath's description of a peripheral region as a “Wild West frontier”, p.59), or novice researchers navigating fieldwork ethics (e.g., Taskar negotiating access with the e-waste recycler Muhammad, pp. 187–188; and Kuroda realising the productive capacity of monetary exchange with the dabbawalla Shankar, p.213).

These very minor weaknesses aside, *Bombay Brokers* presents deeply engaging ethnographic and thematic reflections that provide grounds to interrogate the future of popular politics and mediations in contemporary Mumbai. For instance, Björkman's introduction engages with the Gramscian notion of *interregnum* — the transitional state where sovereign power is

exercised without political legitimacy — though observing that “contemporary Bombay is neither in a state of imminent crisis nor overrun by monsters” (p.13). Yet, I think this conclusion may be troubled by recent contentious political transitions that have taken place in Mumbai and the state of Maharashtra. Inasmuch as *Bombay Brokers* provides a necessary engagement with the ambivalences and paradoxes of mediation, I am wondering if such ethnographic projects have any potential for cultural critique — which has been a vital part of the anthropological toolkit.

Needless to say, *Bombay Brokers* will undoubtedly be a valuable resource for students and scholars who have a deep interest in, and/or are based in, Mumbai. It is also a must-have for those working in and writing about other large metropolitan cities, particularly in South Asia and the Global South, who will surely find great merit in the volume's ethnographic and comparative analysis. Here, I see the volume overall, as well as the individual chapters, being important interventions in broader discussions around themes like labour, gender, class, caste, kinship, politics, and mobility, to just name a few. Finally, I believe that prospective readers would find the individual profiles/portraits to be fascinating exercises in ethnographic writing, including instances where the ethnographic gaze is also turned on the writers, thus interrogating their presence and relationship with Bombay — or the cities and spaces which we call both home and the field.

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Cruces [Villalobos], F. 2022. *Metropolitan Intimacies: An Ethnography on the Poetics of Daily Life*. New York: Lexington Books.

Lives are mostly experienced through, apparently uneventful, daily routines, small gestures seemingly irrelevant, filled with sameness, the prosaic features of “normality”, when nothing appears to be happening and yet there is much to be told about the dynamics of such experiences, ways of living, which are, after all, a significant part of a larger picture, encompassing memories, identities, aspirations, interactions and a myriad of aspects that are specific to each one of us, trespassing boundaries of time and space.

Intimacy is, usually, hidden from public view, inscrutable. The author clearly exposes his intention to explore “the poetics of micro storytelling in contemporary urban life [because] little stories matter.” (p. 2). They matter in themselves and in what they tell about the way they mingle with a certain form of being part of the wider world.

Rather than exploring the questionable classical dichotomy of the *public* and *private* spheres, the author, simultaneously producer and participant, (p.61) expands the concept of intimacy as whole embracing category, centred on the self, a complex, assertive, agent, through whom disparate composite meanings are blended, construed, and experienced. Boundaries are ill defined, as they always have been, and a constant flux permeates our living experience. Similarly, disciplinary boundaries are increasingly irrelevant, or altogether absurd.

Irrespective of the location this is “anthropology *in* the city” (Prato and Pardo

2013), evoking similarities in diverse social and cultural settings, because “in the metropolitan ecumene, strong similarities in the ways intimate habitats are made can be found across world cities” (p.68). The research is multilocal, despite, intentionally or not, all settings being in Castilian speaking countries (Madrid, Spain; Mexico City, Mexico; and Montevideo, Uruguay). It is fundamentally multidisciplinary and spans over a long period of seven years (from 2010 to 2017).

The book explores in detail multiple variables featuring the intimacy of twenty individuals and their stories “in order to make sense of the whole.” (p.3). The whole is both *in* and *out* of the private realm of each of the participants, launched from a set of seminal questions: “Would it be possible to understand today’s urban life without the rise of the intimate sphere? What are the intimate, the ordinary, and the domestic made of? What is the fate of the ongoing metropolisation of urban dwelling? Can we record intimate life without ruining it? How can intimacy be properly narrated?” (p.4).

Intimacy is not, necessarily, solitude or isolation, it gathers onto it the metropolis. Intimacy is, apparently, reserved but may be, at the same time, cosmopolitan. Focusing on individual experiences, as told by the actors themselves, the book sheds light not only on their inner selves but also in the appropriation each one makes of their realities in, direct or indirect, interactions with others, in a constant dialogue.

