URBANITIES

Journal of Urban Ethnography

Contents

Moving Despite Constraints: Socio-Spatial Navigation in a West African City[1]

Houd Kanazoé
(Virtual University of Burkina Faso)
houdkanazoe@yahoo.fr

Katja Werthmann
(University of Leipzig, Germany)
katja.werthmann@uni-leipzig.de

The concept of socio-spatial navigation allows us to understand how city dwellers come to know the city and what skills they need to move both to reach their destinations and to reduce constraints. In this article, we show that male taxi drivers and their female passengers in Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso possess place-specific knowledge and skills. These are manifested in practices such as learning visible and invisible landmarks, negotiating the fare, making oneself invisible to authorities, concealing one's true destination, or invoking moral norms about gender and intergenerational relations to make the most of a ride. At the same time, drivers and passengers engage in forms of cooperation and solidarity to maintain an urban transport system that is vital to them, even if it involves illegal practices.
Keywords: Urban anthropology, socio-spatial navigation, urban mobility, African cities, public transport, gender.

Introduction

Visitors to the city of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso can buy printed maps with street names from bookstores or street vendors. But apart from the names of a few major *boulevards* and *avenues*, street names rarely feature in everyday conversations about routes, directions and locations among city dwellers. "Who knows the names of the streets in Bobo? We don't use them, we know the city!" claimed Amadou, a taxi driver. Given the alleged "unknowability" (Hansen and Verkaaik 2009: 8; Pieterse 2013; Guyer 2011) of cities in Africa, what did he mean when he said he knew the city? What do taxi drivers use to navigate the urban space?

In this article we explore responses to "unknowability" and thereby contribute to "Southern" epistemologies of the urban (Connell 2007, Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, Jenkins 2013, Mabin 2014, Macamo 2018). For many city dwellers in Africa, knowing the city involves spatial orientation as well as the ability to navigate different social situations in a context of pervasive insecurity (Trovalla et al. 2014). Vigh (2009: 419) coined the concept of "social navigation" for grasping how people "move under the influence of multiple forces or seek to escape confining structures". In Bobo-Dioulasso, these confining structures or constraints include inconsistent governance, inadequate infrastructure, economic hardship and social pressures.

Social navigation is a useful concept for capturing practices of moving despite constraints. However, the metaphorical reference to a seascape neglects the materiality of the urban spaces in which social navigation takes place. We understand spatial orientation and social navigation as simultaneous and co-constitutive practices of knowing the city. By combining them in the concept of socio-spatial navigation, we can show that shared taxis are

---

more than a means of transport but spaces in which taxi drivers and their passengers mobilize spatial and social knowledge to make the most of a ride.[2]

Spatial orientation has been understudied in ethnographies of urban Africa (Werthmann 2022, 2023). In many studies, the cities merely served as backdrops for social phenomena. We use the concept of socio-spatial navigation for everyday practices of mobility (Beck and Werthmann 2016; Kanazoé 2022a; Werthmann 2022: 153-72). It allows us to understand how city dwellers get to know the city and what skills they need when they move, both to reach their destinations and to reduce constraints.

"What will my Co-wife do?"

In order to illuminate the concept of socio-spatial navigation, we begin with a dialogue between a male taxi driver looking for passengers and a potential female customer on the side of a road in Bobo-Dioulasso.

Fig. 1 Taxi driver and potential client negotiating the fare. Photo by Houd Kanazoé.

"Woman: Taxi, I'm going to the TSR station [bus station for long-distance destinations].
Taxi driver: Okay.
Woman: How much will you charge me, *taximan*?
Taxi driver: You will pay 1,000 FCFA [Franc of the Communauté Financière Africaine].
Woman: No, that's too much, I have a lot of expenses! When I get to Houndé [her final destination, c. 100 km from Bobo-Dioulasso], I still have to pay for the transport to bring my luggage home. Leave it at 500 FCFA.
Taxi driver: Ah madam, if I have to work like this, you won't find me here next time.
Woman: Why not?
Taxi driver: Because I will run away from home, since I will not be able to support my family.

---

[2] Taxis in Bobo-Dioulasso usually transport several passengers with different destinations.

Woman: I'm sorry, if you run away, what will my co-wife do?
Taxi driver: Ah, if you want your co-wife to eat, you have to increase the amount.
Woman: Fine, I will give you 800 FCFA.
Taxi driver: All right, that's fine" (Kanazoé 2022a: 160).[3]

At first glance, this interaction appears as a routine act of negotiating a taxi fare in the context of an informal urban transport system such as can be found in many African cities. But why would the two people engaged in this dialogue refer to seemingly unrelated issues such as the customer's future expenses or the taxi driver's marital status?

We suggest that this interaction comprises in a nutshell what we call socio-spatial navigation. In the dialogue above, both sides know that the standard fare for a taxi ride in the city is 300 FCFA.[4] Both also know that most taxi drivers operate illegally because they use butane gas as fuel, which allows them to save costs but is prohibited. Taxi drivers who use butane gas cannot renew the papers for their cars and are under the constant threat of having their vehicles impounded or having to pay bribes to the police. The cost of maintaining the vehicles also rises because of the inability of the municipality to improve the poor state of the streets. Both drivers and passengers experience economic hardship, forcing the majority of city dwellers to work in informal and insecure occupations. Men who are expected to provide for their families are under considerable pressure, especially if they have more than one wife, which is often the case in this predominantly Muslim city. Indeed, many women shoulder the burden of caring for their children, even when these are grown up (Roth 2018). Needless to say, this creates tensions between spouses and between parents and children, and can lead to the breakup of marriages and downward social mobility.

The man and the woman in the short dialogue above skilfully allude to these larger economic, socio-cultural and governance issues. The woman states that she wants to go to a bus station for long-distance destinations. The taxi driver quotes a price that is too high, even taking into account the distance between the spot where they negotiate and the bus station, and the fact that the woman is carrying luggage, which usually drives up the price. Instead of offering a lower price or refusing and waiting for another taxi, which are also standard routines in such interactions, the woman appeals to the taxi driver by referring to the expenses she will have to cover upon arrival at her destination, thereby implying that she has only limited funds for this trip. When she offers half of what the taxi driver has asked for, the driver could refuse and insist on the original price, quote a slightly lower price or simply move on. Instead, he verbally creates a scenario in which he will have to give up his job because he will not be able to feed his family. One may speculate that — based on his professional experience — he correctly assumes that the woman is a trader who is able to pay more than the standard fare. By referring to his wife as her "co-wife" (*sinamuso*), the potential passenger accepts the "offer" to enter into an imaginary marriage and thus considers the taxi driver's social obligations as a breadwinner. Neither of them seems to have hard feelings about not reaching their respective original goals

---

[3] All citations of dialogues and interviews in this article have been translated from Jula or French.
[4] The standard price is fixed by the taxi unions, but drivers ask more when customers have luggage, if the destination exceeds a standard distance or for other reasons.

of getting a higher or paying a lower fare. The playful tone of the dialogue is characteristic of many interactions in Bobo-Dioulasso, where institutionalised joking relationships between relatives, kinship groups and ethnic groups provide a ground pattern for everyday interactions and where people joke with each other even when they are total strangers (Sissao 2002). Being able to navigate through the urban space thus requires an ability to navigate through socio-cultural norms in order to overcome economic constraints. This is what we call socio-spatial navigation.

This particular dialogue was no exception. A similar framing of drivers and passengers as "husbands" and "wives" occurred in other interactions, such as when a taxi driver had to stop during a journey to replace an empty gas bottle. Instead of reclaiming the fare to take another taxi to continue her journey, a female passenger waited patiently for the driver to resume the journey. She explained to the researcher: "They are our husbands, they are doing this [work] to help their families, what else can we do?" (Kanazoé 2022a, 144).

Fig. 2 Taxi with butane gas bottle in the trunk. Photo by Houd Kanazoé.

Approaches to Movements and Mobilities

When we agree that the central concern of urban anthropology is understanding "how social life is structured by and experienced within urban contexts" (Jaffe and De Koning 2016: 3), we have to include everyday movements and mobilities as a crucial feature of city life in order to generate "fresh ideas and forward-looking analyses on the problems and complexity of our urban environment" (Prato and Pardo 2013: 99).

Some recent strands in anthropology, geography and sociology are particularly apt for capturing socio-spatial practices. Empirical studies in the framework of an "anthropology of the road" have highlighted the economic, social, political and imaginary dimensions of roads and public transport in Africa (Beck et al. 2017, Dalakoglou and Harvey 2015, Horta 2019, Ibrahim and Bize 2018, Klaeger 2013, Masquelier 2002, Stasik and Cissokho 2018, Stasik and Klaeger 2018). These works look at the road as an urban space that needs to be studied in its

own right and not just as a backdrop for movements. They resonate with our approach in that they also focus on everyday practices and on the multifunctionality and forms of sociality of mobility infrastructures.

The "new mobilities studies" in geography and sociology focus on practices such as walking or driving (Brown and Shortell 2016, Cresswell and Merriman 2011, Sheller 2014a, Sheller and Urry 2006). Sociologist John Urry (2004) introduced new perspectives on (auto)mobilities and the related socialities. He pointed out the need to explore how people "physically and socially make the world through the ways they move and mobilize people, objects, information and ideas" (Büscher and Urry 2009: 112). He aimed at "transcending the dichotomy between transport research and social research" by "putting the social into travel" (Urry 2003: 157) and stressed that a means of public transport such as the railway carriage is a "socially organized environment" (Urry 2006: 363).

While the new mobilities studies ask how "bodies and objects shape cities, and in turn are shaped, through their rhythms of movement, their pace, and synchrony" (Sheller 2014b: 797; Creswell and Merriman 2011: 4), few have applied such a perspective to cities of Africa (for an exception, see Porter et al. 2017).

Anthropologist Henrik Vigh (2006, 2009) coined the concept of "social navigation" for countering precarity in the post-conflict society of urban Guinea-Bissau. In his field site, social navigation became manifest in *dubriagem* ("muddling through"), which is similar to *se débrouiller* and *se chercher* in Burkina Faso: "making one's way through immediate difficulties as well as directing one's life positively into the future" (Vigh 2009: 423; Nabos 2021: 66). Archambault (2013: 80) proposed that it could also be applied to less volatile environments such as the "intimate economy" of urban Mozambique.

The concept of social navigation emphasises that social relations in urban Africa are not given but constantly emerge from interactions, as Epstein (1961) already pointed out in his seminal account of one man's day in the city of Ndola (Zambia). Such interactions are part of what Simone (2004, 2021) called "people as infrastructure": the separate but interconnected activities of city dwellers based on their capacity to "read" constantly changing situations, which then contribute to the collective making of urban spaces such as the transport depot in Abidjan or the inner city of Johannesburg.

In the spirit of the anthropology of the road and the new mobility studies, we propose "socio-spatial navigation" as a concept at the intersection of social navigation (Vigh 2009) and spatial orientation or wayfinding (Darken and Peterson, 2002). It is a heuristic tool for understanding how urban dwellers make sense of their environment and how they use their knowledge to overcome constraints in order to move successfully in urban space. Indeed, in the realm of urban public transport that we studied in Bobo-Dioulasso, spatial and social mobility are intertwined. Taxi drivers are not only professional providers of mobility and knowledge of the city, but also experts in assessing the possibilities and potentials of spaces and situations. In their interactions, taxi drivers and their passengers mobilize moral norms derived from a common socio-cultural background; they frame their relationships as one between "husband" and "wife", or between "mother" and "son"; and they invoke the history of urban spaces and

past trajectories as they name the visible and invisible landmarks of the cityscape through which they move.

In the following pages, we briefly introduce public transport in Bobo-Dioulasso. We then describe the everyday "practices of movement" (Stasik and Klaeger 2018: 106), as well as the knowledge and skills that underpin these practices and enable city dwellers to move competently through different areas of urban life despite constraints.

Public Transport in Bobo-Dioulasso

Bobo-Dioulasso is Burkina Faso's second largest city, located in the western part of the country. Its population of around one million is predominantly Muslim and the *lingua franca* is Jula.

As in many other African cities, the main urban management challenges are demographic growth, high unemployment and inadequate infrastructure. Historically, the city grew out of pre-colonial settlements at the crossroads of trade routes. The French conquered the city in 1897 and made it an important centre for trade, industry and military recruitment. In the 1940s, Bobo-Dioulasso was the second largest city in colonial French West Africa (AOF) after Dakar in Senegal. However, after independence in 1960, Ouagadougou became the capital and Bobo-Dioulasso's economic importance declined as many businesses moved to Ouagadougou (Werthmann 2013).[5]

In terms of transport infrastructure, a few paved main roads crisscross the city, but most of the smaller roads are unpaved, and parts of the city become impassable for cars during the rainy season (Kanazoé 2022a: 40-70). As elsewhere, "public" transport in Burkina Faso is in fact private and informal. Since the 1980s, several attempts to establish urban transport systems in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso have been unsuccessful. The most recent initiative dates from 2018, when the state-owned bus company *Société de Transport en Commun* (SOTRACO), which had existed in Ouagadougou since 2003, started operating in Bobo-Dioulasso. There are nine bus lines, and the service runs from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. The fare is 150 FCFA. The buses are mainly used by schoolchildren in the mornings and afternoons. For other potential users, they are inconvenient because they only serve paved roads, the stops are not always near popular destinations, such as markets, and the buses often run only once an hour, with no indication of when they will arrive at the stops. City dwellers refer to such inappropriate mobility planning as "white people's calculations", thereby indicating the distance between "westernised" planners and the local population (Kanazoé 2022a: 86).

Inhabitants of Bobo-Dioulasso prefer two types of public transport: cars painted light green that operate as shared taxis, and three-wheeled moto-taxis (*tricycles*) consisting of a moped with a trailer for transporting goods. [6] In Bobo-Dioulasso, there are full-time and part-time taxi drivers; there are drivers who own their vehicles and others who have an agreement with a car owner. As in other informal occupations, solid business plans are the exception, and many owners are overwhelmed by the costs for fuel, maintenance and spare parts once they start using their cars as taxis. Agreements between owners and drivers are verbal and set a daily

---

[5] The capital Ouagadougou lies in the centre and has 2,5 million inhabitants (INSD 2020).

[6] In this article, we focus on shared taxis. For a discussion of the *tricycles*, see Kanazoé 2022b.

amount that the driver must give to the owner. At the time of research, the amount varied between 5,000 and 6,000 FCFA, depending on the condition of the taxi, and determined the driver's monthly income, which was around 30,000 FCFA. [7] The driver was responsible for buying fuel, which cost FCFA 5,000 for petrol and FCFA 7,500 for diesel per day. This put a lot of pressure on the drivers who risked unemployment if they did not earn the target amount. Drivers also had to pay a membership fee to one of the four taxi unions in order to obtain an official number and receive support in case of conflicts with authorities and passengers, or in the event of a road accident.[8]

Taxi drivers need to know the spatial, temporal, social and cultural dimensions of the city, both as residents and as service providers. They have to learn strategies to maximise their profits, including following the rhythms of the city. Peak times for taxi drivers are the mornings when people go to work and the afternoons when they return, or the departure and arrival times of the train that links Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) with Bobo-Dioulasso. Taxi drivers must be able to "read the road" (Stasik and Klaeger 2018, 101). They have both *savoir-faire* (know-how) and *savoir-être* (know-how-to-be). Know-how involves recognizing potential passengers by keeping one eye on the roadside and reading people's body language. People who walk close to the roadside and turn around to look at the street from time to time are most likely looking for a taxi, and the driver will honk his horn to attract their attention. Know-how is also mobilized in negotiating with police officers during controls. "Know-how-to-be" includes looking the other way when a male acquaintance boards the taxi with a woman who is not his wife. It also requires not becoming angry when passengers cheat or abuse the drivers.

Practices of Socio-spatial Navigation

In African cities, people who cannot afford their own vehicles have to walk or use public transport, which often means shared taxis, vans, buses, three-wheeled vehicles, motorcycles or mopeds (Godard and Teurnier 1992). Using public transport requires knowledge of places, times, directions, routes, landmarks, means of transport and situationally appropriate language, as well as verbal and non-verbal strategies for negotiating a ride and interacting within the vehicles. City dwellers build up this knowledge incrementally through learning by doing.

Our fieldwork involved riding in shared taxis, observing interactions between mobility providers and passengers and recording routes with a GPS tracker. [9] This allowed us to see how drivers and passengers gradually constructed a shared mental map of Bobo-Dioulasso,

---

[7] The minimum income in Burkina Faso at the time of research was FCFA 30,684 (US$ 45.31).

[8] All taxi drivers are expected to join a union, but not all do so because they consider them useless or do not want to pay the membership fees.

[9] Houd Kanazoé rode along with and interviewed 125 taxi drivers and 50 drivers of moto-taxis in 2018 and 2019. The selection of these taxis was random, and the drivers were all informed of the purpose of the research. In addition, Kanazoé conducted qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with 50 drivers of moto-taxis, three bus drivers, city and state officials, and with customers and other transport-related providers of goods and services at their places of work or during social meetings.

including landmarks, routes and distances, and how they used their knowledge of times, rhythms and socio-cultural norms to reach particular destinations and goals.

A key finding of our research is the gendered nature of public transport in Bobo-Dioulasso. Drivers tend to be male, while the majority of passengers are female. Male taxi drivers and their female passengers have verbal and non-verbal skills for navigating the city and negotiating destinations and fares. These skills are manifested in the following actions.

Learning landmarks

To become a taxi driver in Bobo-Dioulasso, a newcomer undergoes a kind of apprenticeship by accompanying an experienced driver for some time who will show him the major landmarks and routes. Knowledge of landmarks and their names is also passed on in the countless daily interactions between taxi drivers and their customers. Passengers in shared taxis have to ride along until other passengers have been delivered to their destinations. They therefore pass locations they would not otherwise have known.

Many names of landmarks refer to buildings or places that no longer exist, to past events, or there is both an official and a popular name for a place. Some examples in Bobo-Dioulasso are the roundabout called "Blaise-Khadhafi", where there used to be a monument to the former president Blaise Compaoré and former Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi. It was rarely called by its official name "la place arabo-burkinabè".[10] The name for one vacant space is *kaba kuru misiri* ("mosque of stone blocks") because originally a Muslim prayer congregation placed stones on the ground to mark a space for prayers. The congregation has since built a mosque further away, but the space is still called by its former function. A street known for its nightlife is called "Black" after the famous club "Black and White" (Nabos 2021: 129). Personal names sometimes remain attached to a place even after it has changed its function, as in the case of a building called *Docteur Soma kliniki* (Doctor Soma's clinic), which has served as a secondary school since the doctor's death years ago. These naming practices are not unique to the city of Bobo-Dioulasso but have also been observed in other African cities (Eichhorn 2022; Werthmann 2022: 175-76).

Learning landmarks is vital for taxi drivers. They use them for assessing the distance between locations, which is important for determining the fare. Some drivers learn the landmarks the hard way, because customers of an inexperienced taxi driver who does not know the city well yet can trick him into going much further into certain areas than would be economically profitable for him.

Bargaining

There is a standard fare of 300 FCFA per "drop" set by the taxi drivers' unions, but if passengers want to go beyond a standard distance or into the unpaved and unlit parts of the city, drivers and passengers use verbal and non-verbal strategies to increase or decrease the price. Some passengers ask after the fare as soon as they have stated their destination and try to negotiate with the driver if he asks for a higher price than the standard fare (because of distance, bad

---

[10] During the 2014 uprising which ended president Blaise Compaoré's regime, the monument was demolished.

roads, luggage, night time, risk of not finding passengers on the way back). Normally, the fare should be 300 FCFA if the driver says nothing when accepting a passenger. If the driver mentions a higher price only upon arrival at the destination, passengers may refuse to pay more than 300 FCFA or put up a fight.

Some drivers say nothing and just open their hand at the end of the trip. When the passenger gives him a 500 FCFA note, the driver asks, "How much do you want me to take?", hoping that the passenger will not ask for change. Such a strategy gives the passenger the impression that they are the masters of the game and that the drivers are dependent on their goodwill. By using such strategies, drivers can make more money than they would have if they had discussed the fare at the beginning of the journey.

Some passengers hide their intention of paying less when they get into a taxi. Consider the following dialogue between a taxi driver and a middle-aged woman.

> "Woman: I am going to Belleville [a quarter of Bobo-Dioulasso].
> Driver: Okay, you will pay 500 FCFA.
> Woman: Ah driver, sorry, I have 300 FCFA. I am going to visit my sister who is ill.
> Driver: Mother, are you sure you have only 300 FCFA?
> Woman: Yes.
> Driver: Okay, get in.
> After a few minutes' drive, we are in Belleville.
> Woman: My son, there is a problem of change, I have 500 FCFA.
> Driver: But you said you had only 300 FCFA.
> She no longer looks at the driver and holds out her hand with the 500 FCFA note.
> Driver: You see [addressing the researcher], that's how it is, the customers don't care about us, and then they say that taxi drivers don't respect people. If not, is it right what she did? It's because she's old; otherwise, I would have kept the 500 FCFA" (Kanazoé 2022a: 164).

In this interaction, the woman tried to appeal to the driver's sympathy by calling him "my son" (*n den*) and mentioning that she was visiting a sick relative. Probably because of previous bad experiences, the driver was still suspicious and explicitly asked the woman, whom he addressed as "my mother" (*n ba*), to confirm that she only had 300 FCFA, thus asking her to be truthful, as is expected of a mother. On arrival, the woman's intention to pay less — possibly because she needed the change for her return journey — became clear. She only got away with it because the driver respected her as a social senior. As a small consolation for the driver, she had to listen to what he said to the researcher (Kanazoé) who was present. In another case observed by Werthmann, a taxi driver threw out a woman who admitted that she had no money after she had already got into the taxi.

Hiding from and Negotiating with the Police

In order to evade police checks, taxi drivers without valid papers or those who use petrol as fuel give hand signals to other drivers when they pass a checkpoint or call other drivers on their mobile phones to warn them. They also have set up WhatsApp groups for this very purpose. The phone thus becomes a tool that allows them to make themselves "invisible" in certain

places (Archambault 2013). But when the driver is caught, he negotiates with the police officers to avoid having his vehicle confiscated. The police officers, in turn, play along and many will eventually accept a bribe, as one taxi driver explained: "The first time the police caught me was in the central market. I was driving against the one-way street. I called an old [taxi] driver there. He told me to negotiate with them and give them 2,000 FCFA. That's how I knew we could negotiate and how much we could give them. Even if you don't have the money, you have to negotiate. They will delay you, but in the end, they will give you your car. But if you want to play hardball, it won't work. They know our problems, so we work it out (*on s'arrange*)".

This is an example of learning the unwritten rules on the job. The driver already knew that experienced taxi drivers who are leading members of the taxi drivers' unions always hang out at the central market to supervise other drivers and intervene in cases of conflict. He now knew about the appropriate amount for a bribe.

Fig. 3 Police officers around a tricycle during a traffic control, a taxi passes in the background. Photo by Houd Kanazoé.

Overcharging and Going in Different Directions

Taxi drivers prefer to carry as many passengers as possible at once. They often overcharge their vehicles, especially during rush hours. A driver may ask a passenger to disembark, and refund him or her the fare, if he can have several passengers at the same time for another destination. Passengers can refuse to get out, which can lead to arguments and even violence, or they can refuse to board a taxi that is already full.

If a taxi driver accepts passengers with destinations in different directions, he should let them off in the order in which they got on. In some cases, however, passengers dispute the order. One driver accepted four passengers who wanted to go to three different sectors from the central market.

"Passenger 2: Driver, where are you going to go first, because I went out without my baby?

Driver: I'll drop you off at [Sector] 21 first and then we'll go to 22.

Passenger 3 [going to Sector 11 with another woman]: No, driver, drop us off first, because I am sick and my foot hurts. I can't stand the pain with all this touring.

Driver: Madam, I'm sorry, it won't take long.

Passenger 3: Honestly, I can't stand it. If that's it, we'll get off and take another taxi.

Passenger 2: Okay, driver, as there are two of them, you mustn't lose because of me. I'll get out and take another taxi.

Driver: Oh, thank you very much, madam" (Kanazoé 2022a: 143).

After all the passengers had disembarked, the driver said to the researcher: "You see, the woman who got off at the market was nice; otherwise, she could say she was not getting off because she got on before the other two, and I would lose out" (Kanazoé 2022a: 143). Although the woman was probably doing this primarily to get back to her baby as quickly as possible, her attitude also suggests a form of solidarity with the taxi driver, because by getting off voluntarily she saved the driver from losing two passengers instead of just one.

Invoking Moral Norms

The importance of socio-cultural norms for gender and intergenerational relations when travelling in taxis was very evident in the interactions between taxi drivers and older and poorer women. Some older women address the taxi drivers as "sons" and appeal to their pity, thereby obliging them to show respect and to help, as in the following example:

"Driver: Where are you going, madam?

Woman: I'm going to Salibatogo *cinq heures* [a neighbourhood market that starts in the afternoons].

The driver hesitates, perhaps because this market is very small, hidden and not very far away.

Woman: Ah, my husband, you have to help the old woman!

The driver reflects for a few seconds.

Driver: Okay, get inside.

Less than 10 minutes later, we arrive.

Woman: You see the tarpaulin there? That's where I'm getting off. We are invited to come and eat. [Family celebrations often take place outside dwellings in public spaces that are temporarily transformed into rooms by setting up marquees with open sides and equipped with chairs.]

Driver: Ah, is it a naming ceremony or a wedding?

Woman: It's a wedding.

Driver: Oh, right. Congratulations to the bride and groom.

The old lady hands over a 500 FCFA note.

Driver: No mother, it's okay.

Woman: Ah, my son! Thank you very much. Not all taxi drivers are like that with old people. May Allah bless you; may he give you lots of luck."

Driver: Amen" (Kanazoé 2022a: 165-6).

