# Urban Studies and Periphery

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Over the past twenty years diverse fields related to cultural anthropology, such as urban studies and studies on urban marginality, have often dialogued, in terms of production, with ethnographic research in what that might be referred to as "Street ethnography". Although these ethnographies cannot compete, even from the mere numerical point of view, with those produced in other countries, all of them have been published in recent years, with new elements to which, I believe, has not been yet given much thought. At the heart of this essay lies a question that most of these authors, researchers in different disciplines, sought to answer: how did our suburbs transformed in the light of the end of a production mode - the "world factory" - and the arrival of large migration flows? The aim of this paper is to present, among these monographs, the most interesting.

## Urban Studies and Periphery

Anthropologist Ferdinando Fava, who has conducted an extensive ethnographic research on the Zen neighborhood in Palermo (Fava, 2008b), wrote an interesting essay titled "Tra iperghetti e banlieues, la nuova marginalità urbana" ("Hyper-ghettos and banlieues, new urban marginality").

«Chicago's ghettoes, Paris' banlieues, Barcelona's Poligono, Amsterdam's Probleemstandwij, Moscow's Hrushebi, Los Angeles' hood. All Western cities have their own words to describe their marginal, cursed neighborhoods.» (Fava, 2008a).

At the heart of this essay lies a question that most of these authors, researchers in different disciplines, sought to answer: how did our suburbs transformed in the light of the end of a production mode - the "world factory" - and the arrival of large migration flows? The aim of this paper is to present, among these monographs, the most interesting.

In the last twenty years diverse fields of cultural anthropology, such as those relating to urban studies and urban marginality, have often connected with each other in what we might call "street ethnographies" (Wacquant , 2002). In our country, when it comes to urban marginality, can mention only a few monographs conducted through ethnographic practice (Bonadonna, 2001; Barnao, 2004; Tosi Cambini, 2005; Scandurra, 2005). When it comes to urban ethnography, the scenario changes: many anthropologists have defined boundaries, methodology, have reconstructed the history of this field of study (Sobrero, 1992; Signorelli, 1996; Callari Galli, 2007; Barberi, 2010; Cancellieri and Scandurra 2012), but there are few monographs that actually practice urban ethnography: among the last, for example, the work of Asher Colombo in Milan (Colombo, 1998), that of Giovanni Semi in Turin (Semi, 2004), those of Luca Queirolo Palmas and Alessandro Dal Lago and Emilio Quadrelli in Genoa (Dal Lago and Quadrelli, 2003; Queirolo Palmas, 2006), the work of Adriano Cancellieri in Porto Recanati (Cancellieri, 2009, 2012), by Francesco Federico Scarpelli and Francesco Pompeo in Rome (Pompeo, 2011, 2012; Scarpelli, 2012) and Maurizio Bressan and Sabrina Tosi Cambini in Florence (Bressan and Tosi Cambini, 2011). Interestingly these ethnographies, although they cannot compete in terms of numbers with those produced in other countries (Bourgois, 2003, 2011; Wacquant, 2002), have all been produced in recent years, with new elements of I believe we have not yet given much thought to. Although these ethnographies cannot compete, even from the mere numerical point of view, with those produced in other countries, all of them have been published in recent years, with new elements to which, I believe, has not been yet given much thought.

Between February 2004 and February 2010, I conducted three studies in a first suburb north of Bologna, Bolognina, characterized by the major presence of immigrants in the city – according to statistics the number of citizens of foreign origin in some areas of this urban neighborhood has reached almost 25% of the residents. Thanks to an ethnographic research I worked onto between February 2004 and February 2006, a study about the practices, imaginations, representations by a group of homeless residents in a communal dormitory located behind the Central Station, I was able to see how Bolognina has been for many years radically redesigned from a urban point of view. The dormitory was demolished in December 2005 to allow high-speed rail, a new central station, the process of administrative decentralization, which occurred in late 2008, more generally; this was a collateral result of an extensive process of urban regeneration in an area sandwiched between the Fair and the station and is therefore of great commercial interest (Scandurra, 2005). Later, between February 2006 and February 2007, together with other colleagues, I made a research on a metalworking factory closed in the late eighties (Piano b, 2008). We had the opportunity to see the end of a process started at the end of the seventies: the dissolution of an entire mode of production related to metalworking factories whose presence had marked the identity of the area, especially in the perception of those who live outside of it, since it has always been considered a working-class neighborhood. Factory clo-

sures took place at the end of the eighties, when massive migration flows contributed as well to exacerbate the feeling of disorientation on the part of many residents. Along with the end of this production model we have studied also the end of certain places and social spaces within the territory (Piano b, 2008).