Houses, as living spaces, play a relevant role in the experiencing of our lives. They may be perceived as a retreat, our own castle, but whereas they may be depicted as

“closed”, delimited by bricks and mortar, they are, simultaneously, a reflection of the way we are, they mirror our ways of being and living.

The home is a construed entity, filled with meaning, and can be as peculiar as each one of us (Pardo 1996: 6). Is this a feature of the “western” urban way of living? Maybe the rise of individualism results in the inevitable constraints of neoliberal schemes of globalization becoming impinged upon the minutest details of our lives. There is, therefore, an inherent conflict, constantly calling for ingenious interventions to redress some form of desired equilibrium. In that sense, attempts to preserve one’s own intimacy may be viewed as a sort of retreat, a strategy of resistance and a way to preserve some sort of sanity. Truly it might be possible to live a life without intimacy, but such a life is not really worth living.

Each of the twenty characters that are present in this ethnography has a unique perspective, a personal narrative, a diverse way of experiencing their lives, the stories told, the gestures, the interactions with others, the displaying of the self. Their stories are filled with their own paths, their own meaningfulness. Some live in relatively conventional family units (with or without children), others have housemates, others live alone, and yet others have their own arrangements. For one of them, “Home is any place where I don’t have to ask permission to open the fridge.” (p.121).

A relevant object that has a place in someone’s living space is imbued with meaning. Objects were collected from different places or may have been gifted by

someone or carefully chosen to be bought, they move along with us and each has its own history and an intrinsic potential to produce emotional responses. Inherited objects may be cherished or rejected, according to the recollections they summon. The ability, or willingness, to share mementos with others conveys meanings — the proudly kept box of family photographs, the grandmother’s ring, the grandfather’s watch (that never worked) or, in contrast, the discarded possessions of a Francoist father are significant in the sphere of deep emotions.

Somehow, the home is a retreat from all the rest. Everyone strives to define a space made to the measure of one’s own expectations, creating order or, even, indulging in the disarray that living alone allows. Nothing is static, as life moves on, prospects are rearranged, to accommodate new realities. People move, the new house is different from the previous but nonetheless it will be featured to become a home. A chapter on IKEA (chapter four and several references throughout the book) highlights the “circularity between the public sphere and the private” (p.162), bringing to the debate the redefinition of taste through a transnational, massified concept of furnishing the living space.

The book is divided into 5 chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. It is accessible to anyone, interested in one or more of the many subjects explored in the book, and to students, including undergraduates, owing to an ethnography rich in details, a solid theoretical analysis and a set of sound methodological, mostly collaborative, strategies. An extended

literature review delves on a wide range of fields of knowledge. Disparate as they may seem, they are well intertwined, offering to the readers a comprehensive bibliography, certainly enriched by the author's ability to master at least four languages (Castilian, English, French and Portuguese).

A valuable complement to the book (or vice-versa) is a video produced in 2018 by Jorge Moreno Andrés and Francisco Cruces [Villalobos], available online, with English subtitles, titled *The order I live in. An indoor urban symphony*.

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Reference:

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FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

The Letter: A Message for our Earth. Directed by **Nicholas Brown**. 2022. 80 minutes. Colour.

The film's title announces its purpose; that is, to be an audiovisual manifesto for the public to act effectively to protect the Earth. The letter concerns the encyclical "Laudato Si" written by Pope Francis in 2017. In that document, the religious leader calls on people worldwide to engage in the socio-environmental cause. The film seeks to carry out this activist task and departs from letters sent by the pope to environmental leaders based in four different regions of the world. The first of them is a Senegalese man who survived an accident while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea. The second is a leader of the Maró people who survived an assassination attempt by illegal loggers in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest. The third is a young Indian activist, member of an international collective that fights climate change. Finally, the fourth letter is directed to a pair of scientists who are carrying out research into the extinction of coral reefs in Hawaii. They were chosen respectively to represent "the poor", "indigenous peoples", "the youth", and "nature". To this end, they are invited to go to the Vatican to meet with the leader of the Catholic Church and propose solutions to climate change based on their experiences. It is worth noting that none of the five people identifies as Catholic. The group shares how the Islamic and Hindu religions, as well as the Amerindian cosmology and atheism, all have environmentalism as a common interest. In this way, the pope is presented in the film as a global leader of