Although the driver was reluctant at first, probably because he was unlikely to find another passenger on this route on the return journey, he agreed to take the elderly woman to her destination when she called him "husband" and asked him for help. When he found out that she was going to a wedding, he even waived the fare. This is because the blessings of older women during rites of passage, such as weddings and naming ceremonies, are essential for triggering *sababu*, the stroke of luck based on divine intervention that produces social success (Debevec 2013). Instead of the fare, the driver accepted a blessing himself. Interestingly, the woman who first called the driver "my husband" (*n cɛ*) later called him "my son" (*n den*), after he had addressed her as "my mother" (*n ba*). Both were thereby emphasising that they belonged to different generations, which requires the younger person to show respect and humility. Many taxi drivers comply with such strategies of older women because the blessings and curses of "mothers" are believed to be powerful.

Making Confessions

For female passengers, the taxi can provide an anonymous space in which to discuss marital and other personal problems. According to their "knowing how to be" skills, some taxi drivers simply listen and provide an outlet for their clients' grievances, while others offer advice and even help.

> "Once a lady stopped me on the road and asked me to collect her luggage [from her house]. While I was taking her luggage, she started telling me about her problems. In fact, she was going home [to her parents' house] because her husband had beaten her. He had changed. He used to come home late at night and often stayed out until four in the morning. But she never said anything. On the contrary, she didn't sleep. She waited for him. When he came home, she heated the water for his bath and gave him something to eat. But she couldn't stand being beaten anymore. So I said to her, 'You know, madam, men are like that. Your husband has false friends and it is they who take him to the bars. When he gets drunk, he starts looking for women. If you go home for a few days, he will see your importance and he will come to ask for forgiveness. But please, you have to accept to go back to your [married] home, don't say that you're getting a divorce, that it's over. You'll see he'll change'. She told me she understood. One day I was there and the phone rang. It was the lady. She started to thank me because it had really happened as I said it would" (Kanazoé 2022a: 173).

Not all taxi drivers are sympathetic to the confessions made by women in their vehicles. One taxi driver recalled how he had put pressure on a woman to ensure that she would not repeat actions that he considered inappropriate. He had picked up a married woman from a brothel who confessed that she had just slept with a former lover whom she had run into at the market while buying groceries. When the driver dropped her at her place, he said "see you next time". She asked where they were going to meet again and he claimed to have driven her at least twice before, which was a lie. The driver commented: "I did this to sow doubt in her mind. She'll think maybe I know her and I can tell her husband. That will make her stop" (Kanazoé 2022a: 175). The driver thus contradicted the woman's expectation that she could speak freely in the anonymous space of the taxi.

Working at Night

Taxi drivers who work at night are not the same as those who work during the day. Most night taxi drivers are *Diaspo* (children of Burkinabè parents who had emigrated to Côte d'Ivoire and returned to Burkina Faso during the Ivorian civil war from 2002 to 2007). Their customers are often women who work in nightclubs and who are not from Bobo-Dioulasso but from other West African countries.[11]

Night taxi drivers have regular customers who they pick up at the beginning of the night. These women can leave their veils in the taxis before going to work in "sexy" clothes (i.e. showing their necklines and legs) and retrieve them when the same drivers pick them up again (Nabos 2021: 195-213). Drivers and women form bonds against police officers and against male passengers. If a driver transports a female acquaintance and a man who do not know each other, he will not drop the woman directly at her home in order to conceal where she lives.

Nabos (2021: 211) observed that people waiting for taxis on the streets in the early hours of the morning on their way to work would look away and refuse to embark if they encountered a "night taxi" with its particular type of passengers. Although day and night rhythms overlap, this avoidance marks a boundary between day and night activities. At the same time, it reveals shared knowledge about what happens in the city during the night.

For some women, therefore, the taxi is a vehicle that links different social worlds — the domestic space, which is governed by specific norms of female dress and behaviour, and the nightlife spaces where these norms are subverted or suspended. The taxi becomes a space where women can move from one social category to another while moving to their destinations.

Conclusion

"Urban travel is not just about getting from point A to point B. It is about producing and reproducing the city and the self in a complex relationship involving mobility cultures and different types of mobility knowledge" (Jensen 2009: 152). The concept of socio-spatial navigation, which combines spatial orientation and social navigation, allows us to understand what happens when city dwellers move through urban spaces, what skills they use when moving, and how these constitute a "mobility culture" in a non-northern, "ordinary" city (Robinson 2006). By riding along with taxi drivers and their passengers, we observed how they gradually constructed a mental map of the city, and how they used spatial knowledge, as well as knowledge of social norms for gender and intergenerational relations, to negotiate destinations and fares. This actor-oriented approach to everyday urban mobility is highly relevant for understanding urban spaces as both the environment for and the product of social practices.

The people of Bobo-Dioulasso who provide and use public transport face many constraints. Drivers and passengers live in conditions of economic precarity. Roads are poorly maintained and the official public transport system is inadequate. While many men own at least a scooter or a bicycle, many women and poorer men are forced to use public transport.[12] With

---

[11] While not all waitresses are sex workers, ordinary citizens tend to view them as deviant (Nabos 2021).

[12] Insufficient infrastructures, inconsistent regulations, precarity and inequalities such as class-based access to particular kinds of urban transport are also features of cities in the Global North (DeSena 2019, Hoffmann and Lugo 2014, Pardo and Prato 2021).

prices rising, taxi drivers are resorting to illegal practices to cut costs, such as using butane gas as fuel. This creates constant insecurity as the practice is prohibited and the car could be confiscated at any time. Should the drivers lose their livelihoods, they would be unable to meet their social obligations to their families, thus putting them under considerable pressure. However, the authorities and the police do not enforce the rules consistently, partly because they themselves have invested in informal transport, take bribes, do not want to risk losing voters or are afraid of stirring up social unrest.

In their interactions in taxis, drivers and passengers make references to these larger economic, political and social issues. Drivers and passengers have certain verbal and non-verbal negotiation skills, such as the ability to conduct a conversation according to established cultural patterns of joking, or to skilfully invoke moral norms for interactions between men and women, spouses, and social juniors and seniors. This is based on their shared knowledge of the socio-cultural context, which in the city of Bobo-Dioulasso means references to common social norms and hierarchies in the Mande-speaking regions of West Africa, such as the power of "mothers" to bestow blessings. Individuals can manipulate these norms, for example when older women manage to get free rides by emphasising their status as "mothers". Socio-cultural norms are subverted in some situations, for example when women use the taxi space to talk about private problems or remove their veils during the ride. Through such acts, the different social worlds that constitute the city become manifest.

A taxi ride is therefore not simply a movement between two places. The taxi is a microcosm of society at large. It reflects the pressures, tensions and contradictions of life in an African city, as well as the capabilities of its inhabitants. The "mobility culture" of public transport in Bobo-Dioulasso is characterised by a tacit consensus that everyone is entitled to reach their destination, both literally and figuratively. This consensus sets limits to the extent to which transactions can be regulated, negotiated or manipulated.

Of course, this does not apply in every situation. Disputes and fights can occur during taxi rides. Nevertheless, we observed many instances of solidarity and cooperation between male taxi drivers and their female passengers, in which both sides abandoned their goal of getting the most out of a ride and agreed to frame their interactions as relationships between "husband" and "wife" or "mother" and "son". In doing so, they made the urban space through which they moved a knowable social space.

References

Archambault, J. S. 2013. Cruising through Uncertainty: Cell Phones and the Politics of Display and Disguise in Inhambane, Mozambique. *American Ethnologist*, 40 (1): 88-101.

Beck, K., Klaeger, G. and Stasik, M. eds. 2017. *The Making of the African Road*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Beck, R. M. and Werthmann, K. 2016. *Doing the City: Socio-Spatial Navigation in Urban Africa.* Project Proposal submitted to DFG.

Brown, E. and Shortell, T. eds. 2016. *Walking in Cities. Quotidian Mobility as Urban Theory, Method and Practice*. Philadelphia/Rome/Tokyo: Temple University Press.

Büscher, M. and Urry, J. 2009. Mobile Methods and the Empirical. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12 (1): 99-116.

Comaroff, J. and Comaroff, J. 2012. *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa*. New York: Routledge.

Connell, R. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Sydney, Cambridge: Allen & Unwin, Polity Press.

Cresswell, T. and Merriman, P. eds. 2011. *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*. London and New York: Routledge.

Dalakoglou, D. and Harvey, P. eds. 2015. *Roads and Anthropology: Ethnography, Infrastructures, (Im)mobility.* London and New York: Routledge.

Darken, R. and Peterson, B. 2002. *Spatial Orientation, Wayfinding and Representation*. In K. M. Stanney (ed), Handbook of Virtual Environments: Design, Implementation and Applications. Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Debevec, L. 2013. En attendant notre *sababu*: discussions sur le travail, la vie et l'islam avec les jeunes hommes de Bobo-Dioulasso. In K. Werthmann and M. L. Sanogo (eds), *La ville de Bobo-Dioulasso au Burkina Faso: urbanités et appartenances en Afrique de l'Ouest*. Paris: Karthala.

DeSena, J. 2019. Failed Neighbourhood Legitimacy: Alternative Transportation and Sanitation Services in North Brooklyn. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 9 (2): 77-82.

Eichhorn, B. 2022. *Naming Places, Placing Names: A More-Than-Representational Study of Daladala Stops in Urban Zanzibar*. MA thesis, Leipzig University.

Epstein, A. L. 1961. The Network and Urban Social Organization. *The Rhodes Livingstone Journal*, 29: 29-62.

Guyer, J. 2011. Describing Urban 'No Man's Land' in Africa. *Africa*, 81 (3): 474-92.

Hansen, T. B. and Verkaaik, O. 2009. Introduction. Urban Charisma: On Everyday Mythologies in the City. *Critique of Anthropology*, 29 (5): 5-26.

Hoffmann, M. L. and Lugo, A. 2014. Who is 'Word Class'? Transportation and Bicycle Policy. *Urbanities*, 4 (1): 45-61.

Horta, G. 2019. From Peripatetic Anthropology to the Ethnography of Roads and Motorisation in Africa. *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 37: 213–33.

Ibrahim, B. and Bize, A. 2018. Waiting Together: The Motorcycle Taxi Stand as Nairobi Infrastructure. *Africa Today,* 65 (2): 73-91.

INSD (Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie) 2020. *Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation du Burkina Faso. Résultats Préliminaires.* Ouagadougou.
http://www.insd.bf/contenu/documents_rgph5/RAPPORT_PRELIMINAIRE_RGPH_2019.pdf; accessed 14 March 2022.

Jaffe, R. and De Koning, A. 2016. *Introducing Urban Anthropology*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, P. 2013. *Urbanization, Urbanism, and Urbanity in an African City: Home Spaces and House Cultures.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jensen, O. B. 2009. Flows of Meaning, Cultures of Movements: Urban Mobility as Meaningful Everyday Life Practice. *Mobilities*, 4 (1): 139-58.

Kanazoé, H. 2022a. *Mobilité urbaine et navigation socio-spatiale à Bobo-Dioulasso, un angle pour saisir une ville africaine*. PhD thesis, University of Leipzig. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:15-qucosa2-782450, accessed 14 March 2022.

Kanazoé, H. 2022b. L'affordance comme outil pour comprendre la mobilité dans une ville africaine: le cas de Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). *GARI, Recherches et débats sur les villes africaines*, 2 (1). https://www.revues.scienceafrique.org/gari/texte/kanazoe2022/, accessed 14 March 2022.

Klaeger, G. 2013. Introduction: The Perils and Possibilities of African Roads. *Africa*, 83 (3): 359-66.

Mabin, A. 2014. Grounding Southern City Theory in Time and Place. In S. Parnell and S. Oldfield (eds), *The Routledge Handbook on Cities of the Global South*. London: Routledge.

Macamo, E. 2018. Urbane Scholarship: Studying Africa, Understanding the World. *Africa*, 88 (1): 1-10.

Masquelier, A. 2002. Road Mythographies: Space, Mobility, and the Historical Imagination in Postcolonial Niger. *American Ethnologist*, 29 (4): 829-56.

Nabos, É. 2021. *Ordinary Nights: Trajectories of Nocturnal Dwellers in Bobo-Dioulasso.* PhD thesis, University of Leipzig.

Pardo, I. and G. B. Prato eds. 2021. *Urban Inequalities. Ethnographically Informed Reflections*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Prato, G. B. and Pardo, I. 2013. Urban Anthropology. *Urbanities*, 3 (2): 80-110.

Pieterse, E. 2013. Grasping the Unknowable: Coming to Grips with African Urbanisms. In E. Pieterse and A. Simone (eds), *Rogue Urbanism: Emergent African Cities*. Cape Town: Jacana/African Centre for Cities.

Porter, G., Hampshire, K., Abane, A., Munthali, A., Robson, E., Mashiri, M. 2017. *Young People's Daily Mobilities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Moving Young Lives.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Robinson, J. 2006. *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development*. London and New York: Routledge.

Roth, C. 2018. *Urban Dreams: Transformations of Family Life in Burkina Faso*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn.

Sheller, M. 2014a. Sociology after the Mobilities Turn. In P. Adey, D. Bissell, K. Hannam, P. Merriman and M. Sheller (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sheller, M. 2014b. The New Mobilities Paradigm for a Live Sociology. *Current Sociology Review*, 62 (6): 789-811.

Sheller, M. and Urry, J. 2006. The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, 38: 207-26.

Simone, A. 2004. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16 (3): 407-29.

Simone, A. 2021. Ritornello: 'People as Infrastructure'. *Urban Geography*, 42 (9): 1341-48.

Sissao, J. A. 2002. *Alliances et parentés à plaisanterie au Burkina Faso: mécanisme de fonctionnement et avenir.* Ouagadougou: Sankofa & Gurli.

Stasik, M. and Cissokho, S. 2018. Introduction to Special Issue: Bus Stations in Africa. *Africa Today*, 65 (2): vii-xxiv.

Stasik, M. and Klaeger, G. 2018. Station Waka-Waka: The Temporalities and Temptations of (Not) Working in Ghanaian Bus Stations. *Africa Today*, 65 (2): 93-109.

Trovalla, U., Trovalla, E. and Adetula, V. 2014. Movement as Mediation: Envisioning a Divided Nigerian City. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 23 (2): 66–82.

Urry, J. 2003. Social Networks, Travel and Talk. *British Journal of Sociology*, 54 (2): 155-175.

Urry, J. 2004. The 'System' of Automobility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21 (4-5): 25-39.

Urry, J. 2006. Travelling Times. *European Journal of Communication*, 21 (3): 357-372.

Vigh, H. 2006. *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*. Oxford: Berghahn.

Vigh, H. 2009. Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation. *Anthropological Theory*, 9 (4): 419-38.

Werthmann, K. 2013. Introduction: Identités Urbaines à Bobo-Dioulasso. In K. Werthmann and M. L. Sanogo (eds), *La ville de Bobo-Dioulasso au Burkina Faso: urbanité et appartenances en Afrique de l'ouest*. Paris: Karthala.

Werthmann, K. 2022. *City Life in Africa: Anthropological Insights*. New York: Routledge.

Werthmann, K. 2023. Beyond the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute: Anthropological Research in Urban Africa from the 1930s to the 2000s. In D. Pellow and S. Scheld (eds), *Africa and Urban Anthropology: Theoretical and Methodological Contributions from Contemporary Fieldwork*. New York: Routledge.

Collective Facework and Performative Primordialism:
A Study of Community Relationships in Crown Heights, Brooklyn[1]

Kayla Karyl Thomas
(Yale University, USA)
Kayla.thomas@yale.edu

This ethnographic study analyses racial and religious group identity within the context of Crown Heights, a well-known neighbourhood in central Brooklyn, New York. I set out to understand how residents in an area often described as rife with racial and religious tension have come to navigate instances of discrimination. Through interviews and participant observations conducted across a six-month period, I find that social actors confronted with bias may compensate for inadequacies in institutional reporting structures by resorting what I refer to as "perform primordialism". The study centres two cases, one in which an incident of bias is formally acknowledged by state actors and one in which it is not. Both serve as snapshots of the modal approaches that social actors take to navigate the harm caused by discrimination. Ultimately, the concept of "performative primordialism" extends sociological discourse on interactionism in urban neighbourhood settings.
Keywords: Interactionism, facework, racism, antisemitism, neighbourhood.

Introduction

Crown Heights, a central neighbourhood in Brooklyn, New York, has an almost double identity in the public eye. It exists both on the leading edge of gentrification and as an ostensibly infamous site of recurring tensions between a particular sect of the Orthodox Jewish community known as Chabad-Lubavitch and local Black/African-American/Caribbean-American populations. Social commentators and academics with "primordialist" inclinations have historically treated the area as one of ethnic conflict over resources and political power, in which the same categorical actors reappear, and clash, time after time. Some of the most notable examples of this are the ethnography *Race and Religion Among the Chosen People of Crown Heights* by anthropologist Henry Goldschmidt; the Jeremy Kagan film *Crown Heights* (2004) which explores Black-Jewish relations in the aftermath of 1991; Edward Shapiro's book *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot* (2006); and a plethora of articles, podcasts, and community events attempting to bridge the "community divide". However, dominant constructivist understandings of "group" identity would call into question the prominent way this neighbourhood has come to be understood; by reducing events to "group differences" much is lost. Scholars Jerome Krase and Judith N. DeSena highlight some of this much needed nuance in their book *Race, Class, and Gentrification in Brooklyn: A View from the Street* (2018), where they analyse community-based grassroots opposition to gentrification, along with its racial and class-based implications, in the Brooklyn neighbourhoods of Greenpoint/Williamsburg and Crown Heights/Prospect Lefferts Gardens. Additional ethnographic scholarship (Fijalkow and Lévy-Vroelant 2020, Hosman 2018) demonstrates some of the notable variations in understandings to and rejections of gentrification. This article, in contrast, focuses less on oppositions to gentrification and instead places emphasis on opposition to identity-based discrimination, while the realities of gentrification and displacement frame the historical

---

moment. Although the community actors with whom I spoke are well aware of the nuances both within and between "groups", the reduction of conflict to such differences can oftentimes be beneficial in ways that constructivists take for granted. The present discussion uses Crown Heights as a lens through which we can better understand and address this gap in constructivist framings. To clarify, this is not a push toward primordialism: it is instead a call to take seriously the ways in which local actors and interlocutors have come to understand themselves and strategically employ primordialist notions of group belonging to their advantage; ways which merge some key primordialist perspectives into an overlying constructivist frame.

Dominant constructivist explanations of group identity tend to neglect key characteristics that have influenced group differentiation. In the case of Crown Heights, community actors such as police, organizational leaders and residents apparently — although not in actuality — fall into pre-designated "roles" based on racial and religious affiliations. Contrary to primordialist explanations, these "roles" are not innate group tendencies. Instead, they are constructed political identities that are repeatedly reinforced due to the failure of local governance structures to adjudicate moments of tension categorized by racial or religious discrimination. More specifically, state actors fail to convince the residents of Crown Heights that they take seriously issues of antiblack racism and anti-Semitism. It is this political and social deficiency that continues to reinforce primordialist notions of group identity.

Ultimately, I extend Rogers Brubaker's critique of groupism, the tendency to take racial, ethnic and national groups for granted as homogeneous and externally bounded groups. I concur with Brubaker's understanding that racial, ethnic and national categories are not things in the world but perspectives on the world, but I expound upon Brubaker's understanding of research participants as the "real primordialists". In *Ethnicity Without Groups*, he states, "In fact, on the primordialist account, it is participants, not the analysts, who are the real primordialists, treating ethnicity as naturally given and immutable" (Brubaker 2004: 83). Brubaker's interpretation assumes notable degrees of reflexivity attributable to research participants. Based on my research, I argue that research participants, and in particular the Lubavitchers and the Black residents of Crown Heights, are not necessarily primordialists, but at times may pretend to be, or signal themselves as such, in what I refer to as "performative primordialism". This notion of "performative primordialism" differs from "strategic essentialism" in that it emphasizes theatrical and reflexive embodiment. The significance of "performativity" is echoed throughout Erving Goffman's (1955) dramaturgical analysis of facework. In the case of Crown Heights, the failure of the state to appropriately handle racial and religious discrimination has, at times, led to forms of collective facework. During these moments, Black residents, the Lubavitchers and the police, will step in to both reinforce and protect their respective group identities. When framed in this way, a dramaturgical approach to group identity can allow us both to understand better the seemingly cyclical nature of conflict as it emerges within Crown Heights and to make sense of the shortcomings of existing constructivist understandings.

This ethnographic and interview-based study, conducted during the spring and summer of 2019, illuminates the ways in which conflict is — or is not — navigated by community actors

in Crown Heights. To be clear, I do not claim to explain the relationship between the groups in question, nor do I analyse the racialized histories of Crown Heights at large. Instead, I examine two major conflicts involving Black residents, Lubavitchers and police in Crown Heights. Particular attention is paid to the ways state actors undermine the production of a resolution and the deployment of facework to protect group identity.

On Facework

Constructivist sociological approaches focus on the ways in which ethnic and racial identities are created and recreated over time. Although such identities are created relationally, as discussed by race scholars such as Natalia Molina, Ramón A. Gutierrez and Daniel Martinez HoSang, in their book *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice* (2019), there is a degree of collective facework which leans into performative primordialism. As noted in the case of Crown Heights, performative primordialism can emerge when it serves to counter events that threaten "face". In such cases the "face" that is threatened is one of a collective group identity.

This study builds on the work of symbolic interactionists such as Ashley Reichelmann, Herbert Blumer and Erving Goffman, and considers the collective nature in which facework may be performed. Erving Goffman (1955) introduces facework as the maintenance of "face"; the preservation of one's honour, dignity and position in the social world. Scholars such as Ashley Reichelmann and Herbert Blumer extend this theory of facework to consider group behaviour. Reichelmann utilizes an interactionist frame to contend that racial identities are not only formed through interactions with in-group and out-group members, but that racial groups can also experience racial threat as a collective emotion (Reichelmann 2020). She finds that if an event is perceived as a racial threat it may add to racial prejudice against out-group members. This aligns with Blumer's claim, from decades earlier, that race prejudice is fundamentally tied to where in the racial hierarchy one group perceives themselves in relation to others (Blumer 1958). Although these studies focus on different identity groups, facework strategies appear to be largely consistent across groups and even cultures (Oetzel et al. 2008). I build on this body of work and underscore the notion that a desire to save face, to protect one's pride, can merge into a collective effort when the "incident" is one that implicates a whole identity group. Interactions coloured by dehumanization, discrimination, racism and antisemitism lend themselves to perceived assaults on a collective "face", and the performance of collectively "saving face" may easily be misidentified as genuine commitment to primordialist fallacies. In the case of Crown Heights, I narrate two examples of identity-based discrimination which exemplify performed primordialism.

On Constructivist and Interactionist Analytical Frames

Constructivism and interactionism serve as useful analytical frames through which we may broadly conceptualize processes of racialization. While the former lays the groundwork for understanding racial categories as habitually constructed, with flexible and ever shifting boundaries relative to their temporal and local contexts, the latter allows for more specific

analyses of daily interactions which reconstitute such categories. When viewed together, interactionism can take dominant constructivist understandings of race a bit further. Rather than interpreting racial identifications as lending themselves to "false consciousness", we can use interactionist framing to uncover the ceremonious motivations that prompt performed "groupness". This is similar to Anna Marie Smith's assertion that essentialist claims can be viewed as resistance against the complexities of domination (Smith 1994), or Elisabeth Eide's findings that members may present their group identity in a simplified and collectivized way in order to achieve particular objectives (Eide 2010). My primary point of departure, however, is in the "how" and "why" of group identity construction. By emphasizing performance, rather than strategy, we allow for a degree of reflexivity and role-adherence that is otherwise missed.

Much of the contemporary literature on race and interactionism centres the perspective of the dominant racial group; for example, notably Trump supporters in the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The pool of research subjects is skewed toward white Republicans and emphasizes their strategies for navigating perceived threats to their racial identities. For example, in *Signifying Aggrieved White Selves: Trump Supporters' Racial Identity Work* (2022), Douglas Schrock et al. take an interactionist approach, demonstrating how Trump supporters use racial discourse and emotional communication to engage in three forms of racial identity work: othering racialized freeloaders; criminalizing racialized others; and discrediting racialized dissenters. Together, these forms of racial identity work construct what Schrock et al. refer to as signifying aggrieved white selves. Similarly, in *Collective Threat: Conceptualizing Blumer's Threat as a Collective Emotion* (2020), Reichelmann lays the groundwork for considering racial threat as a collective emotion primarily among white U.S. Republicans. This research frames racial threat as an affective group response generated through sustained interaction with social groups and group representations. While these notions of "signifying aggrieved white selves" and racial threat as "collective emotion" offer significant conceptual contributions to our understanding of race and interactionism, they limit our understanding to the behaviours and strategies taken by a dominant racial group. They do not explore the behaviour of non-dominant racial groups, or the ways these non-dominant groups construct and re-construct their racial identities in the face of similar interactions.

Through the notion of performative primordialism, I extend prominent constructivist framings of group identity to capture some of the subtleties of these non-dominant reconstruction of racial identities. Rogers Brubaker's critique of groupism recognizes that research participants are a kind of primordialist, and ethnicity, race and nations are political projects rather than things that exist in the world. He specifically challenges the tendency to take groups for granted and to treat them as though they are "internally homogenous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes […] the tendency to represent the social and cultural world as a multi-chrome mosaic of monochrome ethnic, racial, or cultural blocs" (Brubaker 2004: 8). Building on this, Brubaker asserts that ethnic conflict should not be interpreted as conflict between ethnic groups, racial conflict should not be understood as conflict between races, and nationally framed conflict should not be understood as conflict between nations. Instead, he

emphasizes, ethnicity, race, and nations are practical categories and political projects. As sociologists we should think of "ethnicization, racialization, and nationalization as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes. And it means taking as a basic analytical category not the 'group' as an entity but groupies as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable" (Brubaker 2004: 11). Rather than a thing, "groupness" should be thought of as an event, and as a cognitive perspective. By focusing on categories rather than on groups, we are better able to capture relevant processes and relations.