Finally, a place emerged as significant from my fieldwork was a boxing gym in the Bolognina, where I conducted along with fellow Fulvia Antonelli, between February 2007 and February 2010, a study on a group of amateur boxers. The most of them are of foreign people, mostly Moroccans. Studying their practices of everyday life we were able to investigate problems, needs, hopes of a "second generation" of immigrants: almost all male youngsters arrived in Italy as children, and who attended school here (Antonelli & Scandurra, 2010).

The Bolognina is not a ghetto or a suburb (Fava, 2008a). This territory was created with the decentralization of factories from the historic center to the suburbs. Here, however, I had the opportunity to read processes similar to those found in other areas of our country mentioned above, namely advanced marginalization produced by the transformation of the industrial sector. With the closure of the factories the local labor market today is increasingly isolating many young immigrants relegating them to the margins of the service economy; their stories highlight the existence of niches of unskilled service sector where these guys are working but are treated as "servants", this is the word that many of them use. In the territory, I also had the opportunity to observe how vocational schools attended among others by foreign teenagers are turning into proper school ghettoes (Antonelli and Scandurra, 2010).

Three years ago, in order to answer the questions confronted in the present essay, along with colleagues planners Carlo Cellamare and Giovanni Attili and social scientists Andrea Brighenti, Paolo Barberi, Adriano Cancellieri, Ferdinando Fava and Caterina Satta we created "Tracce urbane". One of the main objectives of this group of scholars is precisely to identify, analyze and understand what is the specificity of these urban processes. We formed this group of interdisciplinary scholars dealing with city because we firmly believe that ethnographic practice is able to integrate disciplines; even more than that, just starting from the specific urban area, it is possible to build a field of trans-disciplinary studies.

In the book "Tracce Urbane. Alla ricerca della città" (Cancellieri and Scandurra 2012) we collected writings by researchers who most interestingly tried to answer the problem underlying the present essay: anthropologists Ferdinando Fava and Paolo Barberi, historian Alice Sotgia and sociologist Alfredo Alietti.

«Does a term such as "periphery" still make sense[...]? How to "make sense" of a word that still survives in our everyday language but began to lose its meaning in the community of interpreters of urban space some years ago?» (Fava, 2012).

In his latest essay collected in "Urban Traces" (Cancellieri and Scandurra 2012), Fava moves from the historic outskirts of Palermo named Zen – subject of his monograph (Fava, 2008b) – and compares it to the "humanitarian spaces" such as refugees encampment, self-settled camps and other marginal spaces of contemporary society that he reads through Michel Agier (2002, 2012): "How does it happen that built space and social space combine to produce a place of urban exclusion?" (Fava, 2012).

To answer this question, Fava draws attention on the importance of comparing social enclave with so-called humanitarian space, and poses the following question: "What is the point of comparing urban areas, besides marginal areas? Is it legitimate? And if so in which way, and under what conditions?" (Fava, 2012).

In an earlier essay Fava had compared the Zen with the iperghetto and the declining banlieue: With these settings the Zen shares only its "stigma" (Fava, 2008a). This comparison led him to study the history of the urban economy, labour market and housing, welfare and their transformations in the city of Palermo.

In his new and ambitious comparative project Fava focuses on "political logic" (Fava, 2012). The logic with which urban Michel Agier analyses the humanitarian space, shows Fava, it is also useful to read the history of Zen:

«Only at the end of its history the role of political institutions in the interventions programmes, a factor that seems to be absent at the origins, would appear as a determinant issue. We must deepen this role.» (Fava, 2012).

Not surprisingly, in the last pages of the essay, Fava dedicates his anthropological approach to the role of the state in its various forms and orders, in making up the urban fabric. Not only to describe the rules that have governed the management of territory, but rather to understand them, the logics governing their use, their effects and their socio-economic framework.
In her essay collected in "Tracce Urbane" (Cancellieri and Scandurra) Alice Sotgia writes:

«Paris' banlieue is a long-lasting and growing symbol of marginality, violence and social exclusion, a generally negative reference model and a comparative element for every other periphery in the world. »(Sotgia, 2012).

Do our peripheries follow the *banlieue* pattern? Media and researchers started to wonder during the riots of 2005, in an attempt to compare French *cités* to the most problematic Italian suburbs, often linked to the history of public housing in the Seventy.
According to Sotgia, these peripheral and marginal territories and landscapes are the outcome of a double process: they do suffer massive media stigmatization and are place of socio-economic structural violence, but they are also the result of a series of projects that for almost two centuries have been building the city Paris through the distinction of what is other than itself.
Sotgia's essay shows how to understand what has happened in some peripheral areas we need to focus on, and particularly draws our attention to the urban planning made in the last decades. Sotgia, in particular, focuses on how the project "Grand Paris" has been born. According to Sotgia these project:

«should not be understood only as proper action, but rather as a set of discourses made by and around the city that have a "building" capacity that goes beyond their actual physical translation in space.» (Sotgia 2012).