environmentalism and not just a Catholic leader. It is no coincidence that most of the pope's speeches chosen to make up the film have scientific data as their main reference. The emphasis on Catholicism is more easily recognizable when the group visits the Italian city of Assisi. There, an effort is made to demonstrate how St Francis would have been an environmental activist as well as to trace the genealogical origin of ecology back to the 13th century. The film's aesthetics at certain moments are reminiscent of a typical documentary about wildlife, as it lists a series of images of forests and animals synchronized with an informative voice over about the evils of urbanization. Cities are characterized by the destruction and chaos caused by climate change, while forests and oceans are characterized by the harmony and plenitude that would be their antithesis through constant image oppositions between urban and natural landscapes. At other times, the film's aesthetics resemble reality television, as it follows the arrival of the letters at the protagonists' homes and their journeys to and from Italy mediated by a presenter. Streaming services have popularized these film languages that can be effective in engaging the viewers. Being produced by YouTube Originals and distributed free of charge, the film ends by asking for it to be broadcast at public events.

The more than 8 million views in 12 months may suggest that the film has partially fulfilled its political-religious goal.

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Wawan's prayer. Directed by **Robert Lemelson**. 2022. Elemental Productions, 23 minutes.

Wawan's prayer is like *All god's children* a documentary telling the story of people with autism in Indonesia. This time Robert Lemelson has acted as director and Ninik Supartini was producer, but a whole series of people has contributed, among others four interviewers, six persons who made transcripts, and ten translators. The large number of people shows how much the film was a team effort.

Wawan's prayer once more tells the story of the difficulties people with autism have to overcome in Indonesia. His parents, who run a tyre shop in the city of Banjarmasin, at first did not know well what to do with their son, who could be jumping around the house till 3:00 in the morning. Certain sounds or images on television could trigger violent outbursts in him. Wawan is fortunate with two loving parents, who are proud of him and have tried hard to find help.

His father accompanied Wawan to a healer, a haji, who concluded that Wawan is possessed by a spirit. The healer claimed that with the imposition of his hands on Wawan's head, a potion prepared by himself and with Allah's help Wawan could be cured. A viewer believing in biomedical care may look down at such healing practices as "superstition", but the film does not make such moral judgement. It merely shows the options for help open to parents. Wawan's father also wonders what causes autism. Is it a virus? How to prevent it?

Another opportunity to help Wawan opened up when they heard of a private

boarding school specialised in teaching children with autism. The school, called Sekolah Khusus Autis (special school for autism) Bina Anggita, is found in the city of Yogyakarta and run by Muhammad Yasin, who is also co-producer of the film.

The specialised school is doing Wawan well. For instance, he calms down, which is partly attributed to a therapeutic diet (no bread from flour, no cow's milk, no artificial colouring, that is, no European food). The school gives its pupils the extra time on teaching that regular schools cannot offer.

At the Bina Anggita school Wawan can develop skills that autistic people often have. For instance, he was able to retrace all data on the school computer that were accidentally deleted. If this was achieved in the seclusion of the school, at another moment Wawan got public recognition. He was winner of the MTQ (Musabaqah Tilawatil Qur'an) of Yogyakarta, an important Koranic recitation contest. His capacity to remember things came to good use in these achievements.

While the special school was an outcome for Wawan, it still posed a drain on resources of his parents. They missed him when he was in the boarding school and paid tickets to visit him or to bring him home twice a year. Banjarmasin and Yogyakarta are situated in two different islands of Indonesia and the air fare can be considerable for most households.

The documentary *Wawan's prayer* is important to illustrate the practical obstacles autistic children and their families face in Indonesia and show them in a positive light. Not only his achievements

are mentioned, but also his religiosity. As soon as he hears the call for prayer, he starts ablutions. Another value positively represented is parental love, which is most vividly illustrated when his mother visits Wawan in the boarding school and the two greet each other. The two values of religiosity and parental love come together in the comment from the mother: “It is not our wish that a child is like that. There is the Supreme Power who wanted it. If God gives us a child with autism or special needs [...] there is a special door to heaven for the parents”.