What Brubaker overlooks, and what the category of strategic essentialism seeks to identify, partially successfully, is *why* social actors seem to rely upon these primordial beliefs. There is a degree of reflexivity that research participants have that is assumed away by researchers more generally, and by Brubaker more specifically. In many ways these primordial inclinations reflect how research participants believe they are perceived in a given interaction, and how they believe they are able to best protect themselves from discrimination, especially during "incidents". Following Goffman, I identify "incidents" as "events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face" (Goffman 1967: 12). Not only are such groups constrained by forces external to themselves, the threats they face also serve to crystallize and reinforce their group affiliations. To claim that research participants genuinely view themselves as being part of "internally homogenous […] unitary collective actors with common purposes" is to misunderstand the field site. Similarly, to contend that primordialism is merely "strategic" de-centres dramaturgy, also a necessary lens. Rather, I will argue, primordialism, as performed in the field site, can be compensatory, responding to perceived neglect by larger state structures. What Brubaker identifies as false consciousness are in fact attempts to save "face" and to protect against discrimination.

Methodology

Over the course of six months, just prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, I examined "incidents" in Crown Heights characterized by racial or religious tension. My primary methodological tools were ethnography and in-depth semi-structured interviews documenting reported conflict and resolutions, referencing the last thirty years. During the summer of 2019, I developed relationships with several community organizations founded in the aftermath of what is referred to as the "Incidents/Uprisings/Riots/Pogrom" of 1991 (a three-day period of protests and violence between Black and Chabad Crown Heights residents), and through them attended community events, local police precinct meetings and street demonstrations. In total, I conducted hundreds of hours of observations and sixteen in-depth interviews with various community actors, including but not limited to police, organizational directors and lawyers. I coded my interviews and observations for sequence and theme. The two incidents highlighted in this paper echo some of the dominant non-legal ways in which anti-black and anti-Semitic incidents are addressed once they achieve a degree of public prominence.

For context, Crown Heights, Brooklyn has undergone several major demographic shifts over the last century, during which the boundaries of the neighbourhood expanded to include

parts of a bordering neighbourhood, Bedford Stuyvesant. In 1940, during World War II, the Chabad-Lubavitch Orthodox Jewish Hasidic movement relocated in what was then a primarily white neighbourhood, with its World Headquarters officially established at 770 Eastern Parkway, also known simply as 770. The 1960s saw an influx of Caribbean immigrants due both to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and the restriction of immigration to England, a popular destination country for Anglo-Caribbean migrants (Mitchell 1992). In 1969, during a city-wide period of suburbanization and white flight, the Chabad-Lubavitch Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, instructed his religious community to remain in Crown Heights despite demographic changes (Goldschmidt 2006). Consequently, at a time of immense racial and ethnic re-segregation in the United States, Crown Heights was establishing itself as a relatively integrated locality. Although this neighbourhood is still understood to be composed of white people, Caribbean-Americans, African-Americans and Chabad-Lubavitchers, it is important to recognize that the outlines of these groups are neither culturally nor politically fixed.

A "Bias" Incident: Acknowledged
On 27 August 2019, a sixty-four-year-old Lubavitcher man, Rabbi Abraham Gopin, was exercising in Lincoln Terrace Park of southeast Crown Heights when a stranger approached and violently assaulted him. The assailant hurled a large paving stone at Abraham, yelled an antisemitic slur and repeatedly punched him in the face before fleeing the scene (Rosen 2019). Several bystanders rushed to Abraham's assistance and the Jewish ambulance service, Hatzalah, escorted him to a nearby hospital. The assault on Abraham, which leaned into primordialist antisemitic bigotry, resulted in the loss of Abraham's two front teeth, a broken nose, and lacerations to his face (Chasan 2019). One of the websites that documented this incident (CrownHeights.info 2019) also routinely tracks news and crime related to the Lubavitch community in Crown Heights, oftentimes also related to the broader national and international Jewish community. The site's *Crime* section maintains detailed accounts of reported crimes in which Lubavitchers are victims.

In response to this attack, several community leaders from prominent non-profit, cultural and governmental organizations agreed that something else must be done to address the palpable ethnic/religious/racial tensions in Crown Heights. Although this approach often follows incidents involving both a Chabad and a Black non-Chabad resident, according to several of my research participants, this will only occur once the police have already been notified. In contrast, incidents that go unreported are not subject to this approach; those that are reported have already deemed the criminal legal system an insufficient solution. One organizational leader, Paul (pseudonym), notes that he is often contacted by the 71st Precinct regarding "various [violent] incidents that take place" in the neighbourhood. When an incident includes both a Chabad and a Black non-Chabad resident, the police will consider whether to qualify the incident as a "bias incident". Paul states,

> "Police go after it; you know it takes on a different complexion once the word bias
> is included. So, a lot of times you'll hear bias in these incidents, when they're really
> not biased. They're just common criminals […] Many times, even the cops they'll

call me up and I'll say, 'we'll you know what I think about it. It's just a common crime'. But […] their bosses uptown, I mean in Manhattan, are saying, 'treat it as a bias […] but deescalate it if it's not a bias […] And I love for it to be deescalated, because I don't like to hear Crown Heights is always in this bias mode" (Paul).

Paul, like many of those I interviewed, cares whether an incident is considered to involve "bias". Notably, the incidents discussed are most often those involving a Black male perpetrator and a non-Black Jewish victim. Within the field site, I noticed significant disagreement, marked along racial lines, over whether such incidents can be assumed to be underreported or overreported.

In this instance, as with many others, community leaders deemed police response to be insufficient and a further, more interpersonal, conversation to be necessary. Collectively, these organizational and political leaders scheduled several meetings to discuss what they identify as prominent neighbourhood issues. I attended the second of these sessions, held on 28 October 2019 in a local community organization.

On that day, I walked over to the meeting location and was greeted at the door by a young man I had previously interviewed. The space was large by Brooklyn standards, and the open layout was outfitted with folding tables and chairs, in the shape of a square, facing the centre of the room. This allowed for all the participants to see one another. As prominent community leaders began to arrive, I introduced myself to those I was familiar with and then took a corner seat at the table. Attendees included a generous mixture of men and women, Black people and Lubavitchers, seemingly all around forty to sixty years of age.

At the start of the meeting, two handouts were passed around, entitled "Central Brooklyn Leadership Meeting" and "Central Brooklyn Leadership Meeting #2", respectively. The former summarized conversations from the prior meeting, with subheadings labelled "What's going on?", "What can we, as leaders, do to effectively meet these challenges?", "Who else needs to be added to the table?", "What can we do?" and "Next steps". Several concerns were identified under the subheading "What's going on?", such as the rise in anti-Semitic attacks primarily committed by young Black males, increased community violence due to community change and destabilization, economic immobility and a lack of meaningful conversation between the Lubavitchers and the Black residents of Crown Heights. The following excerpts were notable:

> "There is a perception among some Black community members that the Jewish people are taking their homes, while they don't realize that Jews are also being forced out of their homes."

> "There are a lot of bad acting landlords in Brooklyn with many different backgrounds; the Jewish ones are often most visible in the community because of how they dress."

> "Layers of racism in the community make it impossible for people of color to not relive their trauma daily — they feel that society has failed them."

> "In a similar vein Jewish residents have a long-term deep trauma caused by anti-Semitism reignited by recent attacks and incidents, locally and globally."

This document then went on to suggest that to address these issues, an emergent group might consider including a more racially and generationally diverse group of people in the conversation, along with hosting a series of conversations centred around the issue of gentrification.

In connecting this incident of violence to alleged neighbourhood issues of Black on Jewish crime, economic instability and misplaced frustration, two things are notable. There is both a simplification of racial and religious identity, and at the same time an acknowledgement of the complexity added by histories of anti-Black racism, antisemitism, displacement and economic immobility. This nuance frames the oversimplification of identity within a stage that sets the stakes high. One interviewee, Fred (pseudonym), who was present during this meeting stated,

> "When somebody attacks someone for what they look like or who they're identified with, then they're attacking that whole community cause that whole community feels threatened and unsafe. And that's why they have these hate crime statutes. So, if you're just putting a cross on a law […] burning a cross on a lawn, you're telling a person you don't belong here because you're of this race. But if you vandalize somebody's property just cause you're acting out […] So okay there's a crime, there's a victim, there's a damage, but it doesn't have […] it's not the same" (Fred).

In incidents of "bias" these community members view the victim as one of a collectivity rather than as an individual. This threatens collective "face" and reignites local histories of antisemitism.

As the same interviewee notes, part of the approach taken can be attributed to the legacy of the 1991 Crown Heights protests/riots/pogroms (in which anti-Black racism and antisemitism erupted in several days of violence). In the aftermath, community leaders and elected officials took a more active role in "encouraging togetherness". One aspect of this included outreach from city government officials to individual ethnic groups "to ensure that everybody's voice is heard and that everyone's voice is around the table" (Fred). In spite of this attempt to "include all voices", several participants of the 28 October meeting acknowledged in their individual interviews that the voices at the table were not necessarily representative of their respective identity markers, although they may claim to be. Vicky (pseudonym) was present at this meeting and works closely with local Black leaders. In our interview she stated,

> "So, the Jewish community is super organized and hierarchical, and they vote for who their leadership is to represent them […] And we don't have that same sort of structure in the Black community".

In a separate interview, Paul (pseudonym), a Lubavitch man intimately involved in Chabad politics, criticized these claims of Jewish representation. He stated,

"Nobody today can claim to represent the Jewish community [nobody can] speak on behalf of everybody. We're a very diverse community […] Nobody represents everybody. And I object to people going forward and claiming to represent everybody […] the problems with these meetings are that everyone is focused on being the representative that they go along with everything" (Paul).

These questions over the legitimacy of community representation are acknowledged, yet go unresolved. Instead, these select few don their roles as community representatives, take their set at the mediation table when needed, and act in ways that ostensibly protects the collective.

The conversation segued into problem-solving for the "tensions" at hand. There was nearly collective agreement that they should host community discussions on gentrification and the changing neighbourhood. The majority believed that the incident of violence stemmed from misunderstandings and resentment surrounding gentrification. More specifically, it was the result of misplaced blame on the Jewish community for evictions and higher rent prices. By hosting community conversations, they hoped to unpack misunderstandings regarding the who (or what) bore the responsibility for gentrification and socioeconomic precarity.

Two Black community leaders interrupted the ongoing discussion to contest the dominant narrative that Black people are consistently perpetrators of crime. Instead, as one leader stated, "the Black community also feels targeted oftentimes, primarily by the police". For the first time, the conversation began to shift away from "Black on Jewish" crime. One member emphasized that "Black people and Caribbean people respect police, but the criminal justice system has not been good for Black people". Immediately, a Jewish community leader remarked on his discomfort with placing what he saw as too much blame on law enforcement officers. Voices were raised and the tension was palpable. Several participants began to speak over one another, all addressing the different roles policing played in contributing to community tensions and violence. Although it might be counterintuitive to situate police as an identity group alongside Black and Jewish residents, it is actually common practice in Crown Heights. One notable community leader is often quoted as saying "In Crown Heights there's Blacks, there's Blues, and there's Jews". As reductive as that sentence may be, it has set the stage upon which reported incidents of "bias" are negotiated. Before they find their way to the mediation table, these incidents are either reported to (or caused by) the police. Thus, it is commonly acknowledged that the police as state actors are routinely seen as insufficient for addressing "bias", specifically that of antisemitism or anti-Black racism.

As the meeting drew to a close, three further steps were agreed upon. These included the need to extend the conversation into the broader community in the form of intimate conversations, the need for a response team when incidents like these do occur, and the need for some form of public education or public forum on community issues such as displacement. The agreement to lean into group identities and talk across difference was not new. Several "community conversations" have emerged and dissolved since the conflict of 1991. Many began as ways to facilitate conversation across what was described as an ethnic/religious/racial

divide, and to work to close these divisions. Henry Goldschmidt (2006) highlights a number of these formal structures for community conversations, including but not limited to: The Crown Heights Coalition, Project CURE, the Crown Heights Mediation Centre, Mothers to Mothers and Project CARE. The latter is self-described as uniting "communities, religious leaders & engaged elected officials to foster tolerance & better the quality of life for all in crown heights (ProjectCARE 2019)". Although Project CARE was almost exclusively led by community "stakeholders", not all these groups were organized in this way. For example, one group named "Can We Talk" consisted of Crown Heights women from various racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds who convened to discuss their different lived experiences. Rather than donning "roles" as representatives of their communities, they spoke honestly about their unique lived experiences.

The facilitation of community dialogue has been a recurring approach to improving community relationships. These approaches attempt to not only compensate for the inadequacies of the criminal legal system but also serve to soften the impact of perceived collective injustice.

A "Bias" Incident: Unacknowledged

In June of 2019, seventeen-year-old Justin (pseudonym) dribbled a basketball down Rogers Avenue as he walked home from a nearby park. Without warning, a New York City Police car pulled up next to him, parked, and three officers rushed to accost him. Surveillance footage shows the officers forcing Justin to the ground and using their knees to restrict his movement. In an interview with News 12 Brooklyn, this young, Black, Crown Heights resident states that, despite inquiring into the reason for his arrest, he was given no answers (News12 Brooklyn 2019). Instead, Justin was immediately taken to the 71st precinct house, where it was later determined that he was in fact not involved in the crime of which he was suspected. After several hours, having been offered neither water nor a courtesy phone call, Justin was released with a summons, and with the bruises from what his family and supporters now refer to as an unlawful arrest. This situation resulted in much collective frustration on the part of Justin's family and friends, who saw his treatment as racially motivated — an undeniable example of primordialist anti-Black racism. City government officials did not acknowledge the incident as one of police misconduct nor of biased harassment.

During an interview, the director of one community organization noted that there is a long history of tension between the New York City Police Department (NYPD) and Black Crown Heights residents. She specifically cites an April 2018 incident during which police shot an unarmed man, Saheed Vassell, mistaking his metal pipe for a gun. Several activist organizations allied with Black Lives Matter organized protests in the neighbourhood. Crown Heights was once again at the centre of a national conversation around police misconduct, structural racism and gentrification (Lennard 2018). Ron (pseudonym), a young professional involved in Justin's case, emphasized that the relationship between some Black residents and law enforcement goes deeper than mere distrust. He cites a history of false arrests and excessive use of force by officers in the 71st and 77th precincts. Unlike cases of identity-based violence

perpetrated by civilians, cases perpetrated by New York City police officers are not directed to the New York City Hate Crimes Task Force. Rather, "incidents" of this nature are dealt with through two primary avenues; through New York City's Civil Complaint Review Board (CCRB) and through federal lawsuits. If the latter is not settled out of court, it may result in compensatory or punitive damages, while the former may lead to a disciplinary recommendation or an administrative trial. According to a database compiled by the Legal Aid Society, there were forty-nine federal lawsuits filed against the 71st and 77th precincts between 2015 and (CAPstat 2019). Ron remarks that shifts in policing policy over the last couple of decades have unintentionally incentivized a rise in cases filed against the NYPD.

> "I think there's a rise in cases because […] When NYPD decided to accept a shift from broken windows — theoretically decided to take a shift, or pivot from broken windows and stop and frisk, it became, I think that the policy then was that well we're just gonna arrest people, and we'll arrest them, if we find something, a searching incident upon arrest […] then we have probable cause and that's what it is. But I do with more people saying no you can't stop me, you can't question me, that has led to some additional arrests. Um in Justin's case, if there was a stop and frisk policy, he would've been stopped, he would've been harassed, he would've been searched, they would've found nothing, but he would've felt — he would've still felt victimized. But he maybe, maybe he may not have been arrested. And so, because he was arrested, now there's a false arrest case" (Ron).

This understanding of policing policy frames the rise in cases filed against the NYPD as independent of shifts in anti-Black police bias. Instead, Ron views this rise as a reflection of procedural norms.

Considering the arrest of Justin and the subsequent controversy, the 71st Precinct Community Council agreed to discuss the incident at their regularly scheduled meeting, held at a local middle school on Empire Boulevard. As I approached the school on 20 June 2019, several teenage and preteen Black youth stood outside waiting for the event to begin. They spoke to one another with a sense of familiarity. A few minutes into my arrival, a middle-aged man invited us to go inside. The police presence was remarkable. A line of police vehicles sat along the street, and tens of armed officers stood along the inside of the building's corridors, donning "NYPD Community Affairs" apparel. As community members filed into the auditorium seats, a panel of the community board members took their seats at a long table in the front of the room facing the audience. The "stage" was set, and the room filled with the dull hum of conversation. I sat on the right-hand side of the auditorium. Ron sat to the left of me; he explained the purpose of this meeting to four Black children saying, "This is a conversation between the community and the police […] opportunity for us to ask questions about Justin's arrest". Through his description, I came to understand that he, as well as several of the community members seated near us, were unaware that Justin's arrest was not the primary focus of this meeting. It was instead likely to be a bullet point in a regularly scheduled community

council meeting. As the meeting commenced, a piano played, a prayer was recited and the previous meeting's minutes were read aloud.

A member of the community council introduced the Deputy Inspector of the 71st precinct. His introduction was accompanied by a request that members of the audience, "please not yell, scream, nor threaten the director". This moment made clear two things: that he assumed the audience would be inclined to act in such a way, and that a warning might serve as a suitable deterrent. The Deputy Inspector walked to the podium. His remarks began with a clarification that the officers in question were responding to "shots fired". Justin matched a description, and once confronted by police officers he became combative. With the utterance of the term "combative", Ron stood up to interject, "you need to be honest […] the police cannot control the narrative", he proclaimed. One member of the community council warned, "if we [the audience] continue to speak, no questions would be asked or answered". An elderly Black woman in the audience concurred with this sentiment and implored the man responsible for the outburst to listen and to not interrupt the deputy inspector. The Deputy Inspector continued to describe the incident through a distinct police-centred lens, and a similar verbal altercation with the same re-emerged. This dispute continued until Ron loudly proclaimed, once again, that "the police could not control the narrative". With this final decree, he implored Justin's supporters to walk out of the meeting and continue their discussion outside. As nearly half of the auditorium emptied out, the seventeen-armed police officers stationed around the inner perimeter of the auditorium were visibly on edge.

Ron contends that the police did not make room for honesty. In our conversation following this meeting, he stated that admitting fault is a legal liability for the police. Given this, they are incentivized to push particular narratives that offer them protection. Similar to the case of Rabbi Abraham Gopin, the police offer little by way of security. In stark contrast, however, the community leaders I had grown familiar with were not involved in cases such as these, which focus on anti-Black police bias. Ron stated,

> "Police are very powerful, and doing what I did in that meeting in terms of getting up and saying something to an inspector is unheard of. It's like you're being disrespectful. And you need the police if you get in trouble or if you need help, or something like that […] they are the biggest gang in the city […] And so, our cases don't have the community activists, the loud community activists that you, y'know, that you see" (Ron).

In Crown Heights, and in New York City at large, reported incidents of anti-Black violence are more often than not perpetrated by state actors like the police. However, as we have seen, incidents of identity-based violence perpetrated by police are resolved in a different way from those perpetrated by civilians. While both deem the criminal legal system to be an inadequate solution in and of itself, the former is more often limited to this method, despite its framing of police as the perpetrators of violence. This provides a unique challenge in that the police, as state actors, are particularly invested in avoiding legal liability. The bureaucratic

structure equips police with roles, procedure and scripts to save face within the public record; procedural performance may be disregarded when off record.

As I would later find out, upon exiting the meeting, Ron was met by members of the police commissioner's office who "acknowledged that the inspector handled it [the meeting] wrong". In his recounting, he noted that "the commissioner has to handle his rank and file […] [he] has to be very mindful of how he shows support for his officers […] People from the commissioner's office walked out to speak with us about what happened and what was gonna happen moving forward". This act of refusing to punish a colleague during a public facing "performance" is a Goffmanian example of "maintaining the line" — one that Ron acknowledged as a social fact. Team members suppress their immediate desire to punish their offending team member until "the audience is no longer present" (Goffman 1990: 89).

After the mass exit from the meeting, a question-and-answer session began with what remained of the audience. While questions pertaining to the specifics of the case were off the table, a conversation did briefly materialize around how the officers were defining and implementing their use of the term "combative", and whether such a term was appropriate to describe Justin during his arrest. This soon resulted in another, less hostile, debate, which ended with a member of the audience coming to the defence of the precinct and asserting that younger people must demonstrate more respect towards law enforcement officers. After this contentious, roughly thirty-minute Q&A, the discussion of the arrest ceased altogether, and the community meeting moved on to the remainder of the agenda. The arrest went unacknowledged as an incident of bias deserving of official attention.

Throughout the remainder of the meeting the Deputy Inspector routinely touted dialogue as "the way to solve problems". The allegiance to dialogue as a key solution to incidents of "bias", alleged or otherwise, appeared throughout the field, cited by local community organizations and neighbourhood residents alike. In this instance, however, dialogue broke down. Perhaps this was because the discussion was inserted into a regularly held community meeting; because it was limited to only certain questions; because the inspector commandeered the conversation; because the discussion was prefaced by an off-putting warning that assumed the audience would be threatening; because there were many armed officers present; and/or because there was no guarantee of resolution. Those who walked out of the auditorium refused to continue to engage in a discussion that presented a singular and distorted view of Justin's arrest. They were unconvinced by the Inspector's performance, condemning it as not only inauthentic but also absurd.

Although the police would not qualify as a primordialist ethnic/racial/religious group, they have, in both instances, set the stage for the performance of primordialism; in fact, they necessitated it. Ron's comment is emblematic of this fact. While ruminating on his neighbourly relationships, he stated,

> "My neighbour is an older — is an older black woman — and her family, we can't
> stand each other. Two houses down are a row of Hasidic families, and we all get

along fine and dandy. Our differences aren't based on race. Differences aren't based on culture. Our differences sometimes are as granular as personality, y'know" (Ron).

Ron is well-aware of the nuance surrounding racial and religious categories. Despite this, when faced with inadequate state-sanctioned pathways for addressing anti-Black racism, he finds himself compelled to turn away from the state, juxtaposing it to more promising aspirations to the insularity of the Chabad community. He believes "they are goals" because rather than relying on the state, they take care of their own, "doing for their community what we should be doing for ours".

Discussion and Conclusion

The Lubavitchers and the Black residents of Crown Heights are not necessarily primordialists, but at times they may adopt a primordialist "face". On this stage, Black residents, Jewish residents and the police are positioned alongside one another, despite occupying distinctive (and sometimes overlapping) social categories. In the instance of sixty-four-year-old Rabbi Abraham Gopin, who was violently assaulted, and that of seventeen-year-old Justin, who was accosted by police, paths towards redress encourage a reliance on primordial notions of group identity. Not only is the violence against them emblematic of primordialist bigotry, but the solutions they are given necessitate participation in primordialist simplifications of their own racial and religious identities, in order to obtain a seat at the mediation table.

Community actors inhabit their roles as "representatives" of their respective groups, they maintain their team line and they save (collective) face. In many ways, their roles compensate for the shortcomings of the only remaining avenue made available by the state: the legal system. In contrast to assumptions of "strategic essentialism", these performances were not the most strategic — they did not maximize benefits for either aggrieved party. Rather, they were routine scripts induced by the state itself. This has been most notable through the state's intentional sourcing of "ethnic" community representatives in the late 20th century as a hedge against "inter-ethnic" violence, and through its framing of biased incidents in a way that disproportionately excludes the most commonly reported instances of anti-Black and anti-Semitic violence. Of course, this all occurs amongst the much larger backdrop of systemic racism and societal structures that marginalize Black and Jewish identities in different and meaningful ways. This focus on the smaller-scale interactions does not serve to negate structural understandings of the ways discrimination operates.

Both cases exhibit snapshots of distinct approaches taken by members of the Crown Heights community to address ongoing concerns of antisemitism and anti-Black racism. While the reconstitution of racial and ethnic categories appears in both, one salient difference is whether the incident of bias is acknowledged as such by city government actors. Despite these differences in recognition, both cases are demonstrative of a failure on the part of the state to convince residents of Crown Heights that it takes issues of anti-Black racism or antisemitism seriously. Local histories of Black and Jewish subjugation connect these ongoing incidents to

legacies of dehumanization. Such high stakes, coupled with the inadequacy of the tools afforded by the state, reinforces dependence on group identification and action.

My concept of performative primordialism contributes to the sociology of interactionism by tying a Goffmanian dramaturgical lens to constructivist understandings of group identity. This shifts the discourse to one that centres the intentions and motivations of research subjects, positioning such subjects as conscious social actors, both figuratively and literally. Performative primordialism allows us to convey more accurately both the reflexivity and the situational awareness of research participants, complicating how we understand the choices they make.

This research sheds light on some of the shortcomings of current attempts to address identity-based violence. Not only are antiblack racism and antisemitism actively contested in the current historical moment, but the issues themselves are often posited as insurmountable. In better understanding the inadequacies of the current system, we may be better situated to restructure our approach. Specifically, we must grasp the connection between incidents of racial/religious bias and the affront not only to one's personhood, but to one's racial/religious community. This may necessitate, at the bare minimum, a recognition on the part of the state, that actors such as Justin are not disposable; an "on the record" validation of their humanity.

Although this article references these particular examples, it does not mean to suggest that the state generally acknowledges incidents of antisemitism while ignoring incidents of antiblackness. In fact, it is neglectful, in uniquely different ways, towards both issues. Future scholarly work might explore the counterfactual: What might happen to the cyclical nature of conflict within this context if harm is recognized and dealt with without a reliance on performative primordialism. I imagine it may look something like traditional restorative justice practices, decentring the legal system and calling the complicacy of the state into question. Future work might also explore the possibility that these incidents in fact do not constitute unique moments of tension but rather constitute the present an infrequent acknowledgement of a continuous and normalized state of antiblackness and/or antisemitism.

References

Blumer, H. 1958. Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position. *The Pacific Sociological Review*, 1 (1):3-7.

Brubaker, R. 2004. *Ethnicity Without Groups*. Harvard University Press.

CAPstat. 2019. 71st Precinct. *CAPstat.nyc*. www.capstat.nyc/command/71st-precinct/, retrieved 14 June 2022.

Chasan, A. 2019. 63-Year-Old Jewish Grandfather Beaten with Brick in Crown Heights Park in Apparent Hate Crime. *PIX11*. pix11.com/2019/08/27/63-year-old-jewish-grandfather-beaten-with-brick-in-crown-heights-park-in-possible-hate-crime/, retrieved 14 October 2020.

