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Abstract

Este estudio examina el consumo cultural en un cine independiente de Barcelona, identificando dos grandes grupos de espectadores con distintas motivaciones, perfiles y patrones de consumo. Durante la investigación se recopilaron datos de 1.882 participantes a través de encuestas geolocalizadas, redes de consumidores, seguimiento de redes sociales y grupos focales. El perfil predominante responde a personas mayores de 40 años que asisten regularmente al cine y se informan a través de medios tradicionales y redes sociales. A pesar de las importantes diferencias relacionadas con la edad, ambos grupos valoran la excelencia técnica y las experiencias cinematográficas inmersivas, complementándolas con otras actividades culturales. El estudio revela también perfiles demográficos subrepresentados en otras encuestas de participación cultural y muestra cómo los sectores más jóvenes mantienen un enfoque "omnívoro" hacia el consumo cultural, frente a las tendencias más "unívoras" de los segmentos de mayor edad....

Keywords

cine independiente; consumo cultural; heterogeneidad de audiencias; patrones omnívoros; patrones unívoros

The author

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Introducción

El cine, en su doble vertiente de arte e industria, constituye un fenómeno cultural significativo que influye tanto en las dinámicas sociales como en la conformación de identidades colectivas (Bennett 2000: ii). Sin embargo, las salas cinematográficas han dejado de ser los lugares de preferencia para ver películas y compartir la experiencia del visionado (Batlle-Beltrán y Mateo 2022). En este nuevo contexto, como señala Aveyard (2016), es necesario desarrollar estudios que integren de una manera más articulada el consumo audiovisual, el cine, su entorno y los diferentes soportes a través de los cuales se visiona una película.

En este trabajo presentamos la investigación desarrollada en colaboración con un cine independiente de la ciudad de Barcelona (Cinemes Girona) interesado en conocer los comportamientos de consumo cultural y cinematográfico. Así, nuestra investigación informa sobre los hábitos de consumo cultural y cinematográfico en el entorno metropolitano de Barcelona, con una atención especial a los distritos adyacentes a Cinemes Girona, como son Gràcia y l'Eixample¹, realizando una reflexión teórica sobre los cambios experimentados en el consumo cultural en general y el cinematográfico en particular (Bennett 2000; Gomery 1982). Para ello, partimos de la consideración del cine como práctica social y de sus audiencias como un conjunto de sujetos cuyas elecciones no pueden entenderse sin prestar atención a los contextos locales, sociales y relacionales en los que se desenvuelven (Biltereyst et al. 2011; Ramos y Barbosa 2021).

Los resultados del estudio muestran que los espectadores de Cinemes Girona constituyen dos audiencias completamente diferentes en sus motivaciones, hábitos y características sociodemográficas; sin embargo, coinciden en apoyar lo que consideran un cine "independiente" y las salas como espacios de placer cinéfilo (el cine por el cine, o, por parafrasear el conocido motto: *ars gratia artis*). El cambio generacional de la hasta ahora audiencia dominante de avanzada edad por un público más joven, individualista y "omnívoro" como explicaremos más adelante, hambriento de experimentar y comunicar su experiencia como proyecto personal solamente será posible si entendemos la complejidad existente en la experiencia misma de ir al cine a ver una película.

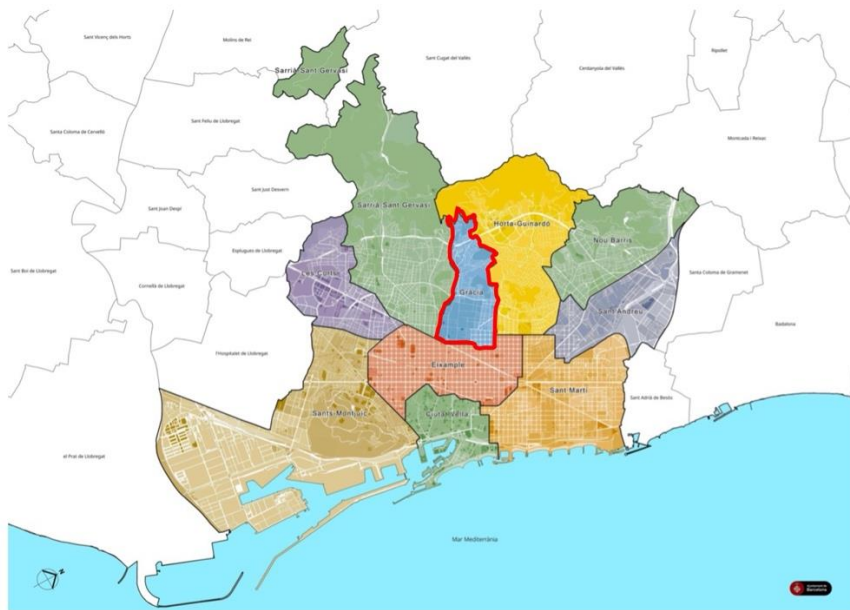
En este trabajo abordamos en la siguiente sección el contexto de estudio para pasar a continuación a revisar la literatura relacionada. En la sección de Metodología describimos la muestra y las diferentes técnicas de investigación empleadas para, a continuación, describir los patrones de consumo de los dos colectivos identificados. Por último, reflexionamos sobre las posibles implicaciones y limitaciones de nuestro estudio.

Contexto de estudio

Cinemes Girona es un complejo de tres salas cinematográficas con un total de 637 butacas, que opera en Barcelona desde hace 25 años e incluye en su programación estable producción europea e internacional, participando en diversos festivales y

¹ Los distritos de l'Eixample y Gracia suman más de 380000 habitantes, un 23% de la población de Barcelona y casi 100000 habitantes más que la segunda localidad más poblada de Cataluña.

muestras de cine, situado junto al popular distrito de Gracia en Barcelona² (Mapa 1), que alberga a unos 122.000 habitantes (el 7.4% de la población de la ciudad en 2023)³, que combina la programación estable de películas europeas e internacionales, con festivales y muestras de cine, además de proyecciones audiovisuales y otros eventos multimedia pensados para atraer a determinados sectores diana de audiencia. En el distrito, se ubica en una zona con una acusada presencia de visitantes temporales; es decir, tiene una considerable capacidad de absorber e integrar las actividades relacionadas con el turismo. Por otra parte, se localiza también en un área con abundantes locales comerciales (Figura 1) donde, además de equipamientos educativos y municipales, destacan los comercios y la restauración (Figura 2).



Mapa 1 Situación del distrito de Gracia (contorno rojo) en el conjunto de distritos de la ciudad de Barcelona (España). Fuente: Ayuntamiento de Barcelona: <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/mapes-imprimibles/es/>. La edición del mapa es nuestra.

² Municipio agregado a Barcelona en 1897, está distribuido internamente en 5 barrios (El Coll, Vallcarca/Penitents, La Salut, Camp d'en Grassot/Gràcia Nova i Vila de Gràcia) que suman 120907 habitantes, distribuidos en 418,6 Ha de superficie, lo que supone una densidad de 603 habitantes/ha (<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/gracia/es/el-distrito-y-sus-barrios/el-distrito-y-sus-barrios>). Es uno de los distritos con mayor actividad comercial (casi un centenar censados, según <https://www.graciacomerc.com/comercios>) y cultural de la ciudad (con más de 500 entidades y asociaciones registradas en la web de la ciudad (<https://www.barcelona.cat>)).

³ Datos extraídos del Ayuntamiento de Barcelona:
https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/estadistica/catala/Estadistiques_per_territori/Documents/districtes/06_Gracia_2023.pdf

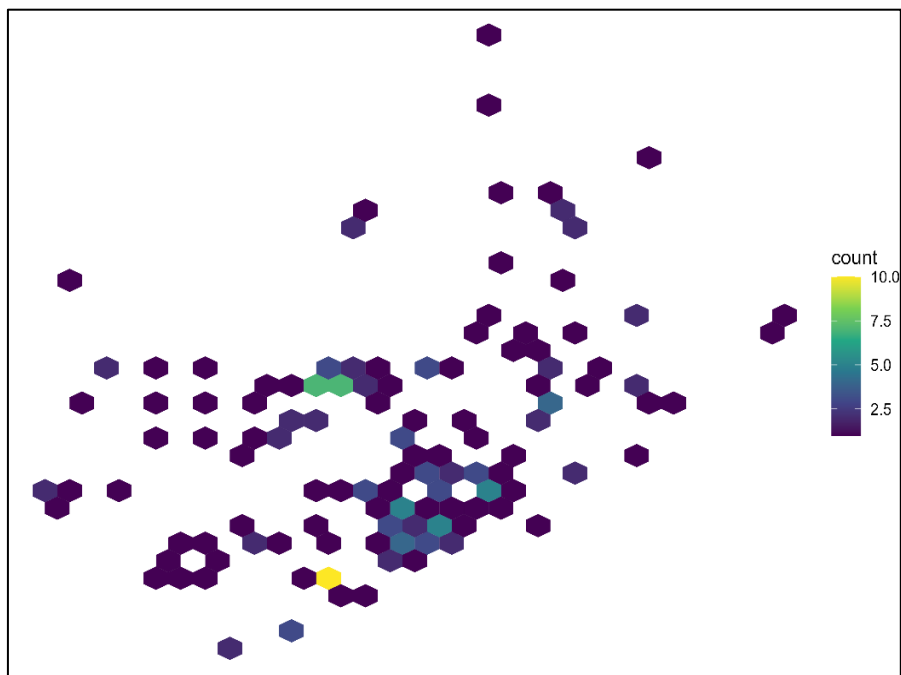


Figura 1. Clúster cultural en torno a los Cinemes Girona. (datos revisados para 2023). Elaboración propia a partir de datos de OpenDataBCN⁴

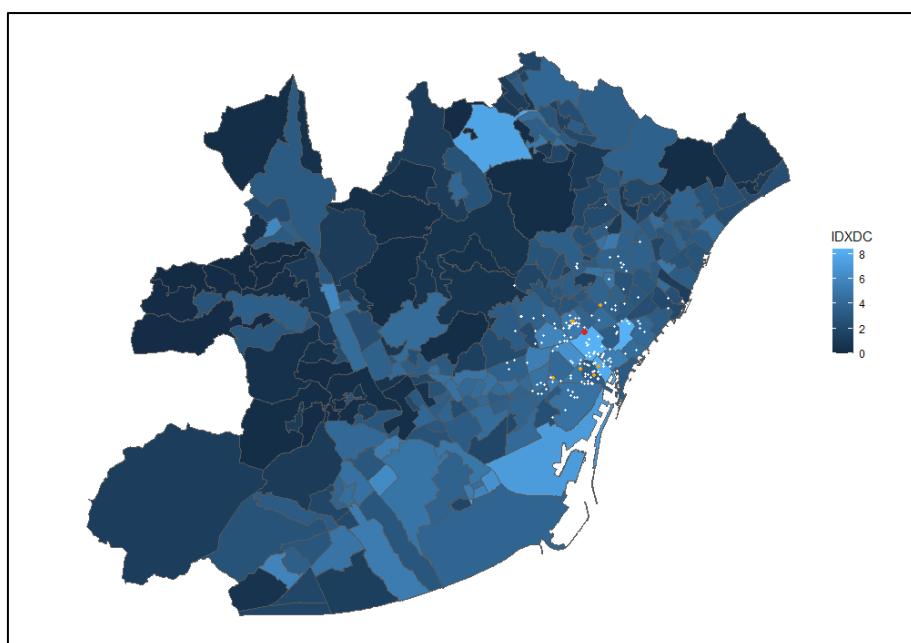


Figura 2 Equipamientos comerciales (ratio de locales/1000 habitantes). Los puntos blancos indican cines, teatros y salas de conciertos en torno a Cinemes Girona (punto rojo). Elaboración propia sobre los datos recabados en la investigación.

Como puede apreciarse, el cine se encuentra en el seno de un clúster cultural relativamente denso, junto con otros cines, teatros y salas de concierto. Si bien esta aglomeración incrementa la competencia entre estas unidades culturales, también

⁴ <https://opendata-ajuntament.barcelona.cat/data/es/dataset/culturailleure-cinemesteatresauditoris>.

promueve la innovación y la búsqueda de estrategias que permitan diferenciarse unas de otras.

Investigaciones precedentes sobre consumo cultural, perfiles de audiencia y salas de exhibición

Los estudios de audiencia de salas cinematográficas tienen una larga tradición académica y una parte de esos estudios ha incidido especialmente en la correlación entre ubicación geográfica, perfil sociodemográfico de la audiencia potencial y características y programación de salas de cine (Gomery 1982; Singer 1995; Bennett 2000; Ramos y Barbosa 2021).

Como señala Francesc Vilallonga (2018), la industria cinematográfica está sometida a alteraciones cíclicas que afectan tanto a la vertiente tecnológica como a su dimensión económica. Diversos estudios académicos coinciden en señalar algunas modificaciones sustanciales en el consumo cultural, específicamente audiovisual; entre ellos, y para el propósito de este estudio, son especialmente relevantes los siguientes apartados.

Espacios de visionado

Los cines, como espacios de exhibición, ya no ostentan en exclusiva la presentación de películas de estreno y de visionado de material audiovisual de calidad. Las diferentes formas de consumo audiovisual y la suma de nuevas opciones como la transmisión en línea (*streaming*) sumadas a una mejor experiencia doméstica, han transformado la dinámica de la proyección cinematográfica. En este contexto, la reconceptualización de las salas de cine cobra relevancia.

Podría, en este sentido, pensarse en estos espacios como ámbitos de fortalecimiento de la experiencia colectiva, por ejemplo: a través de la inmersión sensorial en un entramado de significados compartidos donde cada espectador/a no se limita sólo a consumir un producto cultural, sino que participa de una interpretación conjunta de significados culturales que revitalizan la interacción y el análisis dentro de una cultura compartida (Geertz 1973). Sin embargo, restringir los cines a espacios de tránsito y consumo ocasional, individual y descontextualizado de enclaves simbólicos y culturales más complejos (como podría temerse de la globalización de ciertos estándares de mercantilización de espacios de ocio que no promueven la vinculación cultural colectiva) les reduciría a una consideración muy próxima a lo que Augé (1992) denominó “no-lugares”; esto es: espacios despersonalizados, de mero tránsito, que no suscitan vínculos sociales o sentimientos de pertenencia o arraigo.

Con todo, pese a los esfuerzos que se han llevado (y llevan) a cabo desde los cines para fidelizar audiencias y tratar de atraer nuevos segmentos de público a las salas, el consumo de películas se lleva a cabo hoy en día en formatos y soportes distintos que ofrecen experiencias o ventajas diferentes a los espacios físicos del cine (Batlle-Beltrán y Mateo 2022).

Gomery (1982) subraya la relevancia de los vecindarios para entender la actividad cinematográfica, así como la ubicación de los cines en el seno de estos enclaves vecinales. Por esta razón, Biltereyst, Maltby y Meers (2011) proponen entender las

audiencias como un conjunto de sujetos que activamente se interrelacionan con sus contextos, entre los que se cuenta el ir al cine. Diversas investigaciones han tenido en cuenta la confluencia de estas variables en la conformación de los espacios sociales de las audiencias: desde estudios como el de Singer (1995), que reconstruye la relación entre las salas de cine y el perfil sociodemográfico y étnico de los habitantes del barrio de Manhattan en el que se ubicaban a comienzos del siglo XX, hasta trabajos como el de Ramos y Barbosa (2021) analizando la reinención de una sala de cine (Trindade) en Oporto para hacer frente a la creciente competencia de las multisalas.

En esta línea, Bukvić, Cveniċ y Buljubašić (2017) en un estudio sobre factores de mayor impacto en la asistencia de población estudiante a estos espacios en Croacia, aprecian una especial incidencia en ítems como por ejemplo la calidad de la programación, la ubicación de la sala, o un elenco famoso en las películas exhibidas. Así, detallan cómo los cines han llevado a cabo diversas iniciativas con el objetivo de alcanzar este anhelado equilibrio entre atracción y fidelización, entre ellas: servicio de cuidado infantil durante las proyecciones, ofrecer descuentos especiales en algunas tiendas durante el día de exhibición, incorporar estrategias comunicativas para el seguimiento de la película por parte de personas con necesidades especiales o incluso colaborar con la compañía ferroviaria estatal (Ídem: 59). En esta línea se encuentran también el Bono Cultural o el programa Cine Sénior, iniciativas institucionales que en España vehicula el Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte (FCE y GCC, 2024).

Este esfuerzo por consolidar el funcionamiento de los cines puede encontrarse también en otras ciudades y abarca desde la mejora en la confortabilidad e infraestructura técnica de las salas hasta “[un incremento del] valor de la experiencia de asistir al cine y con ello ofrecer una alternativa atractiva frente a otras formas de ocio, principalmente las que se desarrollan en los hogares” (García Ferrero 2016: 143). Lo que ha llevado a ciudades como Madrid, por ejemplo, a ensayar diferentes formas de fidelización (bonos descuento, pases conmemorativos, servicios de cáterin, etc. -ídem-). Y en la ciudad de Barcelona se ha tratado de ajustar las proyecciones cinematográficas a los hábitos y necesidades de consumo del público mediante diversas estrategias: limitar el número de sesiones para garantizar la rentabilidad, reducción de personal, adecuando contenidos o incorporando actividades extra-fílmicas -ópera, danza, etc.- (Vilallonga 2018: 128).

Otra cuestión (conectada, aunque formalmente distinta) es la razón que impulsa a elegir una u otra película a la hora de acudir a una sala de cine para verla. Estudios como el de Rodríguez-Rabadán (2014) -basado en jóvenes estudiantes de universidad de entre 18 y 24 años-, revela como principales motivaciones para acudir a una sala de cine salir y divertirse, la crítica de una película o su reparto, variable a la que Baranowski, Korczak y Zajac (2020) confieren una relevancia no menor: según sus datos, incluir al menos una estrella cinematográfica puede incrementar en un 10% los beneficios de la película.

Declive de las salas, no del consumo audiovisual

Otros análisis sitúan en la novedad que comporta un estreno la razón principal que impulsaría a acudir al cine para ver una película (Batlle-Beltrán y Mateo 2022), sobre todo

en un contexto en el cual las salas de exhibición dejaron de ser hace tiempo el único lugar donde realizar esta actividad; además, se valora también la comodidad del espacio y la calidad técnica del mismo (ídem: 19). En este sentido, se aprecia que el consumo de producción audiovisual no se ha reducido, sino que se ha diversificado, abriéndose, por ejemplo, a la incorporación de dispositivos multimedia que permiten un visionado (y catálogo) a demanda y adaptado a la movilidad y momento del día.

De hecho, estos cambios no se limitan a las salas de cine, sino que pueden constatarse también en otras prácticas culturales de ocio (García Ferrero 2016), especialmente entre la población joven, en un proceso que ha transformado las ciudades en “nodos de consumo de ocio” (p: 253) para adecuarse a las nuevas necesidades. En relación con estas estrategias, Wiśniewska, Budziński y Czajkowski (2020) comprobaron que en Polonia había dos factores socioculturales que influían positivamente en el consumo cultural: el volumen de ingresos y el nivel formativo. Conclusión que se alinea con los resultados de estudios anteriores donde un consumo cultural más continuado y diverso se correlaciona con una adscripción sociocultural (en términos de clase o estrato social) más alto, mientras que la restricción en ambos sentidos (consumo unívoro) se asocia a capas menos favorecidas (Chan y Goldthorpe 2005: 201 y ss). Más allá de este componente de estratificación social, Chan y Goldthorpe apuntan también al género como una variable significativa: las mujeres tienden a ser más omnívoras que los hombres en lo relativo a consumo cinematográfico (ídem).

Cabe decir que pese al debate académico que envuelve a las concepciones de “alta” y “baja” cultura -o cultura popular- (DiMaggio 1987; Lizardo 2006; Fernández y Heikkilä 2011), esta división en el consumo cultural sigue permeando el imaginario social. Así, pertenecerían a la primera categoría actividades como el teatro, la danza o las exposiciones de pintura, por ejemplo; por el contrario, la “baja” cultura referiría a eventos artísticos o a géneros musicales supuestamente menos refinados. En el seno de la controversia sobre la idoneidad de esta jerarquización, Fernández y Heikkilä (2020) inciden en la irrupción de la dualidad *omnivorismo* vs *univorismo* en el análisis del consumo cultural. Conforme a esta diferencia, quien incluye entre sus hábitos culturales manifestaciones tanto de la “alta” cultura como de la cultura popular (fiestas tradicionales, juegos de rol, videojuegos, etc.) se considera culturalmente *omnívoro*, mientras que quien restringe las esferas de consumo se caracteriza por su *univorismo*.

Por otro lado, no parece que el consumo audiovisual decaiga en su conjunto (sí se ha diversificado, como veremos), aunque el número de salas de cine sí ha menguado. Según datos del portal Statista⁵, en España había en 2009 un total de 3932 salas de cine, frente a 3593 diez años después; de estas, sólo 119 eran digitales en 2009, incrementándose espectacularmente (3558) durante la década siguiente. El esfuerzo de transformación al medio digital (con las inversiones que conlleva) es evidente, pasando durante este periodo de suponer el 3% a la práctica totalidad (99%) de la oferta. En el contexto catalán, según datos de la *Barcelona Film Commission* (s.f.), se pasó de 809 pantallas en 2010 a 664 en 2020 y entre el año 2000 y el 2018 Villalonga refiere una caída del 42% de cines

⁵ <https://es.statista.com/estadisticas/494497/salas-de-cine-en-espana-por-tipo>

activos (2018: 31). Actualmente, sobreviven en Cataluña 600 pantallas activas (FCE y GCC, 2023).

Los datos más recientes publicados por la Federación de Cines de España y el Gremio de Cines de Cataluña (2024), apuntan a que en Cataluña se recaudó un 25,7% más respecto a 2022 y el número de espectadores se elevó hasta 13.779.457, lo que supone un incremento del 21,1% respecto al año anterior, pese a que muchos cines afrontan diversas problemáticas que tienen que ver con diversos factores que impulsan o limitan la elección de las personas para asistir a proyecciones cinematográficas.

Diversidad de soportes, formatos y prioridades de consumo audiovisual

El acceso al catálogo filmográfico se ha flexibilizado en las últimas décadas, superando la competencia que pudo comportar en su momento la televisión o el vídeo (posteriormente, el DVD o Blue-Ray), para incorporar el ordenador, el smartphone o cualquier dispositivo móvil con acceso a red o facilidad para reproducción de contenido multimedia, potenciando de este modo el consumo "extra cinematográfico" *-non-theatrical-* (Aveyard 2016).

Así, un estudio sobre los cambios en los hábitos de consumo fílmico más allá del cine entre 206 jóvenes estudiantes de la Universidad de Salamanca muestra claramente esta diversidad, siendo los soportes más recurridos el ordenador portátil, el monitor televisivo, el smartphone o la Tablet (Matei 2020). Además, como espacio preferido para ver las películas, esta muestra de jóvenes encuestados elige por amplia mayoría (89,30%) el propio domicilio, seguido, a considerable distancia, por el cine (4,90%) y de una casa ajena (3,90%) (Matei 2020: 8). Datos del mismo estudio apuntan a un perfil de audiencia que prefiere ver las películas sin compañía (56%), de dos a tres veces por semana (32%) y básicamente en franja de *Prime time* (21h a 24h); además, el 72,3% admite distraerse con alguna actividad simultánea mientras ve la película -mayoritariamente con mensajería instantánea- (90,8%) (ídem: 8-12).

Por otro lado, no siempre la experiencia que puede ofrecer una sala cinematográfica es el factor que incide en mayor medida a la hora de seleccionar el medio de visionado. Cuando la prioridad radica en la calidad de la imagen o del sonido, o en un entorno orientado a sacar el máximo rendimiento sensorial a un filme, la sala se posiciona claramente en primer lugar (Batlle-Beltrán y Mateo, 2022). Se aproximaría, en este sentido, a un espacio ritualizado que propicia la integración social mediante una experiencia colectiva que se activa mediante la reafirmación de determinados valores, experiencias y significados culturales comunes en entornos de transición simbólica (Turner, 1967, 1982). En cambio, cuando se requieren relatos transmedia o experiencias inmersivas (Berlanga y Fernández-Ramírez 2020), el público puede decantarse por otras opciones. En esta línea, Berlanga y Fernández-Ramírez (op. cit.) enumeran algunos de los nuevos formatos cinematográficos y audiovisuales que ofrecen a las potenciales audiencias experiencias novedosas, entre las que destacan la hibridación del cine y los videojuegos, la televisión social (donde los telespectadores interactúan con el producto emitido), el *Live Cinema*, el *Slow Cinema* o el *Short entretenimiento* (páginas 49-50).

Integración de las salas cinematográficas con sus entornos socioeconómicos

Todo equipamiento cultural adquiere sentido cuando se comprende y analiza integrado en un enclave geográfico, un entorno económico y un contexto sociocultural determinado. En ese sentido, cualquier aproximación al estudio de una sala cinematográfica (o complejo de salas de exhibición) no puede limitarse únicamente a las características de su producción ni a los perfiles de su audiencia. Debe entenderse también como un elemento integrante de un conjunto urbano más amplio que incluye a sus habitantes, al tejido económico que lo envuelve, a su relación con otras salas y espacios de oferta cultural, etc. Así, Cerisola y Panzera concluyen que:

[...] las características culturales y creativas de las ciudades representan activos estratégicos que favorecen las economías regionales y deben ser respaldadas por políticas adecuadas y específicas. Además, la cultura y la creatividad pueden contribuir a la conformación de un ambiente cosmopolita, capaz de atraer inversiones y mano de obra altamente calificada y favorecer la generación de barrios diversos (2021: 18 -la traducción es nuestra-).

Se entiende, de este modo, el cine como un ingrediente esencial en la memoria colectiva, no solo en base a su oferta fílmica, sino en tanto núcleo esencial de actividad en entornos espacialmente delimitados (Bennett 2000). Es en esta línea, que estudios como el de Flores (2018) tiene muy en cuenta estos factores contextuales a la hora de diseñar estrategias de márketing para una sala en concreto. A otro nivel, Vilallonga (2018) tiene también en cuenta en el caso de Barcelona las características estacionales en los desplazamientos en periodos vacacionales en lo que refiere a la afectación que puede comportar sobre el consumo cinematográfico en sala.

Experiencias de visionado en el Social Media

En la actualidad, prácticamente todos los estratos de la sociedad disponen de la capacidad de emplear alguna de las múltiples plataformas digitales existentes para participar en la compartición, creación o consumo de contenido. La convergencia entre redes sociales y salas de cine se manifiesta en la promoción de películas a través de las llamadas “redes sociales”, sin embargo, este fenómeno no solo se ha limitado a la esfera promocional, sino que también ha influido en los hábitos de toma de decisiones de los espectadores como refieren diversas investigaciones (Djamaly 2023; Suvattanadilok 202; Wan et al. 2023).

La búsqueda de información sobre películas, las reseñas en distintas plataformas y la participación en conversaciones digitales influyen en la elección de películas a ver en las salas de cine. Esta interacción no se limita a la toma individual de decisiones, sino que genera la oportunidad de construir capital social como una motivación para compartir experiencias cinematográficas y a la vez es útil mantener relaciones débiles en las plataformas de interacción en línea (Tefertiller et al. 2020).

Además, nos enfrentamos a diversos fenómenos como la simultaneidad de pantallas (principalmente en lo referente al visionado en espacios domésticos) y, en términos de contenido, a las narrativas integradas conocidas principalmente como *crossmedia* y *transmedia*, donde la historia se desarrolla en diversas plataformas digitales antes y después de la proyección, creando así una experiencia cinematográfica más inmersiva y participativa. La interfaz web ofrece conjuntos de sistemas que ensamblan el contenido de otros medios, sin ser independientes ni estar aislados del contenido en los canales tradicionales (Bolat 2021). Si bien estas formas narrativas híbridas se han utilizado sobre todo en sagas y grandes productos comerciales, también comienzan a ganar terreno en otro tipo de producciones al incorporar material complementario al producto principal.

Metodología

La investigación se sirvió de herramientas cuantitativas y cualitativas para la recogida de la información y su posterior análisis. En primer lugar, se realizó un estudio prospectivo de carácter hemerográfico, bibliográfico y estadístico para conocer el panorama de la industria de exhibición cinematográfica en España y Cataluña y su relación con el consumo cultural y de ocio.

El ámbito geográfico de la investigación se circunscribe al área metropolitana de la provincia de Barcelona y se obtuvieron datos de 1882 personas a lo largo de seis meses de trabajo de campo (de junio a diciembre de 2023) mediante diversas técnicas de recogida de datos, combinando encuestas, grupos focales y seguimiento de los principales medios sociales de comunicación (*Social Media*) detectados durante la prospección previa de campo, que se llevó a cabo entre los meses de marzo y mayo de 2023 (Tabla 1).

Técnica	Perfil de participantes	Número de participantes	Propósito
Encuestas	Población relacionada con la unidad de observación ⁶	1447	Administradas en línea con el fin de recopilar datos sociodemográficos e información cuantitativa y cualitativa respecto a hábitos de consumo cultural y de visionado de material audiovisual.
	Población no relacionada con la unidad de observación ⁷	421	
Grupos focales	Jóvenes entre 22 y 28 años	8	Orientado a conocer las motivaciones y barreras por las cuales los/as jóvenes acuden a salas de cine y aporten posibles soluciones.

⁶ Se distribuyó la encuesta sobre el listado exhaustivo de contactos recopilados por Cinemes Girona a lo largo de su existencia y basados en audiencia que asiste al cine y deja sus datos para ulterior información y contacto.

⁷ Se administró la encuesta a personas no incluidas en la base de datos del cine, que cumplieran el perfil requerido en este estudio.

Técnica	Perfil de participantes	Número de participantes	Propósito
	Expertos	6	Diálogo entre personas expertas vinculadas al mundo audiovisual para analizar la situación desde una perspectiva profesional.
Social Media	Cines y festivales	10	Observación de las estrategias, herramientas y <i>engagement</i> de Social Media de salas de cine y festivales
	Prescriptores	12	Observación de prescriptores e <i>influencers</i> sobre el movimiento audiovisual en Barcelona

Tabla 1 Técnicas de recogida de datos y muestra de informantes seleccionados. Elaboración propia.

Todas las respuestas de las encuestas fueron geolocalizadas con el fin de facilitar el análisis geoespacial e identificar la distribución de las respuestas, pudiendo posteriormente correlacionar diferentes aspectos clave de los perfiles de audiencias potenciales y de su interacción con la unidad de observación (Cinemes Girona). Las respuestas se concentraron principalmente en los barrios más próximos a la ubicación de este cine (Figura 3). Las encuestas se administraron mediante un cuestionario en línea a partir de diferentes listas de distribución propias y ajenas a la unidad de observación.

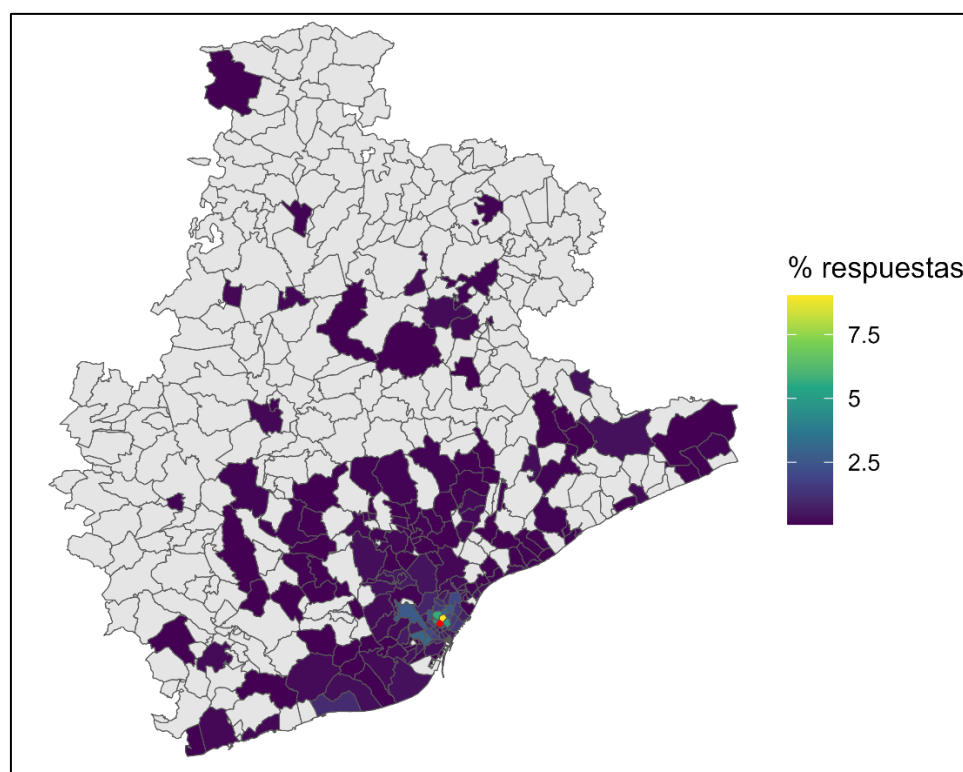


Figura 3 Geolocalización de las respuestas de la encuesta administrada (n=1864) y distribución de las respuestas en torno a Cinemes Girona (marcado con un punto rojo). Elaboración propia.

A continuación, se identificaron y graficaron redes de consumo a partir de variables seleccionadas con el fin de poder detectar y analizar dinámicas relacionales entre las distintas unidades implicadas. Esta estrategia es especialmente relevante para poner de relieve los principales aspectos de consumo cultural de los informantes. Utilizamos para ello un enfoque analítico centrado en el diseño de la red egocéntrica de cada actor, lo que permitió identificar patrones culturales y calibrar el nivel de “omnivorismo”⁸ (Chan y Goldthorpe 2005: 201) en su consumo.

Para tratar de identificar las condiciones en las que las personas toman decisiones (como el caso de la fidelización), utilizamos métodos para clasificar los datos según particiones claves en el cruce de variables relevantes.

Finalmente, localizamos y observamos diferentes estrategias de generación de contenidos, considerando tanto salas de cine en Barcelona como otras experiencias de exhibición audiovisual. Se examinaron así las interacciones en diversas plataformas, incluyendo la participación de prescriptores especializados (*influencers*). Este análisis proporcionó una comprensión integral de la gestión y ejecución de estrategias en el dinámico entorno de las plataformas en línea.

Todas las personas que participaron en las diferentes muestras de investigación -y en todos sus formatos- fueron convenientemente informadas de los propósitos de la investigación y se obtuvo su consentimiento explícito para el tratamiento analítico posterior en los resultados obtenidos a partir de sus respuestas. En todos los casos, la participación en la investigación fue voluntaria. El único incentivo material para participar en la investigación se introdujo en la llamada a participar en el grupo focal de jóvenes y consistió en el sorteo de entradas ilimitadas a Cinemes Girona para la persona participante durante un mes.

Los dos grupos focales revirtieron componente estratégico. En el primer caso nos interesaba acceder a un segmento de audiencia potencial minoritario en la asistencia regular a la programación estable cinematográfica en Cinemes Girona -población joven- (Tabla 2) y en el segundo caso la selección obedeció al interés de los discursos expertos en el ámbito abordado en esta investigación (Tabla 3).

Pseudónimo	Género	Edad	Ocupación
Alba	Femenino	28	Estudiante
Antonia	Femenino	23	Estudiante
Lourdes	Femenino	23	Estudiante
María	Femenino	23	Estudiante
Rebeca	Femenino	23	Estudiante
Lola	Femenino	24	Estudiante
Susana	Femenino	24	Camarera
Pedro	Masculino	22	Estudiante

Tabla 2 Grupo focal de población joven: perfiles anonimizados. Elaboración propia.

⁸ Como recogen Chan y Goldthorpe (2005), un consumo cultural más continuado y diverso se considera “omnívoro”, mientras que la restricción en ambos sentidos se consideraría “unívoro”.

Pseudónimo	Género	Rol
Carla	Femenino	Directora de una asociación profesional
Samuel	Masculino	Distribuidor audiovisual
Bárbara	Femenino	Crítica cinematográfica
Luis	Masculino	Director de un festival cinematográfico
Carlos	Masculino	Director de plataforma de contenidos audiovisuales
Martina	Femenino	Pedagoga experta en el uso didáctico del cine
Carla	Femenino	Directora de una asociación profesional
Samuel	Masculino	Distribuidor audiovisual

Tabla 3 Grupo focal de profesionales y expertos/as: perfiles anonimizados. Elaboración propia.

En lo concerniente a los *Social Media*, se tomaron en cuenta dos aspectos: (a) las plataformas de interacción en línea (redes sociales) más utilizadas y las emergentes para observar y analizar las estrategias de difusión digital de las cinco salas de cine independiente de Barcelona, de características relativamente análogas a cine Girona más recurrentemente mencionados en las encuestas, y de cinco experiencias de consumo audiovisual fuera de la sala convencional del cine - una plataforma de *streaming*, tres festivales de referencia y una programación de cine al aire libre que opera solo durante el verano- (Tabla 4). Y (b) los sistemas de prescripción horizontales, es decir: entre pares o "ceranos" *influencers* o especialistas insertos en el ámbito y en las dinámicas digitales.

Social Media ⁹						
	Facebook (Seguidores)	Instagram (Seguidores)	X (Seguidores)	YouTube (Suscriptores)	App (Descargas)	TikTok (Seguidores)
Salas de Cine						
Cine_1	14 mil (a 30/11/21)	5,278	9,174	95	+1mil	--
Cine_2	561 (a 5/2/22)	1,263	351	--	--	--
Cine_3	108	2,933	193	13	+5mil	--
Cine_4	54 mil	18,917	21,756	434	+1mil	--
Cinemas Girona	9,307	5,714	6,081	43	+100	
Plataformas (P) y festivales (F)						

⁹ Se indica entre paréntesis el criterio cuantitativo seleccionado.

P_1	146 mil	216,207	188,134	53,300	+500 mil	16,100
F-1	76 mil	62,577	96,769	9,051	+1 mil	1,000
F-2	45 mil	24,580	209 (MODIband)	857 (MODIband)	--	416
F-3	2,673	10,112	3,988	317	--	--
F-4	25 mil	10,267	13,501	2,710	--	--
F-5	42 mil	23,874	13,139	372	--	49

Tabla 4 Selección de Social Media: perfiles anonimizados. Elaboración propia a partir de datos obtenidos de las fuentes indicadas

Resultados

En conjunto, la población en torno a la unidad observación muestra un promedio de edad superior a los 40 años lo que coincide con el perfil medio de las personas encuestadas (Tabla 5)

HOMBRE	%
18 a 25	0,4
26 a 35	2,5
36 a 45	3,9
46 a 55	6,8
56 a 65	9,1
66 a 75	8,3
76 en adelante	1,7
MUJER	
18 a 25	1,2
26 a 35	4,4
36 a 45	7,3
46 a 55	12,2
56 a 65	20,0
66 a 75	15,6
76 en adelante	3,0
NA	
36 a 45	0,1
46 a 55	0,2
56 a 65	0,3
66 a 75	0,9
76 en adelante	0,3
En blanco	0,3
NO BINARIO	
18 a 25	0,2
36 a 45	0,2

46 a 55	0,1
56 a 65	0,1
66 a 75	0,1
PREFIERO NO DECIRLO	
18 a 25	0,1
26 a 35	0,1
36 a 45	0,2
46 a 55	0,3
56 a 65	0,2
66 a 75	0,2
≥ 76	0,1
Total general	100

Tabla 5 Perfil de las personas encuestadas (sexo y edad). Porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

Un rasgo significativo del perfil socioprofesional de la muestra es que casi la mitad trabaja por cuenta ajena y un 35,3% de las personas que han respondido la encuesta están jubiladas; el 12,2% está empleado por cuenta propia, un 2,2% están desempleados y el 1,6% son estudiantes.

En lo referente a asistencia a las salas de cine, podemos observar cómo entre la población encuestada (1.668 personas) un 71,4% manifiesta una asistencia frecuente a las salas de cine (entre una o más veces a la semana y una vez al mes), aunque el segmento que tiene un porcentaje mayor (un 23,7%) asiste sólo una o dos veces al año (Tabla 6). Por grupos de edad, quienes asisten con mayor frecuencia se concentran entre los 46 y los 75 años (Tabla 7).

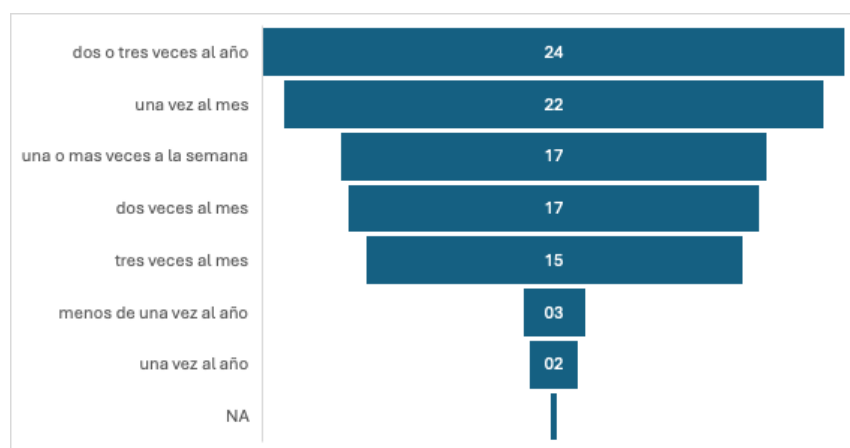


Tabla 6 Frecuencia de asistencia a las salas de cine por parte de la población encuestada (n=1668). En porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

	Una o más veces a la semana	Una vez al mes	Dos veces al mes	Tres veces al mes	Dos o tres veces al año	Una vez al año	Menos de una vez al año	N/A	TOTAL
18 a 25	0,4	0,5	0,2	0,3	0,4	0,0	0,1	0,0	1,9
26 a 35	1,0	1,6	1,9	0,7	1,4	0,2	0,2	0,0	7,0
36 a 45	1,4	2,1	1,4	1,4	4,8	0,3	0,3	0,0	11,6
46 a 55	2,7	5,2	2,7	2,4	5,4	0,6	0,6	0,0	19,6
56 a 65	4,3	6,9	5,2	4,7	7,0	0,6	0,8	0,0	29,6
66 a 75	6,9	4,6	4,1	4,7	3,8	0,3	0,6	0,0	24,9
≥76	0,7	1,1	1,2	1,1	0,9	0,0	0,1	0,0	5,1
NA	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,3	0,3
TOTAL	17,3	22,0	16,7	15,3	23,7	2,0	2,6	0,3	100

Tabla 7 Distribución de la frecuencia en la asistencia a las salas de cine por grupos de edad (n=1668). En porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

Los encuestados tienen un alto consumo mensual de películas (el 54.08% ve hasta tres películas en un mismo mes), aunque también se aprecia una considerable proporción de visionado semanal (17.33%). En el otro extremo, menos del 5% consume una película (o ninguna) por año. El umbral medio de consumo mínimo puede situarse en ver dos o tres películas al año (que representa un poco más del 20% de los encuestados).

En lo relativo al lugar de visionado, la mitad de las personas encuestadas mencionaron que entre el 60-100% de las películas que consumía lo hacía el propio cine. Otro grupo más reducido acude entre el 40-59% de las veces a verlas al cine (14.81% de los encuestados), lo que indica un consumo moderado de películas en sala. En cambio, poco más de un tercio no acude al cine para ver esos filmes (el 21.46% va menos de 19% de las veces que ve una película y el 14.22% ve entre el 20-39% de las películas en la sala).

Los medios a través de los cuales el público suele informarse más frecuentemente de las actividades del cine son los medios convencionales (43,3%), las redes sociales (40,2%) y las listas de correos (12,5%). A considerable distancia se encuentran los blogs (2,4%) o las recomendaciones de prescriptores -YouTubers y Tiktokers- (0,8%). Esto se logra observar del mismo modo cuando se indaga en la manera en que se informa la audiencia de Cinemes Girona, sobre todo quienes asisten con mayor frecuencia, si bien la franja de edad es significativa a la hora de apreciar la elección de medio (Tabla 8):

	18 a 25	18 a 25	26 a 35	36 a 45	46 a 55	56 a 65	66 a 75	≥ 76	NA	TOTAL
Medios convencionales	0,6	0,0	1,7	2,0	6,9	15,4	13,8	2,8	0,2	43,4
Redes sociales	1,1	0,3	4,3	4,4	9,0	11,3	8,1	1,7	0,0	40,2

Listas de correos	0,2	0,0	0,3	2,3	2,1	2,9	4,0	0,8	0,0	12,6
Blogs	0,0	0,0	0,5	0,3	0,5	0,8	0,5	0,0	0,0	2,6
Influencers	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,5	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,9
Podcasts	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,6
TV en abierto	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,2	0,2	0,0	0,4

Tabla 8 Distribución de la frecuencia de los principales medios para informarse en las actividades cinematográficas por grupos de edad (n=1668) En porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

Por otro lado, el consumo de películas fuera del cine y el tipo de pantalla utilizada también muestra una cierta relación, a pesar de no tener un índice de asociación entre variables (chi-cuadrado) particularmente alto (Tabla 9). Este es el caso de las películas por transmisión abierta que se visionan en la pantalla del televisor.

Tipo de pantalla	χ^2	p-valor
Tv	50.68	<0.001
Tablet	18.86	0.276
Móvil	30.77	0.014
Ordenador / portátil	34.97	0.004
Pantalla ordenador fijo	8.57	0.93
Proyección	21.66	0.154
Medio	χ^2	p-valor
<i>Stream</i>	32.74	0.008
Tv abierta	77	<0.001
<i>Peer-to-peer</i>	41.85	<0.001
Canales o bots	13.36	0.646
Alquiler digital	40.66	<0.001
Soporte físico	49.29	<0.001
Otros	24.99	0.07

Tabla 9 Índice de asociación entre variables (χ^2) y valor de probabilidad entre el consumo filmico y soporte de visionado. Elaboración propia.