Moving from the very root of the term *banlieue*, which in the thirteenth century indicates an area under the jurisdiction of an external authority, how certain peripheral areas around Paris are the product of the opposition Paris / suburbs, and how the capital city has systematically exported over time its "harmful substances" (from industrial waste treatment) as well as his "poor" (Sotgia, 2012).
Although several recent papers show how this phenomenon is more the natural product of centrifugal expansion rather than the outcome of a deliberate policy, Sotgia reminds us that, from the beginning of the twentieth century on, the *banlieue* is always ambivalently represented: place for trips, but also for smelly factories and miserable houses; communist stronghold and home to impressive urban development of which the towers of the *grands ensembles* are the most visible symbol.

In his essay collected in "Tracce Urbane" (Cancellieri & Scandurra 2012), Paolo Barberi focuses on a suburb of Rome, the *borgata* Tiburtino III. His work is made of images extrapolated from the visual chronicles of newsreels of the Thirties. Barberi analyzes the language of filmic representations moving from historical newsreels, passing by the first films that relate to these lands, such as those by Joseph Ferrara until, coming to the present day, the film by Roberta Torre.
In his essay, Barberi also reminds us of another story. In 1970 the book of Franco Ferrarotti "Roma, da capitale a periferia" (Ferrarotti, 1970) was published, providing for the first time an overview of the phenomenon of the *borgate* supported by a demographic analysis. The result is, according to Barberi, an urban sociology that uses ethnographic practice to describe the point of view of the inhabitants of the Roman suburbs. Franco Ferrarotti's book drove many students of various disciplines to do research in the field:

«These researchers are equipped with the first audio-visual devices that are spreading on the market: the tape recorders and the lighter and lighter cameras 16 mm alongside the super 8.» (Barberi, 2012).

In those years, also stresses Barberi, urban proletariat conquers the space of the city by symbolically occupying it. While, in the past, institutions used to mark the space concealing those social elements who could not or did not want to join a predefined project of modernization, new subjects now take possession of the territory and occupy the centre of stage of the city.

In his contribution to "Tracce Urban" (Cancellieri & Scandurra 2012), Alfredo Alietti argues that in some neighbourhoods and suburbs of our country the signs of a gradual socio-economic deterioration, the increase in precarious work as well as a decline of the social bond which weakens the ability to demand and to integrate. The repeated word that comes out as long as these neighbourhoods are concerned is "lack": «lack of order, respect for the law, of urbanity» (Alietti, 2012); but they are also frequently referred to as places of excess - «too many immigrants, too many criminals» (Alietti , 2012). This results, as Alietti puts it, in «a regime of truth that limits reflection and imposes an inadequate and ineffective logic in public action, and in a drift of security policies» (Alietti, 2012).

According to Alietti the presence of "foreign people" in these urban contexts assumes in public discourse the character of a negative quality that adds to the pre-existing ones and fuel the internalization of the stigma by the inhabitants, as well as the construction of invisible walls that divide the area inside and towards the rest of the city.

Alietti focuses his gaze on some districts of Milan, or rather on the areas where you mostly encounter this stigmatizing logic and security obsession: via Padova, via Imbonati and the historic district of public housing Corvetto. Historically, moving from the beginning of the XIX century, these districts were inhabited by working-class families and by a widespread local production system consisting of large and medium businesses and small craft. During the years of economic boom these urban areas were transformed by internal migration, especially from the Southern Italy. The social fabric featured by strong class identity as well as by equally strong neighbourhood identity encouraged in that historical period an extensive political and associative network related to the Communist Party and the democratic Catholicism. The transition to post-industrial society and the local effects of globalization have changed the social geography of production: the gradual disappearance and relocation of factories and workshops is necessarily accompanied by a process of de-proletarianization and subsequent socio-economic exclusion. These changes have weakened the agencies promoting political and social integration and, therefore, the forms of intersubjective recognition and identification. In recent years, these urban areas have been the destination of new international migration, and are increasingly referred to as "ethnic spaces" (Alietti, 2012).

Maybe reading this literature in a transdisciplinary view could help to answer the question at the heart of this essay, using the tool of comparison in order to analyze how our territories and our suburbs are transforming, in the light of the end of a production model and of the increasing migration flows.

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