CrownHeights.info. 2019. Elderly Jewish Man Brutally Assaulted in Crown Heights Park, Rushed to the Hospital. *CrownHeights.info*. crownheights.info/crime/677524/elderly-jewish-man-brutally-assaulted-in-crown-heights-park-rushed-to-the-hospital/, retrieved 14 October 2020.

Eide, E. 2010. Strategic Essentialism and Ethnification: Hand in Glove? *Nordicom Review*, 31 (2): 63-78.

Fijalkow, Y. and Lévy-Vroelant, C. 2020. Narratives as Daily Heritage in Neighbouurhoods Undergoing Gentrification: A Study of Four European Neighbourhoods. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (1): 53-70.

Goffman, E. 1955. On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18 (3): 213-231.

Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction Ritual; Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc.

Goffman, E. 1990. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Penguin Books.

Goldschmidt, H. 2006. *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Hosman, S. S. 2018. Allston Christmas: How Local Rituals Reproduce Neighbourhood Temporality and Deter Gentrification. *Urbanities- Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 8 (2): 69-78.

Kagan, J. 2004. *Crown Heights* [Film]. Showtime Ent.

Krase, J and DeSena, J. 2018. *Race, Class, and Gentrification in Brooklyn: A View from the Street*. New York: Lexington Books.

Lennard, N. 2018. Why the NYPD Killing of Saheed Vassell Has Locals Worried About Gentrification in Brooklyn. *The Intercept*; theintercept.com/2018/04/11/saheed-vassell-brooklyn-gentrification-nypd/.

Mitchell, C. 1992. From Policy Frontier to Policy Dilemmas: The United States and Caribbean Migration, 1960-1990.' *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Del Caribe / European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 52: 75-89.

Molina, N., Gutierrez, R. A. and HoSang D. M. 2019. *Relational Formations of Race: Theory, Method, and Practice*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

News12 Brooklyn. 2019. Crown Heights Teen Claims He Was Falsely Arrested by Police.' brooklyn.news12.com/story/40669355/crown-heights-teen-claims-he-was-falsely-arrested-by-police, retrieved 15 June 2020.

Oetzel, J., Garcia, A. J., and Ting-Toomey, S. 2008. An Analysis of the Relationships Among Face Concerns and Facework Behaviors in Perceived Conflict Situations: A Four-Culture Investigation. *International Journal of Conflict Management,* 19 (4): 382-403.

Project CARE. 2019. Project CARE. *Facebook*. www.facebook.com/Project-CARE-931034300249817/about/?ref=page_internal, retrieved 15 June 2019.

Reichelmann, A. V. 2020. Collective Threat: Conceptualizing Blumer's Threat as a Collective Emotion. *Sociological Inquiry*, 91 (3): 534-558.

Rosen, A. 2019. More Jewish blood spilled in Crown Heights. *Tablet Magazine*; https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/more-jewish-blood-spilled-in-crown-heights.

Schrock, D., Buggs, S., Buyukozturk, B., Erichsen, K. and Ivey, A. 2022. Signifying Aggrieved White Selves: Trump Supporters' Racial Identity Work. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 8 (1): 114-128.

Shapiro, E. S. 2006. *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot*. Brandeis University Press: University Press of New England.

Smith, A. M. 1994. Rastafari as Resistance and the Ambiguities of Essentialism in the New Social Movements. In E. Laclau (ed.), *The Making of Political Identities*. New York: Verso.

*Urban Crime and Negotiation Attempts with a Criminal to Access the Field: Contact, Engagement and a Presen*t[1]

Steve Hill
anindyacademic@gmail.com

Negotiating access to a field can be portrayed as relatively straightforward. When the researcher seeking access is a criminology practitioner and that access is being sought from a criminal, the process of attempting to build trust and rapport, especially when the opportunity to engage presents itself by chance, is complicated. This ethnographic account outlines the process of such an encounter, balancing accountability to profession whilst simultaneously seeking to operationalise the theoretical intertwining of the criminology practitioner and independent academic researcher status. The duality of these seemingly opposite roles of this specific encounter is contrasted by the creative opportunity of cultural criminology's methodological approach of verstehen. Techniques of impression management to elicit a favourable response were fluid and evolving, recognising when one approach was failing and changing direction to pursue another. This approach needed to coexist and compliment the disposal of the criminological encounter from a practitioner control agent perspective. This was achieved by the use of discretion. Limited success was gained post interaction with a potential channel of communication elicited by a third party for possible access to the field, although there is no certainty of this.
Keywords: Access to the field, impression management, discretion, verstehen.

Introduction

The following ethnographic account of attempting to gain access to a field of research demonstrates the realities of negotiating with a gatekeeper, especially where the researcher and the potentially researched seemingly occupy diametrically opposed positions. I did not foresee the obstacles I faced in terms of access issues. Although Adler and Adler (2011: 515) identify "potential respondents are reluctant to be interviewed", textbooks devoting consideration to access portray it as relatively straightforward after the initial negotiations (see, for example, Delamont 2016, Hammerslry and Atkinson 2019, Wengraf 2001).

I am a practitioner of criminology, working as a control agent in the private sector. Additionally, I am also an independent academic researcher with no current academic affiliation with any university. My area of research is situated within cultural criminology looking at protest stickers and how they publicise non mainstream political agendas in an area around the University of Bristol's Clifton campus, located in the United Kingdom. I undertake this independent academic work to further the scholarly knowledge within the academic study of criminology from the perspective of a criminological practitioner. I believe the unique position this affords me, to be both operationally and academically invested in my field of study, gives me a niche space to occupy, offering comment on the conflation of both areas. This practitioner independent academic duality provides the currency of credibility, translating theory into practice whilst ploughing my trade as a street level bureaucrat (Lipsky 2010). My independent academic status, developed from my practitioner expertise, opens up scholarly opportunities based on my continuous work in the field.

Protest stickers

Protest stickers, as a form of communicative street art, occupy a ubiquitous yet often overlooked presence of contemporary socio-political discourse in urban landscapes, particularly in pedestrian heavy areas (Chaffe 1993, Clough 2011, Hundertmark 2003, Lewisohn 2008, Riggle 2010). These small, adhesive, ephemeral objects, often featuring text, images and symbols, or a mixture of any of these, serve as a means of expressing dissent, promoting social change, or advocating for specific causes. They populate streetscape furniture around university campuses, travel hubs and retail areas where they invite viewers to engage, should they choose to notice them (Gerbaudo 2014, Velikonja 2021). The interpretation of protest stickers is a complex process influenced by various factors, including the viewer's cultural background, personal beliefs and understanding of the symbols employed. As Hansen and Flynn (2015), Tedford (2021), Collins (2022) and Bodden and Awcock (2024) have all argued, the meaning of a sticker is not inherent but is constructed through the interaction between the viewer and the message. This individualistic interpretation is contingent upon the familiarity of the text, images and symbols in mainstream discourse, with the expectation that the message resonates with the viewer's everyday written and visual vocabulary.

The pervasiveness of protest stickers can be traced to both cultural and historical traditions of communication. Early forms of symbolic expression, such as cave drawings, artefacts and paintings, can be considered precursors to contemporary protest stickers (Chaffe 1993). The development of decalcomania in the 1800s further traces the evolution of this medium (McCormick 2010). In contemporary protest sticker history, the "silent agitators" produced by the Industrial Workers of the World over a century ago helped develop awareness about labour conditions and encouraged unionisation (Tedford 2019). Today, protest stickers continue to be employed by a diverse range of political groups, from left-wing and anarchist movements to extreme right-wing ideologies, environmental activists and international conflict advocates.

The analysis of protest stickers requires a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates elements of semiotics, cultural studies and urban geography. Semiotics, as a framework for understanding the relationship between signs and their meanings, provides a valuable tool for interpreting the visual and textual elements of protest stickers that convey the intended message (Sebeok 2001). Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce are among the key figures in the development of modern semiotics, and their work continues to inform research (Yakin and Totu 2014). More contemporary scholarship by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010), Visgo (2010), Reershemius (2019) and Cosmeleata (2022) has also applied semiotics to analyse protest stickers. However, scholars like Umberto Eco (1978) critique the sole reliance on semiotics, citing issues such as interpretative variability, cultural dependency and the ideological biases of interpreters as significant limitations.

To address these limitations, an approach that considers not only the semiotic elements of protest stickers but also their geographical distribution, their role as a form of protest and the active subjectivity of viewer interpretation provides breadth. Indeed, approaches such as

geographies of protest stickers (Awcock 2021), the use of political stickers as forms of protest (Awcock and Rosenberg 2023) and the active subjectivity involved in interpreting sticker meanings (Bodden and Awcock, 2024) offer fresh perspectives. Shepard Fairey, the renowned sticker artist, reflects on the dynamic nature of protest sticker interactions, noting that the more stickers he disseminated, the more he considered their capacity to create distinct interactions with the urban environment (Fairey 2010: 9). Similarly, Betancourt (2010: 283) emphasises that stickers introduce elements that provoke reflection and engagement, offering pedestrians a counter narrative to the ubiquitous urban advertisements. However, not every protest sticker elicits such active engagement. As Clough (2011) observes, many individuals coexist with these stickers daily without ever noticing them. In agreement, Invader (2019: 9) estimates that "only about one in a thousand" might actually notice a sticker, underscoring the often-invisible nature of these political artefacts.

My ethnographic work aims to contribute to the ongoing academic inquiry into protest stickering. By responding to the call for further research by scholars such as Awcock (2021), Bodden and Awcock (2024), Cole (2021), Feigenbaum (2014) and Nouri and Morgan (2023), this article seeks to expand the understanding of the significance of protest stickers as indicators of political activism across multiple domains.

Protest Stickers as Markers of Subculture, Transgression and Crime

Subcultures use symbolic forms of expression through dissent to resist mainstream values. Stickerists, as a subcultural group, undertake this visible protest to mark urban space and contest dominant political narratives which often exclude marginalised groups, with which they may identify. Armstrong (1998) recognises this facet and identifies that subcultures operate in opposition to middle class respectability and control over public spaces. Indeed, subcultures are not merely isolated groups; rather, they are deeply intertwined with broader societal structures resisting dominant cultural norms forming identities that challenge hegemonic narratives and provide alternative frameworks for understanding identity and belonging (Giulianotti and Armstrong 2004). Subcultures, in addition to understanding, also develop identity formation and expression, and provide the individual members with a sense of agency and community in localities where they may feel otherwise alienated or oppressed (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2016). Taking into account the following section's discussion on the site of the fieldwork regarding the predominantly white and middle-class demographic of the University of Bristol's student body, alongside the gentrification of long-term residential areas driven by these students, the activities of subcultural stickerists can be understood as an effort to reclaim and assert control over these contested urban spaces.

Whilst protest stickers may be able to foster dialogue, in the eyes of the state, placing them is a criminal act with the relevant legislation being outlined later in this discussion. An alternative viewpoint is that they represent a form of transgression that blurs the lines between legality and illegality. Such low level deviance (Garland 1996) is often tolerated at least for a short while, reflecting the ambivalence with which broader society currently views such

political messaging transgressions. Hall (1978) states that the notion of crime is socially constructed and reflects the power dynamics within society. In this context, stickerists frame protest stickers as necessary acts of resistance in a media landscape that often excludes marginalised voices. The states response to protest stickers by criminalising such acts can be understood as the policing of space, where the state seeks to maintain its control over public areas. Presdee (2000) recognises such social anxieties around deviance and control, particularly when mainstream political power is challenged from the margins. Ferrell and Sanders (1995) also recognise such political challenge with negative perceptions of stickerist subcultures being sensationalised in media outlets supporting mainstream narratives. The response of the state reflects Foucault's (1995) disciplinary society, where the state seeks to regulate not only the behaviour but also the visibility of dissent. Such transgressive acts are further blurred by the dichotomy between legitimate street art and low-level deviance. Public perceptions of street art vary on a continuum from criminal damage to sought after works (Young 2013). In the city that is home to the notorious Banksy, never has there been a more contested binary. Therefore, the nuanced motivations behind stickerists actions of transgressions or criminality, and the socio-political contexts that inform them, will continue to be both simultaneously promoted and demonised.

The Fieldwork Site

Since January 2022 I have been undertaking specific fieldwork documenting protest stickers that I find positioned on street furniture such as lampposts, litter bins, traffic signs and utility infrastructure, as well as the exterior of buildings, walls and other publicly accessible spaces. I use my mobile phone's camera to capture images of these stickers and I undertake this discreetly (Webb et al. 1966, Kellehear 1993), although not covertly. From the commencement of this work until June 2024, I have documented 235 political stickers covering a multitude of political domains relating to left-wing, right-wing and environmental activism, and to international conflicts. The site of the fieldwork is based around the University of Bristol's Clifton campus with the geographical boundaries reaching out to a quarter of a mile from a central building known as Senate House. The fieldwork was undertaken once a fortnight in the morning for an hour each time (Hill, no date).

The University of Bristol occupies a unique position within the city. Shaped by the urban environment, a rich socio-political history of protest both within the wider city and the University campus, and the demographic of the student body, a complex relationship between education, class and politics results. With the stickers that I am interested in being one form of protest, this follows the city's popularity for such left-leaning and liberal socio-political milieu. Significant protests, including the 1793 Bristol Bridge riots, the 1831 Queen's Square Reform riots, the Bristol bus boycotts of 1963, the rioting in the St Pauls district in 1980, the Stokes Croft Tesco protest and riots of 2011, the 2019 Extinction Rebellion protests, the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests and the Kill the Bill 2021 violence, all serve as significant reminders of such activity (Scott 2021). The University is also no stranger to such activism with campaigns

drawing attention to perceived social injustices, educational matters and wider geopolitical events, all attracting significant local and national attention (Bevan 2023). This University is traditionally seen as a liberal institution which aligns itself with progressive causes such as environmentalism, social justice and decolonisation (Shah 2018). However, juxtapose this with the student demographic of a higher proportion of white and middle-class students than the national average (HESA 2024), then a paradox emerges with the city's reputation for left-wing politics and the relative privileged background of the University's student body. As Reay et al. (2010) argue, higher education institutions often reproduce social inequalities rather than challenge them, despite their ostensibly progressive missions. While universities often serve as sites for political and social activism, the relatively privileged background of the students attending the University of Bristol raises important questions about the extent to which these students genuinely engage with the city's more radical politics (Bathmaker et al. 2013). The disconnect between the promoted progressive image of the University and the lived experiences of many of its students highlights the limitations of liberalism when it is not accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the class and racial inequalities vis-a-vis the wider city environs. Research by Brockliss (2000, p.147) identified polarising issues around the "town-gown relations", which in Bristol manifests itself with the socioeconomic disparities between the student body and long-term city residents. The influx of students into traditionally working-class neighbourhood areas close to the University is contributing to gentrification, potentially exacerbating social tensions (Jones 2018). This process challenges the narrative of Bristol as a uniformly progressive city and highlights the complexities of urban social dynamics. Furthermore, whilst the city's progressive history and the University's instances of student activism align with left-wing ideals, the predominantly white, middle-class composition of the student body complicates this narrative. It is within this pluralism that my study of protest stickers is situated.

My employed role as a criminological control agent necessitates that I wear a uniform, with every item being black in colour, apart from body armour that has a section of high visibility yellow. My radio and body-worn camera are attached to this. The uniform mimics that of the public police to provide symbolic power (Puck 2018). I am a white, middle-aged, bald, stocky male and it has been suggested that my appearance both matches others who undertake similar roles and compliments my career of choice. While other colleagues have taken similar attributes to be indicative of their profession, when I am attempting to be discreet with my academic fieldwork, these two strands do not allow for seamless compatibility.

The locating of a protest sticker identifies the fact that a crime has occurred. In the United Kingdom, legislation on stickering can be found in three pieces of statute. The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Highways Act 1980 deal with the placing of stickers on property without the owner's permission. The owners of most of the street furniture, Bristol City Council, sporadically conduct clean-up operations to rid such structures of all stickers (bristol.gov.uk. 2024). The

private owners of the other properties affected do the same, often on a more frequent basis. Anecdotal conversations with the workforce that undertake this work would indicate that permission for the placing of political stickers has never been provided.

A Gatekeeper

In October 2023, whilst undertaking employed control agent work outside the geographical boundaries of my specific fieldwork site, I watched an individual place a sticker on a lamppost that contained other protest stickers. I had just turned a corner from one road into this sighting of a crime being undertaken and it caught me by surprise. It was just after 9pm, the sun had already set and the street lights, those that were working, partially lit the area although not directly. As I continued walking towards this individual, they became aware of my presence and shot me a cursory glance. Then, upon recognising and identifying their perception of my role, they looked panicked and apprehensive of what may happen next, more so than I would have expected although as has been previously researched, negative interactions with control agents can elicit such emotions (Geller et al 2014). As I now stood close to them, they said "I was just looking to see what that sticker said". I smiled and replied "of course". I had watched them place a new sticker on a lamppost, thereby committing a crime. However, the limits of my employment are such that I only possess the jurisdictional powers afforded to all civilians. Whilst the ability to act as an agent of the landowner, to deal with any person undertaking such an act on property owned by my employer, is available (Shearing and Stenning 1983), this lamppost was not, however, in that category. Therefore, I was left with two options: report the matter directly to both the police and the city council, or deal with the situation in front of me by using discretion. Reporting to other agencies would not have received a timely response due to the nature of what I was dealing with. I know this from multiple previous requests. Therefore, discretion, in these circumstances, was apt.

For the first time in twenty-two months of research, I was now presented with an opportunity of engaging with my first stickerist. Plummer (2001: 133) discusses such encounters stating "sometimes a subject is found by chance". I had interpreted the stickers I found during fieldwork with subjectivity, consistent with my cultural criminological verstehen as advocated by Ferrell (1998). An alternative interpretation from the stickerists' perspective had now presented itself by this chance encounter, or as Ferrell et al. (2015: 217) terms it, instant ethnography where we "engage the politics of transgressive possibility and so embrace something of cultural criminology's progressive mandate". However, at this point in time I was conscious that I was not in my independent academic research role but in my employed control agent capacity. I had already constructed a position in support of the conflation of both, which had until this point always been a theoretical construction. Now I was faced with an intertwining of my two worlds, my next actions would dictate which path I followed, that of a control agent or an independent academic researcher. Or did I need to separate these two worlds? If I had conflated them theoretically, surely there would now be an opportunity to do so practically?

Whilst still smiling, I asked the individual what the sticker said and why were they interested in it? They replied, "it's Antifa, everywhere in Bristol". Noticing that they did not include in the answer their interest in it, I asked, "And do you support that?"; to which, they replied, "Don't you?". Their backpack was at the foot of the lamppost so I bent down, took hold of it and passed it back to them. As I did so, I said, "where do you plan on putting up the rest of these stickers then?". The backpack was open and easily visible inside was a sheet of stickers identical to the sticker I had just witnessed being placed on the lamppost. "That's nothin to do with you", was the reply provided. The conversation had all the elements forming to become confrontational; so, wishing, for numerous reasons, to de-escalate it, I said, "may I be completely honest with you?". Met with silence, I outlined that I had seen them place the sticker on the lamppost and the fact that there was a sheet of stickers in their backpack suggested that they were out stickering. At this point, though, I offered the olive branch of explaining that whilst I had the option to do something about what I had witnessed, I also had another option of finding an alternative solution, one that was acceptable to both of us. Whilst stickering can be detrimental to a community, this low level anti-social behaviour needs to be tackled sensitively with sanctions enforced appropriately to uphold confidence in crime control (GLC 2020). "So, what's to stop me just walking off?", was their reply. I asked for just one minute of their time to explain and, by doing so, it may answer their earlier question, in a roundabout way, whether I supported putting up stickers.

They appeared to be somewhat intrigued and, whilst they zipped up their backpack and put it on, they said, "Well?". I started to talk about my interest in stickers from an academic perspective and very briefly outlined what I had been doing these past twenty-two months. I showed them two pictures on my phone of the latest stickers that I had recorded. Both were for environmental activism. They looked at me and implied that it was very unusual that I would be interested in stickers. They started to walk off, so I walked with them and told them of the work I had undertaken, subjectively analysing each sticker. I carried on mentioning that it would be just wonderful if I could get a stickerist's perspective. At this point they stopped walking, looked at me and said, "you're mad if you think I'd talk to you". Whilst this was not entirely unexpected, I was caught off balance with my enthusiasm of beginning a conversation with someone who could provide their reasons for stickering. So far, my attempted negotiations with this potential recruit were not being managed too well (Crang and Cook 2007). I began to consider if my approach had been unwise. As Berk and Adams (1970) have discussed, I had attempted to become the naive interviewer haphazardly negotiating access. Coffey (1999: 4) develops this further and discusses "the necessity to activate strategies of impression management in order to secure access to a research site". I needed to find a way to undertake this, and quickly. They carried on walking, so I did also, and continued talking, stating why it would be totally understandable; would they not like their side of the story to be presented? "The stickers do the talking" was their reply, followed by "look, no offence, but me and you, we live in different places. It's clever of you not to do nothin 'bout earlier, but trying to use that now, I don't know".

With my renewed focus on impression-management, I decided to try another approach. I said, "do you want me to show you where the right-wing stickers are? Don't you lot want to take them down and cover that space with your own stuff?" They replied: "There's none of their shit around here, elsewhere maybe, but not here". To which, I said: "You're wrong you know, there's three not far from here". They then went on to say "anyway, if they are up, it won't be for long. The bloc will rip them". This strategy of selectively informing a potential recruit with information has been identified as impression management to entice gatekeepers (Homan 1992). I was now in the territory of Coffey's (1999) active strategies.

I once more stated that I would really like to know more about why the stickers are put up. This prompted the following remark: "I dunno, that's not right, shouldn't you be stopping me? You ain't taken the sheets even!". I replied, "well, I'm trying to find a solution that works for both of us and with you seeing me and now walking off I doubt if you'll put any more stickers out tonight as you know I'm about. So, that's the crime prevention bit of my job done. But I hope you've also seen another side to me, one that's actually interested, really interested, in why you sticker. And not because I wear a uniform but because I'm researching it. I want to understand". This final attempt at impression management, to build rapport (Duncombe and Jessop 2002) with the stickerist, now seemed to hang in the balance.

They looked at me blankly and I did not know what the response was going to be. I could not tell from their body language or expressions what to expect. I broke the growing silence saying, "look, most lunchtimes I go over there for a coffee. I pointed to an independent coffee truck that was now closed. If you want a coffee on me, well, it would be great to chat. I'll even come in normal clothes if it'll help". They said, "I dunno man, you're different an everything, but it ain right talkin to you. Earlier that was sound thou". I had relied on Tyler's (2006) concept of fair treatment in procedural justice interactions hopefully to begin to develop a relationship of trust. I replied, "Ok, well the offer is there, I'll leave it for tonight. And thanks for your time, I appreciate it".

Walking back to the office, I began to analyse critically this interaction with the stickerist. Firstly, my control agent role; had I chosen the correct approach? For the three non-indictable offences outlined above, I really was very limited in my options. By stopping continuing stickering offences with my presence when I did, I had prevented further crime being committed, or as Cohen and Felson (1979) recognised, my sentinel role as a capable guardian worked. Relying on the assumption that this individual would not realise that my options were limited, and appearing to be lenient in my dealings with them by indicating that I had discretion to choose what to do, I had not professionally compromised this role and had actually been effective in my response. How would I have dealt with this incident if it had not involved stickers? Exactly the same is my response. With over thirty years of experience in the criminological field undertaking both public and private control agent roles, I have plenty of wisdom gained from such street level bureaucracy to understand the complex interplay between discretion and the procedural justice model applied in a real time operational context.

What about my detailing my academic endeavours whilst wearing my control agent uniform? I can understand that this blurring of boundaries may have appeared odd to the individual. From my perspective, I had managed to operationalise my theoretical conflations of role, but only after I had decided on my method of disposal for the crime. If there had of been credible options to undertake a different approach, I would not have introduced my academic interest. What about ethical boundaries? As an independent academic researcher, I have no formal ethics committee for guidance. What I do rely on is the British Society of Criminology's statement of ethics (BSC, no date) and my professional association's ethical code of conduct (IPSA 2020). I was happy that I had conformed with both, although I did consult each whilst back in my office, just to be certain. Had I been duplicitous in my undertakings? Again, after careful consideration, I do not believe so. I had stated my interest clearly and whilst I may not have stated that I did not really have much legal recourse at the scene of the crime, the fact that I acknowledged that I had options of how I dealt with the matter was correct.

The Dichotomy of Insider Outsider Positionality

Merton (1972) was instrumental in identifying that a researcher's positionality influences their interactions with research participants, which effects the overall research process. As a criminology control agent, I have an insider perspective grounded in my theoretical and operational knowledge of crime, control and social order. This affords me the ability to analyse critically the legal and social implications of political stickers, as well as the broader subject of public space management. I am able to navigate this area with authority, leveraging theoretical and empirical insights obtained from my research to subjectively interpret the actions of the stickerists as part of broader deviant behaviour. Notwithstanding my insider status from a criminological position, I also occupy outsider status when viewed through the lens of stickerists, with such status being magnified due to my control agent role. Levine and Papania (2011) recognise that my employed role may be seen as an agent of repression who is aligned with the very systems stickerists seek to challenge. Indeed, I am not just an outsider; though I am not active in the field of stickering, I represent the very antithesis when positionality of outsider status is considered. This sharp contrast is interesting as my subjective interpretation of stickers may be far removed from the deeply personal and possibly collective experiences that motivate stickerists. Whilst I can interpret the socio-political messages embedded within stickers, my outsider status limits my ability to grasp fully the emotional and experiential dimensions that drive stickerists to use this medium for expression. However, recognising this dichotomy from the outset, and hence my attempt to recruit a gatekeeper to understand the stickerists perspective, is identified in Finlay's (2002) work of fostering a mutual understanding whilst also maintaining a critical distance. Indeed, the very importance of recognising such reflexivity is crucial to understanding how my dual role as insider and outsider shapes my overall research outcomes (Copes and Pogrebin 2017). It is the very essence of my approach at attempting to work with a stickerist that I hoped would help mitigate my control agent biases, whilst simultaneously building trust with at least one member of this subculture community

(Liu and Burnett 2022). As I reflect on the interactions with this stickerist, it becomes apparent that the complexity of any research field relationship that I do manage to cultivate will necessitate fluidity to negotiate both my insider and outsider positionalities (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

A Present

Due to the shift work hours that I keep, I usually attend that lunchtime coffee truck twice a week. The rest of October passed. Then the colder winter months came and went, until finally early spring arrived. Without any more sightings of the individual from October or their appearance at the coffee truck, I began to think that my offer had not been successful. After initially partially changing my clothes from uniform to civilian attire, just in case the stickerist put in an appearance, in the spring I reverted back to wearing uniform albeit without body armour. The staff on the coffee truck seemed to change quite often, although ownership kept the same name throughout. In early March 2024 a turn of events surprised me. The owner was serving and said, "Steve, I haven't seen you in ages, I took the winter off and went back home. I have something for you, though". Knowing this gentleman's heritage, I wondered if it may be something from his country of birth, to repay my loyalty to his product. I said, "thank you, I hope you've wrapped it up!". He looked surprised and said, in a serious voice, "no, why would I do that?". At this point, with confusion spoiling the suspense of the moment, he handed me a flimsy plastic carrier bag. I thanked him and looked inside. I began to grin as I pulled out an A4 sheet of paper with three Antifa stickers on it. I turned it over and a handwritten note on the back said "go on, do it" with a smiley face emoji afterwards. I asked where did he get these? I was informed that just before he went home in the middle of November a person had come to the truck and asked if he could have a favour — the bald security man would be coming by for a coffee later, could he pass on these, please?