En lo que refiere al consumo audiovisual, las plataformas de *streaming* se revelaron como un medio de visionado alternativo a las salas convencionales. En esta línea, Filmin y Netflix sobresalen como las plataformas preferidas para el consumo audiovisual (Tabla 10), cuya combinación permite dibujar tres agrupaciones (Figura 4):

- Grupo 1: *Amazon prime video*, *HBO* y *Netflix*. Es la opción más generalizada y ampliamente reconocida, cubriendo todos los ámbitos del espectro cinematográfico.
- Grupo 2: *Filmin* (plataforma especializada en producción cinematográfica, centrada en películas independientes cuyo servicio que tiene su origen en España), lo que explica su consumo alto y también su difusión.
- Grupo 3: *MUBI*, *Apple TV*, *Disney +*, *Crunchyroll*, *Rakuten*, *Movistar*. Que muestran un consumo más esporádico o singularizado.

En lo relativo al tipo de consumo, podrían dibujarse dos dimensiones complementarias:

- La primera refiere a la extensión del consumo cultural: *Netflix* se orienta a un público más amplio, mientras que *Rakuten*, junto a dos plataformas más minoritarias en preferencia (*Mubi* y *Crunchyroll*) presentan un perfil más especializado y se orientan a colectivos más específicos (e.g. películas independientes o de animación japonesa).
- La segunda refiere al nivel de dependencia y autonomía en el consumo cultural: así, mientras que *Filmin* puede funcionar de modo independiente, *Netflix* o *Movistar* se asocian a suscripciones a otras plataformas.

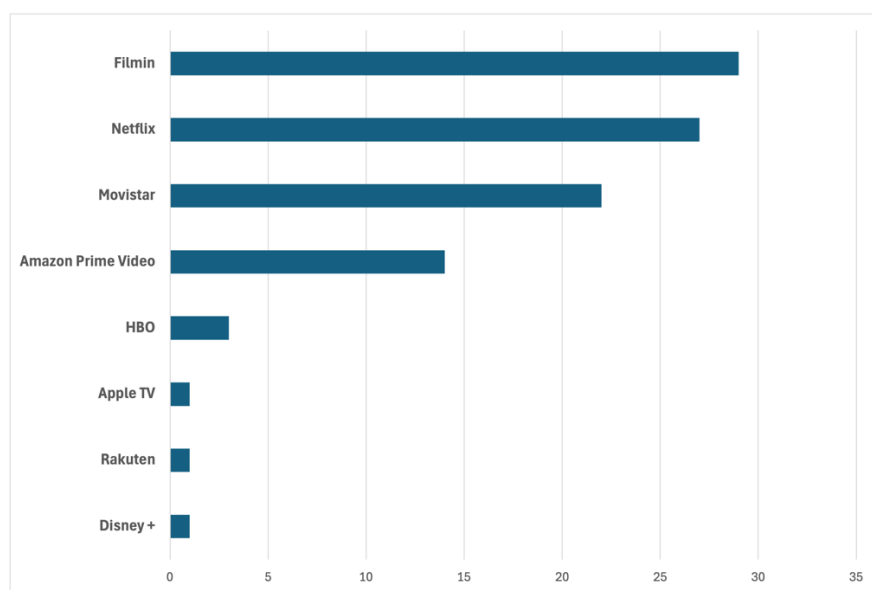


Tabla 10 Principales plataformas de consumo audiovisual al margen de las salas cinematográficas y porcentaje de preferencia entre ellas por parte de las personas encuestadas (n=1864). Elaboración propia.

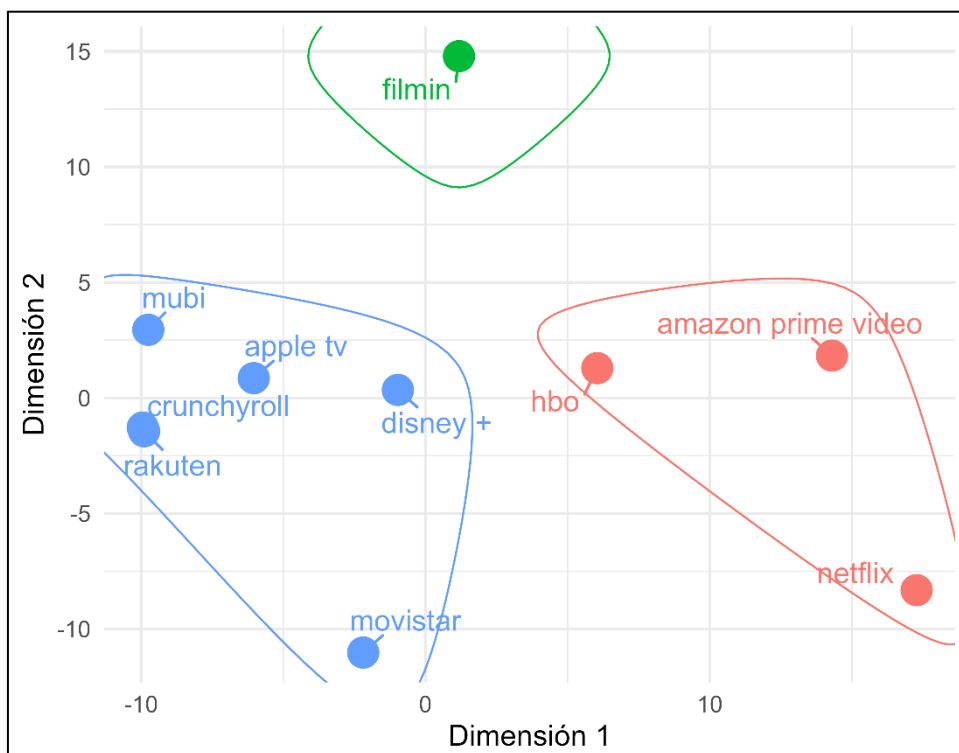


Figura 4 Clústeres de preferencias en el consumo mediante plataformas de *streaming* audiovisual. Elaboración propia.

En general, las personas encuestadas se muestran muy de acuerdo con que el aspecto *técnico* es crucial a la hora de apreciar una película, así como el *ambiente inmersivo* que se genera en el interior de la sala; estas serían las principales razones para acudir al cine. A esto le acompaña -en buena medida- la propia experiencia y las ganas de apoyar la actividad de las salas de cine. Por el contrario, en el otro extremo, aparecen quienes asisten por alguna invitación, porque se suman de manera inercial a un plan de ocio o por razones que no mencionan explícitamente (Gráfico 2).

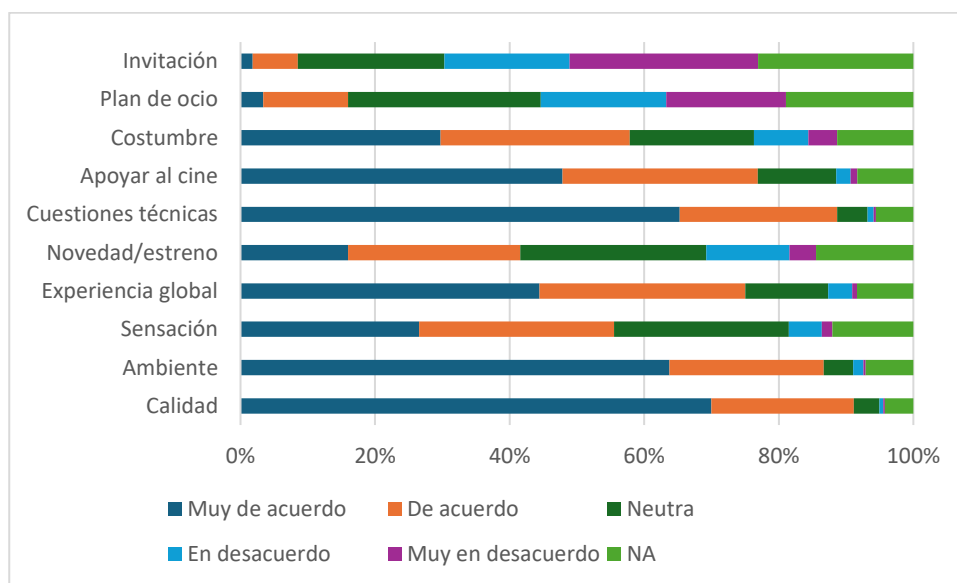


Gráfico 2 Grado de acuerdo con las razones aducidas para acudir a una sala cinematográfica. Elaboración propia.

La actividad que más frecuentemente se relaciona con ir al cine es la de acudir directamente a la sala y regresar al hogar. A continuación, encontraríamos quienes prefieren dar un paseo por las inmediaciones de la sala y consumir un café o un refrigerio antes de entrar. A mayor distancia veríamos quienes optan por cenar o ir de copas tras la proyección (Gráfico 3).

	Antes cena	Después cena	Paseo	Consumición	Compras	Cafe previo	Café posterior
Siempre	1,2	4,0	6,0	3,8	1,8	4,4	0,9
Casi siempre	4,7	16,1	19,9	18,1	7,8	11,7	5,3
A veces	24,5	39,6	30,4	32,6	21,0	23,0	14,3
Casi nunca	20,2	14,9	13,5	14,4	20,2	15,5	14,8
Nunca	20,7	8,6	8,7	9,7	19,3	19,2	28,9
NA	28,9	16,7	21,4	21,5	29,9	26,2	35,8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Gráfico 3 Hábitos de consumo manifestados vinculados al desplazamiento a las salas de cine. (Se excluye del mapa de calor la opción de no responde: NA). Elaboración propia.

Las personas encuestadas han manifestado su preferencia por ver películas solos o con amigos (Gráfico 4), lo que influye también en el plan de ocio trazado para diseñar la actividad.

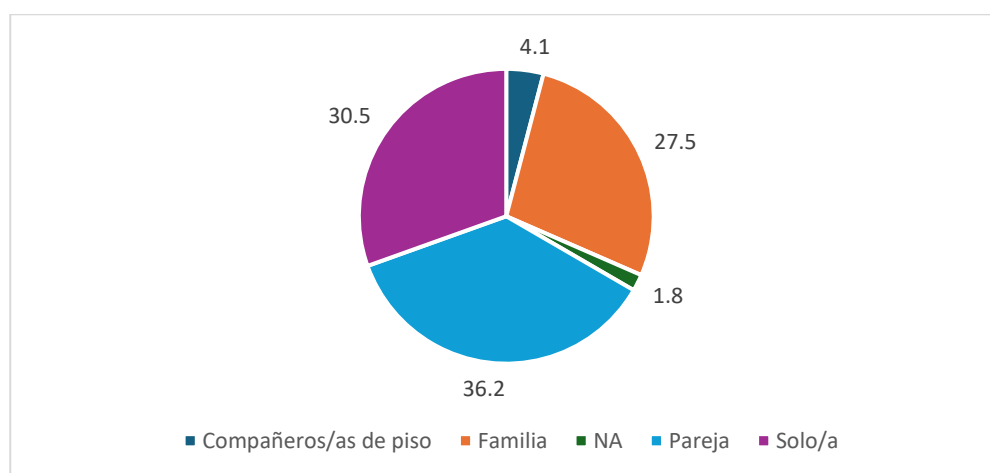


Gráfico 4 Hábito social de consumo fuera del cine. Porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

En nuestro estudio, la red de eventos culturales revela que las personas tienen un consumo amplio y diverso, pero que más allá del cine tienen preferencias vinculadas preferentemente con teatros, conciertos y exposiciones, en ese orden. Las combinaciones entre ellas son especialmente interesantes por cuanto muestran que el gusto por el cine suele combinarse por el de alguna otra expresión artística (Gráfico 5). En el diagrama resultante, las actividades y eventos culturales más populares se indica

mediante el tamaño del nodo y la frecuencia con que se escogen simultáneamente por distintas personas se representa a por medio del grosor de la línea que les une. De esta manera, se forma un “conjunto cultural” que se define en términos de los elementos más populares y comunes del consumo.

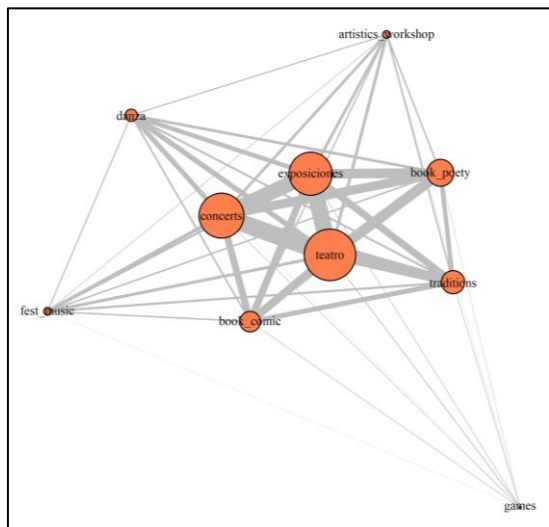


Gráfico 5 Representación gráfica de la red de consumo cultural de eventos entre la población encuestada. Porcentaje. Elaboración propia.

Con respecto a las experiencias de consumo cultural, en el grupo focal compuesto íntegramente por jóvenes hubo coincidencias en cuanto a la búsqueda de experiencias diferentes, es decir, hay una tendencia a huir del consumo masificado. Términos como “único” o “alternativo” definían las vivencias buscadas:

El ocio que hago tiene mucha relación con mis valores o con mi ideología, y como de alguna manera busco espacios o actividades que me interpelen en este sentido ya sea de actividades autogestionadas o participar en espacios alternativos. (Lourdes)

Por otra parte, el carácter exclusivo de la experiencia cultural también se puso de manifiesto tanto en lo que se refiere a su consumo limitado en los espacios y en el tiempo de duración.

Me gusta la música y me gusta mucho el jazz, y el soul. Entonces también es algo que... yo me inspiro en lo que escucho. Es una forma de inspirarme, la creatividad y poder analizar o reflexionar. Entonces son eventos que a mí... ¿Cómo se diría? Diría que la gente consumiera más todos estos eventos, no grandes discotecas, sino también hay locales muy mágicos en los que se respira arte muy bonito, de verdad. (Pedro).

Ahora sobre todo... intento... priorizar, y lo que más me llama la atención, ahora mismo son esto, como más eventos o... cosas en que puedas también como conectar con más personas que no sea solo ir tú solo a ver eso, una exhibición o... o una actividad cultural, sino que haya también como un poco de... evento alrededor de alguna manera. (Antonia)

Con respecto a la forma en que consumen productos audiovisuales, se evidenció que el modelo de suscripción y pago por uso ha cambiado sus pautas de adquisición, concediendo más importancia al acceso instantáneo a un catálogo de opciones que puedan usar o dejar de usar a su conveniencia, más que el poseer un objeto cultural de manera permanente. Sin embargo, por encima de todo destacaron el valor de la experiencia de “ir al cine” (no únicamente se trataba de *ver* una película, sino de una cuestión más ampliamente sensorial: *sentir* la inmersión en el ambiente y entorno que envolvía al visionado).

Yo quiero ir al cine cuando sé que en la sala del cine donde iré se cuida, que en el espacio se pueda ver bien la película, se sienta bien la película, pueda estar cómoda, y que el ambiente o que cuando salga o...vea como que las personas que trabajan también están trabajando para que esto sea uno... o sea como para que venir al cine valga la pena (Lola).

Los participantes reconocen que el precio de las entradas a espectáculos de teatro, danza, del cine o de algunos conciertos, es razonable; sin embargo, hacen uso de recursos gratuitos como los que ofrecen las bibliotecas, la circulación de objetos o los espectáculos gratuitos cuando sus limitaciones económicas van por encima de sus deseos de participar en la oferta cultural: “Pondría énfasis en la proporción entre mi capital y el precio. Si yo cobrara lo que me merezco seguramente iría mucho más al teatro” (María). En este sentido, también se planteó la idea del consumismo acelerado y de los bienes desechables. Uno de los entrevistados (Pedro) decía que no entendía “el algoritmo” porque a pesar de sus intereses culturales, encontraba mucha propaganda en línea sobre ropa *fast fashion* y poca difusión de actividades culturales en el entorno público y educativo para fomentar una apreciación más amplia de la cultura, en contraste con la prominencia de iniciativas comerciales.

También se puso de relieve que la distancia del domicilio a las salas supone un coste que vale la pena asumir si el acontecimiento lo amerita. Se relataron desplazamientos desde diferentes poblaciones en las que hay poca oferta cultural o la que existe se localiza en centros comerciales:

De pequeña iba por ejemplo a Cinesa o a estos lugares, y ahora ya hace muchos años que no voy. Yo sí valoro las salas pequeñas y no me importa desplazarme en media hora... priorizo las salas pequeñas y también que, ahora hacía mucho que no iba al cine, pero el olor de ir al cine, la sala, como es todo, no sé... como la experiencia (Alba).

Siento que varía mucho dependiendo de dónde estés, y que... si vives en Barcelona, eh... puedes estar inmerso (...) en la cultura de una manera muy diferente que una persona que no vive... pues como en el centro de las cosas, y que siento que, que se vive muy diferente (Lourdes).

El cine como herramienta de socialización tiene que ver con la idea inmediata de comentar la película con acompañantes, pero también de realizar debates al terminar

(cinefóruns) y de encontrarse con gente afín. La experiencia social del cine trasciende la simple actividad de ver una película; se convierte en un acto colectivo que promueve la interacción, el intercambio cultural y la construcción de lazos emocionales a través del arte cinematográfico.

Ir al cine y luego comentarlo y lo que se genera luego del cine... Lucía Martel decía que ella hacía cine no tanto por la película en sí, sino por lo que se genera "después de" ¿no?, como esos debates con los amigos (Alba)

En el grupo focal de expertos, la dinámica en este caso consistió en moderar, con mínima intervención una charla entre los asistentes que comenzó con un tópico del que en su momento se habló en medios de comunicación y prensa especializada, pero que, de acuerdo con los participantes, ya no es un factor de intervención directa en la asistencia a las salas de cine: el escenario post-COVID:

La pandemia sirvió para acelerar, para comprimir en ocho meses lo que hubiese pasado en cuatro años, pero no es un cambio significativo. O sea, todas las tendencias que se consolidaron en la pandemia venían de antes: la crisis del cine independiente o la desafección de un cierto tipo de público joven a propuestas de sala cerrada (Carlos).

Pero la pandemia yo creo que empieza a estar un poco... alejada. Fue algo que llegó en un momento y aceleró cambios; pero ya. Yo creo que estamos en otro... multiverso (Luis).

El cuestionamiento sobre la naturaleza de la experiencia cultural, especialmente en el ámbito cinematográfico, revela una dicotomía significativa. Por un lado, se aborda desde la perspectiva de la industria y las grandes cifras, donde la experiencia cultural se asocia a menudo con el consumo de productos.

Tal vez, claro, es que es diferente si lo pensamos como... desde la industria (...) o si lo pensamos desde los espectadores concretos y la posibilidad (...) de vivir una experiencia cultural, ¿no?, cinematográfica, rica, personal, y saber que eso te aporta para tu vida. (Martina).

Por otro lado, se plantea desde la visión más personal y concreta de los espectadores. En este sentido, sobre las estrategias de comercialización y de búsqueda de la experiencia "auténtica" Luis apuntó que muchas de estas intervenciones no son sostenibles en el tiempo ni pertenecen a la dinámica de una sala cerrada:

Trasladar la atmósfera (de los festivales) al cine (refiriéndose a las salas de cinema) es casi imposible y cuando se ha intentado aplicar ha sido un fracaso, [...] las estrategias del evento son otras. Los mecanismos de interacción son diferentes (Luis)

Una de las palabras que más se repitió en este foro de expertos fue "incertidumbre". La velocidad con la que se están sucediendo los cambios en el ámbito del cine a todos

los niveles, no permiten establecer estrategias sólidas para cada uno de los eslabones de la cadena del mundo audiovisual. Las tácticas también han cambiado y la prescripción horizontal, el “boca- oreja” ha tomado un nuevo lugar en este panorama:

Y también hay que pensar que, si nos fijamos en la historia del cine, los cambios cada vez se producen con más celeridad. O sea, el cine como único estado único, a lo mejor te dan 60 años y te llega la tele, a la tele... está 30 años hasta que llega el VHS, el VHS está... 15 años hasta que llega el DVD, el DVD está siete años y medio hasta que llega el Blu-ray, y ha llegado Internet, e Internet lo ha cambiado todo (...) O sea, todo está... y TikTok y Twitch, como elemento que donde se están contando historias; o sea, todo está cambiando con una celeridad que ya no es el proceso que dices: "en 20 años podemos madurar este cambio". No, no, es que no nos dará tiempo. (Carlos)

Así, mientras que los críticos tradicionales representan una autoridad distante y a veces percibida como elitista, los creadores de contenido en podcasts y TikTok transmiten una sensación de cercanía y autenticidad. Los consumidores contemporáneos valoran la conexión personal, la autenticidad, la identificación por medio de lenguajes directos, informales y contemporáneos, y la capacidad de relacionarse con las experiencias de otros usuarios, factores que a menudo se encuentran en las prescripciones horizontales.

Sin embargo, Carlos también reconoce que moverse en plataformas digitales no es fácil, hay que dominar todo un lenguaje estético y técnico para poder producir algún efecto en los espectadores. Samuel concuerda en que las estrategias de las plataformas en línea como Instagram, están copadas por las *Majors*. Por eso apuesta por el público cinéfilo y retoma el concepto de “omnívoro cultural” para referirse al público de entre 20 y 35 que puede ser el espectador y que se mueve en los márgenes.

Conclusiones y limitaciones del estudio

La información recabada mediante la combinación de distintas técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas sobre 1882 personas muestra una frecuencia de asistencia a este cine independiente considerablemente superior a la media de Cataluña: mientras que en el panorama catalán se ven de media 2.39 películas al año, entre nuestra muestra de estudio se alcanza ese promedio de manera mensual.

En contraste con los datos de Laporte et al. (2021), que señalan un consumo medio anual de 2.39 películas, más de la mitad de la gente que ha respondido nuestra encuesta ve esa cantidad de forma mensual (el 54.08% ve hasta tres películas en un mismo mes y un 17.33% lo hace semanalmente). Esto nos revela un perfil que no está adecuadamente representado en las encuestas de participación y consumo cultural más general. Esta fidelidad al cine muestra, en base a los resultados obtenidos, que la audiencia de este cine independiente valora especialmente la experiencia cinematográfica y apoya el esfuerzo que supone mantener abierto un espacio que no puede competir en términos de presupuesto y dimensión con las grandes multisalas de la ciudad. Sin embargo, esta apuesta por el *ars gratia artis* que les inspira las características y vocación de estas salas encierra una evidente polarización entre dos segmentos de audiencia que se muestran

inmiscibles: un sector más joven, culturalmente omnívoro y con un perfil más individual de consumo cultural, y un segmento de mayor edad, que muestra patrones de consumo casi antagónicos.

En general, el perfil de consumo se asocia en mayor medida con una actividad más *individual* y singular que con una dimensión más colectiva e inercial. Por así decirlo, pesa más la iniciativa personal relacionada con la predisposición hacia las películas o la actividad de exhibición, que una actividad colectiva de ocio. En este sentido es interesante resaltar el ingrediente de opción y decisión individual a la hora de escoger ir al cine. Diversos estudios precedentes apuntan a la asociación de un consumo cultural más continuado y diverso (omnívoro) se correlaciona con una adscripción sociocultural (en términos de clase o estrato social) más alto, mientras que la restricción en ambos sentidos (consumo unívoro) se asocia a capas menos favorecidas (Chan y Goldthorpe 2005; Wiśniewska et al. 2020). Los resultados de nuestra investigación corroboran la centralidad del “omnivorismo” para la interconexión de espacios culturales diversos. Concretamente, apreciamos que las redes más eficientes (es decir, las que evidencian mejores vínculos entre ofertas culturales diversas -cine, teatro, etc.-) provienen de quienes no consumen la considerada “cultura popular”. Adicionalmente, el nivel de omnivorismo se ve influido por la edad, de modo que cuanto más joven es una persona más consumo omnívoro evidencia.

Esta inmiscibilidad se pone de relieve también en la frecuencia de asistencia a las salas de cine -incrementándose la frecuencia a medida que se aumenta la franja de edad-, y en las fuentes donde se busca información relativa a las actividades cinematográficas -que pone de manifiesto también la estrecha correlación entre franja de edad y medios digitales / convencionales-. Sin embargo, existe una manifiesta convergencia en la importancia de la sala de cine a la hora de valorar el aspecto técnico y la experiencia inmersiva que supone el visionado en estos espacios, aspecto que confirmaría las conclusiones de García Ferrero (2016) en relación con el valor de la experiencia singular de ir al cine.

Por otro lado, acudir al cine puede ser un acto puntual y desvinculado de otras actividades vinculadas al entorno socioeconómico del barrio. Así, pese a que Cinemes Girona se ubica en el centro de un entramado cultural y de ocio, las actividades complementarias al trasiego de ida y vuelta de la sala no siempre se acompaña de otras actividades de consumo, y cuando estas se dan, suelen ser posteriores al visionado y se concentran en dar un paseo, tomar una consumición en un bar o cafetería o cenar. La coincidencia de estas tres actividades se da sólo ocasionalmente, lo que sin embargo no contradice las conclusiones de estudios precedentes en el sentido de subrayar la integración de los cines con los entornos socioeconómicos en que se ubican. Más bien parece que esta asociación aparece segmentada en función de la edad y del patrón omnívoro de la audiencia.

En este sentido, la *distancia* no supone un impedimento para disfrutar de la oferta cultural. Además, la valoración de la oferta cultural se ve influenciada por consideraciones económicas, donde la conciencia del precio de las entradas se equilibra con la búsqueda de recursos gratuitos en función de las limitaciones económicas individuales. Los jóvenes

buscan diferenciarse y expresar sus preferencias culturales en un entorno donde la oferta es diversa pero también influida por factores comerciales y de consumo masivo. Cabe destacar que este consumo “alternativo” también se destaca por una prescripción entre pares en donde se aprecia una relación horizontal llena de contenido compartido que se pueda interpelar y con códigos que les sean familiares, comunes y confiables obviando lo explícito. Como manifestó una de las informantes: “En cuanto veo la palabra jóvenes en una propaganda, ya sé que es un evento que no está hecho por jóvenes ni pensado para jóvenes” (Susana).

En relación con el material audiovisual consumido en plataformas en línea, se evidencian perspectivas divergentes. Mientras algunos critican la sobrecarga de información y la percepción de baja calidad en los contenidos, otros reconocen la utilidad de estas plataformas para atraer nuevos públicos y ampliar el acceso a información que previamente estaba menos difundida. Sí hubo coincidencia en señalar líneas estratégicas que podrían reforzar el interés por las salas de cine, sobre todo entre los más jóvenes.

Como se puede observar, tanto en las soluciones reales como en las imaginadas existen varios reclamos comunes: más participación del público, más actividades paralelas a la proyección, programaciones variadas y mayor incidencia en la formación de públicos. Estas sugerencias, en la línea de los estudios de Vilallonga (2018), Bukvić et al (2017) o García Ferrero (2016) apuntan a diversificar la oferta, fomentar la participación comunitaria y crear experiencias integrales en torno al cine. Esta común pasión por el cine más allá de las diferencias de edad apela a la transformación de las salas en espacios inclusivos y educativos, promoviendo la exploración y el encuentro cultural. La conexión con espacios de creación y la incidencia en la educación sobre el cine y su lenguaje cinematográfico buscan no solo atraer nuevas audiencias, sino también cultivar un mayor entendimiento y aprecio por la riqueza cultural del cine.

En buena medida, estas demandas se alinearonapw con las apreciaciones del panel de expertos, quienes también incidieron en la relevancia de generar vivencias diferenciadas del consumo cultural hegemónico o de masas; en el grupo de los jóvenes se habló de “lo alternativo”, mientras que en el grupo de los expertos se usó la expresión de “consumo en los márgenes”. Puede concluirse, por tanto, que las experiencias de consumo cultural alejadas de tendencias *mainstream* tienen una audiencia potencial dispuesta a buscar y disfrutar esa singularidad. A lo largo de nuestro estudio se puso de relieve que la creencia de que los jóvenes “no van al cine”, no se cumple cuando encuentran una experiencia diferencial. Sin embargo, el panel de expertos constató la dificultad de sostener en el tiempo esta singularidad permanente.

En definitiva, “ir al cine” implica compartir significados y experiencias emocionales, en un marco que interpela directamente a la identidad del espectador al tiempo que constituye un acto social que refleja, cohesiona y enriquece las creencias compartidas y valores de la audiencia. En este sentido, podría hipotetizarse que el carácter de espacios de ritualidad de las salas de cine (en el sentido de Turner, 1967 y 1982), previene la descontextualización cultural y simbólica de los no-lugares caracterizada por Augé (1992), mediante la compartición de narrativas, la atribución de significados y la interpretación contextualizada de experiencias sensoriales colectivas (Geertz, 1973). De

este modo, las salas no pierden su vinculación cultural con el entramado social en el que se insertan; más bien al contrario: emergen como espacios culturalmente relevantes, al contrario de lo que impondría una dinámica de consumo individualizado a través de plataformas globalizadas o de espacios disgregados y sin arraigo identitario con un entorno social cohesionado.

Por último, cabe señalar que nuestro estudio presenta algunas limitaciones que deberán tenerse en cuenta en futuras investigaciones en este ámbito. En primer lugar, existe un sesgo en la muestra inducido por los canales donde se ha administrado el cuestionario: al recurrir a listas de distribución propias de la unidad de observación se está limitando la variedad potencial de perfiles de audiencia que pudieran responder. Aunque este fuera el único medio que garantizara llegar a población usuaria de Cinemes Girona y que se recurriese también a una administración paralela mediante listas ajenas a la unidad de observación, ciertos segmentos pueden estar sobrerrepresentados (población jubilada, por ejemplo) y otros posiblemente infrarepresentados (jóvenes varones, entre otros).

En segundo lugar, el estudio se ha centrado sobre una sala en concreto, pero debería replicarse en el futuro a otros cines de características similares (también para los más comerciales) para poder establecer similitudes y diferencias respecto a los objetivos abordados en Cinemes Girona. En tercer lugar, el alcance de las conclusiones de una investigación de estas características es necesariamente delimitada en el tiempo, siendo deseable poder replicarla en periodos regulares y distintos a lo largo de un ciclo temporal lo más dilatado posible.

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**Shaping the ephemeral in and out of the field: methodological in-
betweens as tools for disentanglement**

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Abstract

This article addresses dialogical practice between anthropology and art and how it afforded connection of elements of different scales: seemingly distant and disconnected processes and bodies with the multiple, interdependent ways climate crisis manifests in a small valley in the Mediterranean Alps. It discusses how methods and disciplines the author sought to keep separate ended up coming into dialogue that, while in the field, helped in a situation of overwhelm, when back from the field – contributed to making sense of things and, later, helped return to text.

Keywords

Ethnography; Methods; Dialogical; Visual Art Practice; Interconnectedness

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Fieldwork, method, climate and limits

My ethnographic fieldwork took place at the site of a recent disaster in the valley of Roya in France, just off the border with Italy. A doctoral student in anthropology, I arrived the summer following the event of 2nd of October 2020, when an unprecedented storm (Carrega and Michelot 2021) ravaged the valley's infrastructure. Most of the rubble – tree trunks, shells of vehicles, lumps of asphalt and concrete transported by the tight grip of a raging mixture of water and gravel – had been cleared away and driven out of the valley before I arrived. I was familiar with the landscape from my earlier travels aboard a train on a railway line that traverses the valley. I remembered lush green near the riverbed beneath the railroad, colorful houses, and the river Roya, vibrant turquoise to electric blue-green, depending on the time of day and cloud cover. Through those earlier travels, I had never left the train, making the experience of the valley somewhat surreal. The contrast made my heart sink.

The stories that the inhabitants of the villages of the valley shared with me during interviews and those that emerged in daily exchanges guided me through the damage. A ghostly asphalt road leading into nothingness, abruptly ending before a tunnel, the interior of a hotel displayed through seams ripped open, and half of a house hanging on the edge off the cliff attested to my interlocutors' recollections, summoning my gaze. Daily, alongside the villagers, I observed heavy machinery at work on the bed of river Roya. Bulldozers displaced boulders from within the riverbed onto the shores. Rather than serving as a reminder of the storm, rock was transformed into reconstruction material. As storm waters had ripped them off entirely, patches of road leading North of the valley needed to be built anew.

With winter approaching, the sun ducked deeper behind the mountains, and darkness began to weigh on me. I listened to stories and their variations, confusing and conflicting, tensions that are part and parcel of life in a small place on the Franco-Italian border, and grief: grief that followed the storm, grief related to the shift of the border in 1947¹, grief of and for the people on the move stuck in Ventimiglia², refused and unwanted, moving alongside and through the valley. The sight of dry waterways south of the valley engulfed me in solastalgia. Overlap of political, historical, geological, social, and species boundaries, as well as stories – those told and those inscribed in stone – span beyond scales and frames of time I could fathom. I arrived open to whatever thematic

¹ In 1947 the Treaty of Paris was signed. According to the treaty, the communes of Tenda and Briga were transferred to France, and other adjustments were made to the border. One fieldwork participant shared that this shift had been radical for their family history. Their Italian grandmother forbade them from speaking languages other than French "for their own sake" (cited from an informal interview, September 2021).

² Franco-Italian border across the Alps is heavily policed by the French border police in pursuit of persons who enter the country illegally. As I've witnessed multiple times, the presumption regarding one's legal or illegal status is often based on skin color alone. A detailed account of racially targeted policing higher in the Alps, in the Briançon border zone (Haute-Alpes), and the methods of "chase" for the people on the move has been written by Sarah Bachelier (2020). The situation on the border in Mediterranean Alps is much the same. People on the move captured in the mountains are taken to a temporary detention facility in Menton and released back to Italy without the possibility of requesting asylum in the territory of France. It can take several attempts over an indefinite time for a person to cross the border.

lines emerged around and beyond the initial questions I had. I was, however, unprepared to witness and absorb the amount of grief, fear, and pain that people shared with me. I felt like an intruder and a voyeur, uncertain how to respond. I felt as if the quantity of data and emotions had submerged me in, metaphorically speaking, noise, making it challenging to determine the signal. Adding to the load, I was sexually harassed on several occasions, once during an interview I was conducting. Since this experience, I have often felt unsafe and anxious. My mental health deteriorated, making it hard to be present and receptive.

I came to the field with an intention to keep what I saw as my two distinct practices – that of an anthropologist and that of an artist – separate. I wanted my artistic practice to remain a place in which I could find comfort in an overwhelming social situation. I know myself enough to be aware that an unfamiliar situation in which I feel unsafe will result in an overwhelm and as happened, will be followed by an episode of depression. My art practice was supposed to be my safety net³. I had planned to collect interviews, take notes, participate as much as possible in events and exchanges, and contribute to various efforts of restoration and activism while in the field, hence overall a very classic approach to ethnography. As expected, over several months, the initial research questions I had arrived with proved less relevant than those the field showed as pertinent. I started looking into historical and present entanglements between humans and nonhumans and how these resulted in the disaster that had consequently unfolded. While dialogue in those directions was a good way to engage with humans, the field invited me to attend to and attune with nonhumans present. The practice as observation fell short of opening to modes of engagement beyond the human. Throughout my time in the field, I was documenting the landscape via photography, but was uncertain how and if I'd read this material as data. I did it somewhat mechanically – as a thing I do, a routine part of my practice.

When collecting sounds, documenting the clouds and the mist, and writing poetry, I still thought of this as a process separate from my ethnographic practice. In hindsight, I also needed the separation. I started heading towards the mountain tops to work on cloud portraits: there was more air and more space for the eye to rest. Sometimes, the mountaintops would wear a thick cover of cloud or fog undulating under the weight of the sky, creating an uncertain horizon in which sharp edges dissolved. For a while, clouds and fog became my escape, until an interview with a beekeeper, who said that many bees die due to “white day”, smog-related fog that impacts visibility⁴. The ephemeral

³ Around the time I was in the field; several art-based initiatives took place, at least one aimed at helping reflect the experience of the storm. As far as I have observed, there were a couple of cases of strong emotional responses, and observing them, I thought that the people experiencing might have benefited from someone trained in art (as) therapy to intervene. As a performer and an educator in performance art, I have seen how artistic and body practices can allow for an emotional release and evoke painful experiences. I regarded then and now that I had come to a place where many people might be profoundly vulnerable; even at the time of writing this footnote, 2.5 years later, conversing seems to have been the least harmful way to approach the participants in the field.

⁴ I have not found literature to substantiate this claim. One entomologist I approached, a specialist in hymenopterans (ants, bees, wasps etc.), noted that this claim might have been related to the broad discussion regarding the possible causes of the Colony collapse disorder. A detailed study regarding it was issued in 2008-2009 by AFSSA, Agence

landscape of fog and cloud that had until then provided me with some respite from work with disaster narratives and the uncertainty of my role turned out to be yet another manifestation of intense changes in climate.

Timothy Morton has defined climate crisis as a hyperobject (2013). The scales across which the hyperobject of climate crisis operates “overwhelms human cognitive abilities” (Boulton 2016); it is distributed geographically and temporally and cannot be experienced as a whole. Nor can the cause-effect be traced linearly – both because of unfathomable scales and due to the quality Morton defines as viscosity, meaning its inherent nature of being sticky and mutable upon interaction. I thought of the storm that hit the valley as just one of the myriad of events that resulted from the climate crisis. The storm had been a long time in the making: centuries of deforestation, large-scale herding practices on the slopes, and construction within the floodplain had all contributed to the fragilization (Durville et al. 2013 in Carrega and Michelot 2021) of the terrain and thus the consequences of the storm. Expanding from a distant past, continuing towards the future, even if our measure was this relatively small valley, the temporal scale of the anthropogenization processes and spatial scale of the distribution of the storm’s effects are complex to define. To some of the inhabitants I interviewed, with reparation work continuing without a clear deadline, the storm was yet ongoing.

According to Morton (2013), one of the qualities that define the hyperobject, is intersubjectivity: it is experienced through intermediaries. As such, the storm could be considered one of the intermediaries of the climate crisis. Some of the research participants perceived the storm as well as other changes (in air temperatures, seasonality, water levels, insect invasions etc.) they witnessed in their daily farming practices as precisely that. Climate change defined what practices – therefore, what relationships – could continue and what had to be revisited and undergo a change. Many changes, however, are slow, the cause-effect connection seems far removed, and identifying the intermediaries is more complex. Not to mention that whereas some interlocutors saw the storm as part of the global climate crisis, strongly connected to the histories of colonialism, extraction, and intercontinental flows of capital and production, others maintained the view that the storm was, in essence, a singular enraged river conjunct the failures of what they identified as ecological policies⁵.

Upon my return from the field, when I started my analysis and write-up, I came under the impression that my attempt at translating the totality of the ethnographic fieldwork experience to text flattened the reality I had been immersed in. When qualified and treated as *pieces of data*, many things, or research elements, lost their processual aspects.

Francaise de Securite Sanitaire des Aliments (Toma, B. et al. 2009).

⁵ One of the participants of the research, a retired gardener and shepherd, shared the following thoughts regarding the limitations imposed by the “écologes” (ecologists, environmentalists, sometimes also used with derogatory notions) on tree management around the river: “No, you cannot touch a tree in the river, you cannot do anything, you have to leave it all as is, even if the trees will block the river, the valley... Have you seen the river earlier? [The locals] used to collect the wood all the time, every year, for heating in winter. But [environmentalists] didn’t allow that, those idiots. And this is how the valley was blocked and this is why [the storm resulted in] so much damage.” (Cited from an interview conducted in August 2021.)

Beyond data, I wanted to convey *experience*. I thought of the relationships established in the process of exchange with humans; with non-humans, the processes of observing or imagining. In many cases, they were expanding beyond a mere encounter, discovery, sighting, signalling – eventually connecting into a web of interrelated narratives – many of which are extralingual. Therefore it seemed to me that they could only be conveyed in extralingual forms if to be represented justly. The sensorial, perceptual, and uncertain play an important role in how I go along making sense of experiences and relationships in my life and my practices. *Writing* about affects and the sensorial, I felt could not do what the material had the potential to do⁶.

In this context, I asked myself how – methodologically and otherwise – I am to work with that which I brought back from the field to give justice to the complexity, bringing forth the nonhuman, non-linear, and extra- or non-lingual. While I was struggling, feeling I had no tools to write up with, I was also working on the exhibition. Based primarily on the materials I had recorded from the field, the video, photography, sounds, and text I produced were about the ephemeral, the unspoken. Only during the late production phase of the exhibition did I start seeing how my art practice helped me *read* the field, as I will try to demonstrate in this article.

The in-between practice: anthropology and art

This planet as we know it has been shaped by enmeshment and collaboration of different species across kingdoms that co-constitute the environments they live in while being in their own turn (trans)formed by those environments. Life is possible by the entanglement of all things, entanglement defined by Karen Barad as interdependency, wherein each life of each being emerges within and out of “entangled intra-relating” (2007: ix). With an awareness of this as well as the complexity of the causes, developments, and consequences of climate crisis; researchers, activists and artists have called for inter-, trans-, multi-disciplinary, and cross-cultural approaches to address “issues concerning the linked nature of human and biophysical systems, coupled with an increasing understanding of system complexity” (Stock and Burton 2011). From this, various practices emerged: interdisciplinary ones aimed at helping to reconnect the disconnected (Pretty 2011), meshwork-responsive research practices (Klenk 2018), those that embed the most minute of the elements in complex disciplinary contexts (Brevik et al. 2015, Teuber et al. 2022), as well as integrated research practices (Stock and Burton 2011). Artists responded to this call by incorporating trans-disciplinary approaches to

⁶ My thinking/feeling that I cannot translate affect or the affective into text/words connects to the definition of affect in Spinoza’s sense, as read by Deleuze and Guattari, “Affects are becomings” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 256 in Uhlmann 2020: 167), the body is defined via its affects, and by the possibilities to compose various kinds or relationships between affects and other bodies (ibid.) Affects, in this sense, are “immediately meaningful” (p. 170), part of pre-conscious cognitive processes that are in continuum with the conscious ones (p.173).

knowledge production within their respective practices, experimenting with integrating diverse methods, exploring and developing work that increasingly challenges more traditional artistic forms, etc.⁷

Engaged alongside participant observation and other methods, art forms – film, photography⁸, dance and performance, drawing, writing – and artistic methods have been part of the anthropological toolbox for a while. Used for a variety of reasons, they afford engagement of the sensual and shift of perception (Concha-Holmes 2015) – not only of the place and/or others within it, but also of self within that place, with others. They are likewise helpful in bridging nowness with past, facilitating the work of remembering and locating the personal within the broader social, economic, and political context (Irving 2007). Some choose them as more open/receptive and thus enhancing the multivocality within the field (Busta et al. 2023), others turn to creative and artistic practices as “more attuned to the complexities of representing ethnographic research materials and fieldwork experience” (Culhane 2017: 7). Artistic methods can be helpful in tapping into embodied knowledge, finding creative forms of collaboration with interlocutors, and other reasons.

In the 1990s, there emerged a trend that was defined as an ethnographic turn in arts, or instead, art institutions and artists were sympathizing with anthropology as a contextual “science of *alterity*; <...> [taking] *culture* as its object, <...> *interdisciplinary* as well as self-critical” (Foster 1995: 305, italics in the original). Hal Foster (1995) notes that this resulted in a relatively flat approach to social engagement with the site and communities, “which tend to be constructed as readymade for representation” (ibid.: 306). Foster writes how this quasi-anthropological paradigm in contemporary art practice became a sort of aesthetic genre. Revisiting the ethnographic turn in arts in the special issue of *Critical Arts*, Kris Rutten et al. (2013) connect the ethnographic turn in arts with the sensory turn in anthropology and raise critical questions to artists working ethnographically based on critique expressed by Foster and others. The ultimate question being who represents whom and who has the voice to represent the other.

Schneider and Wright (2020) note that the affinities between the disciplines of anthropology and art are fruitful to explore, and a growing body of work proves that projects bridging ethnographic and artistic practices produce knowledge that opens for new understandings emerging from the collisions and collaborations. Regardless, recalling intense doctoral seminar discussions on the matter of applying artistic and creative methods in anthropological work, some remain critical – artists and

⁷ One example is the bio-art scene, see Berger et al. 2023.

⁸ Photography has had a place in social anthropology research since the 1840s; however, for a long time, it was used for illustrative purposes. A thorough overview of shifts in the relationship between photography and anthropology, how anthropologists made sense of photographic medium, and how that has transformed over time, has been done by Elizabeth Edwards (2012, 2015). Just recently (19 Nov. 2024), in an Anthropology lecture series at the University of Bayreuth, prof. Dr. Gerd Spittler expressed his disappointment that the reviewers of his most recent book “Leben mit wenigen Dingen: Der Umgang der Kel Ewey Tuareg mit ihren Requisiten” (2023), had not discussed the numerous photographs included, but only text. Prof. Dr. Spittler accentuated that pictures contain more information and offer more “space for interpretation” than the text.

anthropologists alike. Alana Jelinek writes that “Anthropologists today use poetry, film, photography, and other forms to convey their data. Sometimes, they produce very interesting art-like creations” (2014: 130), “art-like” being key here, in a way of drawing a line between non-art and art⁹. Anthropologist Jennifer Clark engages in the discussion with Jelinek and notices that naive application of “methods drawn from art practice” result in “instrumentalised, and rather artless, art” (2014). While the definitions of “art-like creation” and “artless art” could be applied to, for example, products that are limited to be a mere display of research results, this is not always the case in practices that I define as dialogical. I draw from Stock and Burton (2011) and the concept of “integrated research,” which they describe as a practice in which “researchers need to maintain the utility of their disciplinary perspectives,” and the level of integration is determined in each project individually.

Aiming to add to the inquiry within both practices of anthropology and art, I define my practice as dialogical; conducive to expanding (disciplinary approaches) to merge (knowledge), and emerging new ways of knowledge-making (Clarke 2014). Much like anthropology and philosophy, as noticed by Latour, I believe art and anthropology have the potential to urge each other “to restart [their] inquiries into collectives” (Latour 2014: 302), well beyond (the) human ones. Additionally, I see my artistic practice not only as a means to produce knowledge but also as a practice to cope with the unease and anxiety brought about by the topics I research.

The aim of the exhibition titled “migluotie” (Lithuanian, the English version of the title being “opalescent”), to which I refer further in this text, has not been to apply artistic methods to represent or communicate the results of the fieldwork. Tim Ingold suggested not to equate ethnography – a description of life lived by people, with anthropology – a critical and comparative “inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world” (Ingold 2017, also see 2014, 2021). I find this definition of anthropology suitable to define the approach with which this process of making took place – as an inquiry into the possibilities.