Inevitably, the film raises questions that remain unresolved. For instance, the question why Wawan is often walking around with a bundle of banknotes in his hands. As it is, it seems there are no other children in the boarding school; what kind of interactions take place there and how does the environment react to the children in school?

The film makers have clearly chosen for a positive and optimistic, if not propagandistic, story. The fact that the school principal was co-producer may have played a role, and the school yard, for instance, looks unrealistically tidy and clean-swept. Nevertheless, taking the companion documentary, *All god's children*, into account, it is more likely that this call for recognition of autistic people originates with the film makers. This is an important statement to make in Indonesia. Viewers in the West can take another message from the film, namely the strength people find in Islam. Because of these positive goals, the fact that the film may perhaps show a somewhat sanitized image

of the life and situation of Wawan can easily be forgiven to the film makers.

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All God's Children. **Robert Lemelson** (Executive producer). 2022. Elemental Productions, 67 minutes.

All God's Children tells a story about Idris, a teenager who has non-verbal autism spectrum, from a poor rural area in Central Java, Indonesia. In the documentary, his single-parent mother, Isti, is struggling to take care and meet Idris' basic needs due to the lack of financial support and facilities. Moreover, their neighbours stigmatize Idris as an evil-possessed lunatic who needs to be healed. This complicated condition makes it difficult for Isti to obtain the appropriate treatment for Idris.

The documentary conveys several important messages. First, it helps us to understand Idris' condition as a person with special needs and follow his journey in developing his capabilities with the support from people around him. Further, it shows the important roles of family, local community, government institutions, and experts in supporting children with autism in Indonesia.

Perhaps the most unique part of this documentary is a scene where Isti and Idris conduct a shower ritual and go to an *orang pintar*. *Orang pintar* literally means “smart person”. in Indonesian, but people use this term to refer to traditional healers and people with clairvoyance power. This trans-medium expert is believed to have the ability to see and communicate with unseen

spirits and heal those who are ill. Many urban middle-class Indonesians usually go there only after they have exhausted all medical options, but they prefer to go to the doctor first. However, Isti does not have the financial resources to access proper medical care for Idris, which is why she goes to *orang pintar*.

One scene in the documentary is particularly powerful when Isti meets Hermi, another mother who lives in the more urbanized part of Central Java and has an autistic child named Osa. In this scene, Isti feels a bit stressed about Idris whose behaviours disturb their neighbours. Hermi encourages Isti to be gentler to Idris. This part shows us that the role of supportive people who have similar experience is important for both Idris and Isti. At the same time, the fact that Osa is able to access more educational and treatment facilities shows unequal access to facilities for people with autism between urban and rural areas.

There are scenes that will be difficult to understand for people without a thorough knowledge of Indonesian culture. For instance, the very first scene, when Idris, Isti, and another man, bring an offering; he pours sea water over Idris and throws a white chicken to the shore. There is a similar scene when two people bathe Idris

in the water fountain. As an Indonesian, I am familiar with those activities. The first one is a traditional Javanese praying ritual, and the second one is a form of traditional treatment from a religious healer. Without a more complete explanation, viewers might wonder about the meaning of those activities. Further, the film could have provided more scenes comparing the availability of services for people with autism in rural and urban areas. Doing so will better highlight inequality between the two areas in providing specialized help and care.

Overall, the documentary nicely captures the many layers of problems for people like Idris in Indonesia and the Global South. The story of Idris can encourage people to learn more about issues pertaining to people with disabilities. The last set of scenes ends the documentary with an uplifting note: as a result of support from family, local community, government institutions, and experts, Idris is now welcomed by his neighbours. Hopefully, the film can help diminish the stigmatization of people with autism in Indonesia and elsewhere.

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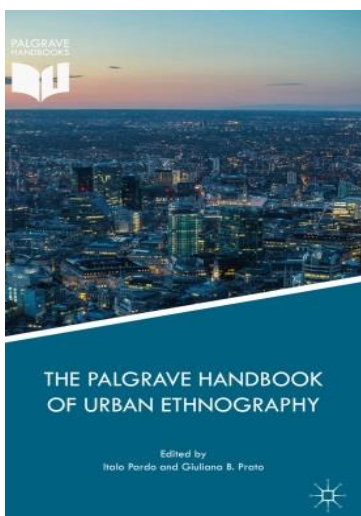
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