I had managed to get contact with the stickerist, albeit later than had been sought, due to circumstances outside my control. This was pleasing, as I believe I had treated the stickerist with respect and honesty, which had served to reduce the power imbalance between us (Todak and James 2018). The three Antifa stickers, to me at least, symbolised a request to replace the three right-wing stickers. Had they searched for them and not found them? They had actually been removed a few weeks after our interactions by a clean-up crew. Or, was this gift an attempt at making contact? It could be either. Could I go so far as to suggest I had established the beginnings of trust and rapport? (Tunnel 2016). I think the jury is out on that one. I asked the coffee truck owner if I could give him and his staff my contact details to pass onto the person who left the gift? He said of course and he would be pleased to help me.

As I write this in July 2024, relying on my electronic field notes made soon after the interactions with the stickerist and the owner of the truck, I have yet to meet again with my stickerist, either in person undertaking their craft or whilst grabbing a coffee. Being the eternal optimist though, maybe one day. In case you are wondering, I do still have the three Antifa stickers, however they will be staying on the A4 paper.

References

Adler, P.A. and Adler, P. 2001. The reluctant respondent. In J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method.* Thousand Oaks California: Sage.

Armstrong, G. 1998. *Football Hooligans: Knowing the Score.* Oxford: Berg.

Awcock, H. 2021. Stickin' it to the man: The geographies of protest stickers. *Area*, 53 (3): 522-530.

Awcock, H. and Rosenberg, R. 2023. Palimpsests of trans rights: Trans-positive stickers and the contestations of transphobia in public space. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*,1-18.

Bathmaker, A., Ingram, N. and Waller, R. 2013. Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: Recognising and playing the game. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34 (5-6): 723-743.

Berk, R. and Adams, J. 1970. Establishing Rapport with Deviant Groups. *Social Problems*, 18 (1): 102-117.

Betancourt, M. 2010. Towards an Aesthetics of Adhesive Art. In D.B. Burkeman and M. Locascio (eds) *Stickers: from punk rock to contemporary art.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Bevan, W. H. 2023. *Mass Movement. Sit-ins. Walkouts. Boycotts. Rallies. Nonesuch meets the Bristol alumni at the vanguard of fifty years of student activism* (published online 2023), https://www.bristol.ac.uk/alumni/stories/magazine-summer-2023/mass-movement/, accessed 20 September 2024.

Bodden, S. and Awcock, H. 2024. Stuck Up, Peeled Off, Covered Up, Shared and Scribbled Out: Doing Ordinary Politics with Political Stickers. *GeoHumanities*, 10 (1): 131-149.

BSC. No date. 'Statement of ethics'. *British Society of Criminology,* Statement of Ethics Page (published online, no date), Ethics–British Society of Criminology (britsoccrim.org), accessed 18 July 2024.

bristol.gov.uk. 2024. Report flyposting. *Bristol City Council,* Report flyposting page (published online 2024). Report flyposting (bristol.gov.uk), accessed 18 July 2024.

Brockliss, L. 2000. Gown and Town: The University and the City in Europe, 1200–2000. *Minerva*, 38 (2): 147-170.

Chaffe, L.G. 1993. *Political protest and street art. Popular tools for democratization in Hispanic countries.* Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

Clough, A. 2011. *Combatting Urban Disengagement? Stickers as a form of street art.* MA thesis. University College London (published online July 10 2011), https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropology/research/working-papers/working-paper-no-092011, accessed 14 August 2024.

Coffey, A. 1999. *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Cohen, L.E. and Felson, M. 1979. Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach. *American Sociological Review*, 44: 588–608.

Cole, M. 2021. Political Street Stickers in Resistance to Biopower in Poland: The Case of Krakow During the 2020 Polish Presidential Election Campaign. *The Journal of Illiberalism Studie*s, 1(1): 71-88.

Collins, J. 2022. *Catherine Tedford on Political Stickers from WW1 to the Age of COVID, Interweaving #29.* [Podcast]. (published online August 4 2022), https://www.weavenews.org/podcasts/interweaving/2022/8/4/episode-29, accessed 4 September 2024.

Copes, H. and Pogrebin, M. 2017. *Voices from Criminal Justice: Insider Perspectives, Outsider Experiences.* New York: Routledge.

Cosmeleata, V. A. 2022. Glued to the city: Urban semiotics and political ideology in Bucharest's stickers. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 13 (2): 57-84.

Crang, M. and Cook, I. 2007. *Doing ethnographies.* London: Sage.

Delamont, S. 2016. *Fieldwork in educational settings: methods, pitfalls and perspectives*. London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Duncombe, J. and Jessop, J. 2002. 'Doing rapport' and ethics of 'faking friendship'. In M. Mauthener, M. Birch, J. Jessop and T. Miller (eds), *Ethics in qualitative research*, London: Sage.

Dwyer, S. C. and Buckle, J. L. 2009. The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8 (1): 54-63.

Eco, U. 1978. *A Theory of Semiotics.* Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Fairey, S. 2010. Towards an Aesthetics of Adhesive Art. In D. B. Burkeman and M. Locascio (eds) *Stickers: from punk rock to contemporary art.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Feigenbaum, A. 2014. Resistant matters. Tents, tear gas and the "other media" of occupy. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 11: 15-23.

Ferrell, J. and Sanders, C. R. 1995. *Cultural Criminology.* Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Ferrell, J. 1998. Criminological Verstehen. In J. Ferrell and M. Hamm (eds) *Ethnography at the Edge: Crime, Deviance and Field Research*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Ferrell, J., Hayward, K. and Young, J. 2015. *Cultural Criminology.* London: SAGE.

Finlay, L. 2002. "Outing" the researcher: The provenance, process, and practice of reflexivity. *Qualitative Health Research*, 12 (4): 531-545.

Foucault, M. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Garland, D. 1996. The limits of the sovereign state: Strategies of crime control in contemporary society. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 36 (4): 445-471.

Geller, A., Fagan, J., Tyler, T. and Link, B.G. 2014. Aggressive Policing and the Mental Health of Young Urban Men. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104 (12): 2321-2327.

Giulianotti, R. and Armstrong, G. 2004. *Football in Africa: Conflict, Conciliation and Community.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gerbaudo, P. 2014. Spiky Posters: Street Media and Territoriality in Urban Activist Scenes. *Space and Culture*, 17 (3): 239-250.

GLC. 2020 Giffords law center: in pursuit of peace; building police-community trust to break the cycle of violence (published online September 9 2021), In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence | Giffords, accessed 18 July 2024.

Hall, S. 1978. *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*. London: Macmillan.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. 2019. *Ethnography: principles in practice*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Hansen, S. and Flynn, D. 2015. Longitudinal photo-documentation: recording living walls. *Street Art & Urban Creativity Journal*, 1 (1): 26-31.

HESA. 2024. *Higher Education Student Statistics: UK 2022/23 released* (published online 8 August 2024) https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/08-08-2024/higher-education-student-statistics-uk-202223-released, accessed 2 September 2024.

Hill, S. No date. Frequency and distribution of protest stickers: An ethnographic study at a university city in the south-west of England. Under consideration for publication in the journal *Graffiti and Street Art*.

Homan, R. 1992. The ethics of open methods. *British Journal of Sociology*, 43: 321–332.

Hundertmark, C. 2003. *The art of rebellion. World of street art.* Corte Madera, CA: Ginkgo Press.

Invader. 2019. Sociopolitical. In D. B. Burkeman (ed.), *Stickers 2: More Stuck-up Crap.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

IPSA. 2020. 'Ethical code of conduct'. Policy page (published online December 2020). Health And Safety Policy Statment (ipsa.org.uk), accessed 18 July 2024.

Jaworski, A. and Thurlow, C. 2010. Introducing Semiotic Landscapes. In A. Jaworski and C. Thurlow (eds) *Semiotic Landscapes: Language, Image, Space.* London: Continuum.

Jones, P. 2018. The Impact of Student Housing on Local Communities: A Case Study of Bristol. *Urban Studies*, 55 (12): 2690-2706.

Kellehear, A. 1993. *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods.* St. Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen and Unwin.

Levine, H. G. and Papania, L. 2011. The contradictions of political graffiti: A case study. *International Journal of Criminal Justice Sciences*, 6 (1): 1-12.

Lewisohn, C. 2008. *Street art: The graffiti revolution.* New York, NY: Abrams.

Lipsky, M. 2010. *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Liu, X. and Burnett, D. 2022. Insider-outsider: Methodological reflections on collaborative intercultural research. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9 (314): 1-8.

McCormick, C. 2010. Towards an Aesthetics of Adhesive Art. In D.B. Burkeman and M. Locascio (eds) *Stickers: from punk rock to contemporary art.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Merton, R. K. 1972. Insiders and outsiders: A chapter in the sociology of knowledge. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1): 9-47.

Nouri, L. and Morgan, M. 2023. Introducing StreetSnap: An Initiative to Transform the Capture, Recording & Intelligence Gathered about Hate Graffiti across the Bridgend County Borough (published online 2023), https://cronfa.swan.ac.uk/Record/cronfa64971, accessed 4 September 2024.

Plummer, K. 2001. *Documents of life 2: an invitation to a critical humanism*. London: Sage Publications.

Presdee, M. 2000. *Cultural Criminology and the Carnival of Crime.* London: Routledge.

Puck, L. 2018. Uneasy Partners Against Crime: The Ambivalent Relationship Between the Police and the Private Security Industry in Mexico. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 59 (1): 74-95.

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and Clayton, J. 2010. 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': Working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36 (1): 107-124.

Reershemius, G. 2019. Lamppost networks: stickers as a genre in urban semiotic landscapes. *Social Semiotics*, 29 (5): 622-644.

Riggle, N. A. 2010. Street Art: The transfiguration of the commonplace. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68 (3): 243-247.

Rosbrook-Thompson, J. and Armstrong, G. 2016 Faith, space and selfhood in East London 'Youth gang' culture. *Urbanities: Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 6 (2): 18-38.

Scott, A. 2021. *A city of protest: Bristol's history of resistance.* (published online 23 March 2021), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56487102, accessed 20 September 2024.

Sebeok, T. A. 2001. *Signs: An introduction to semiotics,* second edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Shah, A. 2018. Decolonising the curriculum: Global perspectives. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44 (6): 1186-1196.

Shearing, C.D. and Stenning, P.C. 1983. Private Security: Implications for Social Control. *Social Problems*, 30 (5): 493-506.

Tedford, C. 2019. Sociopolitical. In D. B. Burkeman (ed.), *Stickers 2: More Stuck-up Crap.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc.

Tedford, C. 2021. *Featured artist: Zola (MTL).* Stickerkitty, 2021 (published online 21 June 2021), https://www.stickerkitty.org/featured-artist-zola-mtl/; accessed 8 September 2024.

Todak, N. and James, L. 2018. A systematic social observation study of police de-escalation tactics. *Police Quarterly*, 21 (4): 509-543.

Tunnel, K. D. 2016. Honesty, Secrecy and Deception in the Sociology of Crime: Confessions and Reflections from the Backstage. In J. Ferrell and M. S. Hamm (eds), *Ethnography and the Edge: Crime, Deviance and Field Research*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.

Tyler, T. R. 2006. *Why People Obey the Law.* Princeton: University Press.

Velikonja, M. 2021. *The Chosen Few: Aesthetics and Ideology in Football-Fan Graffiti and Street Art.* Los Angeles: Doppel House Press.

Visgo, O. 2010. Extremist stickers: Epideictic rhetoric, political marketing, and tribal demarcation. *Journal of Visual Literacy*, 29 (1): 28-46.

Yakin, H.S.M. and Totu, A. 2014. The Semiotic Perspectives of Peirce and Saussure: A Brief Comparative Study. *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 155: 4-8.

Young, A. 2013. *Street Art, Public City: Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination.* London: Routledge.

Webb, E. J., Campbell, D. T., Schwartz, R. D. and Sechrest, L. 1966. *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences.* Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Wengraf, T. 2001. *Qualitative research interviewing: biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. London: SAGE.

Human Perception of Nonhuman Elements in Chittagong City, Bangladesh[1]

Ala Uddin
(University of Chittagong, Bangladesh)
ala.uddin@cu.ac.bd

Urban areas are complex environments where humans live alongside a variety of nonhuman elements, including structures, infrastructure and natural surroundings. Understanding how people perceive and interact with nonhuman elements is crucial for the capacity of urban planning and design. The rapid urbanization of Bangladesh's Chittagong city has resulted in significant changes to its physical and cultural landscapes. Based on an ethnographic study, this article delves into the manner in which city dwellers, perceive elements that are not of human origin within their urban environment. In-depth interviews, questionnaires, in group discussions and observation are utilized to analyse the interaction between inhabitants and these nonhuman elements. The study explores the ways in which residents engage with the natural landscapes, water bodies, urban environment and atmospheric conditions. It intends to enhance our comprehension of the connection between humans and the nonhuman world, offering valuable insights into the cultural, economic and emotional factors that impact urban sustainability and the relationships between humans and nature. The major findings highlight the complexities of human perception, preferences, interactions and the impact of nonhuman elements on the urban setting. The study underscores the importance of cohesive human-nonhuman interactions for better living environment in the cityscape of Chittagong.
Keywords: Human perception, nonhuman elements, urban planning and sustainability, urbanization, human-nature relationships.

Introduction

Cities have evolved into vibrant hubs of human activity, complete with towering structures, bustling markets and intricate transportation networks. However, rapid and unplanned urbanization has frequently resulted in cities being perceived as concrete edifices, with man-made structures dominating and the natural world appearing distant and secondary. Until recently, many people believe that as cities expand, nature must be pushed aside. This mindset has led people to overlook the valuable sensory experiences that nonhuman elements can offer in urban settings. Individuals' well-being, social interactions and overall quality of life in cities can all suffer as a result of a lack of attention to these bodily attributes.

As cities grow and develop, there is a natural tendency to prioritize human needs and structures. Unfortunately, this frequently leads to the unintentional disregard or exclusion of nonhuman elements such as parks, natural environments, bodies of water, wildlife and the overall atmosphere. In contrast to this viewpoint, there is a complex and mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the other living components that coexist in urban environments. This paper aims to look into how residents perceive nonhuman aspects of Chittagong city, with a particular emphasis on how these elements contribute to the formation of coherent urban landscapes.

Chittagong, in southeastern Bangladesh, provides a captivating setting for this study. As Bangladesh's "commercial capital", the city is critical to the country's economic and cultural growth, contributing significantly to its overall development. Because of its strategic location near the Bay of Bengal, Chittagong has long played an important role in trade and commerce, facilitating connections between Bangladesh and global markets (Lévi-Strauss 1955, van

Schendel 1993). It showcases a diverse set of cultural and architectural elements that are constantly changing. It is a vibrant and diverse mix of residential, commercial, industrial and institutional areas, demonstrating its multifaceted nature and ongoing expansion. The urban landscape of Chittagong is constantly changing, influenced by factors such as population growth, urbanization, economic development and infrastructure expansion (Uddin 2021).

As a vibrant city, it is distinguished not only by its urban infrastructure and bustling streets, but also by its natural beauty and long history. The city has a rich historical and cultural heritage that dates back centuries. It is a diverse blend of cultures, languages and traditions, shaped by a variety of historical influences such as ancient kingdoms, colonial rule and post-independence development. Chittagong's uniqueness and charm stem from its diverse cultural fabric. The city's vast port, a historic hub for trade and communication, and the winding Karnaphuli river, with its rich traditions and storied past, contribute to its distinct identity. The presence of these nonhuman elements has a significant impact on the inhabitants' day-to-day lives, shaping how they perceive the world, what they experience and how they feel. As the city grows, it becomes increasingly important to understand how its inhabitants perceive and interact with non-human elements of their environment.

As the country's second-largest city and major economic hub, it strikes an intriguing balance between urbanization and nature. The city's diverse topography, including hills and coastline, provides a variety of nonhuman elements that contribute to its unique sensory landscapes. Urban environments are complex systems in which people's interactions with their surroundings influence overall city life. Understanding how residents perceive and interact with natural landscapes, water bodies, urban wildlife and atmospheric conditions offers valuable insights into the relationship between humans and nature in urban environments. This knowledge is crucial for informed urban planning and promoting sustainable development. This study investigated how people in the urban setting of Chittagong perceive nonhuman elements. It aims to offer valuable insights into the complex relationships between Chittagong residents and their surroundings by exploring the cultural, aesthetic, emotional and economic dimensions of these interactions. The study's findings will contribute to the larger conversation about urban sustainability, emphasizing the importance of including both human and nonhuman perspectives in urban planning and management.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: first, it reviews existing literature on urbanization, human-nature interactions and their impact on city life, and identifies areas for future research. Next, the study objectives and methodology are outlined, including the rationale for using qualitative research methods and selecting participants. Subsequent sections present the major findings and analyses on: (i) nonhuman elements in Chittagong; (ii) human interactions with nonhumans; (iii) effects on daily urban life; and (iv) residents' attitudes and perceptions. The concluding section summarizes key findings, highlights the significance of the research, and offers recommendations for urban planning, environmental conservation and further investigation.

Literature and Thoughts
Rapid urbanization and population growth create significant challenges for infrastructure, transportation, environmental sustainability and overall quality of life. Understanding how residents interact with their surroundings helps to identify priorities and develop strategies for

addressing challenges in a comprehensive and inclusive manner. As Chittagong city rapidly urbanizes, it is critical to gain insights into how residents perceive and interact with green spaces, infrastructure and cultural heritage sites. An ethnographic study, described as the "art of the possible" (Pardo et al. 2020), can illuminate the dynamic interplay between humans and non-humans in an urban environment. This study seeks to achieve that goal.

This is the first study to examine nonhuman elements within the context of Chittagong city, and there has been no prior research or reports on human perceptions of these nonhuman aspects of the city. However, existing research on urban issues has shown that the presence of natural elements in urban areas can improve residents' well-being (Hossain 2012, Kraze 2012, Paul and Islam 2022, Uddin 2021, Kouzas 2022, Caldararo 2017, Pardo 2020, Pardo et al. 2020). This includes reducing stress and improving mental health. Chittagong has serene green spaces like Foy's Lake and Patenga Beach, which provide much-needed respite and recreational opportunities. Cultural beliefs and traditions, emphasize the importance of living in harmony with nature and influence how members of the community perceive and interact with the natural world (White et al. 2023, Chakraborty and Amin 2022, Hasan et al. 2022, Hossain 2012). In the study, we emphasized the critical dynamics of integration versus exclusion in understanding urban environments (Pardo 2020).

The city's blend of contemporary and traditional architecture influences residents' emotional connections and sense of belonging (Mfon 2023, Uddin 2021, Ciubrinskas 2020). The study of urbanization's environmental impact is critical for addressing pollution and habitat loss challenges. Gaining insights into residents' perspectives is critical to promoting urban resilience. The distribution of urban resources should be more equitable (Ahmed and Ali 2016, Zucarol et al. 2022, Baul et al. 2021, Williams 2024), as socioeconomic status influences access to and perceptions of nonhuman elements. By incorporating residents' perspectives, urban planning can promote the development of cities that are both sustainable and people-centered.

There is a scarcity of comprehensive information about the dynamics of urbanization and human-nature interactions in Chittagong city. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding about sensory experiences- human perception about nonhuman city elements and the impact of cultural, historical and socioeconomic factors in this context. Examining how Chittagong residents perceive nonhuman elements helps to improve liveability, resilience and quality of life while also protecting the city's natural and cultural heritage for future generations. This research will enable urban planners and policymakers to make well-informed decisions that are consistent with the needs and preferences of the community.

For an implication to be practically valuable, it must be firmly grounded in the theories and methods of relevant disciplines, rather than merely serving as decorative language (Krase 2012). Hence, we integrated our findings with theoretical insights from anthropology, sociology, psychology and urban studies to explore how humans perceive non-human elements in the cityscape that are integral to the human environment. The study emphasized the economic, emotional, heritage and cultural aspects of human-environment interactions, demonstrating how these factors shape people's perceptions, attitudes and connections to their surroundings. This framework guides the research throughout and provides valuable insights

into the complex interactions between humans and their surroundings, which can be used to inform urban planning and design.

Objectives and Methodology

This study looked at how Chittagong residents perceive various nonhuman elements in their urban environment. Nonhuman components of interest include urban infrastructure, technological advancements, green spaces and natural resources. It attempted to better understand how residents' perceptions shape their relationship with the city's environment, and thus their overall well-being. Keeping this in mind, the primary research question was: How do humans perceive and interact with nonhuman elements in the port city of Chittagong?

To answer the central research question, the study addressed several key questions: What nonhuman elements of Chittagong city do humans interact with on a daily basis? How do we perceive and interact with these nonhuman elements? How do these nonhuman elements affect the daily lives of Chittagong residents? What are humans' attitudes toward nonhuman elements in Chittagong city? Finally, how can a better understanding of human perception of nonhuman elements help to create a more sustainable and liveable urban environment?

The primary goal of this qualitative study was to investigate human perceptions of nonhuman elements in Chittagong and determine how these perceptions influence residents' interactions with the city's environment and overall well-being. The research focused on several objectives. investigating citizens' perceptions of nonhuman elements such as urban infrastructure, technological advancements, green spaces and natural resources; understanding how these perceptions influence residents' relationship with the city's environment and their overall well-being; identifying the factors that influence residents' perception of nonhuman elements, including socio-economic factors, age and occupation; exploring the key concerns, aspirations and recommendations of residents regarding the development and management of nonhuman elements in the city; examining the challenges faced by residents in accessing and utilizing green spaces and their impact on residents' perception and well-being; and analysing the perceptions of residents regarding the natural resources in Chittagong and exploring the relationship between these perceptions, overall well-being and the sustainability of the port city.

By pursuing these goals, the study sheds light on the complex interactions between residents and nonhuman elements in Chittagong. By effectively disseminating the findings, it hopes to inform urban planning, policymaking and decision-making processes, resulting in a more inclusive, sustainable and liveable urban environment that meets the needs and aspirations of its residents.

This study is primarily qualitative, utilizing ethnographic research methods. To gain a thorough understanding of people's behaviours, beliefs and experiences, ethnography requires complete immersion in the cultural context, which was thoroughly investigated. To that end, a qualitative research design was used, with data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), observations and focus group discussions (FGDs). The study focused on Chittagong residents who were 18 or older. Purposive sampling

was used to select participants who have previously interacted with nonhuman elements in the city. The following is a summary of the methods used for data collection.

Fifty in-depth interviews allowed for a thorough exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions. Individual interviews with residents revealed useful information about their interactions with nonhuman elements, their beliefs, cultural perspectives and the importance of these elements in their lives. Key informant interviews (n=10) enabled a thorough examination of participants' experiences and perceptions. Individual interviews with experienced and knowledgeable people revealed important information about their interactions with nonhuman elements, as well as their beliefs, perspectives, perceptions, and the significant impact these elements have on their lives. Focus group discussions (FGDs, n=10) are facilitated discussions with a small group of participants with similar characteristics or experiences. The focus group were useful for investigating group dynamics and collective perceptions of nonhuman elements, as they allowed participants to interact and build on each other's ideas. Observational methods entail directly observing and documenting people's actions and interactions in real-world situations. We learned more about people's perceptions and responses by observing their interactions with nonhuman elements in Chittagong, such as public spaces, landmarks and natural environments. Given the research topic, analysing visual materials such as photographs, paintings, or videos depicting nonhuman elements revealed information about how these elements are represented and interpreted.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of Chittagong residents of all ages, genders and socioeconomic backgrounds who had lived there for at least five years. Surveys and questionnaires are common research methods for gathering information from a large number of participants. In this study, we used a survey (n=300) to collect information about people's perceptions, attitudes and experiences with nonhuman elements in Chittagong. The survey asked about their interactions with nonhuman elements, aesthetic preferences and emotional responses. Even though the sample size is much smaller than that of a population (approx. six million), it is sufficient for ethnographic research, which focuses primarily on qualitative methods.

The ethnographic research was conducted in various parts of the city (for example, Chalk Bazar, Nasirabad, 2 No. Gate, GEC circle, Agrabad, Bandar and Patenga), taking into account important aspects such as historical sites, architectural designs, religious infrastructures, parks, port, water bodies, industries, residential areas and so on. The collected data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach known as "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). It entails finding patterns, themes and categories in the data. The analysis identifies themes and patterns in the data that can be used to answer research questions. The analysis will be done manually, with the researchers coding and categorizing the data into themes and subthemes. The analysis was iterative, with themes and sub-themes evolving as new data was gathered and analysed. The themes were organized into groups based on similarities and differences, and then analysed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how nonhuman elements are perceived in Chittagong city. The study employed "thick description" (Geertz 1973) to deeply analyse the empirical data. Throughout the research it followed ethical guidelines.