The exhibition emerged from things that were circulating but not articulated, my emotional reactions to what I observed, and various things that were ephemeral, subtle, and unworded, someplace in the realm of perceptions. A state out of which or within

⁹ Alana Jelinek defines art as a “knowledge-forming discipline,” which, just as any discipline, has “knowledge sets, methodologies, assumptions and language” specific to it (p.144) and needs its edges to be “police[d]” (p.123). Jelinek seeks to define the endogenous value of art as opposed to its value being defined by (art) market as/and “the prism of neoliberalism” (p.148). Jelinek notes that their aim of defining and policing the boundary of art as a discipline is “to examine and celebrate what art is and how it is distinct from other types of practices, praxes, disciplines, actions” (p.150). Having clear boundaries, the art world “will be better able to resist totalizing discourses, including neoliberalism” (p.151). I am, however, not convinced that dialogical or integrated practices harm the discipline of art (nor any other). Importantly, I think a clear distinction that Jelinek draws between art practice and creativity and its application (“Art practice is not simply the enactment of creativity and it has no monopoly on creativity or on creative uses of material or methodology” (p.142) might be a response to the tension: application of creative methods does not result in the production of a piece of art.

which I worked – reverie – and the work of making, conceptualizing, and installing allowed to connect the dots I was otherwise struggling to connect. Within the field, the weight of a rock, the smell of water, the texture of an olive, the sounds of machinery shuffling stone, the light disappearing beyond the mountain, and the feelings these things evoked within me were certain. Facing a page waiting for a black line of text to grow into a paragraph felt the opposite. Delving back into the photos and sounds collected, revisiting and editing videos of clouds brought distant things closer revealing their interconnection. With and through them, when things finally came together in the exhibition space, I could return to those strings of letters on a page.

Connecting the elements: entanglements, borders and reverie

My artistic practice draws strongly on the sensory, where I am primarily attuned to sound: sound for me is a source of much understanding of and orientation in the world. Elsewhere (Pupkevičiūtė 2022) I have focused on how the aural field conveys entanglements that people I talked with failed to recognize, as well as the dominance of sound of technologies in a site most people would define as natural. During the act of listening, things emerge or become apparent beyond their visual presence. As significant a source of information is the absence of certain sounds as well as the clash between what is invisible but audible and vice-versa. Streams that have etched their paths across the rocks, now dry, emit a sound no more. Sounds of traffic and road construction work penetrate the side canyons while only slopes overgrown with forest are in sight. While exploring the fieldsite, detachment between the visual and aural often resulted in a mental state of reverie. Anthropologist of war and psychodynamic therapist Ivana Maček defines reverie as a state of mind that is free and in a flow, without a specific focus and aim (2023: 25). The state of reverie allows for an overlap of “the unconscious of the anthropologist and the unconscious or non-explicit of the field” (ibid.), helping gain clarity to the complexity of things. Maček used this technique to work with the material from the fieldwork she conducted during the siege of Sarajevo. While our research fields are far apart, reverie as practice is helpful in my work. The context of climate disaster elicits substantial unease and reverie provides the possibility to shape space for the two-fold motion of stepping away while remaining within.

Not only misalignments of the visible and audible worlds but also thick, nearly tangible cloud formations offered space for reverie. Over February and March 2022, I was chasing clouds. At a particular moment in the afternoon, they would descend atop the mountains south of the village where I lived. Clouds would linger, moving in slow motion, a flock of sheep on a foggy early morning. Cloudy, foggy days were windless, thus the clouds would stay seated on the mountains, seemingly motionless. There was a tangible division between the world outside, and within the cloud, and here, the sensibility of my skin took better measure than my eyes. Through the skin, within the cloud, I experienced its not-entirely ephemeral nature: droplets of water in high concentration in the air would moisten my cheeks, soaking my hair, and rest on glasses and camera lenses. The high moisture would alter the sound of the surrounding world. A thick cover of water droplets

would soften the edges of the world, letting only those of the closest cliffs protrude.



Fig. 1 Edge of a cliff in a thick fog, 2022. Photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.

The clouds filled me with awe, releasing from the uncertainty that so strongly contributed to my anxiety in the field, grounding me. Water droplets on my skin connected me intimately to things atop and below the mountain, to the clouds themselves and through them – to the world ocean that had evaporated them. Playing an important role in both cooling and warming of the Earth’s surface and atmosphere, clouds are part of the water cycle of this planet. They reflect incoming solar radiation, simultaneously absorbing terrestrial long-wave radiation. Clouds also play an important role in feedback loops. With the warming climate, the phase change in clouds increases cloud albedo in some regions, disproportionately affecting the Arctic and the Southern Ocean (Storelvmo et al. 2015).

Hence, these nebulous formations offering delight and sense of ease were actually deeply connected to the subject of my research. The body of water, evaporating with increasing intensity, connected to non-human bodies and that of my own; and through it – the bodies of those crossing the Mediterranean Sea, just a couple of dozen kilometers away from the mountain I was standing on. All in all, through fog and cloud, the climate crisis was manifesting itself.



Fig. 2 Video diptych *Debesynas (Cloudscape)*, 2023. Exhibition documentation, photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.

Much later, those clouds I had filmed became a diptych – two videos from one sequence in which the clouds move over the top of a mountain. One video is in slow motion; then, the movement is reversed and looped. The other video is mirrored from the center horizontally, redefining the horizon. With several months between the exhibition and this text, I see the video as a result of searching for a form to reflect both the awe and the recognition of the threat. In a way, it exposes how the role and function of things depend on how and what they connect to. Clouds and fog sipping in through the valleys and spilling over the mountains are beyond measure: their scale is unfathomable if seen from the ground, and their shapes shift while they don't even seem to move. Observing those qualities, I could not not think how they resonate with Morton's definition of global warming as a hyperobject.

Thinking of clouds as a manifestation of climate change, I needed to address the connection between things – bodies and water droplets, sea and cloud – even further beyond. It's what informed the design of the exhibition's narrative and moved me to produce a video titled "*Saugus kelias*" ("Safe passage") about (a) meeting with a group of people on the move. The story behind and within the video is simple. One evening, a Persian-speaking friend of mine and I were driving back to the valley after taking part in a rally against a far-right politician visiting a temporary detention facility for people on the move. Driving through Ventimiglia, we thought we would stop and check out the situation under the highway above River Roya, where many people on the move take shelter at night. That evening, we met a group of young men from Afghanistan. They washed their feet in the freezing water of the river and allowed us to join them at the fire. They

explained their plan to walk upwards the river to Roya Valley in order to enter France elsewhere than the infamous passage of the French-Italian border between Ventimiglia and Menton¹⁰. My friend explained to them that Roya is a dead-end, well protected by the border guards who regularly patrol the road – posted at several intersections, the Breil-sur-Roya and Sospel train stations, as well as the mountain trails that lead out of the valley, descending towards the inland. The men were, however, firmly convinced of their route, so we sat by the fire, drawing maps on sand. There are several possibilities to cross the border in those places, but all of them are risky. My friend and I had heard of numerous cases of how things went wrong. After having paid a high fare to be snuck into France in the back of a truck, some people ended up in Turin. Others were rounded up by border guards passing over mountains, walking on the road towards the valley of Roya, or taking the highway to Nice. Those spend the night in a facility edging Menton, are refused to request asylum and spat back to Ventimiglia. To worse fates, some had fallen to their death from Passo della Morte (Passage of Death), conversely a life-saving passage previously taken by Jews fleeing a fascist regime; while others were electrocuted atop the Ventimiglia-Menton train. Numerous, however, have managed to cross the border successfully, that most of those we met taking shelter under this highway hoped to do with the least delay possible¹¹.

With the borderline running through, people on the move are part of the reality of Roya Valley. They have been driven away from their homes by historical and contemporary issues that drive the climate crisis. These people are simultaneously visible and invisible both in Ventimiglia, under the highway, and in Roya Valley. Some bodies move through the tunnels and trails at night, often noticed by passers by and those actively looking for them. Some are exposed in plain light of day, sometimes spotted to be taken by the *gendarmes*, loaded into vans, and driven away. While police and some inhabitants define these people as “illegal,” in strictly legal terms, it is the state that acts illegally by refusing them their right to ask for asylum. However, there are as well those in the valley and beyond who provide food and shelter for people on the move and seek ways to help them get to places to submit requests for asylum. Relationships that form in these circumstances – between various people assuming various roles in controlling, supporting, aiding, communicating, and other gestures – are thick; they remind me of the thick cloud-fog (but I see that in retrospect). Through this writing, I can reflect upon how I came to produce the work “Safe Passage”. Recorded over a video of electricity cables

¹⁰ The border control here was unilaterally introduced first in 2011. However, it did not last; the control was reintroduced again in 2015 and has not been lifted since. Giacomo Donadio (2021) has thoroughly looked into the irregularity of the border regime on this border segment. The irregularity here is to be thought of not only in terms of disregarding Schengen and EU border regimes and regulations but, more importantly, in terms of human rights, legislation regarding the right to asylum, etc. Gabriele Proglia (2021) has thoroughly researched the historicity of this passage.

¹¹ These lines are the outcomes of brief exchanges I had with border volunteers and people on the move – I’ve encountered when volunteering for one humanitarian organization serving dinner for people on the move in a parking lot next to the highway I write about.

submerged by and disappearing in the stillness of a thick fog– a voice tells the story of a meeting. Like looking into the fog, people and their experiences are obfuscated and flattened in the discourses surrounding migration, reduced to impersonal data sets. Hence, the title of the piece becomes more of a question of whether safe passage is even possible.

For centuries, the Maritime Alps has been a liminal space and one of passage. It was and remains an intersection of trade and transhumance routes, a place of shifting political borders and national and international migrations (Marengo 2021). This mountainous terrain has always been organically conducive to multi-directional flows. However, the border control regime now allows only the flow of certain bodies, delimiting the flow of others and discriminating based on skin color. On many occasions, I've witnessed border guards in the train station checking identity documents, limiting themselves only to people of color. Other than the color of one's skin, border guards on the train are on the lookout for violence inscribed in bodies (Fassin 2011), visible and not – a shrug, a shudder, and a fearful turn of the head are just some of the giveaways. The fog on the mountain trail, such as the one I was chasing, and the dark can provide a partial cover. However, the bodies of people on the move are identified not only visually. By day and night alike, sound gives away that a group of people is moving, one that should not be there, Céline Eschenbrenner (2023) writes. Hence, not only landscapes but also soundscapes of some territories of the mountains are monitored by *gendarmes*. If captured, as in the cases mentioned previously, people on the move are brought back to the frontier and start again. All in all, the safety and relief that people on the move walk towards comes at an extremely high cost.



Fig. 3 Video Saugus kelias (Safe Passage). Exhibition documentation, photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.

Departing from bodies entangled historically and politically with the complicated terrain, I thought about human and nonhuman life stories and life cycles that overlap, collide, and co-constitute the valley's landscape. If I were to define these entanglements as texture, they are thick, dense, and sticky. They are also overwhelming when I try to make sense of them as they expand in space through time. In an interview I conducted in preparation for the exhibition, a friend from the field defined the landscape we were embedded in as "a landscape of connections" (Fr. *paysage de lien*). The concept resonated strongly with the landscape that I had begun to see. For that particular person, the connection that emerged as the most important of all was the connection with their mother:

First thing that comes to my mind is the affective connection I have with these landscapes. It's because I discovered them with my mother. When I was a child, my mother always took me on walks. <...>. The older I got, the more I discovered that it's thanks to her that I had wanted to discover the landscapes via walking, although earlier walking was not my thing. It was even more important for me to restart hiking because this is how I remained in touch with her. [On those trails] there were memories I had of her and maybe at that time [after her passing] this allowed me to stay connected to her (semi-structured interview, January 2023).

My friend and their mother connected via a shared landscape through time after their mother was no longer physically present. They came to share, among other things, love for the landscape, walking, knowledge of trails and plants, and admiration for specific flowers. Experiences of places and those dwelling within places entangled them into a web of inter-subjectivities that expanded beyond the two humans. A web of inter-subjectivities connects physical and non-physical as the landscape is more than a terrain. It consists of layers of meanings, sentiments, and sensations sensed by various bodies and produced over time.

One of the works I was nurturing for the exhibition was itself a landscape co-constituted by multiple beings, shaped by their relationships. It was a large SCOBY – a symbiotic culture consisting of lactic acid bacteria, acetic acid bacteria, and yeast, used to ferment kombucha. The microbial mat, or a microbial pellicle, floating as an interface between liquid and air, is usually of variable transparency and thickness depending on age and has a soft milky sheen. It is a community of a broad spectrum of yeasts that have various functions in fermentation and cellulose pellicle development and several types of aerobic bacteria, some of which produce microbial cellulose (Villarreal-Soto et al. 2018). The pellicle consists of entangled fibrils – nano and micro – of bacterial cellulose that form a matrix (Dima et al. 2017). The composition of yeast and bacteria in kombucha is changing (St-Pierre 2019), and SCOBY is in the process of constant co-cultivation. Growing the SCOBY, or contributing to its growth, requires – as all relationships do – time, as well as the starter and sweet black tea. From a see-through pellicle, it develops into a thick mass and, if left alone, without taking the liquid off, just constantly filling in that which

has evaporated, results in long strands of yeast extending beneath, towards the bottom of the vessel it floats in.



Fig. 4 Exhibit Maya (SCOBY, *Camelia sinensis*, sugar, water), 2023. Exhibition view, photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.

Peering at that bacterial and yeast community floating in the exhibition space, I thought mostly about how human and nonhuman stories entangle, accumulate, and ferment, becoming something more than the sum of parts. In front of the glass container with the SCOBY, I hung a fragment of bone that I had found on the shores of Roya River. It was a *loupe*, a looking glass without a glass within. Gauging by size and judging by form – cut with precision – the bone could have belonged to a bovine, maybe part of a tibia. The elements had worn down the spongy structure within it, attesting to the passage of time. It was my connector to the history of the valley, my link to an 18th-century engraving depicting the royal route to one of the villages, in which, at the bottom, closest to the viewer, three cows, a villager, and a dog are seen (Botton and Gaber 2009). At the same time, it also connected me to a photograph I had seen in another history book, of an ox pulling a plough, a young man and a child behind, on one of the terraces in Breil-sur-Roya (Botton 1996). The text next to it stated how oxen were preferred for work in the fields, but given that they were expensive, they would be bought by a collective of people, all of whom had to get along well enough to agree upon matters of care and employment of the oxen. In the dim light of the exhibition space, the bone fragment hung on a transparent line was swinging when visitors would pass by and move the air. Throughout the exhibition period, it served as a *loupe* to focus the gaze onto exhibition elements – the lulling body of SCOBY, a chair to sit on, a cloud horizon across the room, the mist of the

“Safe Passage” on the far wall of the gallery, and the entry to the corridor that was filled with a composition of recordings of shuffling stones, sand, and cracking sticks, connecting and reconnecting (hi)stories.



Fig. 5 Exhibit Maya (bone fragment), 2023. Exhibition view, photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.



Fig. 6 Bone fragment, close up, 2023. Photo by Daina Pupkevičiūtė.

Final notes

In this text, I have discussed the relationship between my practices of anthropology and art as dialogical and the outcome of this dance between the two – an exhibition. I described in detail how and for what reasons I arrived in the field intending to keep my two practices separate and how, in the end, they co-constituted the body of my current work in both fields. The relationship between the two disciplines is complex and possibly not yet sufficiently articulated as it is still in process and might seem, more than anything, undisciplined. However, I am confident that I would not have been able to articulate the connectivities between the clouds, the Mediterranean Sea, the bodies of migrants, and my own body without the process of constructing the visual narrative that preceded the construction of this current text.

Additionally, both the process of collection of visual and sound material, looking away from narratives as told by humans, and immersion into reverie, a concept that I borrow to define the space within which I become creative and attuned to that which is extralingual, have been helpful to ground and restore in an overwhelming fieldwork situation. Later, work on the exhibition allowed me to expand and return to the texts and contexts from within the field.

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Maasai Women Feeling Photography

Objects and practices between affects, commercialization and colonialism

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Abstract

The stereotyped image of the Maasai is a significant aspect of Tanzania's tourist industry, with photography playing a key role as a form of commercialization as well as a source of income. For some Maasai women themselves, however, selling their image is a complex endeavor implying cultural, economic, and affective challenges. Unlike tourists seeking an authentic experience, Maasai women question where their images go, for what purpose, and to what end. Departing from a collection of colonial photographs brought to the field, this article explores the intricate relationship Maasai women have with their own image, contrasting their perspectives with broader themes of tourism and photography. Photographs are highly affective objects that facilitate relationships of looking and being looked at; at the same time, they can carry memories and are, in the case of tourist photography, highly mobile objects, that circulate globally. While their photographs become a commodity, Maasai individuals are often excluded from the consumption and control of their own images. However, within Maasai households, women often function as the safekeepers of the family's photography; the images in these contexts become carefully guarded objects that the women cherish and care for. The article explores the women's complex relationships with the medium of photography, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of photography and photographic practices in the Maasai context.

Keywords

Cultural Tourism, Photography, Affect, Colonialism, Capitalism

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"Why don't you have a camera with you? Take a picture of us!" I am with a group of *sìànkìkì* (young Maasai women) in the *kraal* of a Maasai boma in northern Tanzania. The dust around us is stirred up by the stamping and jumping feet of the young women. It settles on their large colorful red, blue, green and white shukas with checks, dots, stripes and other patterns. The small metal plates on their earrings and necklaces glitter in the sunlight. They jingle. We stand in small circles and laugh, sharing a Coca-Cola. It's the wedding of a young *múrràni*, a young warrior. His mother comes over to me. We are about five kilometers inland from the main road that connects Arusha with Dodoma and on which tourists travel to the national parks in large safari vehicles. I live in her friend's household and accompany the young women to the celebration. This is my first fieldwork and I arrived in Tanzania two months ago. I have come to conduct ethnographic research on two albums of historic photographs from German colonial times. The photographs were taken by Max Schoeller, a German entrepreneur, passionate hunter and supporter of the colonial project in Africa. Between 1896 and 1897 he led an expedition from the coast of German East Africa – today's Tanzania – to Kenya and Uganda a time when the region was the scene of brutal clashes between the colonial government and members of various ethnic groups, including the Maasai. He 'collected' more than a thousand ethnographic objects, examined the territory for possible investment opportunities, shot big games and took photographs.

I am interested in the histories, memories and affects that stick to these objects and in the presentness of the colonial of which they are materializations. As I enter the field, one of my presuppositions is that the photographic act in itself always contains a potential of violence and that this act establishes and solidifies a relationship, which, in the case of colonialism, is a relationship of looking and taking and being looked at and taken from forcefully. Therefore, I have decided to refrain from taking photographs in the field already during my preparations (cf. Behrend 2013: 53) in order not to reproduce the problematic dynamic inscribed in the entanglement of photography and anthropology (Pinney 2011). I am trying to engage in an open exchange based on the photographs. As a form of visual repatriation (Peers and Brown 2003) I am eager to bring back these images and with them their histories and the knowledge attached to them, in order to collaboratively challenge the perspective of the European Museum, which is the keeper of these images and the narratives attached to them.

And now this: "Where's your camera?" the mother of the groom asks my companion, pointing at me. "She should take our picture." Of course, I don't have a camera with me. Although I have a smartphone with a camera, I deliberately left it at home. The encounter makes me feel highly uncomfortable because it clashes two desires within my fieldwork: the desire to be accepted and to conform to the expectations of my interlocutors and the desire to adapt and not to gaze at the field through the camera. This is not the first time for me to experience something like this. Wherever I go, my presence provokes an association with the medium of photography. While this first appeared as a stressful side aspect of my fieldwork, something that needed to be circumvented and negotiated, I later on realized that the extensive association of me, as a white person and a researcher, with the medium of photography could not be separated from my object of research. Bringing

archival material back to the field connects what is categorized as history with the everyday lives, experiences and feelings of the people to whom these archival materials belong. However, in the context of photography the object and the medium are closely intertwined with the figure of the white other, in the form of tourists, researchers, missionaries and NGO workers. The woman's request for me to take her photograph conflicts with my own ethical stance, thereby complicating my research subject and simultaneously situating me within the relational dynamics that define photography in the Maasai village.

Ariella Azouley states that the photographic encounter "always and inescapably involves a measure of violence." This holds true even when the encounter is consensual because "the violence is inherent in the instrumentalization of the photographed person in order to produce an image of him" (Azouley 2008: 99). The violence inscribed in a photograph stems from the relationship it materializes, with one person acting and the other being acted upon. This relates to an understanding of a photograph primarily as an act (Foliard 2013). This is particularly evident in colonial photography, which emerged in contexts of severe inequality and oppression. However, how does this dynamic translate to cases where an ethnographer is asked to function as a photographer for their interlocutors? Where is tourist photography situated in this context? How do those apparently subjected to the violence inherent in photography perceive this violence? How is it understood or navigated by them?

Photographs in the Field as an Affective Arrangement

A few weeks after the wedding, I visit the person again. She has invited me for tea, and I bring a kilo of sugar as a gift. Once more she asks if I could take her photograph. She tells me she would like to own a picture of herself. Remembering our previous encounter, I come prepared and take two digital photographs. I promise to print them later at one of the shops in Minjingu, the nearest larger village, and give them to her as a gift. She seems happy, this will be the first time she receives a photograph of herself. However, it is not the first time she has been photographed.

After taking her photograph, we sit down to look at and discuss some of the Schoeller images I brought with me. It's a hot day, and someone serves us tea with sugar but no milk. The village is facing a severe drought. The people of the village have been waiting for the rains to begin for two months, and most of the cattle have been moved to other areas in search of pasture and water. As I sip tea from a large enamel mug, I watch two young men behind one of the houses struggling to lift a weak cow. Only the cattle too frail to endure the long journey remain in the village. "She is thanking you," my friend Leah Laizer tells me. "They had no breakfast today because they had no sugar for tea." We are seated on colorful plastic buckets and orange oil canisters, which the women use to fetch water with their donkeys from the nearby river. The river is now dried out, leaving only deep holes in the ground.



Figure 1 Massai Führer von Schimoni. Max Schoeller 1896-1897, © KHM-Museumsverband

The Schoeller photographs I brought are printed in large formats and laminated, a practice I adopted from the Maasai, who laminate important documents, such as birth certificates to protect them from the village's dusty environment. We scroll through the images together. Some show young girls, while others depict *múrrànì* (young Maasai warriors) with elongated earlobes. One photograph captures a young man squatting on the ground, seemingly shielding himself from the sun. The vein on his forehead is visible, and you can almost see the sweat dripping from his face (Figure 1).

The woman holds this image in her hands, and suddenly I realize she is crying. Leah looks at me uncomfortably. "Now we've made her cry," she says. We are all a bit overwhelmed by the situation as the woman begins to narrate. She remembers. The photograph takes her back to a time when she too struggled, just like the man in the picture. It reminds her of hardship, of days when she starved and had nothing.

When she was young, she tells us, she and other children would run back and forth along the main road where safari cars passed on their way to the national parks. They would hide in the bushes, watching the tourists drive by. She recalls how tourists often threw bags out of their car windows; bags filled with various items. The children would run from the bushes to grab them. Sometimes the bags contained cookies, bread, or sweets, but other times, she laughs slightly through her tears, they would just contain trash. The children knew they were being photographed as they picked up the bags.

How do these seemingly contradictory dimensions of photography in the Maasai community interconnect? How can a medium like photography simultaneously serve as a tool for the perpetuation of violence and distinction while also being a desired object that women long to possess?

In the following, I will explore the various dimensions of photography for the Maasai women I worked and lived with during my fieldwork in Tanzania.

My focus on Maasai women arises from the fact that Maasai villages are highly gendered spaces. Women and men do not inhabit the same physical or social spaces. Their daily lives are distinct and overlap only in limited areas. As a young woman, I automatically became part of the women's spaces, in contrast to my colleague Laibor Moko, himself a Maasai, who moved primarily within male spaces. My immersion in women's spaces, through a methodology of "thick participation," (Spittler 2014) allowed me to take part in their daily tasks: fetching water and firewood, going to the market, milking cows, cooking, and repairing mud houses with a mixture of cow dung and soil (Figure 4). This active involvement not only helped me gain the trust and respect of these women, transforming their perceptions of me as a white woman with a camera, but also provided invaluable insight into their perceptions, ideas, and experiences with photography.

Maasai society is highly gendered, disadvantaging women, a dynamic shaped by colonial practices that prioritized male forms of authority and property over women's (Hodgson 2004). As Strathern and others have shown, gender is not a separate field but central to understanding societies in general (Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974, Strathern 1988). While male and female spheres may appear distinct, they are co-constitutive. Additionally, gender and ethnicity are deeply interlinked in their construction (Hodgson 2004). Within this framework, focusing on women is a pragmatic choice of perspective, as my gender being read as female granted me access to certain women-specific spaces while limiting access to more male-dominated ones. Here, "women" is understood as a normative category.

Paying close attention to affects and emotions allowed for a perspective that zoomed in on what actually mattered to people (Lutz 2017) thereby enabling me to come to terms with the complex reality of their lives instead of merely reproducing my own presuppositions. Departing from a neo-spinozan tradition that theorizes affect as a relational force between bodies (Slaby 2019), I understand photographs as highly affective objects that actively shape encounters between different actors in the field. As raw histories (Edwards 2010) they carry a multitude of meanings and can not be pinpointed to one particular history or past. Interview-situations and other encounters based on photographs are not clearly delimited, rationally structured settings of data collection, but affective arrangements, i.e. "array(s) of persons, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviors, expressions, or other materials that coalesce into a coordinated formation of mutual affecting and being affected" (Slaby 2019: 109) and therefore opened spaces of inter-relational coproduction. Within these encounters photographs shape dynamics not only in relation to the images themselves but also between involved actors. Edwards describes photographs as "profoundly social objects of agency that

cannot be understood outside the social conditions of the material existence of their social function; the work they do" (Edwards 2012: 230). The way photographs act upon us depends on our biographies and (affective) dispositions, the contexts in which we exist and which shape us, the structures of feeling (Williams 1977) in which we are situated and our emotional repertoires (von Poser, Heyken & Hahn 2019). This applies not only to indigenous research partners but also to the researchers themselves, which are affectively engaged in the arrangements of the interview situations as well. The researchers' own emotions and affective dissonances are thereby understood as an important epistemic tool (Stodulka, Dinkelaker & Thajib, 2019), helping to come to terms with what is unfolding in the intermediate spaces between different historically situated bodies, such as photographs, the environment, researchers and interlocutors.

What I am interested in is "not just what is depicted in the photograph, what it might be thought to contain in any fixed historical sense, but also what goes on around it, it's life" (Wright 2013: 7). I am interested in the work that photographs in general and the Schoeller photographs in particular do in Maasai women's communities in Tanzania, which includes evoking memories, eliciting feelings, fostering a sense of (non-)belonging and creating relationships and boundaries.

Touristic Practice and Photography as Colonial Continuity

On the main road between Makuyuni and Mto wa Mbu, which leads to Ngorongoro National Park, signs advertising cultural manyatas or cultural bomas appear every hundred meters. From a distance, one can see groups of Maasai men and women waiting under trees or dancing for tourists. The Moran perform their famous jumping, wrapped in long red fabrics, holding their spears tightly.

Before this type of cultural attraction emerged, interactions between Maasai and tourists were more limited. Often, such encounters were controlled by white settlers (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994), investors, or non-Maasai Africans (Salazar 2018). Due to limited educational opportunities in the villages (cf. Hodgson 2004), Maasai were usually integrated into these structures as employees, with little opportunity to influence decision-making (Bruner 2001; Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). Despite these changes, cultural bomas today demonstrate the ongoing fascination tourists have with the Maasai and their way of life.

A friend from Arusha tells me: "There is the Big Five in Tanzania, and then there is number six, that's us, the Maasai." Others have documented similar sentiments in research on Maasai and tourism (Salazar 2018: 60). This quote sets the Maasai in a direct relation with a long history of big game hunting in Tanzania. The Big Five are the five most dangerous and therefore most prestigious animals to hunt, namely: lion, elephant, rhino, black buffalo and leopard. Today most tourists are going on photo safaris. Instead of hunting trophies they are eager to catch all of the Big Five in their photographs. Even though the quote is creating a disturbing parallel between indigenous people and animals, what my friend wanted to empathize was not primarily the stereotypical image of the Maasai, but their commercial value. The importance of her culture for the tourist sector filled her with pride and she only opposed the exploitation of this image by other

non-Maasai individuals who would take advantage of the Maasai without compensating them.

However, the image of the Maasai that is perpetuated in the cultural tourism sector remains highly stereotypical and only partially reflects their lived realities. Cultural tourism often perpetuates omissions and imagined narratives (Kratz & Gordon 2002; Sobania 2002). A guide at a cultural boma I visited told me the Maasai were unchanging, claiming they had remained the same for thousands of years. A common narrative of the Maasai as prehistoric, traditional and unwilling to change reminiscent of colonial salvage anthropology is reproduced by Maasai in the tourist sector, not least to please a specific western gaze. In the 1990s, technical devices were often hidden inside houses when tourists arrived (Bruner & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). However, today the supposed contradiction between Maasai life and technology is less obscured. After our visit the guide messaged me via WhatsApp to ask if I had enjoyed my visit.

These images of the iconic Maasai pastoralists are also gendered, with women being perceived as disadvantaged within a highly patriarchal culture (Hodgson 2004: 2). While this is partially true, the reality of gendered relations does not fit the stereotype neatly, as women themselves contest male authority through various practices such as women committees in the villages. Furthermore, Hodgson argues that patriarchy as the “political and economic domination of women is not inherent to Maasai as a mode of production or ideology” (Hodgson 2004:16) but developed only as a consequence of British colonial policies and therefore from a “historically particular constellation of interactions involving both British and Maasai ideas and practices” (Hodgson 2004:16). Today, Maasai women with their colorful dresses and opulent jewelry are a popular photo motif.

The Maasai have long been marketed as a “tourist attraction” – an idea with roots in the colonial era (Sobania 2002). Even then, the Maasai were a popular photographic subject, their image reflecting the colonial fascination seen in travelogues and ethnographies (e.g., Kallenberg 1892; Merker 1904). Schoeller, for instance, described various ethnic groups primarily in relation to the Maasai (Schoeller 1901). Rather than emphasizing connections between different groups, colonial narratives categorized them into hierarchical racial systems, often portraying the Maasai as superior (cf. Merker 1904). The colonial ethnography die Maasai written by the colonial military officer Moritz Merker and published in 1904 defines the Maasai within Hamitic race theory as semitic and parallels their religious beliefs with accounts from the Bible therefore constructing their ethnicity in proximity to the Germans. However, the idea of the Maasai as superior, aggressive, and uncontrollable cattle thieves, promoted by Moritz Merker and the German colonial administration, was also helpful to justify military expansion around the Moshi military station. The travelogues reveal not only a fascination as it emerged but also how early descriptions that have shaped the Western image of the Maasai to this day were already rooted largely in self-reflection and fantasy from the start.

Some of these colonial-era narratives persist today. The trope of the noble savage, living authentically and in harmony with nature, remains a popular motif in the tourism industry. The Maasai themselves commodify this image, as is evident in cultural bomas. Cultural tourism is now a common part of the safari experience. However, the heavy

commodification, stereotyping, and idealization normalize the consumption of Maasai bodies and culture as part of the travel experience. Books like *The White Maasai* (Hofmann 2000), travel catalogs, and illustrated books (Sobania 2002) stoke tourists' desire for an "authentic" African experience, presenting Maasai culture as a mirror to Western imaginations of "the other" (cf. Abu-Lughod 2005 [1991]). They are part of what Achille Mbembe (2017: 38) calls the "well of fantasies," an image of Africa and its inhabitants as embodying all that white tourists perceive themselves not to be.

Mbembe theorizes "Africa" as an essential gap or "solar hollow" a space that blinds and dazzles, serving as both a mirror and an enigma. In Tanzanian tourism, the Maasai symbolize the authentic African, positioned as the ultimate survivors of modernity. Mbembe suggests that these fantasies about Africa and its people are fluid; they can mean one thing and its opposite simultaneously without destabilizing the construction itself. While this construction rather reflects the western perspective more than an actual Maasai lived reality, tourists experience themselves as "eager hunters with a camera" who track down and capture reality as an "exotic trophy" (Sontag 2010 [1980]: 57).

Today, while some Maasai perceive tourism as a threat to their livelihood, others benefit from cultural commercialization through cultural bomas, selling jewelry and souvenirs, and operating hotels and tourist sites. They are able to shape and participate in these constructions to some extent. However, this was not always the case. Before the establishment of cultural bomas, it was common for tourist guides to bring groups directly into Maasai villages. Many interviewees recalled their childhood experiences of such visits. In these cases, the guides negotiated a fee with an elder man in the household. White tourists often distributed second-hand clothes and sweets to the children while taking photographs.

These memories were not always positive and often formative for people's perspectives on photography. My research partners described their confusion and discomfort as children. Some did not understand what the cameras were or why they were being photographed. Others were promised the photographs but never received them. Occasionally, guides would return with a few prints, but the negatives were kept (cf. Behrend 2013: 57). The experience of being photographed without consent left a lasting impression.



Figure 2 Frauen von Unter-Aruscha. Max Schoeller 1896-1897, © KHM-Museumsverband

For the women I worked with, the weekly market in Minjingu serves as another space where tourists and Maasai interact. For Maasai women, the market is a vital social event, a chance to shop, do business, and connect with friends. Women dress in their best fabrics and jewelry, selling goods like beans, rice, and traditional medicine. I often accompanied my friends to the market to purchase supplies or grind maize for ugali.

At these markets, tourists passing through on their way to Tarangire National Park often stop to observe the lively scenes. Using gestures, they ask Maasai women for photographs, who in turn signal for payment by rubbing their fingers together. This exchange is not always well received. Some tourists balk at the idea of paying for a photograph, perceiving it as disrespectful.

The practice of asking for payment highlights the commodification of Maasai imagery and can create tension. While tourists readily pay entrance fees to national parks or tips to guides, compensating Maasai women for their image feels inappropriate to them, causing an affective dissonance. Mühlhof (2019) defines affective dissonance as distinct from affective resonance. Affective resonances are relational and processual dynamics of affecting and being affected between multiple individuals and contextual factors (ibid.: 198-198). Affective dissonances, on the other hand, form the underside of affective resonances (ibid.:194-195). They are “experienced as aversive, divisive, destabilizing, or even explosive and destructive” (ibid.: 195). Affective dissonances and resonances influence the agency of individuals within specific situations and arrangements and are rooted in their affective dispositions of individuals. The encounter evokes the strangeness of “the other” rather than facilitating connection, a sentiment that becomes convincingly visible in Vanessa Wijngaarden’s documentary *Maasai Speak Back* (2019) on the encounters between tourists and Maasai women selling jewelry at a cultural

boma. By inviting her Maasai research partners to comment on the encounter with the tourists and discussing the material with the tourists afterwards, Wijngaarden reveals what I call the affective dissonances that evolve between tourists and Maasai.

A significant part of a Tanzanian tourist guide's role is to bridge the gap between the local reality and the expectations of Western tourists (cf. Wijngaarden 2010). Guides curate a seamless, comfortable experience for their clients, insulating them from the complexities of local life. Tourists travel in bubbles of air-conditioned cars and accommodations, detached from the environment they observe. These curated experiences offer "authenticity" without relinquishing comfort.

This detachment often breeds insecurity. Tourists, unfamiliar with the local context, rely entirely on their guides and fear being exploited. Frantz Fanon (2008 [1967]) discusses how the image of the black man in the global North is fraught with danger and suspicion. For tourists, the local people and their behaviors can feel intimidating, deviating from western norms and challenging their cultural repertoires (Swidler 2003: 26), i.e. their internalized cultural and social skills.

Susan Sontag argues that photography helps people to regain a sense of control in environments that make them feel insecure (Sontag 2010 [1980]). Hiding behind a camera is therefore not only a mode of consumption but also an affective tool to stimulate comfort in situations that cause affective dissonances. Maasai women demanding payment for photographs may reinforce these affective dynamics and the sense of loss of control that already characterizes some of these encounters. These moments of tension reveal the fragility of the constructed "authentic experience".

Uncanny Photography

I visit two elderly women who live a few kilometers away from our household in the village. Both are in their seventies and the mature matriarchs of large family networks. They have made their contribution to society; their husbands are long dead. Today, they are honored and appreciated by everyone. They snuff tobacco with the men, drink in public, scold and contradict their sons. Their status gives them 'fool's freedom'. These women are strong, they look me in the eye, bright and demanding, while I ask my questions in English. We have just started the interview when the first confrontation arises. Photographs are primarily something from which we Whites (Wazungu) benefit. I insist that nobody really benefits from Schoeller's photographs today and think of money, wealth and the overloaded archives of European museums. One of the women points at me, I would profit, even if I didn't get any money, I would still build my career on the photographs.

Who benefits from photographs? Although the photographs I show are over 100 years old, my interviewees relate them to what they themselves have observed throughout their lives, the behavior of white tourists and scholars. "What did these people want with the photographs?" "Why would you take photographs of strangers with you?" I mirror the question back to her, and what she assumes the reason to be. "It's for business", Leah translates to me. This is not the first time, this comes up. The idea that the photographs are being taken to be sold in Europe, frequently emerges in our interviews. In one of the oldest photo studios in Arusha, an elder photographer contextualizes, that

since the 1980s traveling photographers would visit the villages to take pictures of Maasai and sell them as postcards. However, apart from the economic profit, tourists and researchers alike do profit from photographs as a form of symbolic capital.

Almost all the women I speak to have sold their image at some point in their lives. The camera is often the only point of contact between tourists and the local Maasai. Whites and their cameras seem inseparable. Although the association of white people with photography is deeply ingrained, the "why" often remains unclear.

The relentless urge of tourists to capture everything, even the most mundane aspects of daily life, raises questions. One of my interlocutors (Figure 3) confides that it baffles her why people photograph strangers with whom they have no connection and whose names they don't know. She points out that if I were to take a photo, it would be different, I know their names, and the photographs would be linked to shared memories. Without such a connection, the images lose their meaning. She wonders: "Where do these photos go? What happens to them?" She recalls allowing many tourists to take her photograph, none of whom ever asked for her name.

The memory stirs discomfort in her, which manifests physically. She shakes, grimaces, waves her hands, and shrugs her shoulders in a for Maasai Women typical manner. The experience seems to inhabit her entire body. The unease resurfaces during our conversation, and the affects reverberate, palpable even to me. The loss of control over her image creates an affective dissonance. Something about it feels wrong, as though a boundary has been crossed. She looks down, her expression clouded with sadness.

And yet, she admits, "We've all taken the tourists' money; we're part of it." The guilt for her discomfort turns inward. Helplessness and shame resonate in the affective tone of the moment, and the atmosphere shifts.

Discomfort in connection with photography is neither specific to Maasai, nor is it a new observation. The association of photography with magic has been a topic in anthropology since Taylorian and Frazerian evolutionary anthropology (Pinney 2011: 64) but it has since been actualized, through a variety of ethnographic accounts (Behrend 2020; Edwards 2003: 84; Wendl 1996; Wright, 2008). Heike Behrend (2013: 200) relates the association of photography with misfortune and death in indigenous communities around the globe to the fundamental analogies between death and photography that can also be found in the classical literature of the global North. The parallels raise the question of whether there is a universal phenomenology of photography. This perspective contrasts with a reading that explains the discomfort with photographs in terms of local ontologies (cf. Wright 2008; 2015). The medium of photography simultaneously tempts us to universalize and essentialize, thus encouraging us to seek answers in empiricism.

The word photograph in Maa is either translated as *picha* which is the Swahili term or as *olòip* – shadow. The image of a person as their shadow relates to an understanding of a photograph as the soul of an individual (Pinney 2011: 64-66.; Behrend 2013). Frazer marks the seemingly obvious; people who believe that a photograph contains the soul of a person are reluctant to the practice (Pinney 2011: 65). Despite common tourist practices many people do not like to be photographed. They hide behind their scarfs and hoods

or cover their faces with their arms. While some people openly address their issue with photographic practices others laugh about these “believes” and mock them as foolish.

Discomfort and reluctance to being photographed are by some interpreted as a rejection of modernity. Even though ideas of Maasai as premodern, traditional and underdeveloped are neither accurate nor true, and as scholars have noted the Maasai have always been modern (cf. Wijngaarden 2018), the stereotypization has been haunting the communities past the colonial period and builds an important complex in processes of subjectification and self-representation (cf. Hodgson 2004). The reluctance of others towards photography may thus be connected to feelings of shame for their community and identity as Maasai. The dangers and uncanniness of photography is contested within the community. However, the affective and embodied dimension is undeniable, especially for elder women.

These women perceive photographs as dangerous because of the fact that every photograph also contains a part of the depicted. When a photo is taken, a piece of the person depicted remains in the picture. Their strength, their blood or their lifespan are thereby diminished. The photograph also makes the person depicted vulnerable to threats from outside forces. A Laibon, a spiritual specialist, explains that a photograph can be used to harm or even kill the person depicted. Owning someone’s photograph means having power over that person. Susan Sontag writes “To photograph is to appropriate the photographed object. It means placing oneself in a certain relationship to the world that seems like knowledge - and therefore like power” (Sontag 2010 [1980]: 10). Taking photographs means taking possession of something or someone (ibid.: 67). What makes photographs so controversial is the relationship that is established through the act of photography and in which the potential for harm is inscribed. The medium raises questions of closeness, distance and trust. Allowing a photograph to be taken is an intimate act, it has a value and it has its price. This becomes particularly relevant when a photograph becomes a commodity.

A fundamental ideological prerequisite of the capitalist market is the relationship between formally free individuals. Marx (1867) describes this dynamic with the concept of “doubly free wage labor.” After being recognized as a citizen, the wage laborer is free to enter into contracts and sell their labor under conditions they negotiate. At the same time, they are free from the means of production, rendering them dependent on the owning class to whom they must sell their labor to sustain themselves.

The semi-arid climate of the region surrounding the village makes it highly vulnerable to prolonged dry spells and droughts. The Maasai, who rely on livestock farming, depend on sheep, goats, and cows as the foundation of their subsistence. Climatic conditions and weather patterns directly affect their livelihoods. Extended droughts, exacerbated by human-induced climate change, result in the desertification of grazing lands. Consequently, the distances that people and livestock must travel to find water and pasture are increasing. These challenges are compounded by dispossession, eviction, and land alienation, practices that, although not new, have a long historical trajectory (Hughes 2006).

Today, such practices often manifest in the expansion of national parks for conservation and tourism purposes, as currently observed in Loliondo (Moko & Bens 2022). In these processes, the Maasai are frequently portrayed as backward opponents of progressive development and conservation policies (Galaty 2002: Hodgson 2004). This constructed image of the "traditional" Maasai undermines their voices, even as the same image plays a significant role in attracting tourists. The increasing risks posed by drought due to changing climatic conditions are deeply intertwined with the ongoing consequences of colonial and neo-colonial policies, further heightening the vulnerability of the Maasai. Tourists, knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to and reinforce these processes. Thus, the relationship between the Maasai and their white guests becomes a symbol of the broader dynamics between the global North and South.

This broader context sheds new light on the micro-level encounters in which photographs are taken. The economic precarity faced by the Maasai means that selling a photograph, when the opportunity arises, can make a significant difference. This exchange is driven by demand from tourists. Drawing on Marx's framework, Maasai women can be seen as "doubly free": free to engage in the transaction, yet constrained by their lack of alternatives, which often leaves them with no real choice. In these transactions, they navigate and endure their own affective dissonances.

When I ask one woman why she allows herself to be photographed by tourists for money, despite believing that the act could potentially shorten her life or give tourists power over her, she replies that she consciously chooses to engage in this exchange. For her, the possibility that her children might have a slightly better life outweighs the perceived dangers posed by the photograph.

Within coercive systems like colonialism, no truly equal exchange can exist, as claims are enforced militarily. Even today, in land rights conflicts, interests are often imposed through force. Capitalist exchange relations, too, are marked by profound inequalities. Structural interdependencies position the bodies of formerly colonized peoples, such as the Maasai, and tourists of the global north, within a relational framework that makes a truly equitable contract, as envisioned by liberal ideals, difficult.

In the moment of encounter between white tourists and the Maasai, dissonance arises on both sides. Divergent worldviews clash. For tourists, photographs may serve as tokens of pleasant memories, but more often, they are mere consumable artifacts of the moment. For the Maasai, however, these same photographs are imbued with power and danger. They are an intimate extension of the self, carrying meanings far beyond the fleeting tourist gaze.

While the danger of photography builds a field of tension across generations within the village, also younger people try to hide from the camera. They not only do so when a stranger tries to steal their image but also when the photographs are being taken by peers and family members. Interestingly enough, I observed this particularly among young men. The reluctance of some young men to be photographed neither by their family members nor by tourists contrasts the case of the elder women who actively overcome their discomfort and affective dissonance to allow for their photographs to be taken by tourists but openly demand for photographs to be taken and printed for them by me the

ethnographer. In opposition to women, men are on the one hand more exposed to the gaze of tourists, through their higher mobility. While women usually stay in the villages to take care of children and households, men move around attending a variety of activities including the work with tourists (Wijngaarden 2010).



Figure 3 Nainyara Moko Nooseli rebuilding her house after moving – photographed by the author in response to her request

The recording and distribution of photographs of indigenous people, which become templates for stereotypical ideals, are embedded in complex power dynamics that make the desired moment of encounter at eye level which is part of the narrative of this kind of photography impossible, regardless of the concrete intentions behind them. In this context, the seemingly innocent taking of a photograph as part of a safari becomes an act of appropriation in which colonial patterns are reproduced. However, Maasai women actively shape their relationships with the medium of photography, assessing risks and opportunities and negotiating contradicting social, cultural and economic demands. While this is particularly true for elder women, photography impacts the younger generation in related yet distinct ways.