Findings and Analysis

Chittagong is a thriving metropolis with vibrant features that extend beyond its concrete surfaces, surrounded by breathtaking natural scenery and architecture. It is a rich tapestry woven of diverse elements, each of which has a significant impact on the lives of its residents. From the grandeur of its expansive port to the tranquil beauty of the Karnaphuli river, these features are woven into daily life, painting vivid pictures of what we see and experience. In this urban symphony, the port serves as a grand sentinel, a pre-colonial gateway to trade and communication, while the Karnaphuli river flows through the city, telling stories of tradition and history. These elements have a deeper significance than their physical presence, serving as arteries connecting Chittagong's past, present and future. Understanding the intricate dance between people and their surroundings is critical for envisioning a city in which residents thrive, growth and conservation coexist, and natural and urban sounds blend harmoniously. The study's major findings, based on both qualitative and quantitative research, are presented in the following sections.

Nonhuman Elements in Chittagong City

Chittagong, a city where the past and future converge, is a mosaic of geographical wonders, architectural landmarks and cultural heritage sites that collectively define its unique identity. These elements do not merely exist as physical structures but as integral parts of the city's social and cultural fabric. They shape the rhythms of daily life, influence patterns of trade and transportation, and serve as sources of inspiration and solace for both residents and visitors.

In the midst of Chittagong's dynamic urban landscape, the Kalurghat bridge and the Bangabandhu tunnel emerge as monumental feats of engineering that transcend their functional roles. These structures do more than just connect various parts of the city; they stand as testaments to Chittagong's resilience, modernity and aspirations for growth. The Kalurghat bridge, with its robust structure, not only facilitates the movement of goods and people across the Karnaphuli river but also embodies the city's enduring strength and connectivity (figure 1). Similarly, the Bangabandhu Tunnel, a modern marvel beneath the river, represents Chittagong's forward-looking vision, symbolizing a bridge between tradition and progress.

Figure 1. Karnaphuli river. Photograph by the Author.

Residents express a deep emotional connection to these landmarks, viewing them as symbols of perseverance in the face of challenges and as beacons of the city's evolving identity. The Karnaphuli bridge, in particular, evokes memories of a bygone era when it played a critical role in trade and communication, while the Bangabandhu tunnel signifies a new chapter in Chittagong's narrative, highlighting the city's ambition to enhance urban mobility and economic vitality. These structures are not merely physical entities but are interwoven with the lives of those who navigate the city's spaces, influencing both their daily routines and their sense of belonging.

The Chittagong Railway Building (CRB) further adds to the city's rich tapestry of cultural and historical significance. This iconic structure, with its distinctive colonial architecture, is more than just a transportation hub; it is a living archive of Chittagong's history. For many residents, the CRB (figure 2) is a symbol of continuity, connecting them to a time when the city was a vital link in the region's trade routes. The building's grandeur, coupled with its storied past, stirs a profound sense of nostalgia, reminding locals of their shared heritage and the collective journey of their community.

Our research reveals that these iconic structures — the port, Karnaphuli bridge and CRB — are deeply embedded in the cultural consciousness of Chittagong's residents. They are not just architectural feats but are imbued with symbolic meanings that resonate across generations. Participants in our study spoke of these landmarks with pride, describing them as embodiments of Chittagong's identity, resilience and the harmonious blend of modernity with tradition. The Kalurghat bridge and Bangabandhu tunnel, for instance, are celebrated not only for their engineering brilliance but also for their role in facilitating the city's transformation from a historic port to a bustling centre of commerce and culture. The CRB, on the other hand, stands as a testament to the city's enduring spirit, bridging the gap between the past and the present, and serving as a gathering place for memories that bind the community together.

Figure 2. CRB area, citizen consider it a lung of the city. Photograph by the Author.

Beyond these architectural wonders, Chittagong's cultural heritage sites and verdant spaces contribute significantly to the city's vibrancy, offering a harmonious blend of tradition, nature and communal life. These sites, such as the ancient Patharghata Holy Rosary Cathedral (figure 3), provide a window into Chittagong's colonial and spiritual legacy. Founded in 1843, this cathedral is not just a place of worship but a repository of collective memory, where rituals and traditions have been preserved and passed down through generations. The cathedral, with its serene ambiance and historical significance, evokes a sense of reverence and continuity among the locals, serving as a spiritual anchor in a rapidly changing urban environment.

Figure 3. Patharghata Holy Rosary Cathedral. Photograph by the Author.

Chittagong's bustling markets, such as Riazuddin Bazar and Khatunganj, are also central to the city's economic and cultural landscape. These markets are more than just commercial hubs; they are vibrant spaces where the city's dynamic culture comes alive. The labyrinthine alleys of these markets, filled with a cacophony of sounds and a kaleidoscope of colours, offer a sensory experience that captures the essence of Chittagong's vitality. Local artisans, traders and shoppers converge in these spaces, fostering a sense of community and tradition that is integral to the city's identity. The markets serve as microcosms of the broader societal dynamics, reflecting the interplay between economic activity and cultural practices that sustain Chittagong's communal bonds.

The verdant expanses of Chittagong, such as Foy's Lake and DC Hill Park, play a crucial role in the city's urban ecosystem, offering respite from the hustle and bustle of city life. These green spaces are cherished not only for their natural beauty but also for their social and cultural significance. They are the lungs of the city, where residents come to relax, celebrate festivals and engage in recreational activities that reinforce community ties. Foy's Lake, with its tranquil waters and scenic surroundings, is a popular destination for families and tourists alike, while DC Hill Park serves as a cultural hub, hosting events that bring together diverse segments of

the population. These spaces are more than just recreational areas; they are vital components of Chittagong's social infrastructure, promoting well-being and fostering a connection with nature.

However, the sustainability of these green spaces is increasingly threatened by the pressures of unplanned urbanization and industrial development. Our findings highlight the challenges these areas face, as human activities encroach upon and degrade these natural sanctuaries. Pollution, encroachment and unsustainable practices not only diminish the aesthetic and ecological value of these parks but also threaten their ability to continue serving as essential recreational and environmental resources for the city's residents (figure 4). The loss of these green and recreational spaces would not only affect the city's physical environment but also undermine the cultural and social fabric that these spaces help sustain.

Figure 4. Once a children's park — just a year ago, it was still a park. Photograph by the Author.

The diverse elements that make up Chittagong's urban and natural landscapes form an intricate and multifaceted tapestry that defines the city's unique identity. Each landmark, market and green space contributes to a shared narrative of resilience, cultural richness and a deep connection to the land. For Chittagong's residents, these spaces are not just backdrops to their lives but active participants in their daily experiences, shaping their sense of place and community. As the city continues to grow and evolve, it is crucial to recognize and preserve these elements, ensuring that Chittagong's distinctive character is maintained for future generations to cherish and build upon.

Interaction with Nonhuman Elements

Chittagong, a city marked by its rich historical legacy and diverse landscapes, offers a vivid tableau of human interaction with nonhuman elements. These interactions reveal a tapestry of cultural, economic and spiritual connections, reflecting the city's complex identity. Residents' perspectives on these nonhuman elements are deeply influenced by their socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural heritage and personal experiences, which collectively shape their daily engagements with the city's environment.

For instance, the Karnaphuli river is more than a mere waterway for those whose livelihoods depend on it; it is a vital artery that nourishes the city's economic pulse and anchors

their sense of place within the urban fabric. The river's flowing waters symbolize sustenance, continuity and the deep-rooted connection between the city's inhabitants and its natural resources. This connection extends beyond economic activities, weaving into the cultural narratives that define Chittagong's identity. The river serves as a metaphorical lifeline, with its ebbs and flows mirroring the challenges and triumphs of the city's residents.

The bustling streets and markets of Chittagong, such as the renowned Riazuddin Bazar and Khatunganj, further illustrate the city's vibrant urban environment. These spaces are not merely commercial hubs; they are dynamic social arenas where daily interactions foster a sense of community and economic vitality. The markets pulse with the energy of traders, artisans and shoppers, creating a sensory-rich environment where the sights, sounds and smells are as much a part of the city's character as its architectural landmarks. These markets embody the spirit of Chittagong, where commerce and culture intersect, and where every transaction contributes to the city's living heritage.

In contrast to the urban hustle, Chittagong's green spaces, such as DC Hill Park and Foy's Lake, offer residents tranquil retreats that are cherished for their ability to provide respite from the demands of city life. These parks are not just physical spaces; they are communal sanctuaries where nature and culture intertwine. Residents flock to these areas for leisure, exercise and social gatherings, finding solace in the natural beauty that contrasts sharply with the surrounding urban landscape. The parks are emblematic of the city's ability to balance modern development with the preservation of natural sanctuaries, serving as vital ecological and recreational resources that enhance the quality of urban life.

Spiritual and cultural landmarks, including the Bayezid Bostami Mazar, Chandanpura Mosque (figure 5) and Chatteshwari Kali Temple, hold profound significance for the residents of Chittagong. These sites are more than architectural or historical relics; they are sacred spaces that resonate deeply with the spiritual lives of the community. They provide a tangible link to the city's past, anchoring residents' identities in a shared history and offering spaces for reflection, worship and communal gatherings. The spiritual value attached to these sites transcends their physical presence, embedding them in the collective consciousness of the city's inhabitants as symbols of continuity and resilience.

Despite the city's many assets, Chittagong's residents face significant urban challenges, which they articulate with a mix of frustration and resilience. Issues such as traffic congestion, recurrent flooding and the adverse impacts of rapid urban development are recurrent themes in residents' narratives. Waterlogging, in particular, emerges as a critical concern, exacerbating the congestion on already overcrowded streets and disrupting daily life. This pervasive issue highlights the pressing need for improved urban planning and infrastructure that can mitigate the environmental and logistical challenges facing the city.

Figure 5. Chandarpura Mosque. Photograph by the Author.

Urban expansion has also led to extensive hill cutting and deforestation, significantly altering Chittagong's once-pristine landscape. These activities have not only diminished the city's natural beauty but have also raised serious environmental concerns. The transformation of the landscape, driven by the pressures of development, underscores the complex interplay between progress and preservation. Residents' concerns about these changes reflect a broader anxiety about the sustainability of Chittagong's growth and the potential loss of its unique ecological and cultural heritage.

Nonetheless, the bond between Chittagong's inhabitants and their surroundings remains strong, rooted in a deep appreciation for the city's historical legacy and natural beauty. This connection fosters a sense of community and continuity, with residents drawing strength from their shared experiences and the city's rich cultural tapestry. The vibrant atmosphere of local markets and the serene retreats of the parks contribute to a sense of belonging that is integral to residents' identities. These interactions with the city's nonhuman elements are dynamic, shaping and reshaping the collective memory and cultural fabric of Chittagong over time.

Understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial for urban planners and policymakers tasked with guiding Chittagong's future development. The city's residents emphasize the importance of balancing modern development initiatives with the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. They advocate for urban planning strategies that prioritize the protection of historical sites, religious monuments and green spaces, which are seen as pillars of the community's identity and well-being. The research findings suggest that sustainable development in Chittagong must harmonize these elements, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy and cherish the city's distinct blend of cultural richness and environmental vitality.

The interactions between Chittagong's residents and the city's nonhuman elements reveal a complex and multifaceted relationship that is integral to the city's identity. These interactions are shaped by a deep appreciation for the city's historical and natural heritage,

coupled with a pragmatic recognition of the challenges posed by urbanization. The findings highlight the importance of a balanced approach to development that respects and strengthens the connections between residents and their environment, fostering a sense of pride and commitment to the sustainable future of Chittagong.

Effects on Everyday Lives

In exploring the daily lives of Chittagong's residents, our study delved into the pervasive issues that shape their experiences and interactions within this bustling urban environment. By conducting an extensive survey and in-depth interviews, we uncovered a rich tapestry of perspectives influenced by a myriad of socioeconomic statuses, cultural backgrounds and personal life experiences. The ways in which residents engage with the nonhuman elements of Chittagong — ranging from the city's natural landscapes to its built environment — are deeply intertwined with their daily routines, aspirations and identities.

For many, the Karnaphuli river is not merely a geographic feature but a lifeline that sustains their livelihoods. Fishermen, traders and those whose work revolves around the river view it as a central thread in the fabric of their existence. The river's ebb and flow mirror the rhythms of their lives, linking them not only to the city but to a broader network of economic and cultural exchanges that define Chittagong's role as a maritime hub. This connection fosters a sense of place that transcends the physical landscape, embedding the river in the collective memory and identity of the community.

Similarly, the vibrant atmosphere of Chittagong's streets and markets forms a crucial backdrop to daily life. These spaces are not just centres of commerce but are dynamic social arenas where the exchange of goods is accompanied by the exchange of stories, news and cultural practices. The bustling markets, such as those at Kazir Dewri and Chalk Bazar, are loci of interaction where residents negotiate both economic transactions and social relationships. These interactions reinforce a sense of community, grounding individuals in the shared experiences of urban life.

The city's parks, such as the tranquil DC Hill Park and the serene Foy's Lake, offer much-needed retreats from the hustle and bustle. These green spaces provide residents with opportunities for recreation and reflection, serving as oases of calm where they can connect with nature amidst the urban sprawl. The significance of these parks extends beyond their recreational value; they are sites of memory and identity, where the past meets the present in the form of preserved landscapes that bear witness to the city's historical evolution.

Religious landmarks mentioned earlier, such as the Badna Shah Mazar, Oli Khan Mosque and Chatteshwari Kali Temple, hold profound importance for the residents. These sites are more than architectural or historical treasures; they are living spaces of spiritual and communal significance. For many, these sacred sites are woven into the fabric of daily life, providing places for worship, reflection and communal gatherings. The rituals and practices that take place here are not only expressions of individual faith but are also acts of cultural continuity that bind the community together.

The city's modern infrastructure, exemplified by structures like the flyovers and motorways, represents Chittagong's strides toward progress and modernization. These developments are seen as markers of the city's ability to adapt to contemporary challenges while

still holding on to its historical roots. The juxtaposition of these modern structures with historical landmarks such as the CRB highlights the city's complex identity—a place where the past is honoured even as the future is built. The CRB, in particular, is more than just a historical edifice; it is a symbol of the city's colonial past and its journey through time, connecting residents to a shared narrative that spans generations.

However, despite these valued assets, the residents of Chittagong face significant urban challenges that complicate their daily lives. Heavy traffic congestion, for instance, is a persistent issue that more than 70% of respondents identified as a major hindrance to their daily routines. The gridlock on the streets not only lengthens commutes but also contributes to environmental degradation and psychological stress. The constant honking of horns, the slow crawl of vehicles and the suffocating air filled with exhaust fumes create an atmosphere of frustration and impatience that permeates daily life, affecting both physical and mental well-being.

Frequent flooding and waterlogging add another layer of complexity to urban life in Chittagong. Even a brief downpour can turn streets into rivers (figure 6), disrupting the flow of daily activities and trapping residents in their homes or workplaces. This phenomenon is particularly acute in low-lying areas, where inadequate drainage systems exacerbate the problem, leading to stagnant water that poses health risks and hampers mobility. The recurrent nature of these floods means that waterlogging is not just an occasional inconvenience but a defining feature of life in the city, shaping how residents navigate their environment and interact with each other (Dhaka Tribune 2024, Dey 2024).

Environmental degradation, particularly the extensive hill cutting and tree felling that accompanies urban development, has dramatically altered Chittagong's landscape. What was once a city nestled within verdant hills and lush forests is now marked by scars of deforestation and soil erosion. The loss of natural beauty and ecological balance is keenly felt by residents, many of whom expressed strong concern about the long-term consequences of such degradation. This transformation not only diminishes the aesthetic appeal of the city but also increases its vulnerability to natural disasters such as landslides, further complicating the challenges of urban living.

Figure 6. Waterlogging, a common phenomenon. Photograph by the Author.

The cumulative effect of these issues—traffic congestion, waterlogging and environmental degradation—has significantly impacted the quality of life in Chittagong. For

many residents, the stress associated with navigating these challenges on a daily basis is overwhelming. The constant struggle to move through congested streets, to protect homes and businesses from flooding and to cope with the loss of natural spaces contributes to a pervasive sense of frustration and helplessness. This stress manifests in various ways, including reduced productivity, health problems and a general decline in the sense of well-being.

Despite these adversities, our research uncovered a deep and enduring bond between the residents of Chittagong and their city. This bond is rooted in a profound appreciation for the city's historical significance, natural beauty and cultural heritage. Residents often spoke of their connection to Chittagong not in terms of the challenges they face but in terms of the pride they take in its unique character. This connection fosters a sense of community and continuity that helps residents endure the difficulties of urban life. It is this shared identity, forged through both struggle and celebration, that underpins the resilience of Chittagong's inhabitants.

The perspectives of Chittagong's residents provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between human and nonhuman elements in the city. These interactions shape not only the daily experiences of individuals but also the collective memory and identity of the community. As urban planners and policymakers look to the future, understanding these perspectives will be crucial in creating a Chittagong that is both sustainable and liveable, where development goes hand in hand with the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. The findings of this study underscore the importance of balancing progress with tradition, ensuring that the city's growth enhances rather than diminishes the rich tapestry of life that defines Chittagong.

Attitudes and Perceptions of Citizenry

The attitudes and perceptions of Chittagong's residents toward the nonhuman elements that define their urban landscape reveal a complex interplay of privilege, identity and environmental consciousness. Our study uncovered a spectrum of viewpoints, reflecting both deep appreciation and stark disconnection from the city's natural and cultural assets.

At one end of the spectrum, a segment of the population — approximately 30% of respondents — demonstrates a profound admiration for the city's nonhuman elements. This group, often consisting of those with greater socio-economic advantages, holds these elements in high regard for their cultural and ecological significance. For these residents, landmarks such as the Karnaphuli river and the surrounding hills are not merely physical features but integral parts of Chittagong's heritage and identity. They view these elements as custodians of tradition and symbols of the city's spirit. The Karnaphuli river, for instance, is seen as more than a commercial artery; it is revered for its spiritual and historical depth. One respondent eloquently described the river as "a living testament to our cultural heritage, steeped in mythological tales that bind us to our ancestors." Similarly, the hills and green spaces are appreciated not just for their beauty but for their symbolic representation of the city's historical and spiritual connection to the land. These residents derive a sense of pride and inspiration from these natural and historical features, which they perceive as reflections of the city's soul.

In contrast, a significant portion of the population — nearly 55% — feels a pronounced disconnect from these cherished landmarks. This group, often from less privileged backgrounds, tends to view the city's natural and cultural resources with indifference or even disdain. For many in this demographic, daily life is overshadowed by pressing concerns such as inadequate housing, poor infrastructure and financial instability. In this context, the city's historic and natural elements are perceived as distant luxuries that do little to alleviate immediate hardships. The grandeur of the CRB or the serenity of Cheragi Pahar (hill) (figure 7) may seem irrelevant when faced with the more tangible struggles of everyday survival. These residents often find themselves preoccupied with more urgent matters, rendering the city's nonhuman assets secondary to their immediate needs.

Figure 7. Cheragi Pahar. Photograph by the Author.

The connection between cultural beliefs and the urban landscape is a significant factor influencing residents' attitudes. Sacred sites like rivers and hills are imbued with spiritual and symbolic meanings, which shape the collective identity and sense of belonging among the city's inhabitants. For example, the Karnaphuli river is not just a resource but a revered entity carrying ancestral wisdom and mythological significance. This perception is shared by many who view the river as a spiritual entity, integral to their cultural identity. Another respondent highlighted that "the hills and green landscapes are seen as sacred, embodying the ancestral connection we have with our environment." This spiritual connection underscores the broader cultural framework in which the city's natural features are embedded, linking them to collective memory and identity.

In spite of the divergent perspectives on Chittagong's nonhuman elements, a unifying theme emerges: a growing recognition of the need to safeguard these assets for the overall well-being of the city's inhabitants. This awareness spans social and economic divides, fostering a collective sense of responsibility toward environmental and cultural preservation. The city's green spaces are increasingly valued not only for their aesthetic appeal but for their role in maintaining the environmental and cultural fabric of Chittagong.

The tensions between development and preservation were particularly evident in recent events. In 2020, a proposal to fell trees in the CRB area for hospital construction met with strong public opposition. The community's mobilization against the project underscored a shared commitment to preserving the city's natural spaces and cultural landmarks. This opposition led to a revision of the plans, reflecting a deep-seated appreciation for the city's green areas and a collective determination to protect them from detrimental development.

However, the recent decision in April 2024 to cut down approximately 50 trees, including some over a century old, near the historic CRB for an elevated motorway ramp has reignited public dissent. The community's response, characterized by organized demonstrations and vocal protests, highlights a sustained commitment to environmental stewardship and cultural preservation (figure 8). This activism is driven by a broader understanding that sustainable development must integrate and respect the natural and historical elements that define Chittagong's identity. As the city continues to expand and industrialize, the voices of its residents will be crucial in advocating for a balanced approach that harmonizes growth with preservation.

Figure 8. Author's sit-in protest against tree felling decision. Photograph by Mushfiqur Rahman.

The attitudes of Chittagong's residents toward the city's nonhuman elements reflect a nuanced interplay of privilege, identity and environmental awareness. While there is a clear divide between those who value these elements for their cultural and spiritual significance and those who feel disconnected from them, there is a shared recognition of the importance of preserving these assets. This recognition, coupled with active civic engagement, will be essential in shaping a future where Chittagong's growth and environmental conservation are mutually reinforcing.

Toward a Liveable and Sustainable Cityscape

To cultivate a liveable and sustainable urban environment in Chittagong, it is essential to understand deeply how residents perceive and interact with the city's nonhuman elements. This understanding extends beyond mere observations and responses; it involves embedding these insights into the fabric of urban planning and policy-making processes. By acknowledging the inherent value of Chittagong's natural and cultural resources and incorporating the community's

diverse perspectives, policymakers can create urban strategies that are not only effective but also resonate with the lived experiences and aspirations of the city's inhabitants.

The role of policymakers is pivotal in translating community insights into actionable measures that balance environmental preservation, social inclusion and cultural protection. Rather than operating within a traditional bureaucratic framework, urban planning should embrace a more integrative approach that values community input and collaboration. This means engaging residents in meaningful dialogue and incorporating their feedback into development projects. Such an approach ensures that urban initiatives reflect the real-life experiences and needs of the people they are designed to serve, fostering a more responsive and adaptive planning process.

A collaborative approach to urban development can address multiple challenges simultaneously. For example, by involving residents in decision-making, policymakers can better tackle environmental degradation while also cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging among citizens. This participatory process not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of development projects but also builds trust and cooperation between residents and authorities. When people feel that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed, they are more likely to engage actively in supporting and sustaining urban initiatives.

Central to this effort is the promotion of sustainable practices and active community involvement. Raising awareness about the benefits of sustainability and equipping residents with the knowledge and tools to participate in environmental stewardship is crucial. Educational programs, community workshops and public awareness campaigns play a significant role in fostering an environmentally responsible culture. For instance, workshops that focus on practical sustainability practices — such as reducing waste, conserving energy and promoting green transportation — can empower residents to make informed decisions and take meaningful actions. Research by Uddin (2021) and Paul and Islam (2022) highlights the importance of these educational initiatives in building a shared commitment to preserving the city's natural and cultural assets.

Grassroots movements and bottom-up initiatives are also driving Chittagong's transformation toward a greener future. These local efforts include organizing community clean-up days, promoting tree-planting campaigns and supporting environmental advocacy groups. Such initiatives not only address immediate environmental concerns but also lay the foundation for long-term sustainable practices. They reflect a growing community awareness and initiative to tackle environmental issues at a local level, demonstrating the power of collective action in fostering urban sustainability.

Urban living, however, extends beyond the immediate city centre and into the surrounding areas. To ensure the overall well-being of the ecosystem, it is crucial to consider the interconnections between urban and natural environments. Effective and sustainable interactions between humans and nonhuman elements necessitate a comprehensive perspective that encompasses the broader ecological context. This means that urban planning should account for the impact of city activities on nearby natural areas and vice versa. By integrating this broader ecological view into urban development strategies, policymakers can help ensure

that both urban and surrounding environments are preserved and enhanced for future generations.

Achieving a liveable and sustainable cityscape in Chittagong requires a deep understanding of how residents interact with and value the city's nonhuman elements. By adopting a collaborative and inclusive approach to urban planning, raising awareness about sustainability and supporting grassroots initiatives, policymakers can foster a more harmonious and resilient urban environment. This comprehensive perspective, which recognizes the interdependence of urban and natural areas, is essential for developing strategies that not only address immediate challenges but also promote long-term sustainability and well-being.

Gaining insight into the perspectives of Chittagong residents is critical for effective urban planning. Throughout the study, residents expressed a variety of concerns, desires and recommendations for the development and management of nonhuman elements in their urban environment. These suggestions were proposed obtained through surveys, focus groups and interviews emphasizing the importance of incorporating local perspectives into urban development initiatives.

Overall, a thorough understanding of how humans perceive nonhuman elements in Chittagong is required to create a sustainable and vibrant urban environment. Policymakers can create a city that not only meets the needs of its residents but also protects and enhances its ecological and societal legacy by incorporating community perspectives into urban planning and encouraging active participation in sustainable initiatives. This collaborative approach will ensure that Chittagong remains a thriving and resilient metropolis, where progress and conservation are inextricably linked.

Conclusion

This study delved into the intricate dynamics of how nonhuman elements — natural and infrastructural — shape and are shaped by the urban life in Chittagong. As a bustling metropolis, Chittagong embodies a rich, multifaceted character that transcends its physical structures. The cityscape is more than a mere assembly of buildings and thoroughfares; it is a vibrant, living mosaic where human experiences intertwine with natural elements, each contributing to a unique urban rhythm. Central to Chittagong's identity is its massive port. The port, a sprawling hub of global maritime trade, is more than a commercial epicentre; it symbolizes the city's historical significance and economic vitality. The sight of colossal ships docking at the bustling wharves and the sounds of trade reverberate through the city, embodying the intersection of global commerce and local livelihoods. This port is a dynamic entity that continually shapes and reflects the city's economic pulse, drawing connections with distant lands and diverse cultures.