Building your house, keeping your photograph

At the beginning of my time in the village, Leah and I visited various households, particularly those of women. News of a white stranger staying with the family spread quickly, and she wanted to introduce me to different friends and relatives while showing me around. Maasai villages consist of individual bomas spread across large areas, often located far apart. Walking between households to visit one another and exchange news is a common practice among villagers. After trekking for kilometers through the savanna, we would sit in small huts made of cow dung and soil, drinking tea. Each girl builds her own house, often proudly embellishing it with decorations such as small mirrors or mud designs shaped like flowers and hearts. When we arrived, the girls would showcase their houses to demonstrate their skills before inviting us to sit on a bed or a bucket inside.

While chatting about their lives and mine, curiously exchanging questions, I coincidentally stumbled upon a new aspect of my research subject. During one visit, a girl turned around and retrieved an envelope from the large metal box behind her bed, a common storage place for belongings like jewelry, clothes, and important documents. From the envelope, she pulled out a pack of analog photographs, distributing them among us and the children gathered on the floor and at the doorstep. Initially, the incident puzzled me. It aligned with my broader feeling of being "haunted" by photography in the field, and I wondered if Leah had secretly arranged for her to show the images. However, this later proved not to be the case.

As we examined the photographs, we discussed the people, places, and occasions depicted. Not all the images belonged to the girl; many featured her husband, his friends, and family members, often taken at significant ceremonies like his initiation as a junior elder. Her own photographs, in contrast, were taken at school and showed her with classmates or her family. The subjects posed side by side, holding important cultural belongings or soft drink bottles. While the physical arrangement seemed significant, their eyes were often closed, and smiling appeared unimportant. The *photo objects* (Edwards & Hart 2004) bore visible signs of wear, dark fingerprints at the edges and dust damage despite careful storage.

When I asked what she used the photographs for, she explained that she liked to look at them, especially at night. They reminded her of her past life in another village. Smiling, she admitted that they made her cry but still brought her comfort. For her, the photographs were bittersweet objects that maintained a connection to a past she could no longer access. In rural Maasai communities, where exogamous marriage practices are prevalent, women are often brought from distant areas to marry the sons of the households. Sometimes exchanged for other women or, more commonly, for a bride price paid in cattle, these girls, often teenagers, have little say in their fate. Yet, building their homes, raising children, and forging new friendships with co-wives and other women in their extended family networks help them regain a sense of agency and belonging.

Following this experience, Leah and I began to intentionally ask other women to share their photographs. We traveled to various households, conducting five formal interviews while also engaging in informal conversations about personal images and collecting practices. Looking at photographs from a time when they belonged to another family in

a different village evoked complex emotions of grief and joy for the girls. Even colonial-era photographs sometimes triggered these reactions. When I showed a young girl an image by Schoeller depicting Maasai women arranged similarly to family photographs, she began to weep (Figure 2). Though she didn't own a photograph of her own, the sight of the image reminded her of the family and friendships she once had.

Visual media can serve as a powerful tool to "facilitate social and affective ties and commitments" between migrants and their families back home (Berg 2015: 166). This is particularly the case when visual media are being exchanged between those at home and those abroad and therefore generate feelings of proximity, control and truth (ibid.). In the case of Maasai women living in new families far away from their places of origin, analogue photographs fulfill a similar task, even though photographs are not being exchanged, but stimulate a solitary practice of remembrance and grief.

Although many Maasai women, particularly those who have attended school, collect photographs, acquiring their own images in the village is not easy. Which is why having an anthropologist visiting, was perceived as an opportunity to have a picture taken. Local photographers take pictures at ceremonies and festivals, then print them in nearby towns like Arusha. A young photographer noted that, despite some men owning smartphones, they still rely on him for printed photos. Young men, with greater access to financial resources and mobility (thanks to livestock management, small businesses, and motorbikes), increasingly own smartphones. These devices allow them to take photographs of themselves, their livestock, friends, and motorbikes as status symbols. Social media platforms like Facebook and TikTok have also gained popularity among young men and some women. Due to unreliable networks in remote villages, videos are often downloaded for offline viewing. Smartphones have become creatively integrated into Maasai men's lives, facilitating new ways of engaging with traditional values and practices, akin to what the Indigenous arts collective Miyarrka Media from northern Australia has explored in their multimodal, collaborative ethnography on Yolŋu engagements with smartphones and photography (Gurumuruwuy & Miyarrka Media: 2019).

However, unlike the Yolŋu, access to and engagement with smartphones for rural Maasai remain highly gendered. While women enjoy watching videos or taking selfies on their husbands', brothers' or sons' smartphones, it is uncommon for them to own smartphones themselves. Consequently, they are largely excluded from producing photographic content. Instead, women stay connected to loved ones via keypad cellphones, which, though cheaper, have limited photographic capabilities.

The digital creation, consumption, and circulation of photographs through smartphones, a predominantly male activity, is contrasted by women's control over analog photographs. This divide is rooted in Maasai cultural norms and property relations. As semi-nomadic pastoralists, Maasai traditionally lived in temporary homes that could be dismantled and transported, a task managed by women. Today, women continue to build and own their homes, while men traditionally do not own houses but sleep in their wives' homes. This division extends to personal belongings: items kept inside houses, like

analog photographs, fall under women's purview. By contrast, men's belongings, such as tobacco containers, are often worn on the body and only stored temporarily.

Thus, analog and digital photographs occupy distinct spaces in Maasai society. For women, analog photographs serve as a central medium for remembrance, grief, and belonging, while digital photography primarily exists in the male domain.



Figure 4 Naishoki Laizer and the author in front of the authors house – photographed by Leah Laizer

Conclusion

Photographs are deeply intertwined with emotions and the intimate and personal that Roland Barthes describes as "punctum" (Barthes 1984: 96). The experience associated with a photograph becomes part of the object itself, shaping our understanding of what it represents. Photographs are highly affective objects, with their social dimensions, functions, and associations intricately tied to their material form. As a "bundle" of meanings and affective qualities, they derive their power from the interplay of the visual and the material (Edwards 2012: 228). Additionally, as "an ensemble of diverse actions that include the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of the photographic image" (Azoulay 2008), photography resists being reduced to a singular definition. Instead, its essence is shaped by the affective dynamics of its production, consumption, and circulation, as well as the relational interactions among various actors within this framework.

Photographs establish and nurture relationships of looking and being looked at. A photograph fixes a person as an object in time and space. Conversely, the photographic object itself is highly mobile. In Global North practices, photographs often travel with the photographer as souvenirs or memories, or they find commercial use in coffee table books, postcards, or advertisements. In personal contexts, photographs accompany their owners through different life stages and places. However, in the case of tourist photography, the depicted individuals are excluded from the circulation and consumption of their own images. This exclusion is reinforced by the economic precarity of the Maasai people, a condition further exacerbated by the expansion of national parks and the expropriation of grazing land.

On the other hand, Maasai women exercise control over the consumption and circulation of their own and their families' photographs. In these cases, photographs serve as carriers of memories that transcend time and space, enabling young women to maintain connections with family members who are geographically distant.

Colonial violence resurfaces and is perpetuated through tourist photographic practices, not only via persistent stereotypical imagery but also through economic inequalities. These dynamics are experienced by many Maasai women as a sense of uncanniness, tied to the existing ontological interconnection between magic and photography. However, the potential for harm inscribed in an image does not extend to the private realm of collecting and taking photographs.

Different photographic practices carry distinct meanings, affective consequences, and benefits for Maasai women. While limited resources and touristic practices often position them as outsiders to the medium, Maasai cultural property relations enable women to assume roles as family guardians of analog photographs. This responsibility grants them agency over the consumption and circulation of personal images. In stark contrast, tourist photography commodifies Maasai women, stripping them of control over the subsequent use and distribution of their likenesses, and, by extension, a part of themselves.

The ontological status of a photographic object depends on the individual who creates and circulates it, as well as the social context in which it is produced. The research reveals that, while tourist photographic practices have a long history and are often tolerated within the community, "not everyone is authorized to produce visual materials for circulation in a given transnational circuit" (Berg 2015: 173). Participation and reciprocity emerge as crucial factors in determining the acceptability and meaning of a photograph. Defining here is not only the singular moment of the shot, but the mechanism that is set in motion by it, including the movement, usage and purpose of a photograph. Therefore, the nature of a photograph is not only shaped within the affective arrangement of its production but also through its social life. This raises important questions of how to deal with European collections of ethnographic photographs in the future.

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Smartphone photography of everyday life.

Reflection of a screening workshop of an ethnographic documentary

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Abstract

How can we make the most of smartphone photography, which has become so familiar in our lives, as 'documents of life' that help us understand our lives, rather than just immediate and transient data/media? We organised and held a screening workshop for the ethnographic documentary film *Transition*, which was made using smartphone photography, and discussed the meaning and potential of smartphone photography with the workshop participants. In this paper, after introducing an overview of the film *Transition*, we will report on the background of the workshop's planning and design, the implementation process, and the participants' reactions. Finally, we will summarise the findings from this workshop on how to make the most of smartphone photography as key 'documents of life' that help us to understand our lives, rather than just immediate and transient data/media.

Keywords

Smartphone photography; Ethnographic documentary; Screening workshop; Future-proof documents of life; Fieldwork in Japan

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Introduction

The world is crammed full of human, personal documents. People keep diaries, send letters, make quilts, take photos, dash off memos, compose auto/biographies, construct websites, scrawl graffiti, publish their memoirs, write letters, compose CVs, leave suicide notes, film video diaries, inscribe memorials on tombstones, shoot films, paint pictures, make tapes and try to record their personal dreams. All of these expressions of personal life are hurled out into the world by the millions and can be of interest to anyone who cares to seek them out. They are all in the broadest sense ‘documents of life (Plummer 2000: 17).’

The exploration of ‘documents of life’, deeply rooted in people’s sensitivities, is an important approach to a humanistic understanding of social life (Plummer 1983). In the age of smartphones, the digitisation of documents of life has accelerated. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications’ 2021 White Paper on Information and Communications in Japan, smartphones are the most widely used information devices by individuals in Japan, with a usage rate of 89.4% (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan 2021). People use smartphones to create various documents of life consciously or unconsciously on a daily basis. Among these, the number of visual documents of life has increased dramatically.

According to the results of a survey of 2,000 men and women aged 15-69 across Japan conducted by MOBILE MARKETING DATA LABO. and the Japan Photo Imaging Association in 2023, when asked what they own as a device for taking photos, the most common answer (multiple answers possible) was ‘smartphones (Android, etc.)’ at 50.8%, followed by ‘smartphones (iPhone)’ at 49.7%, and ‘compact digital cameras’ at 34.7%. It can be said that the smartphone is now perceived more as a photographic tool than a phone. When asked if they take photos at least once a week, 74.9% of smartphone users (iPhone) (n=993), 58.6% of smartphone users (Android, etc.) (n=1,015) and 38.9% of tablet users (n=559) answered ‘yes’, depending on the device they own (MOBILE MARKETING DATA LABO. 2023). These results show that smartphone photography has become a widespread, common and everyday activity in Japan.

Thanks to advances in digital technology, anyone can easily take photos and create visual data daily, but they are not being actively viewed, interpreted, or utilised. According to the results of a survey conducted in Japan, when asked about the organisation and storage status of photos taken with smartphones, the most common response was ‘I don’t do anything special or leave them as they are’ with 36.5%, followed by ‘I check my folders from time to time to organise or delete’ with 27.6% (Cross Marketing Inc. 2023). As Van House (2011) pointed out, digital technology has made images immediate and often transitory.

How can we make the most of smartphone photography, which has become so familiar in our lives, as ‘documents of life’ that help us understand our lives, rather than just immediate and transient data/media? We organised and held a screening workshop for the ethnographic documentary film *Transition*, which was made using smartphone photography, and discussed the meaning and potential of smartphone photography with

the participants. In this paper, after introducing an overview of the film *Transition*, the background of the workshop's planning and design, the implementation process, and the participants' reactions will be reported. Finally, the findings from this workshop on how to make the most of smartphone photography as key 'documents of life' that help us to understand our lives, rather than just immediate and transient data/media will be summarised.

Overview of the ethnographic documentary *Transition*

The production process of *Transition* has been described in detail in a separate article (Ohashi and Mizuno 2021), but the content necessary for the discussion here is reiterated. The film is an ethnographic documentary that depicts the rapid life transitions experienced by the second author, Mizuno, and his family through photographs and videos taken daily with a smartphone camera (*Transition* is available at a private URL on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/369453515/db2680dffc>). Mizuno's partner, Mie, was diagnosed with stomach cancer in May 2017, shortly before the birth of their son, and subsequently passed away three months after their son's first birthday. Since Mie's cancer diagnosis, Mizuno has tried to document the changes in his and his family's lives almost daily with a smartphone camera. Mizuno began working with Ohashi to understand and express his family's unpredictable and rapidly changing lifeworld. For nearly a year, Mizuno and Ohashi conducted almost weekly online interview sessions in which they shared diaries and visual data generated on Mizuno's smartphone and collaboratively interpreted their content. This repeated weekly research activity deepened the understanding of Mizuno's life transitions through dialogue. Figure 1 illustrates this research activity, but to simplify the model, Mizuno's position is described as 'participant' and Ohashi's as 'researcher' (Figure 1).

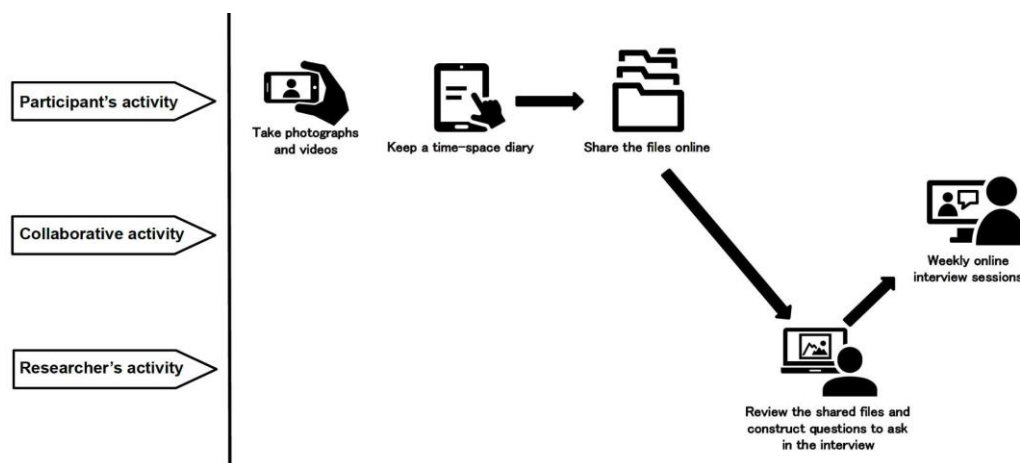


Figure 1 Set of weekly research activities to understand life transitions
(Adapted from Ohashi and Mizuno 2021)

The film *Transition* was then produced based on the visual data and interpretations shared during the weekly research activities. The production process is illustrated in Figure 2.

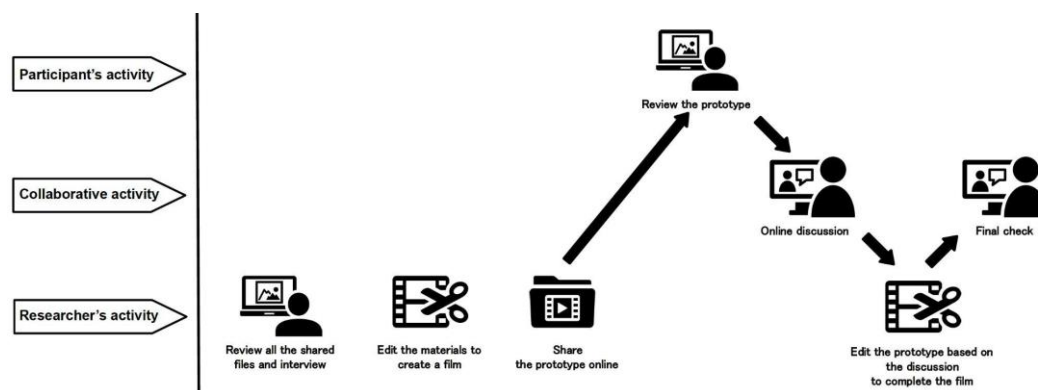


Figure 2 Production process of the film *Transition* (adapted from Ohashi and Mizuno 2021).

In this project, smartphone photography of everyday life became an important research activity to document and share objective facts about Mizuno's life transitions and his physical and mental state while experiencing these transitions. The visual data generated were shared and interpreted in regular interview sessions with Ohashi and transformed into a documentary film. Here, the visual data generated by the smartphone were not 'transitory' but became key 'documents of life' for understanding lived experiences. The film was not only viewed several times by family members, but also screened at three international film festivals and several workshops in Japan, where many people viewed it.

Mizuno was both a researcher and a research subject. His knowledge and research experience were reflected in his actions as a research subject. This particular context certainly made the project possible. What are the challenges for people (including non-researchers) to use smartphone-generated visual data as key 'documents of life' to understand their lives, rather than just immediate and transient data/media? We organised a screening workshop on *Transition* to explore this question in dialogue with participants.

Purpose of the screening workshop and data collection methods

In her previous research, Ohashi conducted workshops in which the film, as a result of ethnographic research, was screened and discussed with participants in different locations, which she calls 'mobile experimental environment = mobile laboratory' (Ohashi 2019). There, participants do not simply watch the film and leave. However, after watching the film, they write what they felt on a reflection card and engage in further dialogue with other participants and the ethnographer. In this dialogue, the ethnographer who made the film and the participants, or among the participants, talk about and learn from each other's feelings and thoughts. The ethnographer can discover new research questions and ideas from the dialogue. In this sense, the workshop site is called a mobile laboratory. This concept was also used in this study. It is a practice of involving non-academics in research and could also be positioned as 'mediated public ethnography' as described by Vannini (2019).

To understand how participants responded during the screening workshop, we drew on the concept of the 'pedagogy of screenings' proposed by Mitchell et al. (2017). This

idea focuses on the learning spaces that emerge between the people involved in preparing for, during and reflecting on the screening of the film. The data we collected included photographs taken in preparation for and during the workshop; records of the authors' interactions during the preparation phase; media used to invite participants, such as websites and flyers; records of on-site observations on the day of the workshop; sticky notes written by participants during the workshop; transcriptions of audio recordings of participants' dialogues; transcriptions of later meetings by the authors; and audio transcriptions of interviews with two participants.

Regarding ethical considerations, permission was obtained from 16 workshop participants after explaining on the application form that photographs, audio and other data would be collected for research purposes and that the data would be used anonymously. The same information was explained verbally on the day of the workshop, and permission was obtained again. Although the photographs taken during the workshop included the faces of individuals, it was confirmed by all concerned that there were no ethical issues as they were to be used as a record of the workshop process in a way that did not connect them to personal information or individual statements. Two participants who could be contacted later were also asked to participate in the interviews. Consent was obtained in advance, explaining the purpose of the study, how the data would be collected and handled, that pseudonyms could be used, that participants could request to stop at any time during the interview, that they could withdraw any data they did not wish to have used, and that they would not be disadvantaged in any way by these decisions. The interviews were conducted by Ohashi in a semi-structured manner via video call. Each participant was interviewed for about an hour and a half, focusing on questions about their feelings and thoughts during and after the screening, during the group and plenary dialogue time, and after attending the workshop. As a token of appreciation, participants received a 1,000 yen gift voucher.

The following is a summary of the background to the workshop's planning, design, and process. It then uses interview data to reveal what participants thought and felt during and after the film's screening, as well as during the post-screening dialogue and at a later date.

Background to the planning of the workshop

The workshop discussed in this paper was held on 17 September 2022 at the Community Café EMANON (hereinafter referred to as EMANON) in Shirakawa City, Fukushima Prefecture, as part of a programme of the Fukushima Biennale 2022. The Fukushima Biennale (<https://shirakawa-art.com/>) is an art project that has been held in Fukushima Prefecture since 2004 in collaboration with local residents under the leadership of Fukushima University.

EMANON, the venue for our workshop, is a community facility open five days a week as a third place for high school students and a café where local people can drop in casually. EMANON is run by the General Incorporated Association, Future Preparatory Office, of which Aoto is the representative. Aoto was a member of the Executive Committee of the Fukushima Biennale 2022, and based on the theme 'Borderless' set by

the Chair of the Executive Committee, Koichi Watanabe, he organised the screening workshop of *Transition* for the following three reasons.

First, he hoped that high school students, the primary users of EMANON, would have an opportunity to reflect on the meaning and challenges of 'life transitions'. As there are no universities in Shirakawa City, many high school students who go on to university will experience relocation. It was thought that through the film, high school students and the people around them could share the meaning and challenges of 'relocation', a major 'life transition' for high school students. Second, some people evacuated due to the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant following the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. They live in Shirakawa City, approximately 70-80 km from the plant. It was hoped that the film would provide an opportunity for residents and evacuees to reflect together on the 'life transitions' associated with evacuation. Thirdly, Aoto hoped that the workshop would become an opportunity for participants to learn about 'documents of life' through expressive activities using their own visual data generated by their smartphones. Based on Aoto's intentions, we prepared the workshop.

Participants were invited through the Fukushima Biennale and EMANON websites and SNS accounts and by distributing flyers in Shirakawa City. The invitation and an overview of the film clearly stated that the workshop would include a dialogue to think about 'documents of life' after viewing the film. Participation was free of charge and required an online pre-registration. The number of participants was 16, more than the expectation of 15. Some participants were teenagers, as planned, while the rest were people from different backgrounds, ranging from their 20s to their 70s.

Design and process of the workshop

The workshop lasted 90 minutes. Ohashi and Aoto were responsible for preparation and facilitation on site. The approximate time allocation for the workshop is shown in Table 1. All participants wore masks, as it was recommended in Japan at the time to wear masks as a precautionary measure against COVID-19 infection.

Time	Activities
16:00-16:15	Introduction Aoto explains the planning of the workshop, Ohashi explains the background to the production of the film and the collection and handling of data for research purposes, and obtains participants' consent. (Figure 3)
16:15-16:35	Screening of the film
16:35-16:40	Break time
16:40-16:50	Participants' reflections (Figure 4) Participants are given pens, sticky notes and clipboards. 'If you were faced with an unexpected life event, what would you do with the various documents of life on your smartphone?' The answers to this question are written on sticky notes and pasted on the sharing paper.
16:50-17:15	Dialogue in groups (Figure 5) Participants are encouraged to form groups with people they have never met before, and are divided into four groups of four people each, where they share their sticky notes and exchange ideas within their groups.
17:15-17:30	Sharing and dialogue in all participants

Table 1 Timetable of the workshop

(The letters A and O in the table stand for Aoto and Ohashi respectively.)



Figure 3 Introduction to the film's background by Ohashi (photographed by Aoto)



Figure 4 Participants wrote on sticky notes and pasted them on the shared paper (photographed by Ohashi)



Figure 5 Dialogue in groups (photographed by Ohashi)

During the group dialogue sessions, participants were encouraged to form groups with people they had never met before so that dialogue could occur between participants of different ages, affiliations and life backgrounds. The question was posed, 'If you were faced with an unexpected life event, what would you do with the various documents of life on your smartphone?' Participants wrote their thoughts on sticky notes, pasted them

on the sharing paper, and then engaged in group dialogue. Participants had time to verbalise and organise their thoughts by writing them on sticky notes first so that they could speak up smoothly in the group. Some participants held the sticky notes on which they had written down their thoughts and checked them as they spoke.

Finally, the content of the dialogue held in each group was shared with the participants. In addition to the visual documents of life such as photos and videos, which were mainly used in *Transition*, the participants also shared ideas on how they already use or would like to use other documents of life, such as a history of messages with loved ones, LINE messages sent to themselves as a personal record, playlists of music they have listened to at different times, voice memos for their records, and so on. Some also expressed the fear that if they keep a record, it will be all they have, so they want to imagine what is not recorded or dare to delete the record to get a sense of loss and think about the future.

The results of the interviews

Two participants, Saeka and Rie, both in their twenties, were interviewed. They revealed what they felt and thought during and after the screening of *Transition*, during dialogue with the group and the participants as a whole, and after taking part in the workshop.

1) The feelings and thoughts of the participants while watching the film

Saeka's case

The film showed Mie losing her energy more and more. When we preserve memories through photos and videos, we often preserve less sad scenes, but this film also showed the painful parts. The most powerful scene was when Mie's body was carried away at her funeral. Usually, such scenes are only seen by people close to the family. It is a record that is not left behind or shown in ordinary family records. I think it would be called 'inappropriate' in Japan, so it was shocking. I was upset. My closest family members who have already passed away are my grandfather and my dog. When my dog died, there was time before the body was cremated, so the body was in the kennel for a while. He was different from when he was sleeping as usual. His stomach was not moving. He was not even warm. He was like an ornament. The sadness that he no longer moved. The feeling of not wanting to think about anything. The feelings of that time came back to me. At the end of the film, there was a scene in Kyoto where Mizuno's little son walked in front and Mizuno walked behind. In a fictional story, there may not be much to talk about after the death of a loved one, but in the real world, their daily life goes on. It was a powerful scene to show this. The trivial event of walking down the street goes on as usual.

Rie's case

I came to the workshop without knowing much about the film. After it started, I realised it was a film about facing death. It was hard from the beginning because I lost my father when I was 20, and my memories overlapped with that. I couldn't cry much because I was in front of people. I struggled to separate my memories from the story of the Mizuno family. I was shocked to see the

stretcher on which Mie's body was carried after her death, like a thing. It was the same with my father. I had a hard time separating my emotions from the film.

Both Saeka and Rie referred to the scene in the film in which the body of Mizuno's partner, Mie, was carried to the funeral after she died following a battle with illness (Figure 6). In Japan, it is sometimes considered 'inappropriate' to photograph funeral ceremonies or the body of a deceased person. Consequently, they said they were 'upset' and 'shocked' to see such a scene. As well as feeling surprised, they also found that seeing the scene brought back personal memories of the loss of their 'loved ones.'



Figure 6 Screenshot of Mie's funeral scene in *Transition*

There are many indications that death and death-related topics have been tabooed, concealed, segregated, excluded, denied and repressed in contemporary Japanese society (Sawai 2002). In recent years, however, notices have appeared on the websites of major funeral service providers stating that it is OK to take photos at funerals as long as good manners are observed. The ways in which smartphone photography can contribute to understanding the process of death are changing and being debated.

Although Rie did not mention any other scenes, Saeka also referred to the scene of Mizuno walking with his son in the neighbourhood of his house, stating that 'the trivial event of walking down the street goes on as usual', which made a strong impression on her (Figure 7).



Figure 7 Screenshot of Mizuno walking with his son in *Transition*

2) The feelings and thoughts of the participants during the dialogue after the screening

Saeka's case

My group consisted of two elderly women and a university student. The two elderly women seemed upset by the fact that someone younger than them had died. I thought that talking about death must be a big issue. Emotions move a lot. Everyone's eyes are on it. But for me, in this film, death is of course a big event, but it's not the only one. Mie's death is a big, painful event, but the fact that her son learned to walk is also a big event. Time always moves on inconspicuously.

Rie's case

My group included a university student, a junior college student and an elderly woman in her seventies. The younger ones had no one around them who had died. The elderly woman told us she had never experienced anything like this because she was not married. Each of them talked about how they wondered what they would think when their loved ones died because they had not had similar experiences. I did my best to suppress the emotions that were building up as I watched the film and remembered my father's death.

During the dialogue after the screening, participants who had never met shared their views. It became clear that people of different ages, affiliations, and backgrounds had different ways of perceiving the film and, in particular, the death depicted in it. Through this dialogue, the participants could clarify and relativise their feelings and thoughts.

3) The feelings and thoughts of the participants after attending the workshop

Saeka's case

If I were to record the changes in my life, I might not record sad scenes. I would take pictures because the scenery is beautiful. If it wasn't beautiful, I wouldn't photograph it. When I'm with friends, I'll take a picture if it's fun. If it's not fun, I don't take it. I just keep the fun and the beautiful parts. But when you are alive, there will always be sad scenes. I don't know if I'll ever look back on them, but I thought it might be worthwhile to have sad records to remind me of myself. To capture myself with continuity. Actually, there was no record of when I was sad. I haven't been conscious of keeping records. There was a period not long ago when I suffered from an adjustment disorder. During those times of mental depression, I wrote down my feelings in notes on my smartphone. On Instagram, I only put the good things. I only put things about going out with friends. I take videos and photos when it's fun, happy, delicious or positive. I found it interesting to document my life and keep photographing both the good and difficult times. Watching the film made me realise that I exclude myself from documenting some things. I thought that if I recorded them, they might have meaning later.

Rie's case

After I went home, I gradually found things I wanted to say. I wanted to tell someone, so I contacted my partner the night after the workshop. There, I was finally able to tell him what I was thinking. I should have taken more photos of my father, like Mizuno had done. I had been hurt. I realised that it was my regret that had caused the hurt. My father died in December, and he was healthy until August. My father got weaker and weaker, and suddenly, he died. I should have taken photos, but I wasn't in the habit of regularly taking photos with my father. There was one day when my father's condition got really bad, I rushed home from university and I only took one picture of him when he was dying. That's all I have. That was the only picture I took, so I'm forgetting more and more. Mizuno took a lot of photos and videos, and I think he has a very strong spirit. I thought I was foolish for not taking many photos of my father. For eight years, I thought I had got over my father's death. But I thought I hadn't got over it at all, that I was running away from it. I didn't even realise the regret until I saw the film. I think it's a positive thing that I realised I had regrets. Now I am thinking about how I can create a medium to express the memory of my father. I want to preserve my father's memory in some way. I could not make documents of life with my father in real-time. I think about how I can restore memories that have already been lost. I am glad that I saw this film. For the first time, I came across a film that made me want to express myself.

Saeka and Rie's feelings and thoughts about the film deepened after some time since they attended the workshop. A common theme in their narratives was about events not recorded by their smartphone photography. Saeka realised that there was no record of times when she suffered, such as when she had an adjustment disorder, and that she 'excluded' such records. She takes photos with her smartphone when she feels a positive emotion, such as 'fun', 'happy' or 'delicious.' These photos are also shared on Instagram. These choices were found to reduce the 'continuity' of the documents of life. Rie, on the other hand, regretted that she had very few photos with her father, who had died, and realised that this had hurt her. This led her to ask how she could express herself in a new

way to replace the photographs she could not take in real-time and the documents of life that did not exist.

Concluding discussion

Based on the results of the workshop dialogues and subsequent interviews, the following three challenges were identified as important for people to use smartphone-generated visual data as key 'documents of life' to understand their lives.

The first is not to photograph on the assumption of immediate public sharing. If immediate public sharing on social media is assumed, one will be photographing with the audience's evaluation in mind, for example, not wanting to be perceived as 'inappropriate' or only showing the 'nice parts'. In the *Transition* project, Mizuno assumed that the images would be shared and interpreted in a closed relationship with his co-researcher, and so he photographed things that represented everyday events and emotional movements, without worrying about external evaluation or criticism. The basic ethical principle of photographing in a way that did not violate one's own or others' dignity but withholding some judgment as to whether it was inappropriate as an expression resulted in thick, redundant visual data. This led to an editing process that made it possible for others to understand the lifeworld and for the film to be made as key 'documents of life'. Rie's statement, 'I should have taken more photos of my father like Mizuno had done', is a testimony to this.

The second is to photograph in a way that maintains continuity from a long-term perspective. As Saeka pointed out in the interview, 'to keep photographing both the good times and the difficult times' creates documents of life that have 'continuity' when viewed in the long term. In the *Transition* project, Mizuno's approach to smartphone photography was to photograph as a record rather than to focus on something. When he did not know how his life would transition, he took a long-term perspective, recording fragments of his days until his life settled down to help him understand it later. Maintaining 'continuity' with such a long-term perspective is an important keyword in smartphone photography to understand lived experiences.

The third is to explore alternative forms of expression. This is related to the question Rie raised with regret in the interview: How can we express something that can replace photographs that could not be taken in real-time, documents of life that do not exist? Suppose photographs and videos are seen only as a means of objectively recording facts. In that case, nothing can be expressed in cases where they were forgotten to be taken or where they could not be taken for ethical or other reasons. However, photographs and videos are media that can be interpreted in many different ways. In the *Transition* project, for example, Mizuno took photos of empty parks and streets at night when he went for a walk after Mie's death because he could not sleep. These photographs were not of observable events, but of his physical and mental state at the time. Exploring alternative forms of expression can also lead to ethical representation without falling into sensationalism, as Van Der Walt (2023) argues. Smartphones are already integrated into the daily lives of many people and are non-invasive media. It is, therefore, necessary to be aware of the negative effects of smartphone photography, such as the violation of

privacy and the dignity of oneself and others. The search for alternative and ethical forms of representation will be a very important issue in the creation of 'documents of life' through smartphone photography.

If we clear the three challenges above and practice smartphone photography, we can use visual data not just as immediate and transient data but as future-proof and rich documents of life. Finally, the screening workshop featured in this study was a practice of 'mediated public ethnography' (Vannini 2019), which involved non-academics in research. Using a community café as a venue, as was done in this study, was seen as easier to maintain a connection with participants after the workshop and to create a cycle of developing the research, for example, by asking them to collaborate in interviews, and beyond that, feeding the research findings back into the community.

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Abstract

This article proposes an analytical framework that complements the well-established anthropological focus on the agency of art objects by shifting attention to their desire. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Comuna 13, Medellín (Colombia), it explores how the desire of local street artists—rather than their agency—is distributed through their artworks. Conducted in collaboration with the artistic collective Casa Kolacho, the research involved participation in their graffiti school, interviews with artists, and close analysis of selected murals. The findings suggest that these artworks express a desire to connect past, present, and future: preserving memory, celebrating transformation, and envisioning new possibilities. By foregrounding desire over agency, the article offers a temporal lens through which to understand how art shapes lived experience and collective imagination in contexts of urban change.

Keywords

Street Art; Comuna 13; Desire; Agency; Futures

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Introduction

Between 2022 and 2023, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Medellín's Comuna 13 for my doctoral thesis in social anthropology. Formerly regarded as one of Medellín's most dangerous districts, some neighborhoods within Comuna 13 have recently undergone profound urban and socio-cultural transformations, attributable also to the vibrant local street art movement. The aim of my research was to examine the role of street art images in the transformations of Comuna 13. To some extent, the goal was to explore the agency of street art images—what they produce in the comuna, or, in short, what they do. To achieve this, I conducted extensive in-depth interviews with a diverse range of participants, including residents, community leaders, artists, tourism agencies, local merchants, members of associations or NGOs, and representatives of municipal councils. Concurrently, I reviewed secondary sources, such as Medellín's urban development plans, tourism flow data, academic articles, newspaper reports, and non-governmental organization reports, among others. The analysis of these data revealed that street art images have played a pivotal role in shaping Comuna 13's transformations, driving complex processes related, for example, to the resignification and reappropriation of public spaces by residents, alongside phenomena like gentrification and touristification, thereby demonstrating a powerful capacity to act (Riga 2024). However, discussing this issue with the artists, I realized that street art images did not merely 'receive' agency from human agents but acted autonomously, in ways that transcended the agency of their creators. Rather, what the artists distributed through street art images was not primarily their agency but their desire. In this article, I propose an approach that enriches the emphasis on the distributed agency of art objects—a central theme in contemporary anthropological scholarship—by foregrounding the underexplored dimension of the distributed desire of art objects. Attending to desire broadens the approach focused on the social effects of art, toward an exploration of elements related to motivations, aspirations, dreams, and hopes. Within the context of Comuna 13, the desire embedded in street art images offers interesting insights into how communities harness street art to interpret the past, navigate the present, and envision possible futures.

Graffiti and street art are widely recognized as sophisticated forms of artistic expression, extensively disseminated across global urban landscapes. Academic interest in these practices emerged in the 1980s, when scholars from diverse disciplines began to establish Graffiti and Street Art Research (GSAR) as a consolidated field of study. Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi (2017) delineate three distinct academic waves and propose the emergence of a fourth. The first wave primarily explored the interplay among graffiti, subcultures, and authority (Bushnell 1990; Castleman 1982; Lachmann 1988). The second wave adopted theoretical frameworks to examine graffiti in its plural forms, moving beyond individual pieces to consider broader contexts, including territoriality (Brighenti 2010), spatial control (Keith 2005), and liminality (Campos 2009), among other dimensions (Ferrell 1993; MacDonald 2001; Phillips 1999). These studies often prioritized the agents—their motivations and identities—over the material artifacts themselves (Brook and Dunn 2011). The third wave, exemplified by Ian Ross's *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art* (2016), shifted focus from the agents toward

discussions aimed at defining and distinguishing graffiti from street art (Kramer 2016; Ross 2016; Waclawek 2011). These debates were often characterized by a set of binary oppositions, such as criminality versus creativity, vandalism versus art, and illegality versus legality (Schacter 2016), thereby underscoring the ambiguous and fluid nature of both practices (Ferrell 2016). Other recent scholarships reflect another dual ambiguity: that between a romanticized street art versus an instrumentalized one. On one hand, particularly in Latin America, street art is often analyzed as a medium for collective action, denouncing state or armed injustices, preserving memory, or fostering community resistance (Milton 2014; Raven 1993; Rolston and Ospina 2017; Ryan 2016). On the other hand, other studies have examined its domestication within the conventional art market and its role in neoliberal urban policies, where it serves as a strategy for urban renewal, tourism, or gentrification (Hewitt 2011; Markusen 2006; Schacter 2014; Tsangaris 2022; Young 2016). These discussions, including my own work, focusing on the social, political, cultural, and economic effects of street art and graffiti, align with Avramidis and Tsilimpounidi's (2017) call for a fourth wave—one that examines not what street art and graffiti *are*, but what they *do*, their agency.

The question of the agency of graffiti and street art fits more appropriately within anthropological debates. The issue of object agency is increasingly prevalent in contemporary anthropological discussions. These discussions are driven by various interconnected currents in contemporary social theory, including the material turn, the ontological turn, and posthumanism (Hornborg 2021). In the 1990s, Alfred Gell's (1998) influential theory specifically addressed the agency of art objects, laying the groundwork for a radical reconceptualization of the artworks—no longer as a text to be deciphered through semiotic frameworks, but rather as an agent involved in social action. Thus, the task of the anthropology of art would be to study the social effects of art objects—not what they mean or represent, but what they do. As Roger Sansi and Marilyn Strathern highlight (2016), Gell's theory, although groundbreaking, remains constrained by the assumption that agency is an inherently human capacity, that is merely distributed into the object. According to Strathern (1988), for example, the 'distributed' or 'divisible' person does not necessarily originate from a single human individual but may instead consist of assemblages of human and non-human, configured in multiple ways and without a predetermined hierarchy of agency. In Comuna 13, street art images have contributed to triggering complex social and urban processes, related to the resignification and reappropriation of public spaces, as well as to the phenomenon of gentrification and touristification (Riga 2025a; 2025b), demonstrating an agency far more powerful than that of their own human creators. Thus, by engaging in conversations with the artists, I realized that what they distributed into the images was not so much their agency, but rather their desire. This implied that understanding the agency of images solely from the artists' perspective would have been problematic; it was necessary to extend the gaze to the public who engage with the images in their everyday lives. What could instead be grasped from the artists' perspective was not necessarily how they distributed their agency through the images, but rather how they used the images to give shape to and manifest their desire.

While the distributed agency of objects is a prominent theme in contemporary anthropology, distributed desire of art objects remains considerably less explored. The issue of desire in relation to objects, particularly images, has been notably raised by visual culture scholar William J. T. Mitchell (2005). Like Gell, Mitchell conceptualizes images as living entities, akin to subjects. However, rather than examining what they do, their social effects, Mitchell urges scholars to consider what they want, thereby shifting the analytical focus from agency to desire: "Images are like living organisms; living organisms are best described as things that have desires" (Mitchell 2005, 11). This reorientation toward the desire of images entails an inquiry not only into their power and efficacy but also into their deficiencies, needs, and lacks. So, drawing on Fanon's question, "What does the Black man want?" and Freud's query, "What do women want?" Mitchell asks: "What do pictures want?" Philosophers and psychologists have produced an extensive body of literature on desire, and attempting to comprehensively trace all its connotations here would be a formidable and unnecessary endeavor. In general, the concept of desire is associated with wants: "desire can refer to what one wants" (Marks 1986: 2). However, beyond this general definition, what I am trying to stress here is how desire has transitioned from being conceptualized as something rooted in the unconscious, internal, and unobservable to a social construct that can, therefore, be studied ethnographically. In Sigmund Freud's foundational work, human behavior is understood as the product not only of conscious and rational calculations but also of unconscious processes. These unconscious processes shape also our desires. Jacques Lacan (1998) associates desire with absence, loss, and lack, positing that it is inherently oriented toward the absent or unattained. In contrast to both Freud and Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) conceptualize desire geographically. They view their task as mapping the conditions under which desire becomes possible and tracing its movements, actions, and connections. This theory has had a significant impact on discursive psychology. Discursive psychologists argue that phenomena like desire, traditionally understood as 'internal processes', are, in fact, constituted through social and discursive activity (Billig 1997). These works demonstrate that desire is not a result of internal, unobservable psychological processes but is actively constructed in discourse during everyday activities (Cameron and Kulick 2003). From this perspective, desire is not confined to the unconscious but is instead a socially constructed phenomenon, expressed by real people using specific language within concrete social contexts.

I will now discuss how street art images in Comuna 13 can be understood as a specific language used by artists to express and manifest their desires, and how their desire, rather than their agency, is distributed in their artworks. Before doing so, in the first section, I provide a brief overview of Comuna 13. In the second section, I describe my entry into the field through my encounter with the cultural and artistic association Casa Kolacho. In the third section, I analyze how artists' desires are distributed in the images they create, and how these desires extend across a timeline that connects the past, present, and future.

Comuna 13

The case of Comuna 13 has attracted significant interdisciplinary scholarship, both locally and internationally, contributing to a deeper understanding of its history, transformation, and current challenges. Recent studies have explored the impact of political conflict (Escobar Gómez 2023; Phillips-Amos 2016; Rojas-Páez 2018), the new transportation infrastructure (Cunnif 2020; Reimerink 2018), informal urbanism (Dolan 2020; Samper 2012; Schwab 2018), gangs (Drummond et al. 2012), community organizations (Navarro and Urtado 2022; Ramírez Suárez 2023), cultural associations (Garcés-Montoya and Acosta-Valencia 2023; Pérez Torres 2021), street art (Álvarez Domínguez and Trachana 2022; Aristizábal Gómez 2021; Rolston and Ospina 2017), and urban-social transformations (Griffin and Young 2023).

Comuna 13, or San Javier, is one of Medellín's 16 administrative districts. Located on the central-western outskirts of the city, it borders Comuna 7 (Robledo) to the north, Comuna 12 (La América) to the east, Corregimiento de Altavista to the south, and Corregimiento de San Cristóbal to the west. Spanning 7.42 square kilometers, it is divided into 23 neighborhoods and characterized by rugged terrain, with elevations reaching approximately 1,650 meters above sea level. As of 2020, Comuna 13 had a population of 140,758, consisting of 67,704 males and 73,054 females. A significant portion of the population lives in lower-income strata, with most homes classified between very low and lower-middle income. Comuna 13 was once considered the most dangerous district in Medellín, one of the most dangerous cities in the world (Cardona et al. 2005; García et al. 2012).

Comuna 13 expansion began in the 1940s and 1950s, driven by the forced displacement of rural populations during *La Violencia*, a period of intense conflict between supporters of Colombia's Conservative and Liberal parties (SISBEN 2020). Displaced *campesinos* gradually settled in the area, forming *barrios de invasión*—informal neighborhoods built without legal permits and therefore lacking public services, proper infrastructure, and security. By the 1980s, faced with escalating insecurity, local residents began organizing themselves into armed groups known as *Milicias Populares*. However, the situation worsened in the mid-1990s as Comuna 13 became a battleground for insurgent groups such as the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*), and the CAP (*Comandos Armados del Pueblo*), all vying for control of the territory and imposing military rule on civilians (Centro de Fe y Cultura 2021). To regain authority, the Colombian government conducted 24 military operations between 2000 and 2002, transforming the comuna into an urban war zone. The last of these operations, *Operación Orión*, became infamous for its indiscriminate violence against civilians. Carried out with the aid of the paramilitary group *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* and two U.S.-supplied Black Hawk helicopters, the operation eliminated guerrilla forces but at a devastating human cost. Estimates suggest that 17 civilians were killed by the military, 71 by paramilitaries, 80 were injured, 12 were tortured, 370 arbitrarily detained, and 6 forcibly disappeared (Amnesty International 2005). However, the expulsion of the guerrillas, despite the high cost paid by the population, did not mark the end of their suffering. Between 2002 and 2005, the paramilitaries, with tacit approval from

President Álvaro Uribe's administration, consolidated their control over Comuna 13 through brutal acts of violence, including murder, torture, and forced disappearances. According to the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (JEP), over 400 individuals disappeared from Comuna 13 during this period, many of whom are believed to be buried in *La Escombrera*, considered the largest urban mass grave in Latin America. Although some argue that *Operación Orión* was necessary to restore state authority (Drummond et al. 2012), others highlight its devastating consequences for the civilian population (Bernal-Franco and Navas-Caputo 2013).

Despite this violent history, residents have worked tirelessly to rebuild their community, responding to trauma with creative strategies of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance (CNRR 2016). Various organizations emerged to promote collective action as an alternative to violence, including Juegos Cooperativos para la No Violencia, Jughandi, Corpades, Caravana por la Vida, Realizadores de Sueños, Corporación Sal y Luz, Red Cultural Expresarte, Asociación de Mujeres Las Independencias, Mujeres Caminando por la Verdad, and Son Batá (Alzate Zuluaga 2012). One of the most influential was Red Élite Hip Hop, founded in 2002 as the first network of hip-hop artists in the comuna. Motivated by a vision to transform Comuna 13 through art, the group started to write protest songs, establish community hip-hop schools, and organize parties, events, and festivals, such as *In the 13, Violence Does Not Defeat Us*, in 2004, and its sequel *Revolution Without Deaths*. Meanwhile, public spaces in some neighborhoods of the comuna transformed into vibrant venues for hip-hop artists—breakdancers, DJs, and rappers—while graffiti artists began creating numerous murals reflecting the community's history and collective memory (Restrepo Cadavid 2013). In 2011, two members of Red Élite Hip Hop, rapper Jeihhco and graffiti artist PerroGraff, used these murals to narrate the history of Comuna 13 to a visiting U.S. congressman preparing a report on *Plan Colombia* and *Operación Orión*. From this, they conceived the Graffitour, a guided tour of the comuna's murals. Initially attracting journalists and researchers, the Graffitour grew to draw waves of national and international tourists, becoming a key factor in Comuna 13's emergence as a major tourist destination. By 2022, Medellín's City Hall reported 1,663,461 visitors, cementing its status as one of the city's primary tourist attractions. During this time, Jeihhco, PerroGraff, and six other artists branched off from Red Élite Hip Hop to establish Casa Kolacho, an artistic and cultural association based on using creativity and art as forms of resistance against the violence carried out by state security forces, paramilitaries, guerrillas and criminal groups (Feixa et al. 2022; Pérez Torres 2021). Today, Casa Kolacho plays a central role in both the local art scene and the organization of the Graffitour, contributing significantly to Comuna 13's ongoing transformation.

Casa Kolacho



Figure 1 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

On May 8, 2022, I arrived in Medellín from Bogotá to begin my fieldwork in Comuna 13. I settled in an apartment in Comuna 12's Santa Lucía neighborhood, 1.5 kilometers from the San Javier metro station, the main gateway to Comuna 13. Part of my methodology was based on walking ethnography. Widely used in urban studies (Campa 2016), this approach has proven particularly useful in studies that address the experiences or issues related to specific urban locations (Ingold 2010; Irving 2007; Pink 2007; Shortell and Brown 2016), as well as in research on graffiti and street art (Phillips 2015; Young 2016). So, each day, I walked through some neighborhoods of Comuna 13, wandering without a fixed destination in order to observe and photograph the life unfolding around me and to engage in spontaneous interactions with the people I encountered along the way. During one of my first walks, I came across the artistic and cultural association Casa Kolacho. I was certainly already aware of their influence on the comuna, but there were still many aspects of their work that were not entirely clear to me. Thus, motivated by a genuine interest in learning more, I decided to reach out and ask directly whether they would be interested in participating in the research. I arrived at Casa Kolacho on a Tuesday around 9:30 in the morning (FIGURE 1). No one was around when, suddenly, from a window to the left of the main door, I saw a guy, about 35 or 40 years old, making coffee. I nervously walked up to the window and introduced myself: "Hey, good morning. How's it going? I'm a PhD student in anthropology, doing research on street art in Comuna 13.

I'd love to chat with you, learn a bit about Casa Kolacho, and maybe do some interviews..."; "Hey, man. Sorry, I've got a meeting in 15 minutes", he responded somewhat hastily. "Oh, no worries. I'll be here for a year, so there's no rush," I said. "That's good. Well, if you want, you can come on Saturday at 11 a.m. We're giving a graffiti class, and afterward, we can chat for a bit," he said before disappearing into the rooms of the building (FIGURE 2).



Figure 2 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

So, the next Saturday at 11 a.m., I went back to Casa Kolacho for my first graffiti class. Once there, I felt a bit lost, not really sure what to do or where to go, so I just hung out outside and waited. After a while, I spotted the man I had spoken to on Tuesday—who I later discovered was Jeihhco—pointing to a door on the right side of the entrance: "The graffiti class is there!" So, I stepped into the room, where eight people—some young, others older—were gathered around a table, focused on a guy in his 30s sketching on a whiteboard on the wall. I stayed off to the side, not wanting to interrupt the class, until Jeihhco came in and invited me to join the group. "I didn't want to bother," I said. "You're not bothering, don't worry," he replied. So, I sat down with the group and introduced myself. The guy drawing on the whiteboard introduced himself as PerroGraff and said he was covering for La Crespita, the usual teacher, who couldn't make it that day. The class was about 3D letters. So, Perro walked us through the technique, then asked us to practice as many as we could on paper, starting with our Tag. "Excuse me, could someone lend me some paper and a pen, please?" I interrupted. "Sure, here you go," Shurak, a member of Casa Kolacho, replied, handing me some paper and a pencil. Finally, I could begin practicing my Tag, which I quickly came up with (FIGURE 3). When the class ended, around 1 p.m., I waited outside, hoping to catch Jeihhco, but after a while, I was told he'd already left.



Figure 3 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

Since that first class, I kept visiting Casa Kolacho—attending graffiti classes, joining some of their Graffitours, conferences, art exhibitions, events, parties, and concerts, or just dropping by for a coffee and a quick hello, which usually turned into hanging out with whoever was around. During these visits, I had the chance to chat with Jeihhco and others, explaining my project and its different aspects in more detail. I also made it clear that I was happy to help with anything they needed. I suggested I could teach an anthropology course, give a presentation on my research, or even share the results publicly. At one point, Jeihhco and I talked about collaborating on a brochure that would tell the story and meaning behind the graffiti and murals in their Graffitours. But in the end, none of this materialized, probably because of other priorities. However, over the course of the year, while participating in their activities and events, I also had the chance to interview several members of Casa Kolacho, like Jeihhco, PerroGraff, Jairito, La Crespa; as well as other artists not directly related to them, like Jomag, TreceDoce, and LaVoz.¹

As Jeihhco detailed during our interview, Casa Kolacho was founded in 2013 by seven artists who had separated from the Red Élite Hip Hop. The name of the association comes from Kolacho, a young rapper, and community leader tragically murdered by a paramilitary in 2009. Today, it is a well-established and structured organization that involves a diverse range of actors, each fulfilling distinct roles and responsibilities. The core group, so to speak, is composed of approximately twenty members, in charge of planning, organizing, and managing all activities and events, through continuous meetings, gatherings, and internal discussions. At no point did I attempt to access these spaces, as it didn't seem entirely appropriate for someone like me, a stranger at the time,

¹ All participants signed an informed consent form in which they could choose whether to take part anonymously or not, withdraw at any time without their identity being disclosed, participate in the analysis and writing process, review drafts, and receive any potential publications.

to intrude upon their internal organizations. At a broader level, there are the Graffitour guides and hip-hop teachers. However, some of the twenty core members mentioned above also take roles as guides or teachers. The guides number around fifty. They are paid based on the tours they conduct and rotate to ensure that all have the opportunity to work. The Graffitours are offered in two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with meeting points at the courtyard of Casa Kolacho or the upper exit of the San Javier metro station. The cost is 40,000 Colombian pesos (approximately 10 dollars), and tours are available in both Spanish and English. The hip hop schools are divided into four disciplines: graffiti on Saturdays at 11 a.m., breakdancing on Saturdays at 1 p.m., rap on Saturdays at 3 p.m., and DJ on Sundays at 2 p.m., each lasting two hours. They are primarily aimed at children, adolescents, and young adults, though anyone can participate for free. At a third level, there is a variety of artists, technicians, photographers, social workers, journalists, students, and researchers, among others, who, although they are not formally part of Casa Kolacho, support or witness its activities and events. Most of the activities and events, such as conferences, exhibitions, book presentations, concerts, etc., are free for participants. Casa Kolacho is financed primarily through income generated by the Graffitours, public grants provided by Medellín City Hall or the national government, private funding from non-governmental organizations such as Comfama (*Caja de Compensación Familiar de Antioquia*), and sales of souvenirs, clothing, hats, books, drinks, food, and more.

Graffiti School

During a year of fieldwork, I attended graffiti school almost every Saturday. Typically, between 10 and 20 people participated, most of whom were children or teenagers. Most of them were residents of the comuna, while a minority of one or two people came from other areas of the city or were foreigners residing in Medellín. The classes lasted two hours, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and were held in the auditorium previously mentioned or in the outdoor courtyard. When the classes were held indoors (FIGURE 4), they typically focused on practicing letters or images on paper with pens, pencils, or markers, and occasionally on the walls using spray paint. When the classes were held outdoors (FIGURE 5), we typically painted with spray paint, mostly freehand, and occasionally using stencils, on panels set up along the side of the courtyard. When drawing on paper, the main goal was to develop manual skills and cultivate a personal style, with a particular focus on our own tag, but also on other elements like characters, figures, and landscapes. When painting on the exterior panels, the primary goal was to refine our spray can techniques and develop manual skills to trace precise lines in various sizes. Our focus was on painting our tag, aiming to reflect the style we had practiced on paper, but also other letters, words, simple lines, figures or characters. In the outdoor classes, we usually worked in groups of three to five people, whereas indoors, we more often worked individually. Typically, the classes were taught by La Crespa, although other artists occasionally substituted for her. All the classes were characterized by a pleasant, relaxed, and informal atmosphere. Everyone was invited to participate, and everyone was willing to help those who were falling behind, although sometimes it was possible to work

independently or take a break without facing any issues. At the end of every class, Casa Kolacho offered us a snack, which often consisted of fruit juices or soda and sandwiches or desserts.



Figure 4 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022



Figure 5 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

Most of the classes were predominantly focused on practical training. Graffiti art, much like other art forms, is primarily learned through hands-on practice and embodied engagement. It represents a form of embodied learning, where skills are not acquired

cognitively but through the continuous repetition of bodily movements. In this sense, it is a technique of the body. The concept of “technique of the body”, already introduced by Marcel Mauss (1934), involves viewing the body as “the first and most natural instrument of the human being.” In fact, the body is the main instrument of the graffiti artists, more important than the aerosol itself, which becomes an extension of their hand. To acquire the ability to draw lines accurately and bring the final image to life, the graffiti artist must dedicate years of practice to developing the sensitivity necessary to press the nozzle of the aerosol and release the paint with the appropriate intensity depending on the type of surface. During these years of practice, the graffiti artist forms an increasingly intimate and personal relationship with the spray can, until the skill to use it becomes almost automatic and pre-reflective. For a novice like myself, instead, determining the optimal posture, the appropriate distance from the wall, and the precise pressure required to create lines of the desired size and free from imperfections proved to be a challenging task.

However, to bring the final image to life, the use of aerosol alone is not enough. The graffiti artists must commit their entire body and senses. They start with the eye to determine the best position and distance from which to draw the lines according to a previously prepared sketch. In some cases, especially in murals, they may use a grid composed of words or numbers that provide the coordinates for the lines. In other cases, especially in graffiti, the grid is less common, and the lines are drawn freestyle. When starting the work, the artists must position themselves in front of the wall, ready to move to the right or left, or to climb a ladder if the wall is particularly high. When releasing the paint, they may bend their knees or stretch their arm upwards, as well as rotate their hips and shoulders to find the best angle. Simultaneously, they must place the nozzle of the spray can at the correct point and distance from the surface, apply pressure with the finger on the nozzle, and may need to move the hand, wrist, arm, shoulder, chest, hips, legs, knees, and even feet, depending on the size of the line or the part they need to fill with color. The best results will depend on the best coordination of all the body parts involved.

In the magnified scope of the graffiti gesture, writing affords the writer an opportunity to impress the individual shape and vitality of the body’s motor power onto the contours of the cultural sign. Yet if the writer performs the motion repeatedly, his own body will eventually be inscribed, the muscles and ligaments physiologically altered, by the gestural routine that expresses and confines his body at the very same time (Noland 2009: 1).



Figure 6 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

However, it was during a specific episode when, as often happens in ethnographic research, I suddenly understood something more about the world of graffiti artists. During a class, after painting my Tag on one of the exterior panels (FIGURE 6), I had to cover it up to make room for another student. After that, I stood a little aside when Shurak came over and asked me: “Did they cover up your graffiti?” – “Yes, it lasted about 5 minutes” I replied. Shurak, smiling: “Ephemeral art!” – “Better that way, because it wasn't that good”, I said. “But did you enjoy the process?” he asked. “Yes, I did!” This brief exchange helped me realize the reasons behind graffiti artists’ commitment to the ephemerality of their work. What matters to them, in most cases, is not so much the final product but the process that leads to the final product. The issue of graffiti and street art as a process rather than a product is a classic theme in graffiti and street art research. Jeff Ferrell (2016), for example, highlights how graffiti and street art, by their very nature as public and often illicit, also incorporate a particular set of practices and experiences—to the point that they can be considered a form of performance art. He further elaborates on this point by citing an interview with SheOne, a British graffiti artist: “I never really worry about the final image, I paint graffiti for the process, it is only important while I am actually making it” (Ferrell 2016, xxxiii). This attitude could be compared to that of alchemists or craftsmen as considered by Tim Ingold (2013). According to Ingold, the work of these two figures is not based on a hylomorphic model, meaning from the perspective of someone who stands outside the work and only observes the beginning and the result, but follows a morphogenetic model, which takes into account what happens in between, during the whole production process. Graffiti artists, like alchemists and craftsmen, do not see the materials for what they are, but for what they do; they do not see the piece as a fixed object, but as a process,

always in the making to become something else, and at least in the case of graffiti artists, they enjoy this process.

Nonetheless, beyond this embodied learning, some classes addressed additional aspects of graffiti, such as its history, origins, and potential as a professional career. For instance, one class led by Jeihhco focused on entrepreneurship. During this session, participants were tasked with coloring pre-printed drawings on paper, assigning them a title, determining their dimensions, and estimating a price. This exercise, rather than practicing drawing skills, aimed to instill the idea—particularly among younger participants—that art, while a passion or hobby, can also serve as a viable professional path in the future. On other occasions, lessons about graffiti extended to broader life skills. For example, one day, a student struggling to draw a hand left it unfinished. Observing this, La Crespa encouraged her to persevere and not be disheartened by initial challenges, emphasizing: “Drawing something difficult teaches you discipline in life, and this discipline can be applied to overcoming challenges in other contexts.” In another class, La Crespa also highlighted the role of emotions in the artistic process and the unique capacity of art to convey human feelings that are often difficult to articulate through verbal communication.

The feeling of helplessness, melancholy, disillusionment, anger, are emotions we can't express with words, but through drawing, we can give them a form. How could we express the feeling of sadness in a mural? How would this feeling be graphically represented? Murals are made to express, not just to decorate.

This is how La Crespa introduced the class: artists create images not merely for decoration but as a means of expressing their emotions and sensations. Over the course of a year of fieldwork, I realized that the artists of Comuna 13 use images not only to express their emotions but also to construct and manifest their desires.

The Artists' Desire

The practices and actions of the artists from Casa Kolacho, particularly those directed at younger generations, reflected their social and political commitment to the community, extending beyond the mere creation of art for its own sake. The following statement by Jeihhco effectively conveyed their desire to collaborate with youth in building a better future together.

Everything we do—the Graffitour, the songs, the graffiti, the school—is all in favor of memory, to use that memory and connect with it to move toward the future. So, Casa Kolacho is a connection between the past and the present, to build a better future.

According to Jeihhco, Casa Kolacho acts as a bridge between the past and the present, built upon the desire to shape a better future. Philosophical accounts of desire often emphasize its intrinsic connection to temporality. “Desire is the immanent present/not-yet relation between people and their creativity, between potentiality and

actualization" (Wariboko 2022, 79). Similarly, philosopher Martin Hägglund (2012) argues that time is the very condition that renders desire intelligible: desire never fully coincides with its object because both subject and object are separated by a temporal gap. "Without a temporal delay there would be no desire, since there would be no time to reach out toward or aspire to anything whatsoever" (Hägglund 2012, 3). Desire, then, is always oriented toward what is not yet—toward the future. Paul Ricoeur (1979) illuminates how human experience of temporality is structured through narrative. Narrative allows us to structure past and present events in a way that opens onto the future. "Thanks to its episodic dimension, narrative time tends toward the linear representation of time in many ways: first, the 'then' and 'and then,' which provides an answer to the question 'what next?'" (Ricoeur 1979, 27). In this sense, street art can be understood as a visual and narrative medium that articulates the temporality of desire. For the artists of Casa Kolacho, it becomes the means through which past and present are woven together as the precondition to orient the future toward a desired direction. Indeed, in Comuna 13, both images explicitly referencing the past and those depicting the present are oriented toward the future. Images of the past, for instance, want to construct a collective memory to support residents in strengthening social bonds fragmented by the trauma of conflict, enabling them to heal and overcome that trauma, and serving as a reminder to prevent its recurrence in the future. The images of the present, relating to those of the past, want to emphasize art as the primary instrument that has facilitated the transformation of Comuna 13, thereby presenting it as a tool for social change. Although there are no images that explicitly portray the future, the desire to provide youth with alternatives to violence and to utilize tourism as a mechanism for local economic improvement is distributed throughout the entire corpus of images. Yet these future-oriented desires are not without tensions. As Lauren Berlant (2011) argues, sometimes the hope for a better future may become entangled in conditions of structural precarity, resulting in what she terms "cruel optimism." In Comuna 13, the artists' desire to utilize art for the benefit of the community must contend with the unintended consequences of touristification and gentrification, which risk perpetuating the very inequalities they seek to address. In this light, street art images, by triggering and participating in these complex processes, demonstrate an agency that extends well beyond that of their individual human creators. The central force animating the artists' visual production is not reducible to *agency* in the traditional sense—understood as the capacity to act or effect change—but rather to *desire*, conceived as a temporal and relational force. While agency implies an intentionality that is often immediate and instrumental, desire is rooted in the experience of temporal deferral and the ongoing tension between what is and what is not yet. When Casa Kolacho's artists weave together past and present through street art images, they are not merely asserting influence over the public space (as agency might imply) but also inscribing a future-oriented longing into their imagery. The images do not just act—they also *reach*, they *aspire*, they *hope*. In this sense, the images become repositories of desire: they organize temporal experience in order to sustain a collective aspiration for a different future. What is "distributed" across the images, then, is not simply the capacity to intervene in the world (agency), but the temporal and affective structure of desire itself. Below, I will

analyze how the artists' desire is distributed across images along the three temporal dimensions: the past, the present, and the future.

The Past



Figure 7 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Jomag, 2022

This photograph (FIGURE 7) was taken by Jomag, a young artist from the comuna, while he accompanied me during an interview as we walked through the neighborhood. As we paused in front of the artwork, he described it as his reinterpretation of a historical photograph. On the right side of the mural, there are the *lavanderas* (washwomen). Jomag explained that the first settlements in the comuna emerged around a salty river, which gave the name to the earliest neighborhood: El Salado (The Salty). In the center of the mural, there is a depiction of *convite*. *Convite* was a rural self-construction practice in which the entire community would contribute either money or labor for construction work. Jomag pointed out that through this practice the urban fabric of the comuna gradually developed over time. On the left side, there is an analogy between people and plants, illustrating how, “people, like plants, are buried, but sometimes also cut off”, in Jomag's words. He then continued:

This mural talks about the agricultural roots of the comuna because we were a land of many campesinos (peasants). Comuna 13 originally came from campesinos, and it has gradually developed that way. Over time, this has been somewhat lost, but it is still a part of our heritage. We need to show it to the public so people can understand that it belongs to us. That's why I've worked a lot with these symbols. There are many social and relational topics tied to campesinos, and these can be brought up for discussion with the people who walk by and see this artwork.

This, like other images on the walls of Comuna 13, depicts scenes that clearly reference the past. In portraying the past, they want to construct, shape, and share a collective memory. The concept of memory emerges as particularly significant within the context of Comuna 13. As Jomag himself explained: “Most rappers and graffiti artists in Comuna 13 have engaged with themes of memory, so the majority of our thematic axes revolve around it.”

Recently, in the field of 'memory studies,' there has been increasing interest in exploring the interconnections between cities, space, and memory (Adams and Larkham 2022; Badilla 2020). “Places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present” (Hayden 1997, 46). These studies emphasize how collective memory is intrinsically linked to a city's spatial configuration through urban elements such as monuments, squares, and street names. The same applies to street art images. In Comuna 13, images referencing the neighborhood's 'foundation' and highlighting its rural origins want to establish a kind of 'founding myth' – a narrative that justifies the basis of the existing society. Émile Durkheim (1912/2013), one of the pioneers of 20th-century sociology, argued that any society must maintain a connection with its past in order to preserve social cohesion and foster a sense of community. By recalling the neighborhood's foundation, these images seek to help residents identify with a shared past, thereby reinforcing the social fabric that has been fractured by the trauma of conflict.



Figure 8 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by Claudio Riga, 2022

However, among the images referencing the past, in addition to those depicting the foundation of the comuna, there are others that more specifically address the themes of conflict and violence. The photograph above (FIGURE 8), taken by me while participating in a Graffitour, depicts an elephant—an animal known for its mnemonic abilities. As explained by some Graffitour guides, this image wants to invite the community to remember the victims of the conflict and honor their memory. By remembering the victims and recalling that trauma, its intention is, on one hand, to assist the community in the grieving process, and on the other hand, to prevent such events from recurring in the future.

Some artists believed that the significance of their work was to help the community undergo a “catharsis” and “to forgive.” As PerroGraff stated:

That was the first impact: helping people heal and have a catharsis. When people forgive, they transcend in a big way because they let go of all the hate and burdens weighing on their soul. It was beautiful because we started creating catharsis with families, remembering, listening to people, and letting them tell their stories... We began helping people heal and understand that the neighborhood has so many positive things.

In many regions of Latin America affected by violence and conflict, murals honoring victims have emerged (Diéguez 2013; Milton 2014; Wilde 2013). These memorials often provide a framework and legitimacy for individual and familial grief (Winter 2014). Grieving is generally a personal and individual experience; however, the atrocities of political conflict necessitate a different, more public form of commemoration. Studies on the Holocaust have illuminated the challenges of conveying such experiences to audiences who neither witnessed nor lived them, as well as the limitations of language to express them (Strejilevich 2006). This can have catastrophic consequences. Trauma, when not articulated and incorporated into a narrative, struggles to be overcome and transformed into memory. The antidote lies in a communicative mechanism that enables the traumatic event to be assimilated and distanced as memory. As Maurice Halbwachs (1980), a pioneer of collective memory theory, stated, “memory requires language.” When language fails in this mechanism, artistic expression can serve as a substitute (Scarry 1985). In Chile, for example, women victims of General Pinochet’s dictatorship found a way to recount their untold stories through the creation of *arpilleras*—textile images—as a new way to think about and represent stories that could not be told in words (Mani 2011). In Colombia, a significant number of murals directly address political issues, the prolonged conflict, and the emerging peace process, articulating the memory of violence and victims’ demands for recognition, reparation, and justice (Rolston and Ospina 2017). Beyond this, these murals often serve as permanent reminders of past crimes, aiming to prevent their recurrence (Torre 2002). The Italian writer and anti-fascist partisan Primo Levi (1989), after his liberation from Auschwitz concentration camp, wrote: “All those who forget their past are condemned to relive it.” As rapper LaVoz told me: “Comuna 13 has a history behind it, a dark history. If we tell it, it’s not to be part of it but to prevent its repetition.”

Evaluating whether these images have tangibly influenced residents—by strengthening community bonds, aiding in the processing of conflict-related trauma, or contributing to the prevention of its recurrence—is a complex task that cannot be addressed solely from the perspective of the artists. To meaningfully engage with this question, I conducted extensive, in-depth interviews with local inhabitants, particularly those who were entirely unaffiliated with the artistic movement. On the other hand, what emerges from the artists' testimonies is a clear articulation of their desire: to reconnect the community with its peasant roots, to facilitate processes of collective catharsis and forgiveness, and to narrate the Comuna's violent past as a means of forestalling its repetition. This desire is not only expressed verbally, but also materially inscribed in the esthetic and symbolic elements of the images themselves. For example, the image depicting key episodes from the Comuna's past are explicitly designed to foster a sense of shared memory, while the image of the elephant—a traditional symbol of memory—functions as a visual exhortation not to forget. These visual interventions reflect the artists' desire more than a straightforward exercise of their agency.

The Present



Figure 9 Medellín, Colombia. Photo by La Crespa, 2022

Images referencing the past want to build a collective memory in order to help residents rebuild the social fabric, process the trauma of violence, and remember the military operations to prevent their recurrence. However, other images, like the one above (FIGURE 9), also refer to the past but to a more recent past, one that blurs into the present. This picture was taken by La Crespa during a walking interview through the neighborhood. As she explained, this image is characterized by an urban style, clearly more closely related to the Hip Hop movement. This image, like others, wants to

emphasize art as a tool of transformation, a transformation that took place in the past but continues to resonate in the present. Connecting with earlier narratives, they want to build a bridge between a past of violence and a present of “transformation”. As Jairito, one of the founders of Casa Kolacho, told me:

The Graffitour is a mirror of what we want to say. The tour tells the story of what happened here, because we cannot forget what happened. But we also show how through art we have transformed a population, a territory, how we have changed things through art.

Both artists and guides usually emphasized the word “transformation”, thus presenting art as a tool for social change. Consequently, the images carry a kind of narcissistic desire to present themselves as the central element in the “transformation” of Comuna 13.

A considerable body of research has examined how art can serve as a transformative force (Aumann 2022; London 1992; Lowe 2001), foster community building (Jones 1988; Simmons 1998), address community issues (Brown 1994; Fisher 1996), and drive social change (Becker 1994; Pacific 1998). Erich Fromm (1995), from the Frankfurt School, described “collective art” as a form of art capable of transforming society from “atomistic” to “communitarian”. A defining feature of collective art is its shared nature, because it allows individuals to experience unity with others in a meaningful, enriching, and productive way. Building on this concept, the notion of community art has emerged as a form of public art that is both “experiential and inclusive,” in which professional artists collaborate with others to create art that benefits the broader community (Raven 1993). The images in Comuna 13 exemplify a collective community process involving a diverse array of actors—artists, guides, residents, and others—thus transcending individual interests and personal artistic goals. These artworks are the product of collaboration, dialogue, negotiation, and power dynamics, all aimed at serving the community’s needs. Community art is often regarded as the “manifestation of an ideology”; what distinguishes it from public art is its long-term cultural and political aspirations (Dickson 1995). It is precisely this long-term ambition, as I will explore in the following section, that characterizes the images’ desire to shape the future.

However, street art—even when community-based—can produce unintended side effects that transcend the agency of the artists themselves. Research has already addressed how street art has undergone a process of domestication and neutralization, progressively assimilated into the conventional art market (Young 2016; Tsangaris 2022) and instrumentalized within the frameworks of neoliberal urban governance (Schacter 2014), where artistic practices are often reconfigured as strategic tools for urban renewal, tourism development, or as an element in processes of gentrification (Hewitt 2011; Markusen 2006). This also happens in Comuna 13, where street art—originally emerging as a community-based practice—has been progressively co-opted by Medellín’s public administrations to showcase the success of their public policies (Restrepo Cadavid 2013), as well as by external commercial and tourism sector enterprises that exploit it as a means of capitalist accumulation (Gaviria Puerta 2019). These processes have undoubtedly given

rise to internal contradictions, which are currently the subject of debate within the community. What emerges, however, is that street art images—while expressing the artists' desire to foster social transformation for the benefit of the community—may also contribute to processes of touristification and gentrification that favor institutional or commercial external actors, exhibiting a capacity to act that surpasses and, at times, transcends the agency of the artists themselves. Simply put, what the images *do* can somehow be different from what they *want*.

The Future

The images in Comuna 13 want not only to remember the past and celebrate the present but especially to shape the future. On one hand, they seek to provide new generations with alternatives to violence; on the other, they aim to promote tourism as a driver of socioeconomic development, thereby enhancing the community's overall living conditions. A local rapper, TreceDoce, well explained these objectives: "We want to give children an alternative to crime and drug addiction so they can take a different path [...] and also create a better economic circuit, a trade route that benefits the community." A Graffitour guide further elaborated:

The project has many goals: we want kids and young people to engage in different, more constructive activities. But we also want to attract tourism, generate income, and for that, we have to innovate, create new and attractive things to keep visitors coming back.

Considering the issue of art as an "alternative to violence," Juan Diego Jaramillo Morales (2015), in his research on youth violence in Medellín's marginalized neighborhoods, cautions against falling into a "binary temporal trap", where it is assumed that music, dance, deejaying, or graffiti inherently serve as the antithesis of violence. Nevertheless, other studies in Medellín's marginalized neighborhoods indicate that while artistic activities may not directly counteract violence, they are nonetheless effective strategies for reducing and preventing youth violence (Mejía Betancur 2014; Pracher 2014). Broader longitudinal population studies further demonstrate that increased adolescent participation in artistic activities correlate with a lower incidence of criminal behavior (Bone et al. 2022). Numerous art-based intervention programs, such as those involving theater (Belliveau 2005), visual arts (Bickley-Green 2007), or expressive writing (Kliewer et al. 2011), have been developed to prevent and reduce delinquent behavior among teenagers. However, these programs often target identified "delinquent" youth, which can inadvertently stigmatize participants and limit the programs' accessibility to all adolescents in need. In contrast, daily participation in artistic activities is recognized as a proactive and inclusive strategy for preventing delinquent behavior in adolescents before it emerges (Bone et al. 2022). Statements by TreceDoce and a local resident confirm that in Comuna 13, the everyday engagement in artistic activities is perceived as a powerful and accessible alternative to violence:

The history of the comuna is marked by war. So much war, so much violence; many of us are alive by a miracle, and our salvation was hip hop. Otherwise, we would have been immersed in drug dealing, stealing, or armed conflict—that was our reality. When I was a child, I remember hearing constant gunfire, Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa-Pa. We always played in the street. I had friends who lost their lives at 12 because they made bad decisions. They saw a gun and thought they were invincible, but they were just kids with a pistol, and they got killed. I saw my friends die. I carried weapons because my friends showed me how. I learned to steal. But life teaches you through mistakes. Thanks to hip hop, we could change, and now I see that I can help others to change too.

Art, after violence, has been very important, especially for kids who are no longer on the corners looking at weapons or drugs but are drawing, dancing, or singing. For a mother, this means everything.

Regarding art as a “tourism catalyst and economic driver,” numerous examples across Latin America demonstrate how art, particularly street art, has been employed as a tool for attracting tourists and revitalizing the economy in disadvantaged and stigmatized neighborhoods. For instance, the “Puebla-Ciudad Mural” project in Puebla, Mexico, involved residents in an “aesthetic transformation” of the Xanenetla neighborhood to stimulate economic growth by promoting tourism (Checa-Artasu 2013). This initiative, led by the Tomate Collective—a group of architects and artists working in direct collaboration with the community—has become a model for participatory mural projects (Martínez-de la Peña 2015). Similar initiatives have been replicated in other Mexican cities and neighborhoods, including Campeche, Tamaulipas, San Cristóbal, Villahermosa, Morelia, Tuxtla, and Culiacán (Álvarez Domínguez and Trachana 2022). Other examples can be found in Brazilian favelas, such as Santa Marta or Villa Cruzeiro in Rio de Janeiro. The “Favela Painting” project, led by the Haas&Hahn group, transformed the facades of houses with vibrant murals, aimed at shifting perceptions of favelas as spaces of social conflict, attract tourism, and improve the economic conditions of residents (Linke and Buchanan 2021; Rahman 2014).

In Medellín itself, street art has gradually shifted from being illegal to being increasingly recognized, accepted, and used in institutional urban renewal projects with a tourism focus. For example, at the end of the 2000s, the Urban Development Company (EDU) launched the program “Medellín se pinta de vida,” renovating more than 4,000 house facades in various neighborhoods such as Santa Elena, Belén Zafra, Villatina, and also Comuna 13². The Medellín Metro, in its “Museo Metro” program, has intervened with 30 artworks on the external and internal walls of Metro Line A, the T Tram, and Metrocable lines H, J, and M³. In 2023, the Mayor’s Office of Medellín inaugurated “Constelaciones,” the largest artistic mural in the city, in the neighborhoods of Brisas del Jardín and San José de la Cima II in Manrique, enhancing it as a new cultural and tourist destination⁴. For

² https://www.edu.gov.co/images/publicaciones/Libro_Medellin_se_Pinta_de_Vida.pdf

³ <https://www.metrodemedellin.gov.co/al-dia/noticias/metro-de-medell%C3%ADn-presenta-su-primera-gu%C3%ADa-digital-de-murales-de-arte-urbano>

⁴ <https://www.medellin.gov.co/es/sala-de-prensa/noticias/constelaciones-el-mural-artistico-mas-grande-de-medellin-se-potencia-como-nuevo-destino-turistico-y-cultural/>

many participants, this acceptance and institutionalization of street art is also attributed to the influence of the artistic scene in Comuna 13 and the disruptive impact it has had on tourism throughout the city. As one resident told me: “The Graffitour paved the way; all of Medellín used to be gray, now it's full of murals.”

As I elaborate in another contribution, these images have effectively played a pivotal role in the “touristification” of Comuna 13 (Riga 2025c). However, their significance brings with it a critical challenge: the risk of losing their appeal. The primary concern is that the images may become repetitive, uninteresting, and unable to attract new visitors. As the guide observed, “We have to keep innovating, creating new and attractive things so visitors keep coming. The idea is for more people to come every day.” The ephemeral nature of street art aligns with this need for constant renewal to attract an ever-growing audience of tourists. So, with each new layer of paint, the images generate fresh narratives and memories (Connerton 1989), adapting to the community’s evolving context. Nevertheless, in their pursuit of attention, the images risk transitioning from instruments of memory and social transformation to mere elements of tourist entertainment and gentrification. I am confident that the collective strength the residents of Comuna 13 have demonstrated over the years will enable them to overcome these contradictions and work together to shape a better future.

Conclusion

The initial impetus for my research in Comuna 13 of Medellín was to examine the impact of street art on the socio-cultural transformations of the Comuna and, by extension, on the lived experiences of its residents. In other words, the objective was to investigate the agency of street art images. However, by learning about graffiti at Casa Kolacho’s school, engaging with the artists’ daily lives, and conducting interviews while exploring murals, I realized that, alongside the agency of the images, I was beginning to delve also into their desire. In particular, I realized that what the artists were distributing through the images was not so much their agency, but rather their desires. Accordingly, their desire to structure the past and present in order to shape the future. Thus, the aesthetic and symbols of the images reconfigured a desire to reconcile a past marked by violence and political conflict with a present defined by artistic transformation, with the intention of orienting the community, especially the younger generations, toward a better future. On this basis, I propose enriching anthropology’s traditional emphasis on the distributed agency of art objects with a focus on the less explored issue of distributed desire. Attending to the desire of art objects can offer anthropologists a lens that captures art’s aspirational and affective dimensions, as well as how people envision and project possible futures through artistic expression. Moreover, relating desire to street art images allows for an exploration of art’s capacity to shape collective desires that are directly inscribed onto the built environment, contributing both to graffiti and street art scholarship and to urban studies. Building on these insights, future research could develop comparative studies across diverse socio-political contexts, such as other Latin American urban settings. Longitudinal studies could also track the evolution of desires expressed in artworks, particularly in communities undergoing rapid change.

Additionally, further investigation into the intersections between desire and other forms of material culture—such as public sculptures or urban installations—could inform urban planning, public policy, and community organization. This framework, focused on distributed desire, may serve as a complementary perspective to the well-established emphasis on agency. By expanding this inquiry, anthropologists can refine and extend this framework, paving the way for new insights into the interplay between art, desire, and the construction of possible futures.

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The Lens of La Salaga: Exploring Indonesian interculturalism through artistic and literary innovation

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Abstract

The La Salaga Project is a multimedia retelling of a legend from West Sulawesi. The project includes art from Bali, the island on which part of the story takes place; innovative fonts of an Indonesian script; poetry and video. This article uses the La Salaga Project as a lens to explore interculturalism in Indonesia. It describes the milieu in which the project was created and received; the intercultural aspects of the project; and interculturalism in Indonesia more generally. In so doing, it echoes the opinion of the Balinese artist and scholar I Wayan Setem who emphasizes the importance of dialogue to interculturalism.

Keywords

Interculturalism, Indonesia, literature, painting, Bali, Sulawesi, dialogue

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Aside from its striking presence on the map of the world, one of the most extraordinary features of Indonesia is its cultural diversity. This sprawling archipelago is home to more than a thousand different ethnic groups.¹ Indonesia's diversity has been part of the daily experience of the cultural activist Louie Buana for his entire life, and part of the work of historian Kathryn Wellen for her entire career. The two of us were therefore delighted to conduct the La Salaga Project, a multi-media retelling of a legend about Sulawesi and Bali. The project brings together two of Louie's multiple "homelands" and adds an artistic element to Kathryn's research about migration from Sulawesi. Significantly, the La Salaga Project also contributes a truly intercultural story to a discourse that has often been multicultural or monolithic.

We use the word "intercultural" deliberately to describe the La Salaga Project even though we believe that "multicultural" and "intercultural" do not have different meanings to most laypeople. As Boswell, O'Shea and Tzadik have noted, just defining "interculturalism" is challenging (Boswell, O'Shea and Tzadik, 2013: x). For purposes of this paper, and influenced by social scientist such as Cantle, Meer, Mohood and Verkuyten,² we define it as policies and practices that encourage cross-cultural dialogue and a sense of unity across cultural differences and discourage the self-segregation of cultures. This differs from multiculturalism in that multiculturalism encourages respectful but segregated coexistence of different cultures. The framework of interculturalism better accommodates the blending within the La Salaga project. Arguably, interculturalism better accommodates the day-to-day existence of many Indonesians, including Louie, because it reflects the reality of day-to-day, or bottom-up, blending in Indonesia.

In this article we describe the La Salaga Project and use it as a lens to examine interculturalism in Indonesia. In so doing, we situate the project within the framework of both English and Indonesian language academic literature on interculturalism. We also describe the project and its reception in detail so as to document the innovative project, and we compare it to similar artistic endeavours so as to contextualize it. This article mentions many people, places and things that might not be familiar to readers unfamiliar with Indonesia. We believe that they are integral to our story and cannot be omitted; and we take pleasure in introducing them to the reader.

Part One: Interculturalism in Indonesia

The cultural diversity of Indonesia cannot be underestimated. Indeed, that it could and can exist as a single nation state was, and sometimes even still is, considered improbable (Pisani, 2014:2; Cribb, 2015:1). Forging this country among people speaking hundreds of languages on thousands of islands required tremendous effort. During the mid-twentieth century Indonesia's founders deliberately espoused a political philosophy for the nation that embraces different ethnicities in the former Dutch colony. They promoted the

¹ The Indonesian government enumerates 1340. (See Portal Informasi Indonesia, Suku bangsa, <https://indonesia.go.id/profil/suku-bangsa/kebudayaan/suku-bangsa> accessed July 11, 2025.)

² The debate between Ted Cantle and Tariq Modood is articulated and analyzed in a set of four short articles published in *Ethnicities*. (See Antonisch, Cantle, Modood, and Iacovino, 2013.) Interculturalism is further theorized in Verkuyten, Yogeeswaran, Mephram and Sprong (2020) who also examine its relevance to political debates and public policy. We also consider Meer and Modood's (2012) collaborative article to be particularly useful.

Indonesian language as a lingua franca and as a unifying national language among the speakers of hundreds of different languages; and the success of Indonesian as the national language has been hailed as “miraculous” (Sneddon, 2003: 5). It is also an important instrument for interethnic dialogue which, in turn, is a prerequisite for interculturalism.

There were also deliberate and earnest efforts to invent a “native” Indonesian culture (Heryanto, 2018: 609) composed of the high points of regional cultures. In practice, however, this native culture encouraged conformity (Hill, 2014: 5) and Javaneseness. Indeed, Javacentrism has been guiding in the formation of numerous political, cultural and academic discourses. As Adrian Perkasa argues, Javacentrism was a consistent element of Indonesian nationalism. He argues that numerous intellectuals and officials, including Soeharto, consistently drew inspiration from Javanese culture and history and promoted Javacentrism in both the educational system and the official national ideology (Perkasa, 2025: 217). Similarly, Ghamal Satya Mohammad traces Javacentrism in historiography back to Dutch scholars’ portrayal of Majapahit as a great empire with subordinate tributaries across the archipelago (Ghamal, 2017: 7). Defining Javacentrism as a “disproportionate and often excessive emphasis placed on Java in terms of geography history, politics, culture and the ethnic population” (Ghamal, 2017:2), Ghamal further argues that post-independence Indonesian historians used Javacentrism as an alternative to Eurocentrism.

Despite this well-documented Javacentrism, space was, and is, still accorded to other cultures in the archipelago. This space is apparent both in theory and practice.³ Indonesia’s national motto is *bhinneka tunggal ika*, most often translated as “unity in diversity.” Moreover, the unity of Indonesia (*persatuan Indonesia*) is the third pillar of government, or Panca Sila. The government put the variety of the archipelago’s cultures on display in places such as the Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Theme Park (Taman Mini Indonesia Indah) and published numerous series of books documenting and showcasing local cultures for a variety of audiences. The government also established and perpetuates a national heroes program including representatives from across the archipelago who have made remarkable contributions to the Indonesian nation. Both the park and the heroes exemplify the government’s creation of a multicultural narrative.⁴

While there has been tremendous effort to include cultures from across the archipelago in this multicultural narrative, there has been less effort to combine them in an intercultural narrative. The government has espoused a nation-region-ethnie spatial model that presents each culture within the archipelago individually (Jones, 2013:269). Accordingly the aforementioned programs present the different cultures side by side as constituent yet discrete parts of a national culture. While these endeavours may be

³ For more information about Indonesian cultural policies, see Tod Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State: Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁴ On Taman Mini Indonesia see Greg Acciaioli, “Pavilions and posters: Showcasing diversity and development in contemporary Indonesia,” *EIKON: A Journal of the Visual Anthropology Society of Australia* 1 (1996): 27–42. On national heroes, see Klaus H. Schreiner, “The making of national heroes: Guided Democracy to New Order, 1959–1992,” in Henk Schulte Nordholt, *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 1997, pp. 259–290.

designed to encourage seeing an underlying Indonesianness, the distinctiveness of each culture is generally maintained (Soebadio, 1985: 22-23).⁵ That being said, this model often falls short, resulting in the misrepresentation of non-Javanese cultures. While the word "non-Javanese" sounds vaguely awkward to Kathryn's Midwestern USA ear, it seems normal to Louie who, like other Indonesians, often uses the Indonesian word "non-Jawa".⁶ Moreover, it reflects the reality on the ground for most of the country.

National representations of local cultures is the subject of Greg Acciaoli's study "Pavilions and Posters." With reference to provincial costumes and displays in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, he points out how the further an area is from the Javanese center, the more it is expected to conform to a generic model based on Javanese ideas of appropriateness (Acciaoli, 1996: 35). He further argues that such impositions constitute an inversion of Anderson's cone of power metaphor. This famous metaphor compares Java's influence on outlying areas to a reflector lamp radiating to from the center and fading in the peripheries (Anderson, 1972: 22, 35). Acciaoli suggests that inverted, Anderson's metaphor represents how the influence of the modern Indonesian state is felt more strongly at the peripheries than in the center as exemplified by the replacement of Papuan netbags with Javanese cloth.

Anderson's metaphor for Javanese power, and Acciaoli's inversion of it, brings us to the importance of power dynamics in interculturalism. The relationship between the Indonesian national government and the provinces is not equal. The centrality of Javanese culture and the force with which it is projected across the archipelago is illustrated by the case of Papua batik. Batik is a Javanese form of art. Highly marketable, it has been exported across the archipelago resulting in variants such as Papua batik and Makassar batik. When Indonesia received funding from the United Nations Development Program in 1985, it used it for cultural empowerment in Papua. Instead of encouraging the development of Papuan art, such as woven bags known as *noken*,⁷ the national government sent batik artists to train the Papuans in this Javanese art. They encouraged the Papuans to develop new batik motifs that represented their own culture. One might consider this to be a case of interculturalism because it blends Javanese techniques with Papuan motifs. However, it is an extremely imbalanced one, because Java sets the standards of batik production and all but obliges other areas to follow suit. Therefore, the blending does not entail the dialogue required by I Wayan Setem's definition of interculturalism. We will return to the example of batik in Part Three.

The Balinese artist and scholar's I Wayan Setem's views on interculturalism provide an important counterpoint to those of well known social scientists like Cattle, Meer, Mohood

⁵ Interestingly this nationalist framework has been replicated on the provincial level. R. Anderson Sutton points out how Taman Miniatur Sulawesi in Benteng Sombaopu puts the diverse cultures of South Sulawesi on display side by side. See R. Anderson Sutton, *Calling Back the Spirit: Music, Dance, and Cultural Politics in Lowland South Sulawesi*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶ For instance, an Indonesian Party Leader uses "Non-Jawa" in his interview:

<https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3137265/agung-laksono-wni-jawa-atau-non-jawa-memiliki-hak-sama-menjadi-capres> accessed 28 June 2025.

⁷ On the cultural significance and uses of *noken* bags, see Avelinus Lefaan, "Pemaknaan, Sosialisasi, dan Internalisasi Filsafat *Noken* dalam Komunikasi Pembangunan Masyarakat Kota Jayapura," *Jurnal komunikasi* (Online) (Yogyakarta), 17, 2, p.137-154.

and Verkuyten. I Wayan Setem emphasizes the importance of cultural blending (*silang budaya*). He argues that the terms transculturalism and multiculturalism do not seem to clearly reflect processes of cultural interaction. Furthermore, both terms might incorporate numerous cultures but they fail to convey the idea of a genuine blending or fusion of diverse cultural elements. In contrast to the terms transculturalism and multiculturalism, interculturalism addresses the realities of diversity and cross-cultural dynamics in Kamasan painting, which is the object of his study, as well as in the daily life across Indonesia communities (Wayan Setem, 21). Similar to the way Verkuyten et al describe the Council of Europe's preference for the term interculturalism because of its emphasis on dialogue and the belief that interaction is critical in plural societies (Verkuyten 505, 507), I Wayan Setem prefers the same term because it appears more appropriate to describe dialectical exchange between cultures. And whereas Verkuyten tries to measure intercultural attitudes, I Wayan Setem outlines various ways to achieve interculturalism.

I Wayan Setem uses the term interculturalism to refer to processes of collaboration interaction and intersection between cultural groups. He outlines seven different strategies of interculturalism: reinterpretation, transaesthetics, cultural dialogism, critical openness, knowledge differentiation, lifestyle, and product semantics. His third strategy, cultural dialogism, is especially relevant here. Cultural dialogism involves recognizing that the encounter between two cultures entails complex bilateral processes of selection, exchange and influence that can be positive, constructive and productive for the development of both cultures. Concomitant to this cultural dialogism are processes of filtering, organizing, separating, selecting and deciding all within the framework of a productive intercultural encounter (I Wayan Setem, 42). I Wayan Setem specifies that this exchange involves mutual learning, planning and competing activities that are framed by specific rules of the game so as to avoid negative conflict. I Wayan Setem uses Kamasan painting as an example. He describes the manner in which Kamasan painting has to change to follow modern culture to continue to thrive as a living tradition. These necessary changes pertain to both the content and the form. In terms of content, the subject matter of Kamasan painting has broadened beyond its traditional corpus of Balinese epics to include more common themes such as village life. In terms of form, the two-dimensional paintings are used for other physical objects such as fans and t-shirts.