Equally significant is the Karnaphuli river, which meanders gracefully through Chittagong, threading together the city's past and present. It is more than a waterway; it is a lifeline that nourishes the land and its inhabitants, carrying historical and cultural narratives through its currents. The river provides essential resources and serves as a serene counterpoint to the city's frenetic pace, embodying a fluid connection between the natural world and urban

life. The port and river, while distinct in their roles, collectively contribute to a balanced urban environment where history and modernity coexist. They are not static landmarks but active participants in the city's ongoing evolution, offering insights into how Chittagong has grown and how it continues to adapt. These elements serve as critical links between past, present and future, enriching the city's identity and underscoring the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the environment.

To foster a sustainable and thriving urban environment, it is essential to integrate a nuanced understanding of the city's complex human-nonhuman interactions into urban planning and policy-making. The sounds of nature, like the gentle flow of the river or the calls of local wildlife, should harmonize with the urban symphony of commerce and development. Developing policies that balance these aspects requires a deep appreciation of Chittagong's distinctive character — where rapid growth and enduring traditions are interwoven. As Chittagong continues to evolve, it is vital to recognize the importance of these nonhuman elements in shaping a liveable urban ecosystem. The study highlights a growing awareness of the need to protect and preserve these elements even as the city advances. This awareness fosters a sense of community where economic aspirations and environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary aspects of urban life.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future urban development in Chittagong should focus on:

1. *Integrating community input:* Engage residents in the planning process to ensure that development projects align with their needs and values. This participatory approach can help address both environmental and social concerns, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.
2. *Preserving natural and cultural heritage:* Prioritize the conservation of key natural elements like the Karnaphuli river and historical landmarks such as the port. Recognize these elements not only as physical assets but as integral components of the city's identity and heritage.
3. *Promoting sustainable development:* Develop policies that balance economic growth with environmental protection. Encourage practices that minimize ecological impact while supporting the city's development goals.
4. *Fostering environmental awareness:* Implement educational programs and public awareness campaigns to promote sustainable practices among residents. Empower communities with the knowledge and tools needed to engage in environmental stewardship.

By adopting these recommendations, Chittagong city can navigate its path toward modernization while honouring and preserving the elements that define its unique character. This approach will ensure that the city remains vibrant and resilient, benefiting both current and future generations.

References

Ahmed, M. J. and Ali, M. K. 2016. *Air Quality in the Chittagong City: An Integrated Assessment*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Baul, T. K., Sarker, A. and Nath, T. K. 2021. Restaurants' waste in Chittagong city, Bangladesh: Current management, awareness on environmental hazard and perception towards potential uses. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 292.

Caldararo, N. 2017. The Housing Crisis and Homelessness: A San Francisco Ethnography. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography,* 7(1): 3-21.

Ciubrinskas, V. 2020. Cultural Citizenship and the Social Spaces of Contemporary East European Immigrants in Chicago. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (3): 95-110.

Chakraborty, P. and Amin, J. 2022. First Multi-Lane Road Tunnel under the River Karnaphuli in Bangladesh and its Impact. *Journal of Transportation Systems*, 7 (3): 28-39.

Dhaka Tribune. 2023. Student drowns in waterlogged road in Chittagong. 7 August.

Dey, A. K. 2024. Deaths in unprotected Ctg drains: Who is next? *The Daily Star*, 3 April; https://www.thedailystar.net/chattogram/news/deaths-unprotected-ctg-drains-who-next-3580926

Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Hasan, S. M., Haider, M. A. and Hasan, M. Z. 2022. Suitability of Urban Green Belt and Green Wedges in Chittagong City, Bangladesh: An Investigation into the Sustainable Urban Environment. *International Journal of Building, Urban, Interior and Landscape Technology*, *19*: 35–50.

Hossain, M. I. 2012. *Hill Cutting & Environmental Consequence In Chittagong City, Bangladesh: Hill Cutting And Its Devastating Effects On Environmental Of Chittagong City, Bangladesh*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Krase, J. 2012. An Argument for Seeing in Urban Social Science. *Urbanities*, 2 (1): 18-29.

Kouzas, G. 2022. Women Street vendors: An Ethnography of Informal Trade in Athens. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 12 (5): 43-55.

Glaser, B. and A. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1955. *Tristes Tropiques*. London: Penguin Classics.

Mfon, I. 2023. Aesthetic Considerations in Architectural Design: Exploring Pleasure, Arousal, and Dominance. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4: 923-935.

Paul, A. and Islam, N. (2022). *Chittagong City: Geographical Survey*. Center for Urban Studies and Chandrabati Academy.

Pardo, I. 2020. A Botched Urban Change: A Case-Study from Central Naples. In I. Pardo, G. B. Prato and J. Rosbrook-Thompson (eds), *Ethnographies of Urbanity in Flux: Theoretical Reflections*. Special Issue of *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (Suppl. 3): 13-32.

Pardo, I., Prato, G. B. and Rosbrook-Thompson, J. 2020. Ethnographies of Urbanity in Flux: Theoretical Reflections. In I. Pardo, G. B. Prato and J. Rosbrook-Thompson (eds), *Ethnographies of Urbanity in Flux: Theoretical Reflections.* Special Issue of *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (Suppl. 3): 2-12.

Uddin, A. 2021. Street vending: exploring an excluded economic sector in Chittagong city, Bangladesh. *Development in Practice*, 31 (21): 1-13.

van Schendel, W. 1993. *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal, 1798: His Journey to Chittagong, the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Noakhali, and Comilla.* Dhaka: University Press.

Williams, R. A. 2024. Becoming Urban? Seeing Amish Legitimacy Versus Technocapitalism. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 14 (1): 66-80.

White, M. E., Hamlin, I., Butler, C.W. and Richardson, M. 2023. The Joy of birds: the effect of rating for joy or counting garden bird species on wellbeing, anxiety, and nature connection. *Urban Ecosystems*, 26: 755–765.

Zucarol, A., Maselli, G. and Ulgiati, S. 2022. Insights in Urban Resource Management: A Comprehensive Understanding of Unexplored Patterns. *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 3, 807735.

Review Article
by
Jerome Krase
(Brooklyn College CUNY)

jkrase@brooklyn.cuny.edu

I was very pleased to be asked by the publisher to review a book co-edited by my Brooklyn College colleagues Joseph Entin and Jeanne Theoharis, titled *Until We're Seen: Public College Students Expose the Hidden Inequalities of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2024). They documented and analysed the first-hand experience of poor and working-class students of colour at our college and at California State University, Los Angeles in *Until We're Seen: Public College Students Expose the Hidden Inequalities of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. I had coauthored, with Judith N. DeSena, *COVID-19 in Brooklyn: Everyday Life During a Pandemic* (Krase and DeSena 2023) that, in contrast, closely examined how the pandemic impacted the lives of much more privileged people living in the super-gentrified Brooklyn neighbourhoods of Park Slope and Greenpoint/Williamsburg. Therefore, I saw this offer as an opportunity for stark comparisons. What I found were more nuanced differences. (See also Krase and DeSena 2020) There are many methodological similarities in both books such as employing autoethnography. Both books also focus on social justice, which closely considers race, ethnicity, and social class issues. However, I would argue that to fully appreciate the lives of disadvantaged individuals and groups sensitively displayed in *Until We're Seen*, one must understand those of the more advantaged people detailed in *COVID-19 in Brooklyn*.

In their edited volume, Entin and Theoharis made note of the sad irony of the elevation of "essential workers" to the status of "heroes" shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic essentially shut down most of New York State after the order of then-Governor Andrew Cuomo on March 15, 2020. The contributions of these neglected "heroes" and their elevated status lasted a while beyond this initial period; even as the shutdown was slowly lifted and finally ended. In our book, we describe how New Yorkers like ourselves came out every evening at 7 PM to noisily thank essential workers. However, as noted by the editors, they have yet to be adequately compensated for their service in the form of higher pay and benefits. Well beyond the crucial medical staff, public order, safety as well as other indispensable government employees, the vast majority of this invaluably heroic army was primarily low-paid, often contingent, employees such as kitchen and warehouse staff and the exploding number of men and women delivering goods, including medicines, during the lockdown and beyond. It must be noted that this inadequately compensated workforce continues to be legion today and that many are undocumented workers.

Entin and Theoharis provided the opportunity to a small sample of their students from these lower socio-economic ranks to tell their own stories about their struggles, their families, their friends, and their neighbours during the pandemic. These poignant accounts are related in their own words and, for the most part, continue to be ignored. As to the format of the volume, each chapter is introduced by one of the students' socially conscious instructors. This insightful

work was initially facilitated by a Social Science Research Council (SSRC) grant that enabled Entin and Theoharis to choose eighteen Brooklyn College students from New York's disadvantaged communities to spend the summer of 2020 researching and writing their own stories. These autoethnographies were later deposited at the Brooklyn Historical Society, the SSRC, and in the Brooklyn College COVID-19 archive. The project was later expanded with twelve more students in January of 2021 and nineteen more in the summer of 2021. Later they also teamed with California State University, Los Angeles Professor Alejandra Marchevsky to include a section of his similar West Coast students' narratives.

These autoethnographies capture the impacts of the pandemic in New York City and Los Angeles on some of the most hard-hit communities over more than two years. Some of the narratives include family and events in Mexico, Pakistan, and Puerto Rico. The twenty-four stories related how people supported each other to survive and keep going during the pandemic.

They are divided into five parts: Essential Work, Disposable Workers; Racism, Family, and Commitments in a Time of Emergency; Crises of Health and Housing; Community Organizing, Mutual Aid, and Struggle; Gender, Sexuality, and Inequality In Los Angeles, and each has several student narratives.

Entin and Theoharis emphasize that such narratives were mostly ignored from the treatment of the pandemic by both mainstream media and academic scholarship. In this regard, I think it prudent to excerpt some poignant examples from the book.

In "Beloved, but Forced to Live and Die in the Shadows" (p. 50), Yamilka Portorreal relates:

"April 10, 2020, marked less than one week until my twenty-first birthday. I was excited to hit this milestone despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. I had accepted that I would not be able to celebrate it the way I always wanted to: with a lot of friends. However, I was very grateful that everyone in my immediate family was okay and no one had contracted COVID yet. That afternoon, my grandmother was making coffee when she got a call from an old friend. In hindsight, I was too focused on my chemistry homework to notice her boisterous shock and confusion. I thought one of her distant family members whom I'd never met before had passed away, which is usually the case, but this time it felt different. Her surprise was accompanied by crying.

"He died?!!!" she exclaimed in Spanish.

As soon as she hung up the phone, she headed in my direction in what felt like light speed. I vividly remember the smell of roasted coffee beans that followed her as she entered my room. "What happened?" I said obliviously. "Leo died!" she exclaimed, as she burst into tears. I felt my heart drop. I was bombarded with feelings of shock, confusion, sadness, and a multitude of questions. "How could it have been possible?! I trusted that he would get better," I thought to myself. Our suspicion of coronavirus was true. Since tests weren't widely available in April, we

had to assume that Leonardo was sick from COVID-19 based on his symptoms of fever and cough. He was also undocumented, which made it challenging for him to seek medical help. It is likely that he never pursued medical assistance for fear of deportation, a dilemma many undocumented people face.”

In “(Need)les and Many Threads: Sewing Community from Pandemic Puerto Rico and Beyond” (p. 163) Daniel J. Vázquez Sanabria writes:

“It was Wednesday, March 11, 2020, when CUNY moved classes online and the uncertainties of the pandemic took over.1 The retail job I worked in the Kings Plaza mall joined the shutdowns a week later. Suddenly, as a college junior with an almost-maxed-out credit card and growing fears (or panic?) of contracting the virus, I became unemployed. I joined a major economic crisis and those I relied on for help were struggling too.

My sister called over video quite frequently during the early months of the pandemic. She made sure I had everything I needed. During these calls, we talked about everything from Zoom classes to the stories of narrow-minded customers visiting her workplace unconcerned about the growing global alerts. It became clear later that these calls also served as a space for us to connect and support each other. These moments painted a detailed picture of the kinds of *vivencias* this tension-filled time was shaping.

This story is about my sister, who continually builds spaces of care in moments of scarcity. This story is also about a colony, Puerto Rico, and the complications the United States presents for islanders struggling to survive. When a pandemic forces us into precarious conditions and, for those already living precariously, pushes us deeper into desperation, it is often hard to stay oriented, continue producing, and care for ourselves. What happens when resistance takes the form of community building and networks of care?”

In “(Her)story: Retelling, Restitching” *We couldn't wear masks; we couldn't wear glove* (p. 164)*.* Daniel J. Vázquez Sanabria writes:

“Living in Puerto Rico and working in customer service at one of the busiest airports in the archipelago—which my sister was doing before the pandemic hit—was not equivalent to staying indoors and emailing professors, which is what I was doing in New York once CUNY transitioned to online learning. During the late weeks of February of 2020, my sister's company, like many others, prohibited the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the workplace.2 Their reasoning against making use of spread-prevention tools was based on their belief that it would create “alterations” to the company's brand and upset customers. “The customer is always right” meant employees would have to risk contracting a deadly

virus for the sake of pre-serving normalcy for clientele. Profit definitely preceded science. *Eventually . . . they said: "Okay, yes. Now you can wear masks."*

In "Pandemic Deepens Food Inequality in Brooklyn: Live from Bed-Stuy" (p. 187), Khadhazha Welch wrote:

"I don't know, Mommy, I just find it weird that I have to go all the way to Trader Joe's in upscale Brooklyn Heights to find affordable, fresh food just because the grocery store by our house wants to sell us rotten fruits and milk for over eight dollars." It was the only thing I could say on Facetime with my mother as we talked during the peak of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic in Brooklyn. My eyes wandered over $3 a pound for spoiled grapes and a 30–50% price increase for meat; milk that was once $3 was now $8.25. Not being the only one dismayed by the sudden price increases, it wasn't surprising to hear other patrons in the grocery store express their grief with comments such as "Since when does this cost this much?" and "Come on, you know no one is working right now; don't take advantage of the people." Price inflation paired with the rise of unemployment left many Brooklyn residents to make tough choices. Usually, most people were able to note a sudden price increase in produce or dairy with no more than a raised eyebrow and a disgruntled grunt because they knew that a steady flow of income would keep them afloat and make up for the extra money spent. But now, as people lost work during the pandemic, every dollar often counted toward securing meals for themselves and their loved ones, and many residents were left with three options: seek food security within local food pantries, buy less food, or if all else fails, succumb to hunger."

Although many friends and neighbours of more privilege also passed away from COVID-19, the daily burdens we faced were greatly reduced. While we hunkered down during the 2020 lockdown, my co-author and I continued to receive our pay as we worked remotely. We had spacious homes and lived in neighbourhoods with nearby medical facilities. In fact, in our areas, when COVID-19 testing and, later, vaccines became available they were within easy reach at local pharmacies and urgent care facilities. Given our economic advantages, we were able to have all our needs met by the army of warehouse, grocery, and delivery workers who brought them to our doorstep.

As might be expected when competent scholars explore similar topics, there are many important parallels and similarities between the two books. However, as is obvious, I believe the differences are far more important. Although DeSena and I also looked closely at the disadvantaged populations in Brooklyn, we did so through a more distant lens. Our methods were also more multi-modal as we employed direct observations, as well as auto-visual- and other ethnographic methods. We also analysed pandemic-related content on the Internet, especially social media. For example, I noted in the study of my Park Slope neighbours how a Google group was employed to check on our vulnerable neighbours. I should also note the sadness of hearing ambulance sirens at night, and when the lockdown was lifted observing the

refrigeration trucks at a nearby a hospital because their morgue was full. The feelings we privileged people get are not different from those of the less advantaged. The difference is our greater ability to deal with the problems that confront us. Other collectivises also suffered disproportionately such as those in rural areas and the elderly. Of course, in both categories, those persons of colour would have "enhanced" disadvantages.

To place the local in a proper context, we first extensively reviewed and summarized the national and global studies of both the etiology of the virus and the growth of both global and local anti-vax movements. Even more comprehensive information was provided in two *Urbanities* Supplements on the topic: Giuliana Prato's *City Life and Beyond in Times of Pandemic* (2020) and Italo Pardo and Giuliana Prato's *Healthcare and Public Health: Questions of Legitimacy* (2022) With words and images, DeSena and I placed our personal experiences inside the broader context of global and national medical emergencies, as well as pandemic-induced unemployment, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the contentious 2020 presidential election. In addition, we addressed the cultural and economic shifts that took place at the start of the pandemic and contemplated how they might impact how the "new normal" of business, entertainment, education, housing, and work will look like locally and globally.

For both our books, the topic was serendipitous as we all were teaching in person at the onset of the pandemic and switched to remote learning. This led to a better understanding of the relative access to both technology and internet access of more and less privileged students and instructors. Some of Entin and Theoharis' students could have been my own as I taught remotely at Brooklyn College during this time. I asked my students to write about how they were affected but only summarized their experiences in our book. I believe the contrast provided in these two books is extremely important, because while these stories are seldom told (read) it is only by understanding what could have been that one can appreciate the stark differences.

Readers should be extremely grateful for the work of Entin and Theohris but even more so what their students themselves revealed. However, the implied premise of their book that seeing the sufferings of their students will motivate social and political change rings hollow to me. For example, I don't believe that racial and ethnic discrimination is merely a matter of lack of knowledge of the suffering caused by it. As in DeSena and my book which is also framed with the social justice perspective, we hope that our insights will better inform public policies for the next pandemic that is sure to come. In sum, a complete understanding of the COVID-19 phenomena requires a wide range and more focused studies. *Until they see us* and *COVID-19 in Brooklyn* would make perfect both ends of a Global Pandemic bookshelf.

References

Entin, J and Theoharis, J. Eds. 2024. *Until We're Seen: Public College Students Expose the Hidden Inequalities of the COVID-19 Pandemic*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Krase, J. and DeSena, J. N. 2023. *COVID-19 in Brooklyn: Everyday life during a pandemic,* London: Routledge

Krase, J. and DeSena, J. N. 2020. "Life in the Time of Covid19 in a Super-Gentrified and Super-Diverse Neighborhood: Making Things Visible". In G. B. Prato (ed.), *City Life and Beyond in Times of Pandemic*. Special Issue of *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (Suppl. 4): 69-75.

Prato, G. B. Ed. 2020. *City Life and Beyond in Times of Pandemic.* Special Issue of *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 10 (Suppl. 4).

Pardo, I and Prato, G. B. Eds. 2022. *Healthcare and Public Health: Questions of Legitimacy.* Special Issue of *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 12 (Suppl. 6).

The 2024 IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar on Urban Ethnography and Theory

Italo Pardo   Giuliana B. Prato
(University of Kent, UK)
i.pardo@kent.ac.uk   g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk

This annual Field Training School and Research Seminar was organised and hosted by the *International Urban Symposium-IUS* in collaboration with an international group of senior scholars from leading universities. It was was held in Montecatini Terme, Italy on 21-27 July 2024 (https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2024-field-training-school/). The working language was English.

The School offered an interactive learning environment and ample opportunity to discuss in depth the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates. The primary aim was to train participants in the "art" of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory.

The School's teaching staff included sociocultural anthropologists, qualitative sociologists, architects and urban planners. They were, in alphabetic order: Gary Armstrong (City, University London, UK); Nicola Brady (Transport for London & Practitioner-in-Residence, City University of London, UK); Jerome Krase (Brooklyn College-CUNY, USA); Erin Lynch (Concordia University, Canada); Karolina Moretti (University of Athens, Greece); Italo Pardo (University of Kent, UK); Giuliana B. Prato (University of Kent, UK); James Rosbrook-Thompson (City, University London, UK); and Matthew Rosen (Ohio University, USA).

The 2024 IUS School brought together 15 postgraduate students, doctoral and postdoctoral scholars from Canada, France, Germany, Hawaii, India, Italy, Singapore, Spain, Turkey and the USA.

The School opened with a 60-minute Session including a Welcome address and a detailed explanation of the event's structure. This was followed by an 80-minute Session introducing the intellectual scope of the programme, which over 7 full days included:

- Twelve 80-minute focused Teaching Seminars led by members of the staff;
- Discussion of the reading materials that were circulated among the participants one month prior the start of the School. Participants were asked to read and actively discuss the literature in relation to each specific seminar;
- A Field Excursion to the medieval hamlet of Montecatini Alto and a Field Trip in the city of Montecatini Terme (preceded by 60-minute methodological instructions from the staff);
- A 1-day dedicated session during which participants reported on their field trip;
- A 1-day Research Seminar Session during which participants presented their own research. With a view to honing and developing junior scholars' skills as future professionals, this full-day Research Seminar offered to participants the opportunity to

discuss their work and benefit from peer-discussion and expert feedback from the teaching staff. Each presentation was allocated 30 minutes, including discussion. In June, the abstracts from all papers were circulated via email among the participants and the staff. The Seminar Sessions were chaired by members of the staff;

- The School concluded with a Session on the publication process, potential outlets, indications on how to revise and explanation of the peer-review procedure.

Social events included a communal light dinner, visits and evening concerts at the historical Terme Il Tettuccio, a World Heritage Site, and a farewell reception, which was attended by the Mayor of Montecatini Terme, Mr Claudio Del Rosso.

From left to right. <u>Back row</u>: Federico Meneghini Sassoli; Franca Henriette Webel; Janka Visky; Andrew Lewis; Julia Faulhaber; Gladice Alida Makamno Talom; Prateck Paul; Andrew Shauff; James Rosbrook-Thompson; Erin Lynch. <u>Front row</u>: Elisa Zanoni; Srilekha Ati; Italo Pardo; Claudio Del Rosso, Mayor of Montecatini Terme; Giuliana B. Prato; Danna Massielle Gutierrez Lanza; Karolina Moretti; Sophie Bartlein; Conny Hansel; Patricia Garcia; Cigdem Erdal; Mattew Rosen. Not in the picture: Jerome Krase; Gary Armstrong; Nicola Brady.

BOOK REVIEWS

Bille, M. and **Schwabe, S.** 2023, *The Atmospheric City: Ambiances, Atmospheres, and Sensory Experiences of Spaces.* London: Routledge.

The study of atmospheres and ambiances is a growing area of interest in urban studies. Bille and Schwabe's slim but impressively rich volume, *The Atmospheric City* (2023), contributes to this growing literature by tracing transformations in the feel of urban life across several Nordic cities. Drawing from ethnographic research in Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm, the authors illuminate the embodied experience of the city through the compelling lens of "atmosphere".

The study of urban atmospheres typically draws from Gernot Böhme's influential conceptualization of the term. For Böhme, "[a]tmosphere is what relates objective factors and constellations of the environment with my bodily feeling in that environment. This means that atmosphere is what is in between, what mediates the two sides" (Böhme & Thibaud 2016: 1). Bille has written elsewhere on the relational quality of this idea of atmosphere, and how it necessarily attunes the researcher to the "*in-betweenness*" of the contact zone where the felt body meets the environment (Bille 2015: 269). The ethnographic case studies in *The Atmospheric City* deepen our understanding of the interplay at the heart of urban atmospherics, provoking the reader to consider how the body and the city come to animate one another.

Bille and Schwabe (2023) begin by introducing the reader to hints of change that can be not only seen but heard, smelt and felt in the urban environment — from the way the sensations of industry have largely been moved to the margins of the city, to the campaigns of night-time illumination that transform the erstwhile shadowy spaces of the urban into theatrical stages for action. Gradual though it may have been, the authors turn our attention to the way this urban metamorphosis has transformed the *felt* spaces of the city. Cities, they argue, are fundamentally atmospheric (p. 5), and attuning ourselves to atmosphere is a vital component of urban meaning-making (both for citizens and scholars). Furthermore, the authors position atmosphere as both relational and porous (p. 22); as Bille and Schwabe evocatively put it, in the production of urban atmospheres, the environment and humans "seep affectively in and out of each other" (p. 13).

Four central themes organize the chapters that follow: "*social relations,* the *environment*, *movement,* and *care*" (p. 22). The overarching context of the Covid-19 pandemic is woven through the ethnographic work in the book (since field research for the text took place from 2018 to 2021) — a move which further emphasizes both the porosity of urban life and how atmospheres can be at once intimate and collective. For example, Chapter 2 begins with a reflection on how social distancing measures rapidly altered the sociality and feel of cities around the world, the jarring nature of this shift drawing our attention to importance of atmosphere in urban social life. Through pandemic life and beyond, the authors use twinned notions of resonance and dissonance, presence and absence to explore how we relate to the people and

places around us. From the pleasures and perils of being alone to the "atmospheric intensity" of a crowd, the ethnographic snapshots herein point to urban atmospheres as a "deeply social phenomenon" (p. 48).

Given how the allure of "designing atmospheres" has shaped urban (re)development in recent years, Bille and Schwabe also explore how atmospheric design and non-human factors impact the way the city feels. Chapter 3 considers how material changes to the urban environment seem to invite particular affective responses and ways of being in the city. Everything from the qualities of lighting to the slant of a bench have atmospheric power here — urban design is meant to make some people feel comfortable in a given space, while rendering it distinctly *un*comfortable for those designated "others".

Chapters 4 and 5 take on questions of movement and care, respectively. The former demonstrates how we commonly make sense of urban atmospheres in motion. For example, Bille and Schwabe consider how Copenhagen's cycling culture shapes both the shared atmosphere of the city and individuals' affective relations to and within it. Chapter 5 explores feelings of safety and protection in the city and attempts to delineate what a "city of care" might feel like. The authors conclude the book by looking towards the future of the atmospheric city as both a phenomenon and area for further inquiry.

By grounding its study of atmospheres in urban ethnographic research, *The Atmospheric City* makes a valuable contribution to the growing study

of how atmospheres are imagined, designed, and — perhaps most crucially — experienced (see further Böhme 2014, Bille 2015, Bille and Simonsen 2021, Degen and Rose 2022, Edensor and Sumartojo 2015, Lynch 2023, Sumartojo and Pink 2019, among others). While the authors focus their study on the Nordic context — which has some particularity — the book offers broader insights into the embodied experience of cities as lived/living environments and underscores the value of an ethnographic approach for understanding how the urban *feels*. This book will be of particular interest to scholars looking to (literally) "make sense" of the city and the assorted atmospheres that bring it to life — however ephemeral or difficult to capture they may be.