Having examined several theories of interculturalism, we turn now to the La Salaga project. The La Salaga Project combines the cultures and history of Bali and Sulawesi within an intercultural setting.

Part Two: The Project

The Legend of La Salaga

The story of La Salaga hails from Mamuju and Pamboang in West Sulawesi, Indonesia, which is home to some of Louie's ancestors as well. It has been recorded in the Mandar language which can be considered the literary language of the immediate vicinity. There are rich oral traditions in the Mamuju language, but they were not traditionally recorded in *lontaraq*, the category of manuscripts from South and West Sulawesi that have been

recorded with indigenous Indic-based syllabaries. The word *lontaraq* stems from the type of leaf on which these manuscripts were traditionally written but is now used more generally to describe manuscript traditions from the peninsula. Some of these, including the story of La Salaga, have been Romanized, translated into Dutch, Indonesian or English, and published.

The story of La Salaga recounts the legendary family relations between Mamuju in West Sulawesi and Badung in South Bali, the island on which Louie attended secondary school. This relationship is said to have commenced with the marriage between Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang who become the parents of the cultural hero La Salaga. In a nutshell, this story relates how the Balinese royal Puang Bali arrived in Mamuju with his beautiful daughter, Mera'ara Puang. His vessel entered the land through the river and Puatta Mamuju, the local ruler, welcomed them. Puatta Mamuju then fell in love with Mera'ara Puang and asked his ministers to prevent her from leaving Mamuju. Mamuju soldiers secretly dammed the river where Puang Bali's vessel was docked. When Puang Bali was about to bid farewell to Puatta Mamuju, he was surprised that the river mouth was completely sealed by sands and it was impossible for the Balinese ship to leave. Understanding the subtle reason behind this action, Puang Bali acquiesced, remained longer in Mamuju, and married his daughter to Puatta Mamuju. As Kathryn's earlier research shows, marriage was a prime means of assimilation for migrants from Sulawesi (Wellen, 2014:88-89).

After the marriage, Mera'ara Puang became pregnant. She craved oysters and fruits. The Mandarese were puzzled, because they were not previously accustomed to eating oysters. But they obliged her request and soon started eating oysters themselves. Later during her pregnancy, Mera'ara Puang was terribly homesick. She wanted to return to Bali to see her family. Puatta Mamuju then allowed her to go with her followers. Several weeks after her arrival in Bali, she gave birth to twins: a boy and a *kobiq* (traditional machete).⁸ She named the boy La Salaga or I Salarang and raised him on Bali.

After several years, Puatta Mamuju died. The *adat* council or the elders of Mamuju decided to seek the crown prince in Bali. They sailed to Badung and asked for La Salaga. To their displeasure, the *adat* council of Bali rejected this request. The emissaries from Mamuju thus returned home empty-handed. The situation in Mamuju was chaotic without the rightful heir to rule the land and there was a long drought. According to local belief in Sulawesi, the absence of a rightful ruler or the presence of an unjust one can cause crop failures, epidemics, and natural disaster (Mattulada: 1985, 142-161). Therefore, the *adat* council of Mamuju decided to try again, and this time they hatched a plan. When they sailed to Bali they brought with them a Mandarese master ironsmith named Sakkaq Manarang. The emissaries from Mamuju asked if La Salaga could stay on board of their ship just for a night and sleep with his family. The *adat* council of Bali agreed. In the middle of the night, Sakkaq Manarang sneaked out to the harbor and drilled holes in all the

⁸ It is interesting to note that there is considerable regional folklore regarding twin births, sometimes involving a crocodile or monitor lizard as the twin. (See Andre Koch Andre and Greg Acciaioli, "The Monitor Twins: A Bugis and Makassarese Tradition from SW Sulawesi, Indonesia." *Biawak: Journal of Varanid Biology and Husbandry* 1, 2 (2007): 77-82.) La Salaga's twin is the only example of an inanimate object being a twin known to the authors.

Balinese ships with his staff iron to sink them. This allowed the Mamuju contingent to kidnap La Salaga and take him to Sulawesi.

In Mamuju, the child La Salaga was unhappy and homesick. He did not adapt well to his new surroundings. Very sad, he asked the *adat* council of Mamuju to take him back to Bali. Like marriage as a means of assimilation, this element of the story also has historical parallels. Kathryn's book on Bugis migrants, *The Open Door*, highlights the homesickness that plagued migrants (Wellen, 2014:103). The members of the *adat* council of Mamuju were moved by this request and, out of pity for the young boy, they sailed back to Bali and returned him.

On Bali, La Salaga grew up to be a brave warrior. He fought against the Sasak kingdom on Lombok and his reputation grew. One day, he went to Gowa in South Sulawesi. When the people of Mamuju heard about his arrival on Sulawesi, they went to Gowa and asked the now grown-up La Salaga to rule in Mamuju. La Salaga agreed; he then went to Mamuju with them.

An audacious and capable leader, La Salaga united Mamuju. He conquered the kingdom of Kuri-Kuri and made a peace treaty with Kalumpang. He extended Mamuju's region as far as the land of Kaili on the north and bordering with the land of Luwu on the east. Later on, he married princess Puatta Boqdi from Pamboang and co-ruled with her as Tomatindo Diagamana in Pamboang. They received the Muslim teacher Sayyid Zakaria Al-Maghribi (a.k.a. Puang Disomba) and converted to Islam, thereby becoming one of the earliest rulers in Mandar to embrace the new faith.

The La Salaga Project

The La Salaga Project both created an intercultural version of this tale from West Sulawesi and brought it to new audiences. We commissioned a painting to relate the legend of La Salaga using a traditional Balinese style known as *Kamasan*. We then used the painting to illustrate a children's book containing this legend in Mandar with poetic interpretations we wrote in Indonesian and English. We also used it for a children's video narrating the legend, and a second video documenting the project. These results, including a downloadable version of the book, are available on the website of KITLV as well as that of the Lontara Project, an initiative promoting the literature of Indonesia general and Sulawesi in particular.

KITLV funded the La Salaga Project during the Covid-19 pandemic. Like the pandemic itself, the unexpectedly available funds and KITLV's call for special projects was unprecedented. In response to this call, Kathryn contacted Louie, who shares her interests both in diaspora groups from Sulawesi and in Bali, and who just happened to be reading Mandarese folklore at the time. Louie is also a founder of Lontara Project, a youth community that was established in 2011 to promote South Sulawesi cultural heritage through new media for Indonesian young generations. Together with young Indonesian artists, musicians and illustrators, he has been passionately retelling the epic *La Galigo* and traditional stories from South Sulawesi in the form of popular reading (see www.lontaraproject.com), comics, songs and even musical drama performance. He has more than a decade of experience bringing traditional Indonesian literature to new

audiences. In contrast, Kathryn came to the La Salaga project as an ivory tower academic with limited experience bringing history to a wide-ranging public. Since the La Salaga Project, however, her interest in public history has developed markedly. She created an art installation entitled “The Library of Karaeng Pattingalloang: A Lost Heirloom” which is curated by the Karaeng Pattingalloang Museum in Makassar.⁹ She also published a popular comparative history of Amsterdam and Makassar in the daily newspaper *Fajar*¹⁰ and is actively seeking collaborators and funding to convert this story into an art exhibit. Together Louie and Kathryn fleshed out the details of the La Salaga project and Kathryn submitted an application for funding with Louie as project partner.

The Painting

Once funding was secured, Louie contacted the Balinese painter I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana via Instagram. It was possible to agree upon the most basic aspects of the painting via electronic communication, but the details required a face-to-face meeting. On 14 June 2021, Louie traveled to Kamasan¹¹ to meet the artist.

In Kamasan Louie met Pak¹² Made and his wife Ni Wayan Sri Wedari, the daughter of the famous painter Nyoman Mandra. Both Nyoman Mandra and Ni Wayan Sri Wedari are known for their exploration of new themes using traditional styles (Vickers, 2012: 91). Pak Made also comes from a family of accomplished artists and started learning from his grandfather I Ketut Rabeg before studying with Nyoman Mandra in 1978. Quickly it became clear to Louie that Pak Made was the right person to translate the story of La Salaga from a written text into a visual masterpiece.

The meeting between Louie and Pak Made exemplifies the sort of dialogue required for interculturalism according to I Wayan Setem. While in Kamasan, Louie discussed the project and the artistic elements of the assignment with Pak Made. They reviewed the legend of La Salaga at length. Louie presented Pak Made with a story board describing nine scenes from the legend of La Salaga as well as visual guidance about the material culture of West Sulawesi. This guidance included information about Mamuju styles of clothing, *pakur* and *sandeq* ships typical of Mandar, houses on stilts known as *rumah panggung*, the machete born with La Salaga that constitutes part of the royal regalia in Mamuju, and a Mandarese stone monument used for the ceremony of *assitaliang*, the

⁹ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kp5R4lvr1vU>

¹⁰ Kathryn Wellen, ‘Globalisasi Amsterdam dan Makassar’, *Fajar*, 9 December 2023.

<https://harian.fajar.co.id/2023/12/10/globalisasi-amsterdam-dan-makassar/>

¹¹ Kamasan is a village in Klungkung about forty kilometers northeast of Denpasar. Its organization reflects its history as an artistic community under royal patronage. There are different wards that are specialized according to the services that the artists once provided to the court such as painting and goldsmithing (Campbell, 2014: 252-53). Historically, Balinese art has experienced development on its understanding about culture and traditionalism to the modern world. In the 19th century, Balinese artists were innovating in art (Vickers, 2011: 35-36). The arrival of Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet at Ubud led to innovative movement of the 1930’s, where they taught local artists on technical tricks to improve local paintings and to give lessons of how to market painting. The influence of Spies and Bonnet inspired local artists such as Ida Bagus Made Poleng to move “from traditional wayang-based art to a more modern style” which in turn gave birth to “a modern style of distinctly Balinese art” (Vickers, 2019: 257). After the disastrous 1906’s battle against the Dutch military expedition, Kamasan, which was once the centre of Balinese classical culture entered a period of stagnation. The rise of Ubud’s art scene helped trigger the return of Kamasan art (Vickers, 2019: 254).

¹² Pak is an Indonesian title used for adult males.

tying of ropes for unity. These served as inspiration for Pak Made's own creation to which he brought his own culture and his many years of experience.

The La Salaga commission entailed significant challenges in terms of iconography. Most often Kamasan paintings depict scenes from the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and Balinese local folklore with numerous images on one canvas to relate consecutive scenes within the stories. Other painters, including Pak Made's own father-in-law, have experimented with different themes. For example, Kamasan artists have depicted scenes from the *Malat*, a Balinese story that relates the adventures of Prince Panji, as well as with the story of the Brayut family that depicts peasant life (Vickers, 2012: 57-61). Nevertheless, until Pak Made painted the legend of La Salaga, there had never been a major Kamasan work depicting a story from outside the Balinese literary cannon (Adrian Vickers personal communication, 27 September 2021). Accordingly, the La Salaga commission entailed iconographic challenges. Pak Made gave considerable thought to how he would depict the story of La Salaga. The information we had provided him offered some visual guidance but Pak Made still found himself dreaming about how he would depict all the characters and the scenes. In the end he demonstrated tremendous ingenuity.¹³

Pak Made's genius can be seen in various aspects of the painting. The sarongs worn by people from Mandar are checkered as is common in southern and western Sulawesi but the sarongs of most of the Balinese people in the story are batik. Similarly, there are also differences in the headdresses worn by the characters of different ethnicities. The characters from Sulawesi have circular headbands known as *songkok to Boné* or *songkok pamiring* whereas the characters from Bali have more extensive head coverings known as *udeng*. The female characters from Sulawesi are depicted with traditional *baju pokko* blouses and wear their hairs in typical Mandarese buns. On the first two scenes, Mera'ara Puang who just arrived in Mamuju is depicted in Balinese traditional *kemben* (torso wrap) but once the story moves on to the scene where she already settled down, her dress changed to traditional Mandarese blouse. However, when she returned back to Bali to give birth to La Salaga, her dress changes again to Balinese style. This particular attention to detail that Pak Made shows in his work makes the painting not just as a visualization of the story but also an object worthy of study in its own right.

¹³ Pak Made says this himself at minute 08.23 of the The Journey of La Salaga video:

Made: "The interesting thing (from the La Salaga Project) is the challenge to paint a rumah panggung (traditional house on stilts in Sulawesi). I asked myself "How to paint it?" In the process, I started painting from the easiest scenes (and then progressed) to the hard ones. I already plotted 9 scenes, dividing each scene with these karang-karangan (rock ornaments).

Louie: Why does the painting start from there (bottom left side)?

Made: The beginning starts from the bottom, then continues (to the right) and goes further up, the upper part is the climax of the story, the upper right is the end."



Figure 1 The La Salaga Painting by I Made Sesangka Puja Laksana photographed by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

These specific ethnographic details were missed by the commentator Mohammad Aditia Gilang Romadhon from Institusi Seni Indonesia in Surakarta in his article “A Visual Deconstruction” but they are apparent to viewers with a knowledge of the cultures of Bali and Sulawesi.

Despite the unprecedented storyline, the oeuvre is still a Kamasan painting, albeit an intercultural one. Pak Made followed the traditional color scheme for Kamasan paintings, and drew inspiration for the face of La Salaga from Arjuna, a hero from the *Mahabharata* who is a figure of masculine perfection in Balinese art. Similarly, the face of Mera’ara Puang is inspired by the heavenly nymph Suprabha, another character from this great Hindu epic. They are both portrayed in a refined (*alus*) manner as is appropriate for princes and princesses in Balinese painting. In contrast, malevolent characters are often painted with bulging eyes in Kamasan painting. Accordingly, the ironsmith’s eyes are a little bit bulging as he drills holes in the Balinese boats; but the bulging is not extreme. This degree of bulging is appropriate because he is a conspirator but there is no real villain in the legend of La Salaga. Made’s use of Balinese symbolism to illustrate the story from West Sulawesi is but one of many intercultural elements in the project.

The Text

After the commission of the painting was definite, we began working on the Indonesian and English poetry for the book. The book is written in three languages. This trilingualism is multicultural in that the languages are presented side by side. Prominent on each page is the legend in Mandarese script subtitled in Romanized Mandarese; this constitutes an

intercultural element because of the blending. The text is from *Lontar Mandar*, a manuscript found in Balanipa, West Sulawesi. We used a transliterated and translated version edited by A. M. Mandra, and published by the Department of Education and Culture in 1992. Based on the information mentioned inside this publication, it is from a copy made in 1814 of an older manuscript. This book is representative of the Indonesian government's multicultural efforts to promote individual local cultures as constituent elements of the national culture. Below the text in Mandar are our Indonesian and English versions of the story. They are not direct translations of the Mandar original but rather poetic interpretations. In writing the poetry we tried to convey the story in understandable, beautiful Indonesian and English. It must be emphasized that the legend of La Salaga hails from Mamuju where people speak their own language known as Mamuju. However, Mandarese was traditionally used for writing and until now no *lontaraq* manuscripts have been found in the Mamuju language. The texts in the book are also intercultural in the sense that they narrate Kamasan painting.

The use of Mandar language in the book and video is a significant aspect of the La Salaga Project's interculturalism. Pak Made's gorgeous Balinese-style painting is extremely prominent in the book, as this outstanding work of art should be. Yet the project is intended as a blending of cultures from Sulawesi and Bali, representative of the marriage of Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang. Were it not for the large Mandar font, the visual presentation of the book would be overwhelmingly Balinese. With the Mandar text featured prominently throughout the book, the cultural impressions are visually balanced. The book's intercultural character is readily apparent in this Balinese-Mamuju mix.¹⁴

To achieve the desired visual balance, we engaged the talented designer Aditya Bayu Perdana. A lecturer at Telkom University in Bandung, Bayu is also a typographer of traditional Indonesian scripts. He has designed more fonts than he can remember, many for Indonesian languages such as Javanese, Balinese and Batak. An aficionado of language, history and culture, he regrets that language revitalization efforts often neglect the visual diversity of the scripts. He uses his talents to enrich the esthetics in hopes of making Indonesian scripts appealing to younger generations. One might well imagine that the increased emphasis on local genius post-Suharto has offered Bayu increased opportunities to work for hotels and other institutions wishing to emphasize their local roots. As he was born in 1997, however, such opportunities have always been available to him.

For the La Salaga Project, Bayu invented two fonts. Both have been featured in a book on typography by Surianto Rustan (Rustan, 2023, Vol. 2: 135). The font on the cover used for the title of the book represents a radical break from existing fonts for languages from Sulawesi. Its elongated shapes flow. Positioned under the boat on the cover and title page, it looks like waves. Even to the trained eye of *lontaraq* readers such as Kathryn and Louie, at first glance it looks like part of the illustration. This font is an artistic achievement in and of itself.

¹⁴ This mix is perhaps less obvious in the video because most viewers will not recognize the language used to narrate the video, but the mix is still there.



Figure 2 The Bugis wave font designed by Aditya Bayu Perdana. Photographed by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

The font used for the Mandarese text of the book posed its own set of challenges. Bayu considered the well-known font used by B. F. Matthes to be too stiff, thick and angular for the project. It appears that Matthes favored angular scripts and considered rounding the V-shaped constituents of Iontaraq to be sloppy (Noorduyn, 1993: 553). Because Matthes published Bugis and Makassarese dictionaries and chrestomathies¹⁵ of enduring value, the font he used has become well-known.¹⁶ It was not, however, the only option. Bayu designed a more rounded font that is a better aesthetic match for Pak Made's art. It is intended to resemble the tendrils of young plants growing among Balinese coral.

Retrieving the painting

When the painting was completed, Louie, the videographer Agit Primaswara and his team travelled to Bali for the next phase of the project. On September 16, 2021 they went to Klungkung, where they were greeted by a gleeful and extremely hospitable Pak Made. When they arrived in his workshop, the first thing that they saw was the La Salaga painting. It was prominently displayed in the pavilion. Pak Made had sent updates, including images of the painting in progress and short videos of him working on it, but nothing could compare to the experience of seeing the completed painting. The painting was resplendent. Painted with limestone-based paints, the canvas radiates delicate shades of blue and yellow mixed with earthy tones of brown and beige. The result almost appears to be glowing from within itself, irrespective of external light. Measuring 1,5 by 3 meters long, it dominated the view in Pak Made's workshop. The painting was still fresh, rich in colours. In fact, Pak Made was still adding his last touches when the team arrived. The

¹⁵ A chrestomathy is a selection of literary texts and passages that, taken together, are useful for learning a language, showing the development of a language or studying a subject. A chrestomathy's didactic purpose distinguishes it from an anthology.

¹⁶ The history of printing in the indigenous languages of Sulawesi extends back into the eighteenth century when Radermacher published two short wordlists in Makassarese and Bugis in 1786. A Bugis code of laws was also printed in Singapore in 1832, but it was the Dutch missionary B. F. Matthes who pioneered printing in, as well as the scientific study of, these languages. During the mid-nineteenth century he printed a variety of materials in the indigenous script in Makassar. The late-nineteenth century saw increased concern for education and consequently the printing of textbooks in Bugis and Makassarese in the indigenous script. In the twentieth century, there preference was for printing in the Roman alphabet. Notable exceptions are La Side's 1971 history of Arung Palakka and the readers of Tamin Chairan (Noorduyn, 1991: 140, 168-79). In the late twentieth century a Bugis font was also developed for use on computers. Thus, Aditya Bayu Perdana did not have to start from zero.

diligence, artistry and eye for details used for this artwork were immediately obvious. Louie realized that it would serve as perfect art to illuminate the text.

The videographers quickly got to work setting up their equipment including cameras, lights and microphones. They shot footage of Pak Made describing his process, Louie and Pak Made discussing the painting, Pak Made's studio and his co-workers, and Pak Made's wife Bu¹⁷ Sri Wedari, a teacher at SMA Negeri 2 Semarang, discussing the importance of preserving this style of art for future generations. Because only half a day was available for filming, it was a challenge for the crew to obtain all the necessary footage.

The next day, Louie and the team delivered the painting to Indus restaurant. There they were greeted by Mbok Erma and Bli Abut, representatives of the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival with which Indus restaurant is associated. When Louie unfolded the La Salaga painting for them, they were awestruck. Not only were they impressed with the painting's beauty but they also recognized its intercultural innovations. Although very active in the Balinese art scene, never before had they seen such a Kamasan painting. Louie told them about the legend and the painting. He then started to describe how to care for the painting but this was not necessary. Having attended art school in Denpasar, Bli Abut was already well trained in handling Kamasan paintings. However, neither of them was previously aware of the legend of La Salaga and the connection between Badung and Mamuju.

The book

Photos of the painting completed by Agit Primaswara's team, the Indonesian and English poetry written by the two of us, and the fonts developed by Aditya Bayu Perdana, we then engaged the talented free-lance illustrator Ghina Amalia Yuhanida to design the book. Her primary interest being Indonesian culture, Ghina appreciated the challenges posed by the book's interculturalism and its trilinguality. To overcome these challenges, Ghina collaborated with Bayu. Together they succeeded in designing a book that contained the text in three languages and two scripts while still showcasing the artwork of Pak Made.¹⁸

Ghina also reworked the photographs of the painting so that the images would be appropriate for a book. This entailed examining the raw image, eliminating the superfluous parts of the image, adjusting the image so that it is appropriate for the book, and finalizing the image. This four-step process is apparent in figure 3.

¹⁷ Bu is an Indonesian title used for adult females.

¹⁸ The technical and artistic aspects of the book's design are described in greater detail in Aditya Bayu Perdana et al "Designing a Cross-Cultural Picture Book: A Glance at Legenda La Salaga". *KnE Social Sciences* 10, 1 (2025): 9-17.

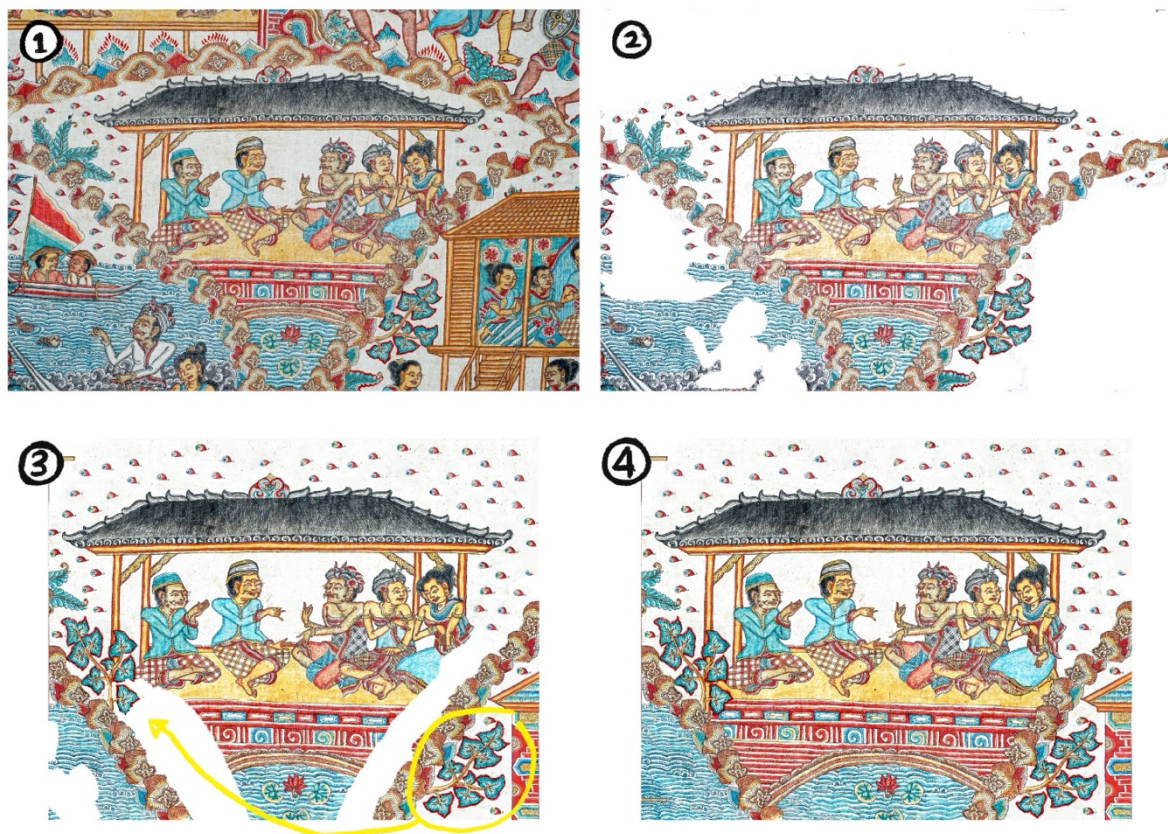


Figure 3 The patching process. Artistic assemblage by Ghina Amalia Yuhanida, 2022.

The patching process was her favorite part of the project, even though it was complicated by the use of photographs rather than scans, a necessity given the large size of the painting.

For the book, printing consultant Abie Zaidannas and Louie chose a linen-look paper because it had the right balance of affordability, durability and aesthetic appeal. It also reveals the colors in the painting beautifully. Pameo Productions printed 125 copies of the book. Aside from those provided to project participants, the rest were donated to literary organizations in Indonesia and libraries. These include Akademi Sastra Banggai, the Ternate Heritage Society, Lakoatjawas Library on Timor, Salihara Community, Radio Buku Literacy Community, Gurat Institute, Oprasi Lontar Community and the libraries of Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gajah Mada, and Universitas Udayana. Pameo productions mailed most of these directly to their destinations and sixty copies to Louie in Makassar for distribution in Sulawesi.



Figure 4 The book cover designed by Aditya Bayu Perdana. Photo by Agit Primaswara, 2021.

The videos

Technically, or perhaps traditionally, the painting and the book alone could complete the project. The videos might even be considered superfluous. This would be an underestimation of the aims of the project, however, because the videos are essential to communicating the results to wide-ranging audiences. Many more people are able to access the videos on their smart phones than will be able to locate a copy of the book in a library. This stems both from the small number of books printed and from the fact that global communications via social media are deeply embedded in Indonesia, even in rural areas (Collins, 2012).¹⁹ In terms of accessibility and distribution, therefore, the videos are an important part of the La Salaga project.

Videographer Agit Primaswara of Mari Madjoe Productions made two videos. The first is a documentary which describes the project. It contains interviews with Pak Made as well as our own perceptions of the history and the project. The second video is intended for children telling the story of La Salaga. The video is of Pak Made's painting. Louie's father Haji Muhammad Darwasir, who is a native Mandarese speaker, narrates the film which is

¹⁹ Indonesia has been nicknamed the Social Media Nation. Prior to the pandemic, 48% of the country's population is online and spent an average of 3 hours and 26 minutes per day online, with YouTube being the most popular platform (Hui, 2020:156). Social media consumption appears to have increased as a result of the pandemic. Additionally, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on traditional media consumption was immediately felt; in early March 2020 Indonesians watched three hours of television per day, and this increased by almost half an hour by the end of the month (Oxford Business Group, 2020).

subtitled in English or Indonesian according to the viewer's settings on YouTube. It may be among the first professional videos in Mandar.

The reception of the book

Even before the book was made available online, the public response to the book was greater than anticipated. It was also overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic.

On Bali, we participated in the Ubud Writers Festival via internet. We were interviewed by none other than the Balinese writer Wayan Juniartha a.k.a. Bli Jun. Bli Jun is a well-known journalist who is highly respected for his commentaries and analyses of Balinese affairs. Nevertheless, like most Balinese, he was surprised to learn of the connection between Badung and Mamuju. He was also especially curious as to how the legend had survived Islamicization in Sulawesi. During the festival we explained that many kinds of pre-Islamic literature still exist in Sulawesi. Most notable is the *La Galigo* epic, which was used as the basis of an international theatrical production and is included in UNESCO's Memory of the World. Louie also discussed the cultural thirst among his generation of Indonesians for traditional literature and its place in the modern world. After the Ubud Writers' and Readers' Festival, numerous individuals and bookstores approached us about how to purchase copies of the book. It is not yet available for sale, but an electronic copy is available for free download.²⁰

The book was equally well received in Sulawesi. Anwar Jimper Rahman of Kampung Buku Community and Innawa Publishing invited Louie to speak at the Makassar Biennale. Here people were just as surprised to learn about the connection between Bali and Mamuju as people on Bali were. There were discussions about the Sulawesi diaspora before and after the arrival of European powers in Southeast Asia, with young people with backgrounds in literature and art from different parts of Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia. Cornerstone School in Makassar also invited Louie to participate in an online event for child refugees from Afghanistan in Makassar. At this event, Louie introduced *La Salaga* and the project and read the book to the children. The Afghan children actively participated in the discussion and asked curious questions about the painting and expressed fascination with the machete. Like *La Salaga*, these children were forced to leave their homes at a young age; thus, the story of *La Salaga* resonated with them. This attests to the enduring value of literature as a mirror of the human experience.

In West Sulawesi, from where the Legend of *La Salaga* hails, the reception of the book was most complex. On 27 November 2021 Louie traveled to Mandar to present copies of the book and the painting itself to Nusa Pustaka, a literacy organization in Polewali, West Sulawesi. *Legenda La Salaga* is the first children's book ever written in Mandarese language and Pak Made's painting is also the first visual known representation of *La Salaga*, a figure who retains importance in Mamuju today. As such the book is considered a treasure by people in Mamuju (personal communication, Abdi Latiefi, 4 January 2022; personal communication Suparman Sopo, 3 December 2021. See also the introduction by the Maradika Mamuju, Bau Akram Dai, S. E., M. Si.)

²⁰ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1d0IGRMMyUWEzY8Mp5-IHyTlcATdZA1JqN/view>

Despite the overwhelmingly positive reception, Louie encountered some reservation in Polewali. There was concern about which version of the story was used for the book, whether it was really a Mamuju version and if efforts had been made to discover other versions. Louie explained that the innovative purpose of the project was to bring traditional literature to new audiences instead of to conduct philological research. There was also curiosity about why the drawings were done in Balinese style as opposed to a style from Sulawesi. This is because the intercultural project strives to integrate the cultures of Bali and Sulawesi, just like the marriage. On a national level, the book's value is augmented by this combination of cultures. Even on a local level, the use of Balinese art to illustrate a well-known story from West Sulawesi was appreciated. The testimonies received from local literary activists, educators and even the King of Mamuju himself, reflect tremendous pride. Whereas Bali frequently represents Indonesia on the (inter)national stage, Mamuju almost never does.²¹

While the painting's permanent home is at Nusa Pustaka in Polewali, where it occupies a prominent place in the library and attracts the curious eyes of visitors, it also attracted attention in Germany. In 2023 members of the Lontara Project including Louie travelled to Berlin and Dresden where they made multimedia presentations of the project including visual presentations, traditional singing and poetry declamation.²² Clearly interest in the project has spread beyond Bali and Sulawesi.

Part Three: The La Salaga Project in Comparison

Having discussed interculturalism in the first section, and having described the La Salaga project and its reception in the second section, the third section places the La Salaga project in comparative perspective. We compare the La Salaga Project with other artistic discourses as well as with historical and contemporary realities. We also discuss it in our personal, intellectual and creative lives.

Intercultural projects in a comparative perspective

As the reception of the book illustrates, both the contact between Badung and Mamuju and the interculturalism of the project surprised people. This surprise stems in part from the comparative rarity of intercultural discourses in Indonesia, especially in children's literature. While the variety of cultures within in Indonesia is showcased and emphasized in numerous children's books designed to cultivate awareness and empathy, the cultures are generally displayed individually. Strangely for such a diverse country of multilingual citizens, cultural discourses that intertwine two cultures are unusual in Indonesia. They are not, however, entirely absent. Two projects in particular contain elements resembling the La Salaga Project.

Among Indonesian artists who combine art and traditions from different parts of the archipelago, Heri Dono is the most famous. He was the first of his generation to establish

²¹ One exception is in the episode "Natural History" of the television series "Chicago Med" in which Mamuju is portrayed as a difficult to identify language, and the Mamuju-speaker is unrealistically portrayed as young but monolingual.

²² Photos and videos of the presentations in Germany are available at <https://www.instagram.com/p/CjyhK9CAF2R/> and https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn7Hpt4Pa9e/?img_index=6

an international reputation as a contemporary artist and has been hailed as “the epitome of the cosmopolitan artist” (Ingham, 2014). Heri Dono combines elements of various Indonesian cultures in innovative, intercultural ways. His puppets entitled “Raja Batak and His Wife Boru Anian” exemplify this perfectly. They are made of cardboard rather than the usual leather and they represent a story from northern Sumatra rather than a story from the Javanese literary canon, as shadow puppets generally do (National Heritage Board, undated). Similarly, his 1988 Wayang Legenda series adapts the Batak folktale “Si Tungkot Tunggal Panaluan” (Supangkat, 2014: 95). Heri Dono advocates preserving traditions in new dialogues (Wiyanto, 2004: 58), which is exactly what much of his work does. Such a hybrid, intercultural production is also what Pak Made’s achieved with his Kamasan interpretation of the legend of La Salaga.

Another example is the Yirrkala Batik Project which is also intercultural. It resembles the La Salaga project in that it also combines styles from Sulawesi and a place where people from Sulawesi travelled, specifically northern Australia. From the early seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries, sailors from South Sulawesi traversed the Timor Sea in search of sea cucumbers (Macknight, 1976). This shared heritage is apparent in Macassan words in the indigenous languages of East Arnhem Land; in rock art across northern Australia; in Aboriginal oral histories (Ormond-Parker, 2020:4) and in songs and dances (Abdi Karya, n.d.). Initiated in 2014, the Yirrkala Batik Project entailed the production of Pekalongan-style²³ batik based on the designs of Nawurapa Wunungmurra, a renowned artist from Yirrkala who is descendant from both Makassarese sailors and Yirritjamoiety Australians. While Pekalongan batik is Javanese rather than Bugis or Makassarese, as the artist Abdi Karya points out, people from other parts of Indonesia besides Sulawesi also participated in this trade (Abdi Karya, nd). The portrayal of bark painting motifs in batik constitutes an intercultural dialogue combining the two traditions. Similarly, Macassan pots are produced in the village of Soreang and decorated with Yolŋu painting. Entailing extensive dialogue, both are examples of intercultural art. These intercultural projects were both initiated on the local level and therefore differ significantly from the batik Papua masterminded by the national government which continuously places Java on center stage. We the authors are aware that in Part One we used batik with non-Javanese designs as an example of a hegemonic cultural exchange that does not meet I Wayan Setem’s definition of interculturalism, and we contend that the difference lies in the power dynamics.

The historical links between Sulawesi and northern Australia are well remembered and commemorated in a variety of ways including theatrical performances and storytelling (Bilous, 2015 and Stephenson, 2008). The Makassar City Museum has a room dedicated to Makassar-Australian relations established through the sea cucumber trade in which cloth from the Yirrkala Batik Project is displayed. In contrast to the Makassar-Australia relationship which is remembered on both sides, the legend of La Salaga has been forgotten on Bali. While migrants from South Sulawesi and their descendants on Bali are aware of their heritage and have cosmopolitan attachments, the legend of La Salaga

²³ Pekalongan is a city on northern Java that has long played an important role in the batik industry.

is not part of the cultural consciousness. Hans Hagerdal recalls possibly having encountered awareness of the legend among the Sasak of Lombok, but such memories are vague and rare (Hans Hagerdal, personal communication, May 9, 2022). With the exception of Mamuju and the Bugis community on Bali, it appears that memories of contact between Makassar and Northern Australia loom larger in the conscious of the descendants than the marriage of Puatta Mamuju and Mera'ara Puang or the historical relations between Bali and Sulawesi.

Despite these innovative initiatives, the ethno-spatial model in which regional cultures are juxtapositioned and not blended prevails across Indonesia. For example, provincial governments sometimes follow a similar approach to multiculturalism. Local identities are also sometimes displayed as being distinct from one another. A good example is the Tari Empat Etnis (Dance of Four Ethnicities) from South Sulawesi created in 1975 by the local impresario Ida Joesoef from Yayasan Anging Mammiri (YAMA). This dance represents the four largest ethnicities in South Sulawesi, namely Makassar, Bugis, Mandar and Toraja. It incorporates costumes, movements and music from each ethnic group. Significantly, the cultures are displayed successively, one after the other. There are no Torajan dance steps accompanying Mandarese music or other similar blending. Moreover, the smaller ethnicities within the province such as Luwu, Enrekang, Wotu, and Selayar are excluded. In this case the national model of ethno-spatial containment has been reproduced on the provincial level. Interestingly, when the five regencies in which most of the Mandarese populations live decided to establish the province of West Sulawesi apart from South Sulawesi in 2004, a new dance called Tari Tiga Etnis (Dance of Three Ethnicities) was created in response to this political change. The new dance is basically a modification of Tari Empat Etnis, which omits part from Mandarese dance and continues only with parts from Bugis, Makassar and Toraja (Soraya, 2018).²⁴

The history behind La Salaga

The history surrounding La Salaga is inherently intercultural. La Salaga himself may be a legendary rather than a historical figure, but he is emblematic of the relationship between Bali and Sulawesi. While it is unclear exactly when this relationship may have started, it has been documented through anthropological and archaeological research. There is a Balinese folktale about the origins of the names Buleleng and Singaraja linking the greatness of these kingdoms to stranded Bugis boats on the shores of Buleleng (Khusyairi, 2017: 109). There are also similarities in styles of gravestones in South Sulawesi and southern Bali (Fadillah, 1999: 111-112). These gravestones date from the late nineteenth century and are thus from a much later period than the pre-Islamic period (in West Sulawesi) during which the Legend of La Salaga takes place. Nevertheless, folktales and gravestones suggest that there was a long-standing relationship between the two islands.

Such a relationship might have entailed more than intercultural exchange and inter-island marriages. There may have been other social, political or military aspects as well.

²⁴ Tari Kreasi 3 Etnis Bugis, Makassar dan Tanah Toraja Toraja SDN Komp. IKIP 1 Makassar, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaJ2XLoG0z0>

Perhaps Badung felt that a relationship with a polity on Sulawesi may have been militarily advantageous. Mataram long threatened to conquer or otherwise interfere in Balinese affairs. Under this threat, it would be logical to seek military alliances elsewhere. While it is commonly believed that soldiers from Sulawesi gained prominence in the archipelago following the Makassar War, research in Sundanese texts documents that soldiers from Sulawesi had a reputation for prowess as early as late 15th to early 16th century (West, 2021: 217).

La Salaga is also emblematic of migrants in early modern Asia who led transnational existences and were more common than one might realize. According to legend, La Salaga served numerous governments. He both fought against the Sasak on Lombok and agreed to rule Mamuju. Such multiple loyalties were not unheard of in early modern Asia. As Kathryn's research has revealed, historical migrants are known to have maintained multiple loyalties. For example, the eighteenth-century Bugis migrants Haji Hafiz and Daéng Mabéla both considered themselves to have two lords in different places. Haji Hafiz felt loyal both to the Wajorese²⁵ leader Daéng Matekko and the so-called five Opu Daéng who were important Bugis statesmen in the Malay world. Similarly, Daéng Mabéla claimed to be loyal to his king in Sulawesi and the Dutch company in Sumatra (Wellen, 2014: 124-26).

Such loyalties can be heart-wrenching. According to legend, La Salaga cried from homesickness for Bali while residing in Sulawesi as a child. This is very realistic and not just for a child. Seventeenth-century Bugis soldiers in the service of the English East India Company are known to have complained persistently of homesickness (Wellen, 2014: 103). While La Salaga may be a representation of how easily early modern migrants could adapt to new surroundings (Hägerdal, 2001: 77), these transitions could entail emotional costs. This holds true not only in historical situations but also contemporary situations. This is evidenced by the homesickness of the Afghani refugees residing in Makassar to whom Louie read La Salaga and his own challenges living under the grey skies of the Netherlands.

La Salaga commemorations

The way La Salaga is remembered and commemorated in Mamuju also exemplifies how interculturalism is an inherent part of Indonesia. Every two years, the royal family of the Mamuju kingdom who trace their ancestry to La Salaga hold a ceremony called *Masossor Manurung*. During this ceremony La Salaga's twin, the machete named *Maradika Tammakana-kana* is cleaned. Bearing indigenous and Islamic elements, and including Muslims from Mamuju as well as Balinese Hindus, the ceremony is undeniably intercultural. As such it has tremendous potential for promoting national unity, but it seems to serve other purposes; and these purposes seem to have changed over time.

Previously, the ritual of cleaning Maradika Tammakana-kana was used to legitimate the royal family. According to local legend in Mamuju, the ceremony started when there was a famine. At that time, the king of Mamuju ordered the *Galaggar Pitu* (the seven

²⁵ Wajo' is a Bugis polity in the Cenrana Valley in South Sulawesi.

members of *adat* council or customary leaders) to bathe Maradika Tammakana-kana. The water from the washing process of this heirloom was then distributed to gardens, rice fields, the sea, and a few days later the drought that hit Mamuju ended. While the ritual still serves to reinforce the position of the royal family, it now also boosts tourism and celebrates local culture. In 2019, the ritual was deliberately chosen to be the highlight of Festival Maradika Mamuju, a three-day event by local government to boost tourism and the creative industries. The sacred ritual has been popularized, enlivened with cultural performances involving local art communities and students from public schools. Delegations from Bali are also invited (Harahap, 2019).

Like intercultural art, intercultural commemorations that combine traditions from two different islands are not common in Indonesia but they are not unheard of, especially among diaspora communities. For example, the Bugis community in Riau and Jambi who embraces a Malay identity still preserve traditions such as *mabbarasanji* and *cemme saffareng* from South Sulawesi (Jamaluddin, 2018: 133). The descendants of Bugis migrants in Pulau Serangan (Denpasar, Bali) interchangeably use Balinese and Bugis languages in daily life, while still celebrate 'megilicik', an Islamic tradition originating from Wajo'. They also observe local *palemahan* and *pawongan* customary village administration (I Nyoman, 2018: 96, 108). The mixtures are very real, and yet cultures in Indonesia are usually put on display side by side. Even the Betawi culture which mixes Malay, Sundanese and Javanese elements usually is displayed distinctly, alongside other cultures including those that shaped it.

Conclusion

In contemporary Indonesia there are many migrants and cross-cultural encounters that do not figure prominently into the nationalist discourse. Many people are multilingual and maintain multiple attachments. There have also been many interethnic marriages producing children like Louie with multiple and hybrid ethnic identifications. Not the least of these are migrants from South Sulawesi who have established a far-flung network with members in thirty-seven provinces.²⁶

While Indonesia is an intercultural nation par excellence, the state's discourse is generally multicultural. It mostly entails the juxtapositioning of different cultures, which is multicultural. Very little of the discourse highlights the intercultural combinations that resulted from grassroots dialogue and interaction between cultures throughout time and space. This stems in part from the New Order's desire to depoliticize local cultures and contain them within a national framework. While Java figured, and figures, disproportionately in this discourse, there were, and are, efforts to counterbalance this dominance.

Under the New Order cultures from across the archipelago were promoted in a policy of "suku-ologi" designed counterbalance Javanese studies. Special attention was also paid to designing children's literature that would help children appreciate other cultures

²⁶ This is the Kerukunan Keluarga Sulawesi Selatan (Organization of Families from South Sulawesi). This is commonly known its initials KKSS which is also said to stand for "kaluku kelapa sama saja" meaning "coconut (in Bugis) coconut (in Indonesian) it's the same."

within the archipelago (Jones, 2013: 244-248). Yet like the collections of *cerita daerah*, this juvenile literature highlighted the variety of cultures within Indonesia as opposed to the many ways in which cultures have blended, and continue to blend, in Indonesia. Variations “from the established model” were discouraged (Jones, 2013: 247). Despite the significant changes of the Reform era, there has been little modification to the positioning of local cultures within the national cultural bureaucracy (Jones, 2013: 269).

While it is beyond the scope of this article to explain the rationale behind the Indonesian government’s model, it is interesting to point out the irony of interculturalism in Indonesia as it relates to La Salaga. There is much more blending than is commonly realized. Both *Legenda La Salaga* and the project as whole reveal and highlight unexplored narratives of interculturalism in Indonesian society. The story it relates is one of migration, a phenomenon with a much longer history than is commonly recognized. La Salaga is emblematic of the migrants that have always existed and of the cultural exchanges that have resulted in such migrations; as is his mother who introduced shellfish to Mamuju and Syekh Zakaria who introduced Islam. The book and the painting also exemplify this intercultural reality. Pak Madé’s painting is the first major Kamasan painting to depict scenes outside of the Balinese literary cannon. Books like *Legenda La Salaga* are extremely rare within the scope of Indonesian children’s literature. Even anthologies designed to encourage cultural awareness among children tend to present the cultures of the archipelago side by side whereas *Legenda La Salaga* truly blends the cultures of two different islands. In so doing, it reflects the long-existing but increasingly intense interculturality of Indonesia.

As I Wayan Setem points out, interculturalism enriches rather than eradicates kamasan painting (I Wayan Setem, 45). Intercultural dialogues allow kamasan painting and lontar literature to be enjoyed by more people than ever before. The authors and I Made Puja Laksana as well as Aditya Bayu Perdana and Ghina Amalia Yuhanida are proud to have contributed to their enjoyment.

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Abstract

I riti dell'Assunta si tengono in un paesino del beneventano, Guardia Sanframondi, nel Sud Italia. Iniziano il lunedì successivo al 15 agosto e si aprono con le processioni rionali. La cadenza è settennale e per questo attraggono fedeli, semplici curiosi e molti fotografi da tutta la regione. Rintracciarne l'origine non è semplice, le ipotesi e le storie ricostruite sono diverse. Secondo alcuni studiosi, il rito risalirebbe al XIII secolo (1239), nato come un moto di protesta contro le politiche di Federico II ha assunto la forma di una rappresentazione sacra. La sua messa in scena coinvolge non solo il paese di Guardia ma anche i paesi limitrofi, i numeri si aggirano su circa 50.000 partecipanti tra battenti, disciplinati e figuranti. Ogni rione organizza e partecipa a due processioni: la processione di Penitenza, per cancellare le colpe e i peccati, e la processione di Comunione, per mostrare alla comunità il ritrovato stato di grazia, dopo essersi purificati dai propri peccati. La processione generale si tiene la domenica e con il rientro della madonna nel santuario si concludono i riti.

Keywords

riti settennali; Sud Italia; classi subalterne; religiosità; etnografia; antropologia

The author

Vincenzo Bello, classe 1980, napoletano, laureato in Economia e relazioni internazionali, decide di studiare Antropologia presso l'Università della Basilicata.

Nel corso degli anni ha elaborato diversi progetti fotografici esposti in diverse mostre tra cui il festival della Fotografia etica di Lodi- Circuito OFF e Miradas Compartidas a L'Avana (Cuba). Tra i suoi progetti: "Napoli Souvenir" per raccontare la gentrificazione della città partenopea; "Hebron, la città fantasma" e "Aida Camp" reportage fotografati durante il viaggio in Palestina, "De Umbris Pompeii" un gioco di silenzi e ombre; "Contadini" un progetto sulla raccolta delle nocciole in un paesino del beneventano.

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I riti dell'Assunta

Un saio bianco, un cappuccio che lascia intravedere appena gli occhi, il torace scoperto, il crocifisso e l'immagine dell'Assunta in una mano, la spugna di sughero conficcata di spilli nell'altra. In fila per due, preceduti da tre uomini che portano la croce simbolo della passione di Cristo, sfilano per le strade del paesino di Guardia Sanframondi battendosi, fino al sanguinamento del petto, e intonando, in un'atmosfera carica di silenzio e tensione "mistica", le litanie rituali. Ora pro nobis. Sono i battenti dei riti settennali di Guardia Sanframondi.

Rintracciare le origini di questo rito non è cosa facile. Le origini sono incerte e diverse sono le teorie e le supposizioni. Secondo alcuni studiosi, il rito risalirebbe al XIII secolo (1239) e sarebbe collegato ad un moto di ribellione degli abitanti del paesino di Guardia Sanframondi contro le politiche ostili al papato di Federico II. In particolare, i paesani avrebbero reagito contro Guglielmo III Sanframondo per il rigore e la violenza con cui applicava i capitoli pubblicati nel regno dall'Imperatore. La protesta avrebbe, secondo questa tesi, assunto la forma di una rappresentazione sacra¹. Assunse i contorni ed il colore di un'eclatante iniziativa mistico-religiosa, imperniata sull'allestimento di quadri viventi penitenziali².

I riti seguono la struttura del paese di Guardia Sanframondi. Questo è diviso in quattro rioni: Croce, Portella, Fontanella e Piazza. Ogni rione costituisce un comitato rionale formato da cinque Deputati che li rappresentano nel Comitato dei Riti penitenziali, costituito dai quattro comitati rionali. Ogni comitato ha il compito di organizzare, pianificare e finanziare la manifestazione rionale. I riti iniziano il lunedì successivo al 15 agosto e si aprono con le processioni rionali. Ogni rione organizza e partecipa a due processioni: la processione di Penitenza, per cancellare le colpe e i peccati, e la processione di Comunione, per mostrare alla comunità il ritrovato stato di grazia, dopo essersi purificati dai propri peccati.

Le processioni rionali rappresentano le fasi di avvicinamento alla processione generale che si terrà la domenica successiva. In ogni processione sfilano per le vie del paese le rappresentazioni sacre, i "misteri", vere e proprie scene viventi dei misteri biblici, della vita dei Santi, della storia della Chiesa e anche scene tratte da avvenimenti drammatici della storia contemporanea. Nelle processioni di penitenza, sfilano anche uomini e donne incappucciati che si percuotono con la cosiddetta "disciplina", antico strumento di penitenza formato da strisce metalliche unite da una catenella e utilizzata per percuotersi le spalle. Ad accompagnare i misteri e i disciplinanti sono i canti del coro rionale. Il sabato che precede la processione generale della domenica, le vie del paese sono percorse dalla processione del clero e delle associazioni cattoliche. È questo il momento in cui, raggiunto il santuario e celebrata la messa solenne, si apre la lastra che chiude la nicchia in cui è riposta la Madonna dell'Assunta. I fedeli potranno, così, renderle omaggio percorrendo la scala che li conduce al ballatoio per poi ridiscendere dalla parte opposta, a ritroso, senza mai dare le spalle alla Madonna.

¹ F. Sanzari, *I re penitenti*, 1961.

² V. Esposito, *Statue, penitenti e corpi immobili nei riti settennali di Guardia Sanframondi*, Sinestesieonline, Anno IX, Numero 30, Settembre 2020 Rifrazioni n. 2

La fase conclusiva e quella con maggiore intensità e partecipazione, tant'è che attrae fedeli, curiosi e molti fotografi, è la processione generale della domenica. I battenti, i disciplinanti, i misteri, i cori di tutti i rioni sfilano lungo le vie del paese. Un colpo di mortaio annuncia l'uscita della Madonna dal santuario, la processione è alla sua massima espansione e raggiungerà l'apice con l'incontro tra i battenti e la madonna a piazza Castello. Con l'ingresso della Vergine nel santuario la processione si chiude.

La carica simbolica dei riti settennali è evidente e esplicitamente esaltata in ogni sua componente: le figure, i simboli, i suoni, i luoghi.

Le figure: i disciplinanti, i misteri, ma soprattutto i battenti. Al grido: «Con fede e coraggio, fratelli, in nome dell'Assunta, battetevi!» tutti gli incappucciati, all'unisono, cominciano a colpirsi sul petto, con rumore cupo di tamburo e si incolonnano, lasciando il santuario, mostrando a tutti il primo sgorgare del loro sangue³.

I simboli: gli Stendardi, ogni rione ha il proprio che apre le processioni rionali e lo spezzone dei singoli rioni nella processione generale; la Disciplina, lo strumento con cui i penitenti si percuotono; la spugna, un pezzo di sughero circolare in cui sono conficcati gli spilli che provocano il sanguinamento dei battenti. Forte è il contrasto tra il biancore delle tuniche e il rosso del sangue che invade anche muri e strade; la statua della Madonna, fulcro di tutti i riti settennali.

I suoni: le campane il cui suono apre le processioni rionali e quella generale, custodite sotto la nicchia della statua dell'Assunta vengono utilizzate solo in tre occasioni: per intercedere la Madonna dell'Assunta in caso di calamità naturali; in occasione delle processioni penitenziali; per effettuare le questue rionali⁴. I cori e le litanie; il colpo di mortaio proveniente dal castello e che indica il momento in cui la statua dell'Assunta esce dal santuario e comincia a percorrere le vie del paese. Subito dopo il colpo, i partecipanti alla processione si inginocchiano.

³ V. Esposito, *ibidem*.

⁴ G. Lombardi, *Ritisetennali*, 2023 www.ritisetennali.org



Photo 1 e 2 i battenti battono il petto con la spugna. Vestiti di bianco e incappucciati, i battenti mostrano il petto scoperto lacerato dalle ferite prodotte dagli aghi conficcati nella spugna.



Photo 3 Per detergere e disinfettare la ferita viene versato del vino sulla spugna



Photo 4 la spugna: pezzo di sughero circolare, nel quale sono conficcati degli spilli. Queste punte fuoriescono dal sughero per circa due millimetri. Il battente, percuotendosi incessantemente provoca il sanguinamento del petto.

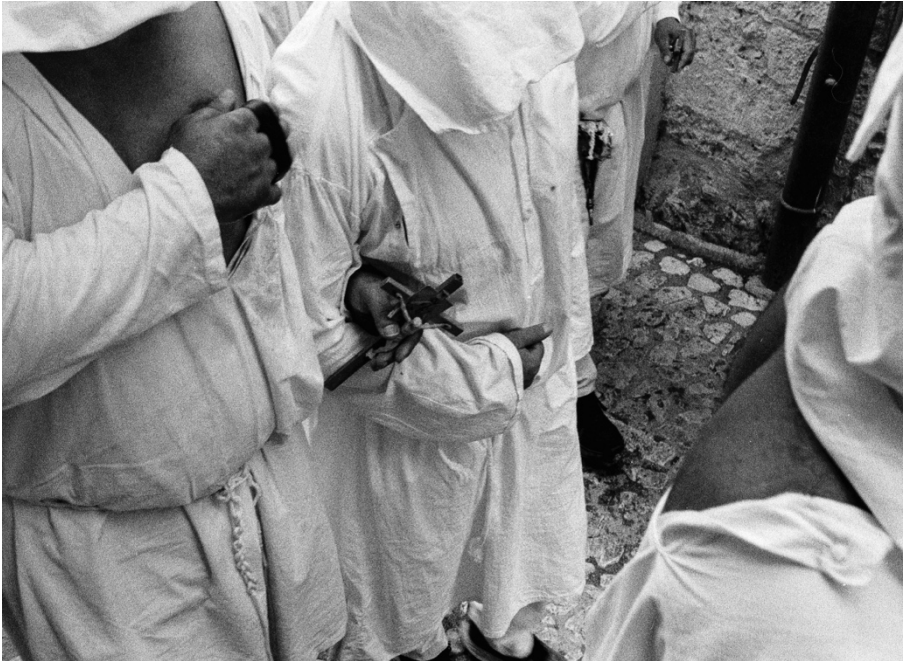


Photo 5 e 6 i battenti portano con sé il crocifisso e l'immagine della madonna dell'Assunta.

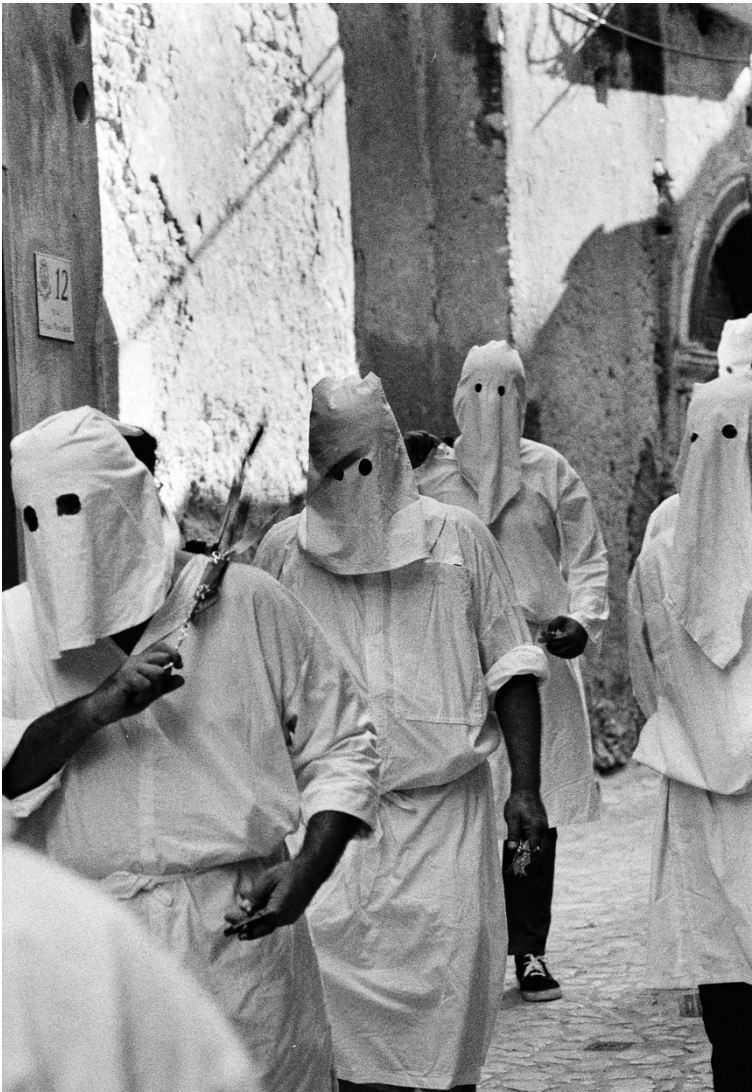


Photo 7 e 8 i disciplinati: vestiti di bianco e incappucciati, come i battenti, si percuotono con una catena di strisce metalliche.



Photo 9 la disciplina e il crocefisso con l'immagine della Madonna



Photo 10 la disciplina: strisce metalliche, unite da una catenella con la quale si percuotono le spalle





Photo 11,12, 13, 14,15 I Misteri, scene tratte dalla Bibbia, dalla vita dei santi e dalla storia della Chiesa.

I misteri sono quadri viventi, rappresentazioni di storie raccontate nelle sacre scritture, che appartengono alla storia della Chiesa, ritraggono le vite dei santi, ai dogmi. Come il martirio di San Sebastiano (fig. 12) o San Pasquale Baylon (fig.13)



Photo 16, 17 i rioni percorrono l'ultimo tratto prima di giungere nella piazza antistante il santuario



Photo 18 la statua dell'Assunta percorre i vicoli del paese, in coda alla processione. La statua poggia su una base lignea in posizione eretta e nell'atto di benedire, sul lato sinistro sorregge il Bambino. È ricoperta da un lungo mantello in seta.

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**The castle neighbourhood through children's eyes:
A study in photography and critical practice**VOLUME 14 | No 2 | 2025
<http://dx.doi.org/10.12835/ve2024.2-192>**Abstract**

This photographic essay presents a photography workshop held in Ankara, Kale Mahallesi (castle neighbourhood), with a group of Romani and Syrian children aged 6 to 13, as part of an ongoing effort by Birlikte Kent (a collective based in Ankara) to create space for dialogue, exchange, and knowledge production. Guided by critical social theory and Freirean notions of conscientisation, the workshop encouraged children to use photography as a method for reflecting on and narrating their urban environment marked by community, gentrification, and displacement. The workshop, which was organised through a collaboration between two collectives, Birlikte Kent (Ankara) and Fotohane Darkroom (Mardin), positions children as 'knowers', supporting them in documenting their personal and collective stories, claiming ownership of their narratives, and bringing attention to conditions of urban transformation and the right to the city. This photo-essay presents 15 photographs taken by three of the participating children.

Keywords

Critical practice, Ankara, community-building, photography, children, gentrification

The author

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Paulo Freire wrote about the right of 'naming the world'. To name the world, is to re-create it. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he discusses this at length as the development of a critical consciousness, an awareness and analysis of social realities. However, not in isolation, nor in silence. As Freire (1972) reminds us, 'human beings are built...in word, in work, in action-reflection' (p.61). The act of naming is intimately connected to a praxis, as he notes, it is reflection *and* action that produce material goods, social institutions, ideas, and concepts.

In a critical pedagogy in the Freirean sense, photography has the potential to become a tool of critical (self)reflection of lived experiences, in articulating oppression and injustice, and developing ideas for re-creation. Photography or 'photovoice' has developed as a specific form of participatory action research method to incite reflexive discussions and social participation for structural change. It is rooted in critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and documentary photography. In this methodology, participants are not subjects but active researchers in the process (Wang and Burris, 1997).

The series of photographs presented in this photo-essay is from a photography workshop held in Kale Mahallesi (castle neighbourhood) of Ankara in January 2025, with a group of children aged 6 to 13 from socially marginalised backgrounds. Organised through a collaboration between two collectives, Birlikte Kent, a volunteer group working toward urban justice in Ankara, and Fotohane Darkroom, a mobile analogue photography project for children and youth on the Turkish, Syrian, and Iraqi borders, this three-day workshop is part of an ongoing initiative designed to create space for dialogue, exchange, and knowledge production about issues affecting the communities living in the neighbourhood. Grounded in critical social theory and Freirean notions of conscientisation, this workshop is about developing critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action.

The participating children all live and go to school in Kale Mahallesi located in the Altındağ district of Ankara, which is being slowly, but violently, reconfigured through gentrification. Historically, the inner castle and its surroundings have been populated by non-Muslim communities (Koç, Saraç, and Döne 2024). By the 1920s, this district became a settlement for the poor and immigrant populations living in Ankara due to relatively low rents. Over time, it has become home to Romani communities, predominantly those who were expelled from the Balkans to Turkey through compulsory population exchange (*Ibid*). In the past decade, displacement from Syria has led to a significant number of Syrian families settling in Altındağ, including in and around Kale Mahallesi. More recently, following the fall of the Assad regime, some families have expressed their intentions to return to Syria.

The castle, which gives its name to one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Ankara, is a distinct urban landmark as it remains a place where people continue to live within its inner and outer walls. Over the past two decades, the neighbourhood has become subjected to large-scale urban renewal projects led by local government and TOKİ (the housing development administration of Turkey). Under the language of 'development', these projects have functioned as mechanisms to force out local residents as they increase land

value and property prices, making it increasingly unaffordable for long-time residents to remain, and as a result, dispossessing the urban poor of land.

The social and spatial reconfiguration of the neighbourhood driven by infrastructure and urban renewal projects has led to the commercialisation of the neighbourhood, replacing low-income housing with middle-class residential zones, as local shops and homes are replaced with restaurants and souvenir stands (depicted in the photographs below). For the residents who have lived there for long years, this shift signifies a loss of familiarity and communal bonds, as everyday life becomes increasingly alienated. The erosion of the neighbourhood's sense of community (*mahalle kültürü*), and its destruction of a collective memory of place are forcing more families to relocate. The ongoing displacement is an example of how urban space is commodified, with people no longer in control of their surroundings.

This photography workshop began with the idea of 'naming this world' (Freire, 1972); the everyday life of children as they navigate a changing urban landscape, in the backdrop of cranes tearing down and re-developing homes, as tourists pass through, and as the children play upon the descending slope of the castle. Through the lens of the camera, to etch their presence into their neighbourhoods. For three days, the children gathered in the premises, situated along the castle walls. This workshop recognises children as 'knowers', offering them the space to take ownership of their visual narratives, and express their stories and perspectives, providing insights into their emotions, sense of belonging, and environment, as a method of producing local knowledge. Through photography, they were encouraged to connect more deeply with the neighbourhood.

During the workshops, the children asked: "what should we photograph?" They were introduced to analogue photography by photographer Serbest Salih, co-founder of Fotohane Darkroom, who led the workshops. The children took the cameras with them, which allowed them time and space to experiment. As for what to photograph, encouraged to explore their own perspectives, the children were asked to photograph their surroundings in ways that reflected their own views. Throughout the workshops, we had discussions around the concepts of 'place', not just as a physical location, but as a lived and imagined space, helping the children engage with deeper notions about how we perceive and relate to the environments we inhabit. The children were present in every step of the process, including developing their photographs in the darkroom.

Critical practice is conscious of its effects. Reading and reflecting on the images is as integral to the process as capturing them. Wang and Burris (1997) identify three goals of photovoice: 1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, 2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge, 3) to reach policymakers.

Photographs can be used as a way to discover valid symbols for a community or social group (Boal, 1979). In this way, the photographs will provide a vocabulary for children to voice their perspectives over the course of the next months as we gather for discussions. At the same time, the photographs will be exhibited in a community setting, building space for dialogue, reflection, and (re)creation, encouraging conversations within the neighbourhood about the social changes impacting their lives. Finally, the photographs

will also be part of a symposium bringing together civil society actors in Ankara on the topic of urban poverty and the right to the city.

Below are 20 photographs taken by several of the participating children (Pseudonyms were used).



Photo 1 Photo by Ahmet, 2025



Photo 2 Photo by Yasemin, 2025



Photo 3 Photo by Aya, 2025



Photo 4 Photo by Yasemin, 2025



Photo 5 Photo by Yavuz, 2025



Photo 6 Photo by Yasemin, 2025

The castle neighbourhood through children's eyes



Photo 7 Photo by Yusra, 2025



Photo 8 Photo by Mustafa, 2025



Photo 9 Photo by Mustafa, 2025



Photo 10 Photo by Yusra, 2025

The castle neighbourhood through children's eyes



Photo 11 Photo by Ali, 2025.



Photo 12 Photo by Ayaz, 2025



Photo 13 Photo by Ahmet, 2025.



Photo 14 Photo by Ayaz, 2025



Photo 15 Photo by Ali, 2025



Photo 16 Photo by Ali, 2025.



Photo 17 Photo by Ahmet, 2025.



Photo 18 Photo by Ali, 2025

The castle neighbourhood through children's eyes



Photo 19 Photo by Yusra, 2025



Photo 20 Photo by Ayaz, 2025

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2024 Demographic, Economic and Social Characteristics of a Roma Neighbourhood in Ankara: An Example of a Castle Neighbourhood. *Journal of Ankara Studies* 12, no. 1-19. Accessed online (February 21, 2025)

Abstract

My contribution will focus on the visual composition of a field diary that I wrote during two and half years of research as a clinical anthropologist within a European project for refugees and asylum seekers. The images, conceived as pieces of a mosaic, tell of the encounters, suggestions and evocative power of the stories heard in the clinic.

The project, already selected in international photography calls, proposes the objective of composing an artistic narrative of doing ethnography. As Anna Grimshaw (Edwards, 2015) uphold, anthropology (and ethnography) can be seen as a project of visual imagination. In this perspective, photographs can be thought of as a translation of an affect, a matrix of the subjectivity of experience.

Thus, the images that composed my field diary are a 'way of seeing', a recording of thought in a synaesthetic manner, as some of the literature on the practices of visual anthropology claims (McDougall, 2006; Marano, 2013). The resulting mosaic presents itself as a possible way of traversing and experiencing 'difficult' terrains such as those of ethnoclinics.

Keywords

Fieldwork; Photography; Ethnography; Medical anthropology; Migration; Anthropology of senses.

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Maria Elisa Dainelli is a clinical anthropologist living in the province of Siena, Italy.

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Fieldwork: diary of a clinical anthropologist

This project is the fruit of two and a half years of research as a clinical anthropologist within SPRINT 2 European project, giving psychological support to refugees and asylum seekers in the region of Tuscany, in Italy.

This is a narration I composed retrospectively, after the project had ended. In fact, the narrative as a whole only took shape when I had the opportunity to reflect carefully and objectively on what I had seen and heard in clinical settings.

Taken individually, each of them has an epistemological value that was both the result of fieldwork and following elaboration.

Pictures can be divided into three categories:

- The images I have collected over the years of ethnography, going to reception centres or healthcare centres
- The images I recomposed following some significant interviews, which I kept in my memory and which I considered central in my research
- Aerial images taken from Google Earth

The latter, in particular, mark the rhythm of the narration of the entire ethnographic project. The first two represent the route that migrants from Africa take, for the most part, to reach Italy: the Sahara Desert, taken at the border with Libya, and the Mediterranean Sea. Both images recall the absence of limits and, at the same time, remind us how, in those contexts, border controls represent concrete experiences of violence. The other one depicts the major reception centre in which I have worked: a place of closure, of containment, where borders are, in their most extreme form, legal, physical and psychological barriers.

The rhythm of the narration, punctuated by these three photographs, is then guided by images that recall, in a more or less direct manner, the individual ethnographic cases. Each of them has its own narrative value.

The attention to meanings that emerged from the ethnographic experience guided me in the conscious use of photographs, not trying to adapt them to a possible academic writing but allowing them to exist as the product of an uncompromising way of seeing. As David McDougall (2006) argues, the peculiarity of visual is that it is based mainly on rhetorical representations such as metaphor or synaesthesia, and is well suited to describing emotions, sensations and embodied experiences. This is precisely how I understood my project: overcoming the language barrier in order to embrace embodied experiences of affection with greater fluidity and depth.

This is what Elisabeth Edwards (2015) refers to as the “abundance of photography”: it opens up the possibility of recovering alternative narratives and has an evocative power that allows for different readings of the ethnographic experience. If the image is the evidence of a moment, it can also be produced and negotiated in order to shape new knowledge.

On the other side, the peculiarity of ethnoclinics is that there is no real “participant observation” phase (unless the anthropologist seeks it by asking to spend time with patients in their daily lives). The fieldwork takes place with interviews. In this moment, the reconstruction of memory is done by patients when they sit down and begin to tell their story. In this experience of sharing, “devices are composed that trigger the functioning of a complex and amazing machine, designed to create connections, an art of multiplying universes”, as Tobie Nathan argued.

In this “archaeological” work of evoking memories and spirits, of a “subsoil” also mentioned by Roberto Beneduce, the ethnographic account itself becomes a tool for healing, intertwining with the clinician's knowledge to create connections and escape routes.

Given the heterogeneity and fragility of such a “difficult” terrain as that of the ethnoclinic, my intention is not to faithfully represent the field, as the reportage approach would require. I therefore present a diary, made up of suggestions and abrupt transitions, of visual impressions left on me by the people I met. Although many of the requests made by patients were concrete and referred to situations of immediate need, underlying the conversations were family stories, personal experiences with a powerful spiritual charge, a suffering that I myself concretised, while listening, with mental images. In fact, all the images were born out of my personal need for alternative, non-verbal ethnographic writing.

My proposal therefore presents itself as a different process of doing ethnography, not only in the sense of writing about experience but also of doing and composing it. It is a matter of giving cognitive value to the ethnographic experience, of fuelling reflection both retrospectively and at the very moment when ethnography is being done and experienced.

In conclusion, the visualisation process I produced these images follows the methods of interaction and care that have been developed in ethnoclinics. The use of photographic language in the session allowed the encounter between the patient and the multidisciplinary team to be composed of more than just the linguistic worlds we were facing. The presence of linguistic-cultural mediation, which is invaluable and indispensable in these cases, was accompanied, in certain situations, by the use of images as a non-verbal bridge of communication.

If there can be a second phase, after the writing of the field diary, it is certainly the one I am now presenting, which may open up new perspectives and interpretations.



Photo 1 The sea at night. Large part of patients talks about sea like something dangerous and scaring, where good spirits aren't able to help. I choose to take a picture of the sea at night from the narration of a patient, who recomposed his journey with a vivid memory of fear and darkness. "My father said that spirits can't help me in the sea. I was alone, unprotected, in a black desert".
Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli, 2022.

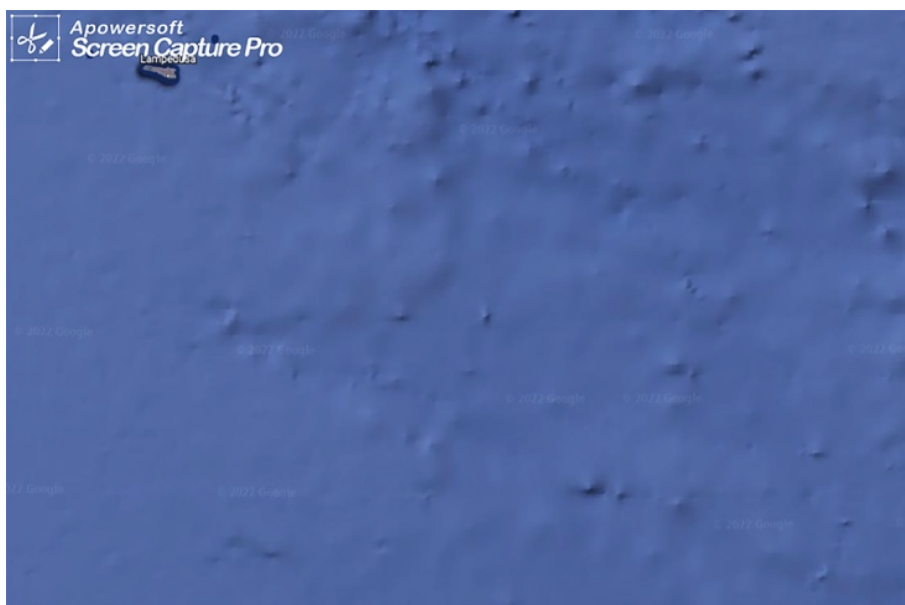


Photo 2 Mediterranean Sea from Google Earth. The picture is taken halfway between Libyan and Italian territorial waters. This is one of the most dangerous places of the journey to Europe. June 2023



Photo 3 What remains of an ending year's party. This room was converted into a place of worship for guests of a reception centre. When I found it, it was abandoned and it gave me a great sense of lost hope: the reception centre was considered, from the most part of people who lived inside, damned. It was as if all the prayers had been trapped in that room. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli, January 2022



Photo 4 S's tomb. This picture was shared with the etnoclinic equipe to present the terrible situation of the tomb of a man died in a reception centre. This case was very important for the taking charge of five Nigerian patients who knew the deceased and did not even know where he was buried. (Cfr. Dainelli, Pasquinelli, 2025) Photo by unknown author, March 2022.



Photo 5 The Sahara Desert, on the border with Libya. This is a place, like the Mediterranean Sea, where the absence of limits is in stark contrast to state policies of repression and violence. Google Earth. June 2023



Photo 6 Wall writing in Livorno, near a mental health centre. Most patients miss home and family and this is perceived as one of the elements of malaise. The sense of loss exacerbates, in many cases, the psychological distress of patients. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli, April 2022.



Photo 7 Floor of a reception centre leading to the interview room. In moments of confrontation with the clinician, I often found myself staring at this floor. The thoughts and images of the sessions flowed with the steps and the tiles. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli, March 2023.



Photo 8 E.'s family picture. He shared with us this image in order to talk with us about his old and new family in Ghana. The archive image constitutes a valuable element both on a clinical level, for the affective value it constitutes, and on a photographic level as direct testimony and shared memory. Unknown author, July 2022.



Photo 9 Cat in a reception centre. Walking inside it, we noticed the massive presence of cats. One of the guests of this reception centre said: "A place with a lot of cats is not a good omen" (F. July 2022). Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli, January 2023.



Photo 10 An egg on the floor of a reception centre. After seeing a lot of eggs like this one, the SPRINT 2 equipe asked to a patient why there were all these eggs on the floor. She said: "People in the reception centre throw eggs to cast curses" (F, July 2022). Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. September 2022.



Photo 11 An empty womb. A lot of women try to get pregnant during their stay in the centres. Due to their psychological and health status, it often happens that the desired child does not arrive. Here, the emptiness of the uterus corresponds to an important loss of meaning and a perception of stasis that leads many patients to anxious and depressive states. April 2023.

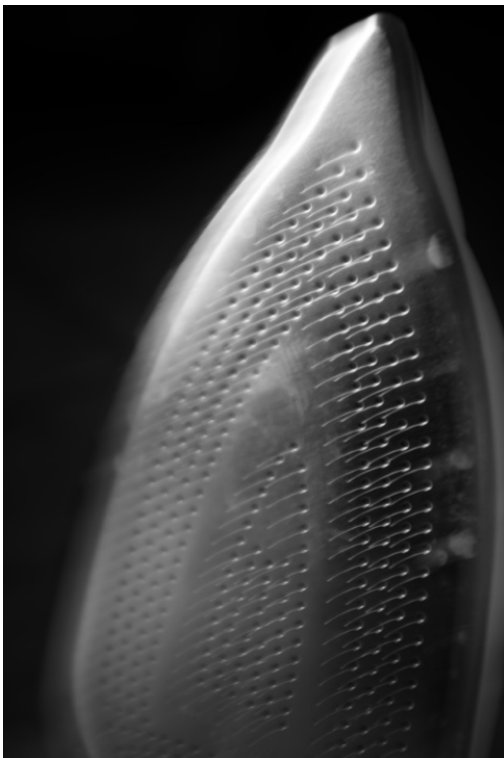


Photo 12 During an interview a woman talked with the SPRINT2 equipe about the violences she suffered in Nigeria. She talked about her uncle who had beaten her with an iron. Given the violence and impact of the narrated experience, I decided to depict the object used to injure the woman in an image. This, as well as other images I have presented, are a personal way of extolling experiences and mental images of strong impact. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. May 2022.



Photo 13 Welcome of Afghan people in a reception centre, during an ending year party. This period was characterised by frequent group sessions with Afghan women and men who needed important support during their stay in Italy. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. December 2021.



Photo 14 "I found myself wandering around a field and didn't know how I got there". (G. April 2022). Again, I decided to reconstruct the sense of disorientation and loss of reference reported in the session by the patient, who presented a strong sense of anxiety related to her psychophysical situation. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. May 2022.



Photo 15 Steps on a beach near a reception centre. At that time, I had a strong need to isolate myself in order to reflect on the cases I was following and to settle some mental images I was carrying around from the clinic. I was often in seaside areas and the winter beaches were a suitable place for this type of reflection. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. October 2021.



Photo 16 "I dreamt of a horse and a donkey. The horse represents good news, the donkey represents bad news" (M., October 2022). This image is a clear example of how I tried to render in photography not only the clinic stories, but also the dreams that, in this case, had a strong impact on the patient's treatment. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. August 2023.



Photo 17 Aerial view of a reception centre in the province of Livorno. Unlike the other images taken from Google Earth, this one represents one of the control and containment sites set up by the state system to regulate migrants. In this case, the centre was set up in an old residence. Google Earth. June 2023



Photo 18 The road to the reception centres in Livorno, visions flashing by along with my reflections on what I had heard in the session. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. November 2021.



Photo 19 Ukrainian guest at a reception centre. She tattooed Ukrainian land on her arm, with a heart where she comes from. The sense of nostalgia for the past of prosperity and peace, towards one's home and lost family, alternated in the session with the uncertainties of the future, given by not knowing when the war would end. Photo by Maria Elisa Dainelli. July 2023.

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Quando l'immagine guida la ricerca: riflessioni metodologiche da un percorso espositivo

Abstract

Il presente contributo propone un'analisi critico-riflessiva della mostra fotografica *Paesaggi con figura. Immagini di Toscana dagli Archivi Alinari* (Museo del Paesaggio di Castelnuovo Berardenga, gennaio-settembre 2025). Oltre sessanta fotografie in bianco e nero documentano le trasformazioni storiche, sociali e culturali di Siena e del territorio circostante tra gli anni Sessanta dell'Ottocento e gli anni Ottanta del Novecento. Il contributo illustra il processo curatoriale e sviluppa una riflessione sul rapporto tra paesaggio rurale e urbano in prospettiva antropologica. L'analisi si concentra su un approccio metodologico in cui le immagini non costituiscono strumento di approfondimento di premesse teoriche preesistenti, ma rappresentano la risorsa di partenza della riflessione. I vincoli archivistici si sono trasformati in elementi generativi, mentre il dialogo con i visitatori ha arricchito la ricerca attraverso memorie individuali e familiari, trasformando l'archivio in catalizzatore di memoria collettiva. L'esperienza dimostra come la pratica curatoriale possa configurarsi un laboratorio metodologico per un'antropologia visiva processuale e partecipativa, in cui il patrimonio iconografico diventa motore di conoscenza e rigenerazione territoriale.

Keywords

Pratiche curatoriali; archivi; Alinari; memoria; paesaggio.

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Il rovesciamento del rapporto tra ricerca e restituzione

Cosa accade quando il tradizionale rapporto tra ricerca e restituzione si ribalta completamente? Quando non è più l'archivio fotografico a documentare una ricerca già definita, ma sono le immagini a orientare, costruire e generare i percorsi di indagine?

Il lavoro curatoriale della mostra *Paesaggi con figura. Immagini di Toscana dagli Archivi Alinari*, realizzata presso il Museo del Paesaggio di Castelnuovo Berardenga in provincia di Siena, ha posto al centro della riflessione proprio questo aspetto: la capacità del visivo di trasformarsi da elemento accessorio a motore epistemologico primario, ridefinendo sia le modalità di costruzione di un percorso espositivo, sia il rapporto stesso tra fonte visiva e riflessione teorica.

Se solitamente una mostra rappresenta la restituzione finale di un percorso di ricerca, in questo caso è stata l'esposizione stessa a precedere e guidare l'indagine successiva, configurandosi come dispositivo euristico capace di generare conoscenza anziché semplicemente restituirla.

La riflessione qui proposta muove da questo rovesciamento metodologico per interrogare più ampiamente le dinamiche dell'antropologia visiva contemporanea, utilizzando l'esempio specifico come chiave interpretativa di nodi teorici più generali.

Tale trasformazione del rapporto tra immagine e ricerca si iscrive infatti nel rinnovamento che ha attraversato il campo disciplinare negli ultimi decenni, come accuratamente esaminato da Pietro Meloni nel suo recente volume *Cultura visiva e antropologia* (2023), con il passaggio dalla tradizionale antropologia visiva – centrata su fotografia e video quali strumenti documentari – verso approcci multimodali che riconoscono alle immagini uno statuto di agenti epistemologici attivi, capaci di orientare traiettorie inedite di ricerca.

L'indagine sulla mostra *Paesaggi con figura* evidenzia in particolare tre aspetti: come i vincoli archivistici possano trasformarsi in elementi creativi e generativi, come la curatela possa configurarsi un processo dinamico e dialogico e come il visivo possa assumere ruoli centrali nei processi di esperienza etnografica.

In questa prospettiva, la pratica espositiva può diventare laboratorio metodologico per ripensare le forme della conoscenza antropologica, aprendo spazi di riflessione che eccedono la dimensione puramente museografica per toccare questioni fondamentali della disciplina.

La genesi del progetto e i vincoli creativi

La mostra fotografica *Paesaggi con figura. Immagini di Toscana dagli Archivi Alinari*, che ho curato insieme a Valentina Lusini, nasce dalla collaborazione inter-istituzionale tra l'Università per Stranieri di Siena, la FAF Toscana – Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia e il Museo del Paesaggio di Castelnuovo Berardenga, dove è stata ospitata da gennaio a settembre 2025.

Una configurazione collaborativa che già di per sé rappresentava una sfida metodologica rilevante, richiedendo la negoziazione continua tra logiche istituzionali

diverse: quella accademica dell'Università, quella conservativa della Fondazione archivistica, quella territoriale del museo locale.

In continuità con gli interessi del museo, l'obiettivo iniziale consisteva nel presentare i processi economici e sociali legati alla trasformazione dei paesaggi del Chianti senese, dei dintorni di Castelnuovo Berardenga e, più in generale, della Toscana. Sulla base di questo, e a sostegno di un'idea di paesaggio mostrato come ambiente di relazione più che di contemplazione (Grilli, Lusini 2024), la preliminare ricerca di spoglio dell'archivio digitale ci aveva portato a individuare tre possibili linee tematiche.

La prima: i 'Paesaggi produttivi', nello specifico i contesti delle cave e delle miniere, con due possibili direttrici di sviluppo. Da una parte l'evoluzione degli strumenti di lavoro, dei trasporti e delle loro funzioni; dall'altra una panoramica sulla geodiversità del territorio, con materiali, stili di vita e tecniche di lavoro a confronto. La seconda: i 'Paesaggi attraversati', con un'attenzione all'evoluzione dei trasporti e ai modi in cui la viabilità ha contribuito alla mutazione della configurazione dei paesaggi rurali. Infine, i 'Paesaggi abitati', incentrata sul rapporto tra città e campagna nella provincia di Siena, per ragionare sul tipo di fruizione di questi ambienti dai diversi gruppi sociali e sulle modalità in cui le classi sociali si intersecano nei due contesti.

Tuttavia, l'ingresso nel 'campo' dell'archivio digitale della Fondazione Alinari ha immediatamente posto la questione delle presenze e delle assenze. Oltre all'impossibilità di reperire documentazione fotografica specifica su Castelnuovo Berardenga, non si trattava di esaminare l'archivio completo, bensì una selezione parziale, determinata dai processi di catalogazione e digitalizzazione ancora in corso.

Eppure, questa dimensione dell'imprevisto, lungi dal rappresentare un ostacolo, si è configurata un elemento costitutivo del processo creativo, in linea anche con quanto teorizzato da un'ampia letteratura sulla *serendipità* della ricerca etnografica, per cui la pratica conoscitiva si caratterizza per l'incertezza della scoperta. L'antropologo Leonardo Piasere parla a tal proposito della «vita come metodo» (Piasere 2018: 156): un approccio che predilige una frequentazione aperta dell'orizzonte conoscitivo, con la flessibilità di «saper continuamente spostare i confini» (Ivi: 74). Se da un lato, infatti, i vincoli dell'archivio hanno inevitabilmente demarcato i confini delle nostre scelte curatoriali, dall'altro hanno orientato l'indagine verso un progressivo allargamento dell'orizzonte tematico, trasformando quello che appariva come un limite in un'opportunità per individuare filoni trasversali e connessioni più ampie.

Hans Ulrich Obrist, ricordato come un curatore brillante per la sua capacità nel coinvolgere sensibilità artistiche differenti, afferma che «le mostre sono sempre dei semi piantati» (Obrist 2020: 194). In accordo con le sue riflessioni, nel nostro caso specifico già il processo di germinazione ha rivelato come ogni fase operativa nasconda in realtà scelte condizionate e obbligate e come l'idea curatoriale debba piegarsi ad una serie di elementi e di fattori i cui esiti sono spesso impossibili da prevedere al momento dell'ideazione.

Adottando un criterio primariamente geografico, abbiamo quindi deciso di concentrarci sul tema dei 'Paesaggi abitati', per esplorare il rapporto tra ambienti rurali e

urbani della provincia senese, con particolare riguardo alle pratiche d'uso degli spazi di vita e di lavoro e alle dinamiche relazionali tra i diversi gruppi sociali.

Un modello interpretativo: l'affresco di Lorenzetti

Fin dalle prime fasi della progettazione, il riferimento iconografico che ha orientato la nostra concezione del rapporto città-campagna è stato l'affresco di Ambrogio Lorenzetti *Gli Effetti del Buon Governo* (1338-1339). Nel capolavoro lorenzettiano, il centro urbano fortificato e il territorio agricolo sono rappresentati come spazi sociali distinti ma interconnessi: figure ed elementi rurali – persone, bestiame, prodotti della terra – compaiono all'interno delle mura cittadine, mentre nobili cittadini si dirigono verso la campagna, in una rappresentazione che suggerisce una relazione di reciproco beneficio. Il modello ideale di rapporto equilibrato tra città e campagna è restituito dalla stessa costruzione formale dell'affresco, dove i due contesti sono rappresentati in un perfetto equilibrio spaziale, senza gerarchie visive che privilegino l'uno sull'altro (Meoni 1998).

Questa idea di compenetrazione, radicata nell'immaginario visivo toscano, è diventata la lente attraverso cui interrogare l'archivio fotografico Alinari, cercando nelle immagini le tracce di quella stessa circolarità tra urbano e rurale.

Le immagini come agenti epistemologici: il processo di selezione

Inizialmente, per facilitare l'orientamento nell'esame dell'archivio, avevamo definito una prima suddivisione dei *materiali* fotografici tenendo conto unicamente del macrocontesto di riferimento: urbano/rurale.

L'aspetto distintivo dell'intero processo curatoriale è stato però il riconoscimento del ruolo generativo delle immagini nella costruzione dei diversi percorsi interpretativi. Le fotografie non si presentavano come documenti da classificare, ma come agenti che sollecitavano continuamente nuove domande, suggerivano collegamenti imprevisti, resistevano a categorizzazioni troppo rigide.

Per comprendere meglio questo approccio, è utile richiamare il concetto elaborato da William John Thomas Mitchell nel suo testo fondativo *Pictorial Turn* (2008), dove presenta una definizione delle immagini non come semplici oggetti inerti del nostro sguardo, ma come entità dotate di individualità e soggettività, di bisogni e desideri. Nella panoramica degli studi di storia dell'arte e cultura visuale, quando si solleva la questione del desiderio, di solito si fa riferimento ai produttori o ai consumatori di immagini: «l'immagine è considerata come un'espressione del desiderio dell'artista, o come meccanismo per suscitare i desideri dell'osservatore» (Ivi:141). Mitchell, invece, trasferisce nelle immagini stesse la collocazione del desiderio e, ponendosi la domanda «che cosa vogliono le immagini?», getta una luce diversa sul problema del significato e del potere che esse incorporano.

Nel nostro caso, un esempio emblematico di questo processo generativo dell'elemento visivo è stata l'evoluzione della dicotomia città-campagna.

L'analisi progressiva delle fotografie che avevamo individuato ha gradualmente rivelato come la divisione dicotomica, inizialmente assunta come griglia interpretativa,

fosse in realtà attraversata da continue penetrazioni e interconnessioni. Le fotografie documentavano in maniera evidente flussi frequenti tra i due ambienti. La *Fiera del bestiame in Piazza d'Armi a Siena* (Fig. 2) mostrava come il commercio agricolo animasse gli spazi urbani. Le donne che portavano i prodotti della campagna ai mercati cittadini testimoniavano reti di scambio quotidiano (Fig. 5). Le fotografie del turismo borghese verso le campagne del Chianti rivelavano come la città cercasse nella campagna non solo svago ma anche rigenerazione identitaria (Fig. 3).

Queste immagini, inizialmente catalogate separatamente, hanno dimostrato una narrazione in realtà unitaria, di scambio e contaminazione reciproca, che ci ha portato alla scelta di abbandonare una netta separazione tra i due contesti nell'articolazione del percorso espositivo, mescolando piuttosto le sezioni secondo una logica che rispecchiasse l'interconnessione effettiva dei territori.

Organizzando le immagini su un tavolo, abbiamo notato che alcuni accostamenti andavano ripensati, mentre altri suggerivano nuclei tematici imprevisti. La struttura espositiva si è così articolata su due livelli complementari: le fotografie selezionate per le cornici, che costituivano la struttura narrativa di base, organizzata secondo la dicotomia urbano/rurale a un livello più generale; e quelle destinate alle vetrine, che hanno progressivamente rivelato micronarrazioni non ancora prese in considerazione. Questa seconda articolazione è emersa proprio dall'esame materiale delle anteprime disposte sul tavolo di lavoro. E in questo senso le ipotesi preliminari sono state rimodulate dal visivo stesso, che ha assunto il ruolo di motore euristico primario.

In conclusione, il lavoro con le fotografie ci ha permesso di sperimentare quello che Mitchell definisce come la distinzione tra 'picture' - un oggetto materiale - e 'image' - ciò che appare in una picture (Mitchell 2008: 9). Noi siamo partite da una 'image' - l'idea visiva di un rapporto tra città e campagna come due poli posti in continuità, incarnata nell'affresco lorenzettiano - per cercarla nelle 'picture' disponibili nell'archivio Alinari, in un processo di continua negoziazione tra concezione teorica e materialità fotografica.

Il materiale come processo: una prospettiva fenomenologica

L'utilizzo del termine *materiale*, in riferimento alle fotografie, non è né casuale né impiegato in maniera inconsapevole. L'associazione a cui vuole rimandare è relativa, infatti, al processo in divenire piuttosto che al prodotto statico, a un'entità informe ma dotata di proprietà d'azione in potenza, strettamente connessa ai concetti di trasformazione e metamorfosi.