References
Bille, M. 2015. Hazy worlds: Atmospheric ontologies in Denmark. *Anthropological Theory*, 15 (3): 257-274.

Bille, M. and Simonsen, K. 2021. Atmospheric practices: On affecting and being affected. *Space and Culture*, 24 (2): 295-309.

Böhme, G. 2014. Urban atmospheres: Charting new directions for architecture and urban planning. In C. Borch, G. Böhme, O. Eliasson and J. Pallasmaa (eds), *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*. Boston: Birkhäuser.

Böhme, G. and Thibaud, J. P. 2016. *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*. London: Routledge.

Degen, M. M. and Rose, G. 2022. *The New Urban Aesthetic: Digital Experiences of Urban Change*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Edensor, T. and Sumartojo, S. 2015. Designing atmospheres: Introduction to special issue. *Visual Communication*, 14 (3): 251-265.

Lynch, E. E. 2024. Constellations of (Sensual) Relations: Space, atmosphere, and sensory design. In P. Vannini (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Sensory Ethnography*. London: Routledge.

Sumartojo, S. and Pink, S. 2019. *Atmospheres and the Experiential World: Theory and Methods*. London: Routledge.

Erin E. Lynch
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada
erinelizabeth.lynch@concordia.ca

Jones, P. 2023. *Corrupt Britain: Public Ethics in Practice and Thought since the Magna Carta*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Peter Jones, a historian affiliated most recently with the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester, has earned a reputation as an authority on modern urban governance and its discontents, especially through his book, *From Virtue to Venality: Corruption and the City* (2016). He has been a helpful presence in a transnational network of scholars of these issues. Reflective of that background, the author begins this accessible, broad-ranging book with a point that researchers treat as axiomatic: corruption is a muddled topic. A metaphor derived from the ancient notion of the body politic, *corruption* can signify anything from specific actions by identifiable people to a whole condition of society. The current textbook definition — use of a "public role for private advantage" — sounds "simple enough". But this precision hinges on a "rational legal" understanding of governance, in Max Weber's sense. The ideal of disinterested public service remains an aspiration even in those countries that approximate the model most closely (pp. 1-4).

Further, as Jones notes, systems of governance generate a "tension between legality and legitimacy" (p. 1). To sustain fractious coalitions and push measures through, politicians trade favours and distribute benefits. The extent to which segments of the public perceive such practices as corrupt depends on what else is happening. Charges of corruption fly about when disaffection is widespread and conflict rancorous for other reasons. Waves of accusation might or might not track with underlying levels of bribery, embezzlement, or influence peddling. In any period, a range of standards co-exist that only approximate the legal code. Legality is an imperfect measure, anyway, since political systems can seem corrupt to the disaffected precisely because law and custom entrench status and sanction exploitation.

Like most of Europe, medieval and early modern England tolerated and even encouraged classic venality, in which offices were "considered to be private property to be bought, sold, inherited and deployed to acquire wealth" (p. 51). As Henry VIII's distributions of church lands spectacularly illustrated, little constrained the monarchy's manipulation of property and patronage to elevate protégés and reward allies. People counted on needing to bestow gifts on officials or judges. Even so, groups beyond the barons seized on the principle, enunciated in the Magna Carta of 1215, that the king had to obey his own law. Lawlessness became a lever for vilifying and even — in the case of Edward II — deposing kings. From Hugh Despenser in

1326 to Thomas Cromwell in 1540, enemies used corruption to bring despised royal associates to the gallows. The notion that the monarchy had degraded into a "canker of corruption" became central to the Stuart legitimacy crisis (p. 59). Jones cites the 1621 impeachment of Sir Francis Bacon, the Attorney General, for accepting gifts from litigants as a sign of tentative change. By the 1620s, parliaments displayed increased concern with legislating against corruption, perhaps a reflection of a post-Reformation moralism that continued into the Commonwealth.

The so-called Old Corruption after the Revolution of 1688 would shape British understanding in enduring ways. Guided by leaders such as Robert Walpole and the Duke of Newcastle, the Whig oligarchy used a "byzantine" system of "rewards, patronage, inducements and coercion" to consolidate its regime (pp. 72, 82). Given Britain's success in establishing the fiscal, military and administrative apparatus needed to operate as a far-flung empire, supporters plausibly argued that sinecures, rotten boroughs and bought electorates were an acceptable price for stability and prosperity. Huge segments of the British and Irish population experienced the system as unaccountable, burdensome and frequently brutal.

And then there was the imperial mismanagement aired during the American Revolution and detailed during the impeachments of the East India Company's Robert Clive and Warren Hastings. Eighteenth-century critics such as Edmund Burke along with nineteenth-century reformers such as Sir Charles Trevelyan imagined that "a more efficient, professional and modernised state bureaucracy" could replace nabob values with civilizing government in India and Britain itself (p. 88). Thomas Carlyle, a proponent of civil service reform, nevertheless shrewdly worried that merit would rationalize privilege and connections anew, with meretricious products of "our Oxfords and Etons" still "advantaged" (p. 112). Jones remarks that the Whig interpretation of British history as gradualist progress was not entirely fiction. There were "significant steps to root out corrupt practices" and "open up the political state" starting with the Reform Act of 1832 (p. 117). The price was a conceit that the country's governing classes were above behaviour that they were clearly not above, neither within Britain nor across the empire.

As the book proceeds, Jones devotes increased attention to urban manifestations of corruption. Drawing on his previous research, he explicates the systematic racketeering that arose in Belfast, Glasgow and Liverpool. All three were port cities in flux, characterized by "migratory flows; and of course sectarian conflict" (p. 133). Belfast's Protestant establishment worried about corruption mainly when benefits went to Catholics. Once cited by US reformers as a model of "civic probity", Glasgow after 1918 "came to be regarded as a British Chicago". The Scottish city's critics now drew on the American vocabulary of bosses, machines and graft to denounce the "inventory of failed governance" that they documented (pp. 134, 138). As in the United States, comprehensive critiques of machine methods tended to come from left-

leaning analysts, who deplored the "graft and boodle" of Labour-controlled Glasgow and the "Tammany practices" of Conservative Liverpool as obstacles to creative working-class politics (pp. 142, 159).

This was drafted as Britons voted in the 2024 general election, in which dismay over political self-dealing and conceit formed a backdrop. Jones's final chapter supports Transparency International's rueful conclusion that UK political elites persist "rather complacently" in regarding corruption as "something that happens elsewhere" (p. 213). The Whiggish story of Britain outgrowing the unsavoury aspects of its past is history that lulls and deceives. This learned, sensible book calls attention to that self-deception and its cost.

Alan Lessoff
Illinois State University
ahlesso@ilstu.edu

Williams, R. A. 2021, *Garrison State Hegemony in U.S. Politics. A Critical Ethnohistory of Corruption and Power in the World's Oldest 'Democracy'*, New York: Peter Lang

One would have thought that there are a few domains of anthropological inquiry still remaining underexplored. Williams' work on U.S. Politics is one of them. In the four parts of the book, he sets out to give us an account of how U.S. politics works through the extensive analysis of the Libertarian Party structure and function along with its place in the American political system. Coming originally from the state of Ohio, Williams' aim is to explore the social construction of Libertarian Party politics

and describe the social animation of cultural logics by recent party migrants in that State during the Libertarian Party transformation. The analysis is situated within America's duopoly polarization, giving an account of the role the Libertarian Party plays in it both as "alternative" and as reproducer of traditional and historically informed American political values.

Williams uses the anthropological notion of culture in order to analyse — from an "insider" point of view — the social processes by which diverse individuals and segments unite to animate Libertarian electioneering. The party emerged after World War II, importing Tory conservatism via the coalition of three Old Right segments, thus producing a "libertarian wing". By 1972, three dominant and distinct segments of the right-libertarian movement — classical market liberals advocating small government, supporters of limited-government and a minimal state, and individuals advocating for noncoercive, voluntary government — coalesced, giving birth to the Libertarian Party.

Williams notes that, apart from sporadic and uneven surveys, both anthropology and sociology have largely overlooked the Libertarian Party, despite it being, by 1976, the United States' largest third party. This study offers one of the most thorough and systematic insights into a political phenomenon that draws from traditional cultural logics and practices in order to formulate a seemingly paradoxical condition: although the Party supports, in a non-homogenous way, the idea that the ever-growing government at all levels of administration is a threat to the economic

and social freedoms of all Americans, in the final analysis it reproduces the U.S.' rightward authoritarian trajectory by becoming more in line with mainstream opinion.

Williams has successfully studied the way in which this "third" party has been growing in America and in Ohio, and its persistent and unsuccessful efforts to unfix one of the two major parties, especially the Republican one. He manages a difficult process of participant observation because, as a member of the Party, he had to cope with the difficult problem of "objectivity". By analysing the party's structure, administration, political rallying, electioneering campaigns, and the way members-to-be are volunteering to serve, Williams gives the reader a well-rounded account of the Party's internal and external image, and of the way ideology and values are constructed through daily political and cultural interaction. Thus, in my view, he addresses the question of how different dimensions of membership might be affected by new or renewed modes of local representations of governance and politics. In addition, based on local ethnohistorical data, he investigates the shifting relation between the State and its citizens. Finally, Williams examines the impact of the social construction of ideas about political participation on specific social groups and how they are turned into hegemonic discourses, thus becoming the cornerstones of an encompassing and monitored power structure. In so doing, he finds analytical recourse to anthropology, sociology and history in order to show that the political phenomenon of the Libertarian Party is not

just a lightning bolt but the fruit of a deeply rooted conservative political and cultural context as a way of life.

In Part I, Williams clarifies his conceptual approach by exploring meanings in the social constructions of the Libertarian Party. In Part II, he presents the ethnography of this case study. Part III addresses the wider questions generated by hegemony and, finally, in Part IV he reviews the ethnographic and historical data. In these pages, the reader finds the necessary preconditions for an understanding of U.S. politics imbued with rigour of argument, rigour of logic and rigour of theory — all mediated by the rigour of empirical research. This work essentially bridges empirical data and their translation into theory. It is exactly in this connection that the researcher manages to match his frame of reference with the empirical soundness of the data, effectively grounding his analysis and explanation of the reality under study. Here, the rigour of the research brings into play two dimensions: first, the relation between the argument and the data produced by the fieldwork; second, the relationship between the fieldwork data and the frame of reference.

Manos Spyridakis
National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Greece
maspyridakis@gmail.com

FILM AND VIDEO REVIEWS

Alive & Kicking: Soccer Grannies of South Africa. **Lara-Ann de Wet.** 19 min, 2015.

This documentary narrates the inspirational story of Rebecca Ntsanwisi, affectionately known as "Mama Beka", who, in the midst of her personal battle with cancer, discovered football not only as a means to improve her physical health but also as a space for motivating other women of her age group to join her in forming a football team, the Vakhegula Vakhegula F.C. In the Tsonga language, *Vakhegula* means "grandmother".

Set against the backdrop of Nkowa Nkowa, a municipality in South Africa's Limpopo province, Ntsanwisi initially embraced walking as a form of exercise to enhance her physical condition. During one of these walks, she encountered other elderly women and invited them to join her. In a serendipitous moment, they came across a group of boys playing football in the street, and by chance, the ball rolled towards them. As they kicked the ball back, they realised that not only did it help strengthen their knees, but it also brought them joy. Over time, these encounters evolved into regular football sessions, where the women not only engaged in physical activity but also found a space for enjoyment, socialisation, and mutual support, ultimately feeling more energised and empowered in their daily lives.

The anthropologist José Magnani, when reflecting on urban anthropology's role in cultural studies, references Roberto DaMatta's dichotomy of *the street versus the home*. According to DaMatta, the home represents the domain of kinship, while the street symbolises a space of encounter with strangers and acquaintances, a field of interaction where people meet, create new bonds, and negotiate differences, feeding networks of sociability in a landscape often viewed solely through the lens of poverty or exclusion. Cities are often hostile environments for the movement of people, particularly for the elderly. Mama Beka recognised that many older women in her community felt isolated, with few opportunities for socialisation and physical activity, as they tended to stay at home, occupied with domestic chores. Football emerged as a powerful tool for bringing these women together, offering them a space not only for sport but also for social interaction and boosting their self-esteem.

In addition to the themes of mobility and sociability, it is important to highlight that these are elderly women playing football. Football fields have long been considered male-dominated spaces, and the recognition of women's football in South Africa, as well as globally, has taken years to achieve. During apartheid, women, particularly black women, faced various forms of exclusion and segregation, not only socially and politically but also in sports. Women's participation in sports was limited, and football, in particular, was viewed as a male activity. Even after the end of apartheid, women's football took considerable time to gain visibility, facing cultural barriers and a lack of institutional support. Even today, in some regions, prejudice against women who play football persists, restricting their participation in sporting events and limiting access to sponsorships. In this context, the "soccer grannies" become powerful symbols, not only for challenging these gender and age

norms but also for demonstrating the positive impact that sport can have on women and the communities around them.

By playing football, the grandmothers not only challenge traditional gender and age-related norms but also highlight the transformative potential of sport as a tool for empowerment and community building, especially in contexts where social exclusion and limited opportunities persist.

Adriana Eidt
Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil.
drikamixer@gmail.com

Waiting for the Carnival, **Marcelo Gomes**. 86 min, 2019.

The history of exploitation in textile production in the rural villages of the Northeast is centuries old. In the early 20th century, the state of Pernambuco became a key site for large factories, second only to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Despite facing long periods of drought, hunger, and shifts in labour throughout the century, the Pernambuco Fashion Hub, also known as the Pernambuco Agreste Clothing Hub, emerged. This hub formed a circuit of large street markets held on alternating days in the cities of Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, Caruaru, and Toritama.

In this documentary, director Marcelo Gomes takes the audience on a journey to a city where, on the one hand, he searches for the rural landscape he had known as a child, 40 years prior. On the other hand, his exploration is shaped by the cyclical movement of jeans production, as the garments are transported through the streets and alleys, passing by people, homes (garages, porches, and living rooms), and sewing machines. Disturbed by the monotonous movements and relentless noise of the labour, Gomes engages in interviews with young workers, mothers, and elderly individuals who have long devoted themselves to the production of jeans, as well as with small-scale entrepreneurs, proud of their craftsmanship and creativity.

Among the many characters, three from the rural area of Toritama stand out. Léo, a jack-of-all-trades, works in various roles, from jeans manufacturing to construction and agriculture. Then, there is Seu João, who can predict when it will rain and tends to his herd of goats. Lastly, Dona Adalgisa, a farmer whose chicken farm was replaced by sewing machines. These are the only characters explicitly named by the narrator, interviewer, and director, Marcelo Gomes.

Throughout the film, the names of the interviewees are notably absent — even in subtitles — underscoring the lack of recognition and condemnation of the region's historical textile production conditions. Additionally, several images highlight the historical invisibility of female labour in domestic settings, as seen in the film's portrayal of the behind-the-scenes struggles of Toritama's textile workers, who are responsible for twenty percent of the country's jeans production.

The integration of fabric scraps from factories in Santa Cruz do Capibaribe and Caruaru into domestic production, to create "Sulanca" (low-quality clothing) and the "blue gold" from Toritama, was the solution the people of the Northeast found to survive the long periods of drought. In recent decades, this production has become the economic backbone of these towns, now

considered "company towns," reducing the interest in migrating to cities like São Paulo, which offer better infrastructure and working conditions, as noted by two interviewees in the film.

However, the self-exploitation experienced by textile workers in the jeans and "sulanca" industries is perceived as something positive. This not only reinforces the image of female workers in the Northeast as symbols of strength and resilience — survivors of droughts who journeyed across the country in search of better living conditions — but can also be viewed as part of a family's economic strategy to buy a house or other assets, as ethnographic studies on the subject suggest. At the same time, for some workers, it represents a form of subversion, where — deeply embedded in the textile industry's profit-driven, exploitative, and neoliberal system — they sell everything just to celebrate Carnival.

Aline Gama de Almeida
State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
alinegama.uerj@gmail.com

City of God. **Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund**. 130 min, 2002.

The film *City of God* presents the stories of characters living in the favela of Cidade de Deus, located in the West Zone of Rio de Janeiro. Narrated by the character Buscapé, the film chronicles the emergence and evolution of drug trafficking in the area from its early days. Released in 2002, *City of God* marked a major milestone in Brazilian cinema, with subtitles in numerous languages, paving the way for other films about urban violence, such as *Falcão - Meninos do Tráfico* and *Tropa de Elite*.

The film's success was so profound that it continues to inspire subsequent adaptations, including the 2024 HBO Max series *City of God: The Fight Doesn't Stop*. However, just over a decade after the film's release, a documentary entitled *City of God -10 Years Later* was produced, interviewing the actors who brought the original characters to life. Through their words, gestures, and silences, the documentary reveals that these individuals were learning much more than just how to portray physical violence on screen.

Despite its compelling narrative and high production value, the entirety of *City of God* is steeped in various forms of violence — from the actions of the "Trio Ternura" to the children of Caixa Baixa. This raises the question: how much violence can be embedded in a single film? How much of it is concealed or left unnoticed? The film's international acclaim was built on the performances of black, marginalised youths from Rio de Janeiro's favelas, many of whom had no prior professional experience or acting careers. Yet behind the scenes, there were questionable negotiations, with producers failing to provide either professional development or emotional support after the filming, release, and global screenings. On screen, however, the slang and dialogue of the film seeped into the vernacular of Rio's teenagers, particularly with Zé Pequeno's iconic line "my name is Zé Pequeno", and Bené, the so-called "good bandit", whose character inspired the *Baile do Bené* parties.

While the film constructs a binary narrative of good versus evil — juxtaposing

crime and honest labour — it also contrasts Christian religiosity with African-derived spiritual traditions, which are subtly criticised. In one night scene, the Afro-Brazilian entity Exu Sete Caldeiras baptises and guides Zé Pequeno, positioning him as the "evil bandit". In contrast, we are presented with a Weberian depiction of redemption associated with Christianity. In a scene where Alicate escapes the police, a drop of sweat on his face transforms into a fish, symbolising divine power in Christian scripture. After this transformative moment, Alicate walks unnoticed by the police, abandoning crime in favour of honest work.

What we witness is a film largely produced by white filmmakers, portraying a social reality that does not align with their lived experiences — be they religious or socio-economic. This is the transmission of the white gaze. Once again, prejudice and the marginalisation of black people are reinforced. The association of Exu with crime reflects narratives rooted in colonialism.

City of God transcends fiction. It embodies the anthropological theory of cinema, which views films as modern myths that gain new meanings with each viewing, shaping and reflecting the realities of specific social groups. As a myth retold through different mediums — be it in sequels, books, or news stories — it continues to produce and reproduce societal narratives. On the one hand, we see the enduring impact of the film's mythos in the slang and the *Baile do Bené* parties, which preserve elements of funk music and celebrate black culture in Rio. On the other hand, religious intolerance, which escaped critique in the film, persists and manifests

itself continuously in the urban landscape of Brazil.

Bruna Alves and Aline Gama
State University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
brunaalvesuerj@gmail.com
alinegama.uerj@gmail.com

The Football Aficionado. **Sharmin Mojtahedzadeh** and **Paliz Khoshdel.** 69 minutes, 2022.

"I am a tired warrior, after a disparate battle", Zahra Khoshnawaz said as her final line in the film "The Football Aficionado" (2022). Directed and written by Sharmin Mojtahedzadeh and Paliz Khoshdel, the film explores how football serves as a platform for activism, particularly concerning women's rights and the equitable access to sporting events for both men and women.

Central to the narrative is Zahra Khoshnawaz, an activist and leader of the Iranian movement advocating for women's access to football stadiums. Throughout the film, she provides the audience with an intimate glimpse into her courageous struggle. Khoshnawaz employs a dual strategy to navigate the restrictive environment surrounding women's access to football matches. Her initial and most successful approach involves disguising herself as a man, utilizing full-body coverings and fake moustaches and beards. This strategy often garnered her significant support from male spectators during matches. Conversely, her second tactic entailed positioning herself at the stadium gates, where she confronted security personnel and demanded entry for herself and other women. This latter approach proved less effective, while the former

ignited a substantial activist movement, inspiring numerous women to emulate Khoshnawaz's example. However, this activism came at a personal cost, resulting in her imprisonment for two months.

Despite the growing participation of women in the movement, they continued to confront the challenges posed by Iranian Islamic law, which persisted in prohibiting female attendance at football stadiums. In response to this ongoing injustice, FIFA intervened, threatening to exclude Iran from its list of host nations for international football matches. This action prompted a notable shift, as Iranian men began to refuse entry into stadiums if women were barred from attending alongside them. The aforementioned elements render this film a remarkable and essential viewing experience. It offers a compelling perspective on gender equality, illustrating how men can play a pivotal role in empowering women and advocating for their rights. Despite addressing the challenges posed by Western media propaganda, the filmmakers effectively portray a nuanced reality of Iran and its global standing.

While many traditional filmmakers may perpetuate the narrative that "the West serves as a flawless model of morality and equality for all", Mojtahedzadeh and Khoshdel present a unique and refreshing lens — both literally and metaphorically — through which to examine a country like Iran, characterised by its distinct history, culture, and ongoing struggles that are not to be compared to those of other nations.

This film serves as an invaluable resource for both academic and practical courses focused on gender issues, human rights in post-conflict contexts, and urban studies. It encourages audiences, both academic and non-academic, to adopt a broader perspective. The film exemplifies the complexities of the "grey" zone, compelling viewers to move beyond extreme dichotomies and to engage with the human aspects of the narrative. The audience is left with a profound sense of empathy for Zahra and the other women who bravely challenge both the law and the status quo, while simultaneously understanding the exhaustion she experiences by the film's conclusion.

Malika Ouacha,
Erasmus University, The Netherlands
malikaouacha@hotmail.com

palgrave macmillan   **https://link.springer.com/series/14573**

Series Editors

I. Pardo, Ph.D. (i.pardo@kent.ac.uk**)** is Honorary Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Kent, U.K. and serves as President of the International Urban Symposium (IUS). Prof. Pardo, a well-known specialist in Urban Anthropology, is the author of several books and peer-reviewed essays.

G.B. Prato (g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk) is Honorary Professor at the University of Kent, U.K. Widely published in anthropology, she serves as Secretary and Treasurer of the IUS.

Forthcoming:

I. Pardo & G.B. Prato, Eds. 2025. *Forms of Inequality and the Legitimacy of Governance*, 2 volumes

Previously Published:

P. Jones. 2023. *Corrupt Britain: Public Ethics in Practice and Thought Since the Magna Carta.*

I. Pardo & G. B. Prato. Eds. 2023. *The Legitimacy of Healthcare and Public Health: Anthropological Perspectives.*

M. Mollica, & A. Hakobyan. 2021. *Syrian Armenians and the Turkish Factor.*

P. Kuppinger, Ed. 2021. *Emergent Spaces: Change and Innovation in Small Urban Spaces.*

I. Pardo & G.B. Prato, Eds. 2021. *Urban Inequalities: Ethnographically Informed Reflections.*

M. Bell & A, Armstrong. 2021. *A Social History of Sheffield Boxing.* 2 volumes.

Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology

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

J. Krase & J. DeSena, Eds. 2020. *Gentrification around the World*, 2 volumes.

I. Pardo &G. B. Prato, Eds. 2019. *Legitimacy: Ethnographic and Theoretical Insights.*

M. Istasse, 2019. *Living in a World Heritage Site: Ethnography of Houses and Daily Life in the Fez Medina.*

N. Caldararo, 2019. *An Ethnography of the Goodman Building: The Longest Rent Strike.*

C. Védrine, 2019. *The Spirit of Capitalism According to the Michelin Company: Anthropology of an Industrial Myth.*
J. Rosbrook-Thompson & G. Armstrong, 2018. *Mixed-Occupancy Housing in London: A Living Tapestry.*

M. Spyridakis, Ed. 2018. *Market versus Society: Anthropological Insights.*

I. R. Örs, 2018
Diaspora of the City: Stories of Cosmopolitanism from Istanbul and Athens.

J. Krase & Z. Uherek. Eds. 2017
Diversity and Local Contexts: Urban Space, Borders, and Migration.

T. Kuldova & M. Varghese, Eds. 2017
Urban Utopias: Excess and Expulsion in Neoliberal South Asia.

A. Vailati & C. Rial, Eds. 2016
Migration of Rich Immigrants: Gender, Ethnicity and Class

I. Lindsay, 2014
Living with London's Olympics: An Ethnography.
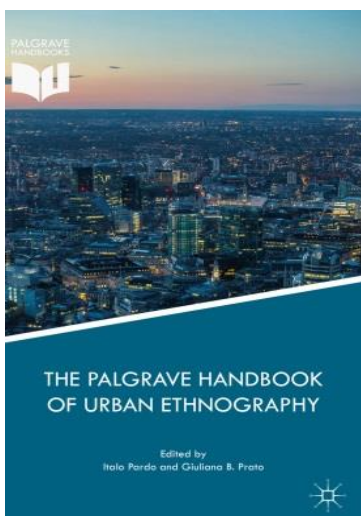
Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato (Eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Urban Ethnography*
1st ed.: November 2018, pp. XIX, 575, 26 illus
ISBN: 978-3-319-64288-8. DOI: 10,007 / 978-3-319-64289-5.
https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-64289-5

- Presents a range of topics, such as work, employment, and informality; everyday life and community relations; marginalization, gender, family, kinship, religion and ethnicity; and political strategies and social movements in historical and transnational perspectives
- Encourages reflection on the significance of the anthropological paradigm in urban research and its centrality to mainstream academic debates
- Points to new topical debates and charts new theoretical directions

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

Submission information at the series homepage (http://www.springer.com/series/14573)
Order online at springer.com or for the Americas call (toll free) 1-800-SPRINGER or email us at: customerservice@springer.com
For outside the Americas call +49 (0) 6221-345-4301 or email us at: customerservice@springer.com