Tale prospettiva interpretativa prende spunto dalle riflessioni proposte da Tim Ingold in *Making* (2019), dove la nozione di produzione, tradizionalmente legata a quella di progetto, viene ripensata nei termini di un «processo di crescita» (Ivi: 45), in cui, come sottolinea lo stesso autore, «anche se l'artefice ha in mente una forma, non è questa forma a creare l'opera finale. È il coinvolgimento con i materiali» (Ivi: 46).

Nel nostro caso concreto sono state proprio le fotografie a rivelarsi le materie prime e le «sostanze in divenire» (Ivi: 61) di quel processo di crescita finalizzato alla realizzazione della 'mostra-prodotto'. Soprattutto, esse hanno orientato anche la presente ricerca verso la considerazione del lavoro di progettazione come una pratica in cui si alternano azioni

basate su codici, ad istinti che rispondono invece del canone dell'inatteso e dell'imprevisto.

Tale approccio richiederebbe di abbandonare una concezione lineare insita nella progettazione museale tradizionale e di iniziare a «pensare in modo circolare» (Meloni 2020), dove l'organizzazione metodica dovrebbe corrispondere piuttosto a una rete di relazioni applicata alle possibili traiettorie dei flussi informativi. La logica con cui ci siamo mosse nell'universo della progettazione espositiva si è delineata infatti come un'oscillazione continua tra il momento caotico dell'ideazione iniziale e la fase di gestione concreta del progetto, dove le idee sono state effettivamente riordinate e materializzate in immagini.

L'articolazione del percorso espositivo: quattro nuclei tematici

Il percorso espositivo finale si è articolato in quattro sezioni principali, sviluppate secondo un principio curatoriale di alternanza tra ambientazioni rurali e urbane.

La prima sezione, *I lavori in campagna*, si è concentrata sulle pratiche agricole fondamentali del territorio – cereali, vino, olio e allevamento – documentando le trasformazioni nelle tecnologie produttive dall'aratro al trattore e l'evoluzione delle sistemazioni idraulico-agrarie. La seconda, *I lavori in città*, ha esplorato le connessioni tra città e campagna attraverso il commercio del bestiame e dei prodotti agricoli, evidenziando la divisione sessuale del lavoro. La terza sezione, *Architetture rurali e vita quotidiana*, ha documentato le tipologie delle dimore coloniche e le dinamiche della famiglia mezzadrile, mentre la quarta, *Architetture urbane e vita quotidiana*, ha mostrato l'evoluzione del paesaggio urbano attraverso i luoghi di aggregazione collettiva, dai lavatoi alle infrastrutture moderne.

L'allestimento del museo prevedeva otto vetrine già predisposte ed equamente divise in due sale. Nella sala de *I lavori in città*, le vetrine hanno ospitato approfondimenti su dimensioni trasversali come il turismo (con le prime automobili di cittadini nelle strade rurali e gruppi di turisti borghesi nelle campagne del Chianti), i lavori delle donne (filatrici, venditrici, lavandaie), i giochi dei bambini (che si svolgevano sia nelle piazze urbane sia nelle aie rurali con modalità simili), e le piazze di Siena come luoghi di incontro tra mondo urbano e rurale. Nella sala delle *Architetture rurali e vita quotidiana*, le restanti teche hanno accolto raggruppamenti quali: i ritratti (fotografie che documentavano l'identità sociale attraverso pose, abbigliamento e contesti), i paesi (vedute di centri abitati della provincia di Siena che mostravano l'evoluzione del tessuto urbano minore) e le vedute (paesaggi che rivelavano la trasformazione del territorio nel tempo).

La strutturazione tematica di base si è arricchita in maniera significativa solo però in una fase successiva, grazie alle testimonianze raccolte dai visitatori. È stato il dialogo continuo tra immagini e memorie orali a far emergere nuovi collegamenti e suggestioni. Durante una delle prime visite guidate condotte personalmente, una visitatrice ha riconosciuto in una fotografia di lavatoio il luogo dove sua mamma andava quotidianamente. Ha raccontato i rituali sociali che si svolgevano lì, le gerarchie tra le donne, i canti che accompagnavano il lavoro.

Queste informazioni, insieme a molte altre raccolte con la stessa metodologia di interviste semi- strutturate, non solo hanno arricchito le visite successive, ma hanno anche orientato e definito la mia ricerca per la stesura di due elaborati di natura differente e destinati a pubblici eterogenei. Il primo è un articolo di approfondimento della mostra per la rassegna "Landscape Archive" del Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Paesaggio in Toscana dell'Università per Stranieri di Siena che sarà pubblicato a gennaio 2026. Il secondo è una sceneggiatura per la conferenza-spettacolo teatrale dal titolo *Un fare e un farsi di genti vive*, che si è svolta a giugno 2025 presso il Teatro Comunale Vittorio Alfieri di Castelnuovo Berardenga nell'ambito del progetto "ATLANTE SIAA - In viaggio tra i territori dell'antropologia pubblica e applicata in Italia".

Entrambi i testi hanno privilegiato temi specifici emersi proprio dal dialogo con i visitatori - la raccolta delle olive (Fig. 1), il lavatoio pubblico come luogo di socializzazione (Fig. 7), le veglie intorno al focolare (Fig. 6) - confermando ancora una volta una visione fluida della curatela. Ed è in questa prospettiva che la fotografia si è configurata, da un lato, come strumento sia di riconoscimento sia di riscoperta del reale, dall'altro, come condizione a spronare l'immaginazione verso nuove possibilità di decentrare lo sguardo.

Strategie collaborative e mediazioni istituzionali

La riflessione teorica sul processo di creazione collaborativa di questa mostra ha evidenziato lo snodo di dinamiche relazionali articolate, in cui idee, oggetti, persone e messaggi si sono mescolati tra loro, rimandando ancora all'idea centrale, sviluppata da Ingold, di un movimento di corrispondenze e del considerare questo mescolarsi come «l'essenza del produrre» (Ingold 2019: 61). Differentemente però dall'antropologo britannico, il quale suggerisce uno schema di lettura della produzione fondato sulla contrapposizione tra una visione longitudinale ed una trasversale - indicando di seguire la prima rispetto alla seconda - quella che propongo di suggerire in relazione alle dinamiche osservate sembra delinarsi piuttosto come una lettura di tipo circolare, in cui le competenze delle diverse figure coinvolte (visitatori inclusi) si sono intrecciate fino a fondersi, al pari di «melodie in contrappunto» (Ivi: 180), generando un sapere collaborativo che non poteva essere previsto o pianificato a priori.

In precedenza, ho parlato del concetto dell'imprevisto e dell'inatteso e di come questi connotano in parte la pratica della progettazione. Nell'esperienza curatoriale di *Paesaggi con figura*, un ulteriore elemento di imprevedibilità è stato rappresentato dalle mediazioni curatoriali, che hanno rivelato la loro natura di raccordo tra diversi livelli istituzionali e concettuali. Da una parte, le identità specifiche e 'autoriali' del museo e dell'archivio, dall'altra le dinamiche interne alla co-curatela e, infine, la necessità di bilanciare l'attrazione di visitatori esterni con la partecipazione attiva dei residenti, creando un linguaggio espositivo che fosse al contempo accessibile e scientificamente rigoroso.

Seguendo ancora le orme di Obrist sul terreno della produzione espositiva concepita come un'esperienza aperta, evolutiva e multidisciplinare: «il curatore deve essere flessibile. A volte è l'inserviente, a volte suggerisce agli artisti idee; nelle mostre di gruppo è il coordinatore, in quelle tematiche l'inventore» (2020: 152).

Nel nostro caso, tale flessibilità si è tradotta nella necessità di sviluppare competenze trasversali che andavano dalla ricerca archivistica alla mediazione istituzionale, dalla progettazione allestitiva alla comunicazione pubblica. Il compito curatoriale si è configurato come un costante «raccordare, fare in modo che elementi diversi entrino in contatto tra di loro» (Ivi: 9-10), dove la stessa fabbricazione dell'esposizione coincideva con l'idea di stabilire accordi, associazioni, collegamenti e gesti tra materiali, istituzioni e comunità. Ogni decisione apparentemente tecnica si è rivelata un fondamentale momento di negoziazione teorica e pratica, in cui questioni operative e riflessione metodologica si alimentavano reciprocamente.

Verso nuove metodologie dell'antropologia visiva

L'esperienza complessiva documentata – dalle strategie collaborative alle mediazioni istituzionali, dalla ricognizione sistematica dei materiali visivi alle trattative allestitivo-pratiche – ha messo alla prova un approccio metodologico sperimentale in cui la mostra, anziché rappresentare l'esito finale di un percorso conoscitivo preordinato, si è configurata come punto di partenza per ulteriori sviluppi di indagine. Questa inversione ha inaugurato una modalità operativa in cui il processo espositivo diventa esso stesso strumento di ricerca, generando dinamiche impreviste tra teoria e pratica.

Seguendo tale logica invertita, l'indagine scientifica effettiva è maturata in una fase seguente all'inaugurazione stessa della mostra. Si è articolata attraverso l'elaborazione di visite guidate di approfondimento tematico caratterizzate da una struttura in continuo divenire, l'ampliamento dei percorsi inizialmente suggeriti dalle fotografie mediante il confronto con la documentazione archivistica locale e la realizzazione di una conferenza-spettacolo che integrasse la narrazione scientifica al coinvolgimento emotivo del pubblico. È in questa seconda fase di sviluppo che si è rivelato particolarmente rilevante il contributo dei visitatori, le cui memorie individuali e familiari hanno costituito fonti preziose per l'approfondimento e la verifica delle ipotesi teorico-interpretative emergenti dalle immagini.

I racconti personali hanno infatti permesso di contestualizzare storicamente molte fotografie, fornendo precisazioni sui luoghi specifici e ricostruzioni delle pratiche documentate, trasformando in tal modo l'archivio visivo in un autentico *catalizzatore* di memoria collettiva.

Da questa interazione è emerso un contesto metodologico rinnovato: la restituzione vera e propria non è stata tanto la mostra in sé – concepita piuttosto come dispositivo di indagine – quanto l'incontro diretto con le persone nel museo. Tale dinamica dialogica e partecipativa trova una significativa consonanza con le recenti riflessioni di Pietro Clemente sui rapporti tra urbano e rurale: «Oggi il paese è la dimensione del cambiamento. Vedo un nuovo nesso città-campagna, un'idea di democrazia diffusa, di centralità della "coscienza di luogo"». (Clemente 2022: 20).

Ed è proprio questa «coscienza di luogo» che l'approccio metodologico qui sperimentato intende alimentare, partendo dall'assunto che il patrimonio visivo degli archivi fotografici non costituisce semplice documentazione del passato, ma un insieme di risorse simboliche attive, capaci di generare nuove forme di comprensione del

presente e di progettazione del futuro territoriale. L'attivazione di questa coscienza si realizza precisamente attraverso l'incontro tra le immagini del passato e la memoria viva delle comunità, creando un circuito virtuoso di riconoscimento e risignificazione.

In linea con questa chiave interpretativa e riagganciandomi al concetto di 'sapere collaborativo' esposto in precedenza, la partecipazione dei visitatori ha contribuito in maniera concreta a sviluppare un approccio curatoriale aperto, basato sul *pensare facendo* e sull'affinamento continuo.

Conclusioni: per un'antropologia visiva processuale e partecipativa

Il rovesciamento metodologico proposto attraverso l'analisi della mostra *Paesaggi con figura* può indicare una possibile direzione in parte alternativa per l'evoluzione degli studi visuali in ambito antropologico: quella di un approccio che riconosca nella pratica curatoriale non un semplice momento di divulgazione scientifica, ma una forma specifica di indagine, caratterizzata da proprie procedure e proprie potenzialità conoscitive.

Assumere le fotografie come *agenti epistemologici* significa in questo senso sviluppare pratiche curatoriali che funzionino come veri e propri dispositivi euristici, in grado di produrre saperi che non preesistono al processo di indagine visiva, ma che emergono dall'incontro dinamico tra materiali d'archivio, competenze disciplinari diverse e aspettative delle comunità territoriali.

È così che il processo assume una configurazione circolare: le immagini suggeriscono interpretazioni, le interpretazioni vengono verificate e arricchite dalla memoria locale, e questa verifica genera a sua volta nuovi percorsi di senso che ritornano a interrogare le immagini stesse. Una circolarità che diventa risorsa per superare la tradizionale separazione tra momento della ricerca e momento della restituzione. Si tratta di una ricerca che si costruisce nell'interazione tra sguardi, nella mediazione tra prospettive disciplinari e comunitarie, nel dialogo continuo tra passato fotografato e presente interpretante. Questa modalità di lavoro non sostituisce le forme tradizionali di studio antropologico, ma le integra e le arricchisce, aprendo spazi di sperimentazione metodologica particolarmente fertili per l'antropologia visiva contemporanea.

In prospettiva, tale approccio potrebbe essere applicato sistematicamente ad altri contesti archivistici e territoriali, sviluppando una vera e propria metodologia della mostra-come-ricerca, dove gli archivi fotografici potrebbero diventare laboratori di sperimentazione per forme innovative di analisi visiva partecipativa.

La sfida è trasformare il patrimonio iconografico da risorsa patrimoniale statica in motore dinamico di conoscenza antropologica e di rigenerazione territoriale, contribuendo a quella che Clemente definisce la «coscienza di luogo» necessaria per ripensare il rapporto tra comunità, territorio e memoria collettiva.



Fig. 1 Autore non identificato, Raccolta delle olive, 1940 ca. Archivi Alinari, Firenze.
(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)



Fig. 2 Fratelli Alinari, Fiera del bestiame in Piazza d'Armi a Siena, 1895 ca. Archivi Alinari, Firenze.
(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)



Fig. 3 Aurelio Monteverde, Turisti a bordo di automobili durante una gita nel Chianti (21/12/19). Archivi Alinari, Firenze. *(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)*



Fig. 4 Vincenzo Balocchi, Lavandaie, Toscana (1932), Archivi Alinari, Firenze. *(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)*



Fig. 5 Autore non identificato, Venditrice ambulante in Piazza del Campo in un giorno di pioggia, Siena. Cartolina inviata dall'autore a Vincenzo Balocchi (1930 ca.), Archivi Alinari, Firenze.
(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)



Fig. 6 Fratelli Alinari, Famiglia di contadini riunita intorno al fuoco di un caminetto (1900 ca.), Archivi Alinari, Firenze.
(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)



(Ed. Alinari) P. L. N. 9074, SIENA - Fonte-Nuova. (XIII Secolo.)

Fig. 7 Fratelli Alinari, La Fonte Nuova a Siena (1890 ca.), Archivi Alinari, Firenze.
(per gentile concessione di Fondazione Alinari per la Fotografia)

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Abstract

The paper examines the localization of hip-hop culture in the province of Foggia, with a specific focus on the town of Apricena, through an ethnographic study inspired by the methods of visual anthropology. Originating in the Bronx as a form of cultural resistance, hip-hop is reinterpreted by young people in Apulia as a tool of identity expression and social agency. The investigation draws on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and photography, culminating in the production of a fanzine that visually reflects the fieldwork. The analysis explores artistic practices—rap, dance, graffiti, fashion—with particular attention to the use of dialect as a means of symbolic reappropriation and territorial rootedness. Hip-hop culture emerges as a glocal phenomenon, capable of articulating both innovation and tradition, aesthetic participation and the collective construction of meaning.

Keywords

Hip-hop culture, fanzines, identity, youth community, artistic expression, cultural resistance

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Between Sound and Visual Traces: Hip-Hop as a Space of Cultural Subjectivation

Inhabiting a cultural space that is constructed as much through sounds as through images means immersing oneself in a universe of meanings that shape identities and social relations in complex ways. Subcultures, in particular, emerge as responses to dominant values and norms, offering cultural alternatives that reflect different ways of living and thinking (Berzano and Genova 2011). They develop in a constant dialogue and tension with the dominant culture, opposing it while simultaneously influencing it, thus creating a dynamic space of cultural negotiation.

Hip-hop culture, which originated as an artistic and social phenomenon in the African American and Latinx neighborhoods of the Bronx in the 1970s (Bradley and Dubois 2010), represents a paradigmatic example of a subculture. Initially marginalized by the media and institutions, hip-hop has evolved and established itself, creating new spaces of expression and identity for the communities that practice it (Caroli 2023). Gradually, it has transcended its original geographic and social context, transforming into a device of cultural subjectivation capable of redefining who we are and how we recognize ourselves within communities.

More than a mere musical or performative form, hip-hop functions as an aesthetic and symbolic language that intertwines body, imagination, and narrative, producing spaces of affirmation and resistance that interact with local contexts. Its adaptive capacity allows it to preserve core elements tied to its origins while transforming according to specific social and territorial particularities. This raises critical questions: How is hip-hop interpreted when it moves from large metropolitan centers to peripheral realities? In what ways do its visual components—graffiti, fashion, street art—acquire new meanings, becoming tools of self-assertion and identity construction even in less central areas?

These concerns call for an anthropological perspective that goes beyond the sonic dimension, exploring also the visual traces of hip-hop and analyzing their symbolic meaning and performative power. The use of visual anthropology and participant ethnography allows the combination of direct observation, photography, and semi-structured interviews to understand how visual and sonic practices become instruments of identity construction. A peripheral town like Apricena thus becomes a privileged site to observe how young people adopt and reinterpret hip-hop as a form of identity expression and cultural resistance.

As Banks (2001) notes, photographs and film sequences elicit comments, memories, and discussions, generating a dialogical space where individual and collective narratives emerge. Similarly, the analysis of archival photographs, whether historical or familial, provides valuable “keys to access particular cultural universes” (Pennacini 2005), offering essential data and meanings for interpreting culture over time. Visual anthropology therefore intertwines documentation and interpretation, becoming a channel for reading the transformation and dissemination of hip-hop beyond its places of origin.

Particular attention is given to the visual expression of hip-hop, which extends beyond music to manifest through images, symbols, fashion, and urban art. Street art emerges as a powerful vehicle for asserting one’s presence in urban space (Piccioni 2021), while

fashion contributes to the definition of both individual and collective identities. Analyzing these practices allows for an understanding not only of hip-hop's global diffusion but also of its creative reinterpretation in peripheral contexts, where images and art become levers for self-assertion, social cohesion, and identity negotiation. The production of a fanzine, alongside written text, provides a visual narrative of the collected experiences and strengthens the dialogue between theory and practice.

The hip-hop phenomenon presents itself as an integrated system of practices that construct collective imagination and spaces of cultural subjectivation. The history of pioneers such as DJ Kool Herc demonstrates how hip-hop has been, from its inception, a channel of resistance and symbolic reappropriation of space and identity (Hess 2007). In the transition from global metropolises such as New York to provincial realities like Apricena, this culture transforms: visual forms, such as graffiti and fashion, become essential devices to claim visibility, reaffirm belonging, and redefine social identity in original ways. Here, hip-hop is not mere imitation but a creative and political reworking, a hybrid language intertwining global influences with local roots.

The global diffusion and adaptability of hip-hop demonstrate how subcultures can transform and influence other cultural contexts, providing tools to gain a deep understanding of cultural and social dynamics. This introduction thus preludes an investigation into the multiple facets of hip-hop culture, highlighting the tensions and paradoxes that emerge when a global culture becomes a local expression, with all the contradictions and potentialities this entails.

Origins and Transformations: A Journey through Cultural Roots

The emergence of hip-hop is closely tied to the Bronx in the 1970s, a neighborhood marked by profound economic and social crisis. The disintegration of traditional neighborhoods, accelerated by the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway and the migration of the middle class to the suburbs, left behind a fragmented urban fabric, characterized by degradation, youth unemployment exceeding 60% (Chang 2005) and rising violence. To this were added national tensions: the Vietnam War, political assassinations, and growing racial injustices deeply impacted the collective memory of African American and Hispanic communities, creating a fertile ground for alternative cultural forms (Alemanni 2019).

In this context, block parties became the beating heart of the emerging hip-hop culture. DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant, introduced innovative techniques such as the extension of instrumental breaks, transforming music into a collective and participatory experience (Bradley and Dubois 2010). Alongside him, Afrika Bambaataa founded the Mighty Zulu Nation, promoting values of community and brotherhood, while Grandmaster Flash experimented with turntablism, revolutionizing the expressive possibilities of DJing. These free, open-to-all events were not merely parties but spaces of gathering, creativity, and resilience, where music, dance, and storytelling redefined youth identity and strengthened the sense of belonging.

Deciphering the Codes of Collective Identity

If hip-hop was born in a Bronx in crisis, how did it manage to expand and take root in peripheral contexts far from its place of origin? The answer lies in its nature as an open and adaptable language, capable of reflecting local conditions of marginality, isolation, and resistance. In peripheral contexts, hip-hop is reinterpreted through its original practices—DJing, MCing, breaking, writing—which assume new meanings in relation to the needs and imaginaries of young people. Graffiti transform public space into a site of visibility, while dance becomes a tool of redemption and collective subjectivation. Hip-hop, therefore, functions as a symbolic and performative system, combining artistic expression and social critique, contributing to the construction of shared identities. Perhaps this is the key to its global success.

From a visual perspective, graffiti represent one of the earliest forms of public narrative, turning walls and urban spaces into canvases laden with symbolic and political meaning. Artists such as Dondi and Phase 2, for example, were pioneers in producing a visual narrative capable of transforming urban space into a field of visibility for marginalized communities (Alemanni 2019).

On the sonic side, DJing and MCing serve as tools of subjectivation through the manipulation of sound and word. Music becomes a medium to depict social reality, denounce injustices, and construct collective imaginaries of resistance. Tracks such as *The Message* (1982) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five exemplify this role, providing a raw and unfiltered narrative of life in urban peripheries. As Paola Zukar (2017) highlights, the song ultimately gave American rap its own identity, marking a process of full maturation.

The performative dimension is particularly evident in breakdancing, where the body becomes the protagonist of a symbolic and political dialogue. Break battles, far from being mere athletic competitions, are moments of identity negotiation, creative challenge, and personal assertion without resorting to violence.

Hip-hop, therefore, emerges as a multilevel apparatus of resistance, where music, body, and visual sign intertwine to produce a narrative that challenges power structures and creates spaces of autonomy for marginalized communities.

Rap as a Practice of Resistance and Identity Construction

The diffusion of hip-hop culture in the province of Foggia takes shape as a complex and multi-layered cultural device, through which local youth construct, negotiate, and perform both collective identities and individual subjectivities. Within this context, rap emerges not merely as a musical genre, but as a powerful vehicle of identity narration, where the voice assumes a value that goes far beyond sound, becoming a tool of visibility, social recognition, and self-affirmation. In a territory marked by limited cultural opportunities and by geographical and social marginality, rap enables the articulation of a language and perspective that, while nourished by global influences, is expressed through profoundly local practices and lived experiences, thereby shaping an original and contextualized mode of expression.

Field testimonies confirm that the first encounter with hip-hop is often mediated by family environments where music plays a central role. As one interlocutor recalls, «music was never absent in the house»¹ (Buccino 2024), thanks to figures such as a radio-host uncle or an enthusiastic father, but above all through the early introduction to hip-hop by older siblings. This early exposure generates an intimate bond and a process of musical subjectivation, producing a deep emotional and cultural memory that shapes a musical identity intertwined with personal history. At the same time, rap functions as both a personal and communal narrative, a privileged channel for those living in conditions of social and economic marginalization. In such contexts, music becomes the expression of lived experiences, a ground for identity elaboration and reconstruction, but also a space of action and participation. Stories such as that of De Nittis² (2024) –who, between streets and playgrounds, began imitating and reinventing hip-hop movements and styles– demonstrate how this culture is built not only in words but also in the body, motor activity, and performative gesture. Bodily creativity and personal imagination thus intersect to transform a context often poor in resources into an opportunity for expression and recognition.



Figure 1 Boy performing breakdance. Apricena, Italy. From the archive of Samuel Buccino, 2017

Foggian hip-hop thus emerges as a performative and narrative practice capable of traversing bodies, memories, and social spaces, positioning itself not only as a musical expression but also as a tool of individual and collective testimony. Local biographies, interwoven with global influences and social tensions, produce a language that narrates marginality, resistance, and hope, transforming rap into a device of self-definition and recognition. Emblematic spaces such as the jams organized by the association *I Polli di Pirro* in the former prison of Apricena provide occasions for visibility and cohesion, where rap combines with other hip-hop arts and becomes a motor of community and belonging³ (M. Perrone 2024).

¹ Interview with Samuel Buccino, conducted by the author, 24 September 2024.

² Interview with Antonio De Nittis, conducted by the author, 14 December 2024.

³ Interview with Mario Perrone, conducted by the author, 12 November 2024.

The performative dimension manifests itself in the relationship between body, clothing, and visual arts: breakdancing, as a sensory and transformative experience, translates pain, inner struggle, and aspirations into creative energy and social recognition. Clothing, far from being a mere ornament, becomes a symbol of collective identity and lifestyle, revealing how hip-hop constructs meaning and social bonds also through appearance⁴ (M. F. Perrone 2024).

The Southern Italian dialect assumes a central role in local rap, functioning as a performative code that reinforces belonging and cultural resistance. Artists such as Co'Sang, Kid Yugi, and Geolier elevate the local language to a vehicle of visibility, historical memory, and social revendication (M. F. Perrone 2024). Dialect rap thus becomes a practice of cultural and political legitimization, challenging prejudices and symbolic marginalization, and transforming into a narrative that gives voice to marginality while promoting emancipation and collective action⁵ (Restani 2024).

Fieldwork conducted in Apricena and the surrounding areas reveals the plurality of voices, practices, and visions that animate Foggian hip-hop culture. Interviews, participant observation, and encounters sketch a dense social fabric in which individual biographies intertwine with physical spaces—former prisons, basketball courts—and social networks, giving rise to an active and dynamic community. Hip-hop, therefore, does not merely construct individual identities but becomes a practice of social cohesion and intercultural dialogue.

The multiple expressive forms—from writing to dance, from visual art to experimentation with virtual reality in street art⁶ (Presa 2024) —testify to a cultural vitality capable of challenging marginality and rejecting the idea of a static identity. In this provincial context, hip-hop confirms itself as a dynamic medium that articulates tradition and innovation, memory and projection, re-signifying spaces, bodies, and languages through performative practices that consolidate a sense of belonging and a desire for social transformation.

Between Memory and Future

The experiences collected through interviews, participant observation, and encounters with leading figures of the hip-hop scene in the province of Foggia outline a composite panorama of diverse biographical trajectories, nonetheless united by shared elements. The first contact with rap often arises in family contexts where music is an integral part of everyday life; yet this initial bond quickly evolves into an autonomous process of cultural subjectivation. Passion for rap thus assumes a dual function: on the one hand, a tool for escape from difficulties and social constraints; on the other, a medium to express emotions, desires, and frustrations otherwise left unspoken, embodying a practice of self-definition and recognition⁷ (L'Altrella 2024).

⁴ Interview with Morena Francesca Perrone, conducted by the author, 9 October 2024.

⁵ Interview with Matteo Restani, conducted by the author, 9 October 2024.

⁶ Interview with Francesco Presa, conducted by the author, 9 October 2024.

⁷ Interview with Federica L'Altrella, conducted by the author, 1 December 2024.

Within this dynamic, the communal dimension of jams plays a central role: described by participants as a true “family,” they represent models of horizontal solidarity and cultural exchange, capable of generating belonging and reinforcing alternative social networks (M. Perrone 2024). Narratives such as that of Ferrara⁸ (2024), who discovered Tupac through a friend, illustrate how cultural transmission within the local scene is grounded in word-of-mouth and intergenerational interactions, establishing a constant link between historical continuity and renewal.

The Foggian hip-hop scene also experiences internal tensions, stemming from the challenge of reconciling innovation with fidelity to a cultural identity rooted in the territory. Local artists construct an imaginary that dialogues with global influences, yet remains deeply anchored in local experiences and values. The production of lyrics by figures such as Restani, committed to representing Apulian reality with both artistic rigor and social awareness, embodies this dialectic between roots and openness. Beyond music, street art also contributes to shaping the collective imaginary: artists like Presa transform urban spaces into devices of memory and political visibility, experimenting with expressive forms that include innovative technologies such as virtual reality, thereby expanding the boundaries of both subject and community.

The tension between tradition and innovation, roots and experimentation, runs through the entire local scene. The globalization and increasing massification of the genre raise critical questions regarding how to preserve identity specificity and social cohesion. Symbolic places such as the former prison of Apricena—once a dynamic center of artistic production and cultural resistance—demonstrate how internal transformations and evolving challenges affect the movement (M. Perrone 2024). The future of the scene will depend on its ability to maintain a balance between memory and innovation, roots and openness, consolidating its territorial bond while remaining in dialogue with contemporary global dynamics.

The Use of Images and Media in the Dissemination of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop emerges as a multifaceted cultural mechanism, articulated through performative, linguistic, and visual practices that transcend geographic and social boundaries. Since its inception, hip-hop has conveyed its essence through a plurality of languages, enabling this culture to overcome geographic, linguistic, and cultural barriers, while adapting to the diverse contexts in which it has taken root. Among these expressive forms, images play a crucial role: they do not merely document the movement but actively contribute to its evolution, giving rise to a visual imaginary that constitutes one of the most distinctive dimensions of its identity. Photography, in particular, possesses the ability to capture not only the external appearance of events but also the emotions, passions, and philosophies animating its practices. As Vikki Tobak notes in her influential book *Contact High: A Visual History of Hip-Hop* (2018): «Photographs, like music, are imprinted onto our collective consciousness. Both define our individual and cultural identities and help shape how we view the world as well as ourselves. In the case of hip-hop [...] both the

⁸ Interview with Andrea Ferrara, conducted by the author, 30 May 2024.

visuals and the music become a part of us. It's not just that one powerful song that has a way of getting under your skin, it's also the visuals that equally captivate, and stick with us for years to come».

Within this interplay, images are not confined to a documentary function, but actively participate in shaping the collective imaginary and the processes of subjectivation. It is from this perspective that I chose to complement ethnographic analysis with the creation of a fanzine, inspired by the experience of Alleanza Latina (Aelle), to document and celebrate the hip-hop scene of Foggia. The fanzine functions as a channel of visibility and collective memory, endowed with strong symbolic and communicative value.

Founded in 1991 by Claudio "Sid" Brignole, Alleanza Latina was conceived as a visual and narrative archive encompassing not only rap but also writing, breakdance, turntablism, R&B, and the multiple expressions of urban culture. In a pre-digital era, the magazine operated as a device of connection between peripheral realities and a global imaginary, fostering visibility and cohesion within a scene that was still fragmented (Tripodi 2022). It is no coincidence that Aelle published the first interviews with figures who later became icons, documenting the transition of hip-hop from a subcultural phenomenon to the mainstream.

It is from this experience that my fanzine takes shape, aiming to narrate the local scene of Foggia through an interwoven visual and textual narrative, rich in memory and subjectivation. The fanzine is thus not a mere archive, but a performative medium that activates practices of recognition and identity, while simultaneously interrogating the role of the physical and symbolic spaces that host the movement.

Images and Narrative

The images collected during this ethnographic research were not originally intended to document or represent the local hip-hop scene. On the contrary, they were taken almost by chance, playfully, with the naïve gaze of someone simply wishing to preserve a personal memory. No staging, no artistic ambition, no awareness of their future value—only moments captured in the spontaneity of an encounter, in the lightness of a shared experience. Yet it is precisely within this innocence of the shot, almost "raw" and imperfect, that an extraordinary testimonial force resides. These photographs, taken with untrained hands, tell more than words ever could: they speak of an instinctive culture, one that expresses and defines itself visually even before it does so verbally.

In each frame, the visual soul of hip-hop emerges: oversized clothing, caps, sneakers, and hoodies become more than mere accessories—they function as identity markers, emblems of belonging to a community and to a worldview. Fashion here is never an end in itself; it becomes a language, one that tells stories, draws distinctions, and claims spaces. It is an aesthetic choice that turns political, much as it did for the African American community that, through music and style, demanded to be seen, heard, and recognized. Even in Italian provinces such as Foggia, these same codes are reactivated and reinterpreted with new awareness yet shared roots.

The images also speak to the modes of listening to music in an era dominated by speed and instant streaming. Within this context, hip-hop rediscovers slowness, the value

of choice, and the practice of attentive listening. Vinyl records reappear; shelves filled with albums, hands caressing covers as though they were relics. Collecting is not a simple act of nostalgia but rather an act of care and resistance: a way to preserve a living bond with the past, to safeguard the legacy of a movement that is deeply rooted in memory and narration.



Figure 2 Vinyl Collection. Poggio Imperiale, Italy. From the archive of Francesco Pio Presa, 2024

What stands out most in these photographs is the sense of community they succeed in evoking. The captured moments are fragments of brotherhood, peace, and mutual recognition. Images hold the power to freeze time, to preserve and return the depth of bonds which, though they change, leave enduring traces on bodies and emotions. When looking at group photos, interviewees often experience nostalgia, a gentle melancholy that warms the heart: for these images are not merely memories of a shared past, but tangible proof that such a sense of collectivity truly existed. They are emotional testimonies, which—like the pieces of a mosaic—reconstruct a layered and pulsating collective memory. It is no coincidence that one of the most iconic albums in Italian hip-hop bears the title *Foto di Gruppo* (“Group Photo”) by Bassi Maestro. The title track functions as an existential photograph, immortalizing not only places and faces but also fragments of life: joys, sorrows, loves, disappointments, and friendships, all framed within a single emotional snapshot.

Thus, these seemingly “casual” photographs transform into documents—powerful in their imperfection, alive in their implicit language. No artistic intent was required, for what speaks are the bodies, clothes, unstudied poses, shared smiles, and lived places. Each shot becomes a trace of a collective identity in constant redefinition, a mirror of a culture that refuses to be confined within the peripheries but, through the image, claims space, history, and dignity.

The Word as a Device of Knowledge

The interviews collected serve as an essential complement to the images forming this research: not merely biographical testimonies, but genuine analytical devices, capable of revealing the multiple subjective, affective, and political trajectories that traverse the field

of hip-hop. Through direct dialogue with the protagonists of the Foggian scene—young men and women selected according to cultural affinity and narrative ability, based on my own personal intuition—I was able to gather a constellation of voices composing a choral, layered, and sometimes contradictory narrative, which is precisely why it is authentic.

Some interviewees chose to recount their first encounter with hip-hop, the moment when a song, a music video, a jam, or a graffiti piece ignited something within them. For others, hip-hop represented a transformative encounter, a horizon that allowed them to discover latent passions such as music production, writing, drawing, or dance. These activities often originated in clandestine forms of expression, serving as outlets in response to rigid, judgmental, or indifferent social contexts.



Figure 3 Boy Performing on Turntables. Apricena, Italy. From the archive of Samuel Buccino, 2024

Other participants spoke to me with tenderness and nostalgia about how this culture allowed them to form deep emotional bonds. One of the most recurrent and significant narratives concerns the function of hip-hop as a tool of cultural assertion, particularly for those living in or originating from Southern Italy, who often bear the weight of a stigmatized identity. Several testimonies highlight how hip-hop has served as a resonating chamber for the voice of Southern Italy, historically marginalized within the national narrative. The young people recounted how, through the use of dialect, they reclaimed dignity, pride, and visibility, overturning the paradigm that regarded the Southern accent as a sign of ignorance or otherness. Indeed, it is precisely through dialect rap that many discovered the evocative power of their mother tongue, capable not only of engaging outsiders but also of empowering those who, for decades, had to mask their speech to be accepted. In these narratives, dialect emerges not only as a communicative code, but as a political act, a tangible marker of belonging and cultural resistance.

At the same time, an often underappreciated yet strongly evident element from the interviews is the role of women in the local hip-hop scene. Far from being an exclusively male or patriarchal culture, hip-hop also emerges as a space of female empowerment, where several young women have found voice, presence, and courage. Some recounted how, through music, dance, or writing, they were able to challenge gender stereotypes and carve out a space for recognition within a culture that, despite its contradictions,

provided tools for self-expression, defense, and visibility. Their voices, sometimes still timid, are resolute, aware of their potential as active agents of transformation, capable of disrupting dominant models and opening up new imaginaries.

The testimonies collected thus convey the polyphony of the hip-hop movement: some experience it as an educational and inclusive support, others highlight its aesthetic dimension, and yet others explore its political potential. For some, hip-hop is a daily practice; for others, an ethic of life; and for others still, an embodied memory. Each narrative, in its uniqueness, contributes to deconstructing the monolithic vision of hip-hop as merely an urban subculture, revealing instead its fluid, situated, and deeply relational nature.

In this sense, the fanzine produced as the culmination of my research is not merely a graphic product, but a device of restitution and listening, a hybrid form that combines the ethnographic approach with the narrative and visual power of hip-hop culture itself. The collected stories, intertwined with images and words, speak not only to enthusiasts of the genre but to anyone who feels the need to recognize, reclaim, or remember.

The Body, Memory, and Imaginary as Devices of Transformation

Through these narratives, hip-hop emerges as a field that traverses the body, memory, and collective imaginary, shaping a complex and layered identity. Embodied practices—dance, writing, and performance—function as devices that produce visibility and assertion, while individual stories reflect the tension between local roots and global influences.

In this sense, the fanzine becomes a site for dialogue and reworking of the past, a device that contributes to perpetuating the memory of the movement while projecting it into the future. One may then ask: how can a local narrative contribute to rethinking global hip-hop? In what ways can the craftsmanship of a fanzine act as a gesture of cultural resistance in an era dominated by digitalization?

The fanzine project represents an original contribution to the long tradition of visual and textual narratives of hip-hop, a practice that not only preserves but also renews a culture in motion. By combining images with profound testimonies, it conveys the vitality of a scene often rendered invisible, placing the community at the center as an active subject and agent of transformation.

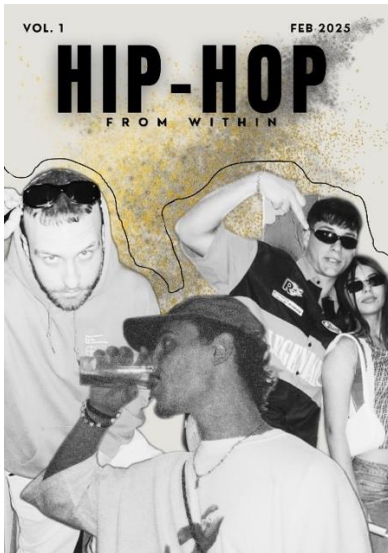


Figure 4 Cover of the fanzine. Online. Created by Denise Pia Formica, 2025

Final Considerations: Expressive Potential and Transformative Horizons of the Local Hip-Hop Scene

The ethnographic path I have undertaken unfolded as a multisensory and layered exploration of the local hip-hop scene, moving along the threshold between visual inquiry and immersive fieldwork experience. The aim was not merely to document, but to make visible what often remains invisible: cultural microcosms in ferment, biographical trajectories intertwined with artistic practice, and margins that become pulsating centers of meaning. Within this framework, the fanzine produced during fieldwork does not constitute a mere final product, but rather a cultural artifact that condenses, reworks, and reactivates the visual and narrative memory of the observed community.



Figure 5 Pages of the fanzine. Online. Created by Denise Pia Formica, 2025

This product serves multiple functions: an affective archive, ethnographic document, and generational testimony. The images, texts, and voices collected during the research do not merely represent the past or present; they also speak to the future, bearing witness to the vitality of a culture that continuously regenerates through the dialogue between local practices and global imaginaries.

If it is true that hip-hop is “a way of life” (De Nittis 2024), then the fanzine becomes the tangible space where this life settles, narrates itself, and is projected forward. A paper-and-visual stage, it fixes attitudes, values, alliances, and tensions, but also hopes and aspirations. The hip-hop culture analyzed here should not be understood as an isolated or merely derivative phenomenon, but as a dynamic process of identity construction and cultural negotiation rooted in the local context.

Interviews with artists and enthusiasts revealed the transformative power of hip-hop: moments of self-reflection in which personal experience intertwines with the construction of identity. In a South often marginalized, the local scene emerges as a creative and collective space, where scarcity becomes a driver of ingenuity and the community generates enduring bonds, affiliations, and rituals.

Within this context, the ethnographer assumes a reflective and decentered stance, attentive both to listening and analysis. Every ethnographic narrative is a negotiation of perspectives, and in the case of hip-hop, observation transforms into a collaborative act: making the invisible visible through situated testimony, without the illusion of capturing an absolute objectivity. Ethnography thus becomes a tool for participation, documentation, and sharing, valuing both the strength and fragility of a daily yet revolutionary culture.

The fanzine reflects this approach and suggests evolutionary perspectives: interactive archives combining interviews, images, and soundscapes; immersive photographic exhibitions; participatory moments such as jam sessions, workshops, and open mic events. All initiatives capable of expanding collective memory, offering new modes of access, and restoring tangibility and intensity to the lived experience of the scene.

More profoundly, the project aims to act as a catalyst: sparking new narratives, fanzines, and archives. If even a single reader, young rapper, or graphic enthusiast finds inspiration within these pages, the research has already fulfilled its purpose: to become a seed, not merely a photograph.

Looking to the future, hip-hop must continue to function as a language of freedom, a form of creative resistance, and a driver of collective transformation, overcoming the prejudices that trivialize or marginalize its significance. In particular, it is crucial that women find space and recognition, not as exceptions, but as central actors in a diverse and inclusive movement. Their voices, stories, and images deserve to be heard and shared, as every gesture and trace contributes to writing new possibilities and strengthening hip-hop as a space of expression and collective participation.

In conclusion, what remains is a constant tension toward movement: a desire for openness. An awareness that ethnography, like hip-hop, never truly ends, but evolves, contaminates, and reinvents itself. Perhaps it is precisely in this continuous becoming that its strength lies.



Figure 5 QR Code linking to the fanzine. Online. Created by Denise Pia Formica, 2025

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Rhizomatic Graphic Novel. Research, paper and unpredictable fieldworks

Abstract

This text focusses on a fieldwork experience in which we aimed to use illustrations and images to disseminate research outcomes. Inspired by the concept of *rhizome* in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we will discuss the method and contradictions of research when it seeks to produce cultural and visual texts/objects which aspire to reach beyond academic circles and engage in co-narration practices. We deal with the ambiguity of our own ethnographic experience presenting a diary of what happens in fieldwork: the Foggia area between the so-called "runway" in Borgo Mezzanone and the "ghetto" in Rignano – two migrant day laborers' settlements, two islands surrounded by endless agricultural fields. We will try to explain the method we used to build what we have called "rhizomatic graphic novel", that is, a piece of work created by researchers from a heterogeneous range of disciplines starting from a shared field experience, which has radically challenged our initial intentions unsettling the relations between "informants" and "researchers".

Keywords

Ethnography – fieldwork – graphic novel – agriculture – migrants' camps

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“Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come”. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 4-5)

The graphic novel and the rhizomatic map¹

In the following pages we will discuss a situation we came across during a fieldwork experience in which we aimed to use illustrations and images to disseminate research outcomes. Inspired by the concept of *rhizome* in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we will discuss the method and contradictions of research when it seeks to produce texts/objects which aspire to reach beyond academic circles and engage in co-narration practices.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is a bulb, it is “a map and not a tracing”; the rhizome is “oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real”. Thus, if we think of ethnographic research as a rhizome which professionals from different disciplinary areas as well as actors in the field contribute to producing, the outcome of that research will not be a tracing of what we will observe. It will be a generative map with “multiple entryways”, an experience open to encounters and connections.

The rhizomatic map “fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:12). What does that mean? Based on our interpretation, the product of research can only be rhizomatic, that is, generative along unexpected trajectories, unsaturated, ungrammatical, escaping any structural or discursive hegemony. From this point of view, images offer many cues since they can express and condense multiple representative planes and act as a generative amplifier along multiple lines of thinking. Thus, they “foster connections between fields”.

Let us consider two more aspects. The “removal of blockages on bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency” can be achieved by taking intentionality out of research work. This is a difficult and somewhat paradoxical passage. How can research work be unintentional? It cannot be at its origin but, following the logic of the rhizome, it will have to be unintentional immediately after entering the field. Thus, intentionality will have to look only at the field in its initial moment and, immediately after, forgo the flattery of the “field - organism”, that is, of the field seen as a system, to dissolve into “a field - body without organs”, falling into what Deleuze and Guattari define as a “plane of consistency” - a plane which is not designed but inspired by desire.

The work discussed in the following pages is organized as a diary of what happens in fieldwork, specifically in the Foggia area between the so-called “runway” in Borgo Mezzanone and the ghetto in Rignano - two migrant day laborers' settlements, two

¹ This essay is part of the outcomes of SOLROUTES, an ERC research project funded by the European Union (grant n. 101053836 - www.solroutes.eu - X: @solroutes). The views and opinions expressed in this essay, however, are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or of the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the funding body can be held responsible for them. Translation: Elena Boschi.

islands surrounded by endless agricultural fields.

We will try to explain the method we used to build what we have called "rhizomatic graphic novel", that is, a piece of work created by researchers from a heterogeneous range of disciplines starting from a shared field experience, which has challenged our initial intention to create an ethnographic graphic novel. We will not be using images to write a text tracing the field experience, but rather as a technique we will use to delve into and reveal the complexity of the ethnographic encounter. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 12) have put it: "The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation." Our work will be about disorientation and deterritorialization, removal of the researcher's intentionality, and negotiation in other territories. As Agier (2020) highlighted, knowledge arises from a montage of sequences of life which represent only a tiny part of what happens in the world and "paints a sort of second city which is the result of data collection and arrangement procedures" carried out by researchers and ethnographers.

Preparing the drawings

"A Fiat G.91 reconnaissance fighter-bomber, used in counter-guerrilla operations in Portuguese Guinea and Mozambique between 1966 and 1973, flies over the runway. There's smoke coming out of the engines, it's losing altitude. The racket that could be heard before turns into a deafening hiss; pieces of metal sheet break off from the wings and from the main body. A glow in the night. The pieces of metal sheet fall on the runway onto a mound of tiles, rusty pipes, and wooden boards with beaten nails sticking out of them, torn rope; shacks are forming along the runway. After the crash, when we wake up, the landscape has changed. That was the runway where FG.91s were tested; then those same planes became a weapon of the colony. Now a black man is coming out of that rubble."

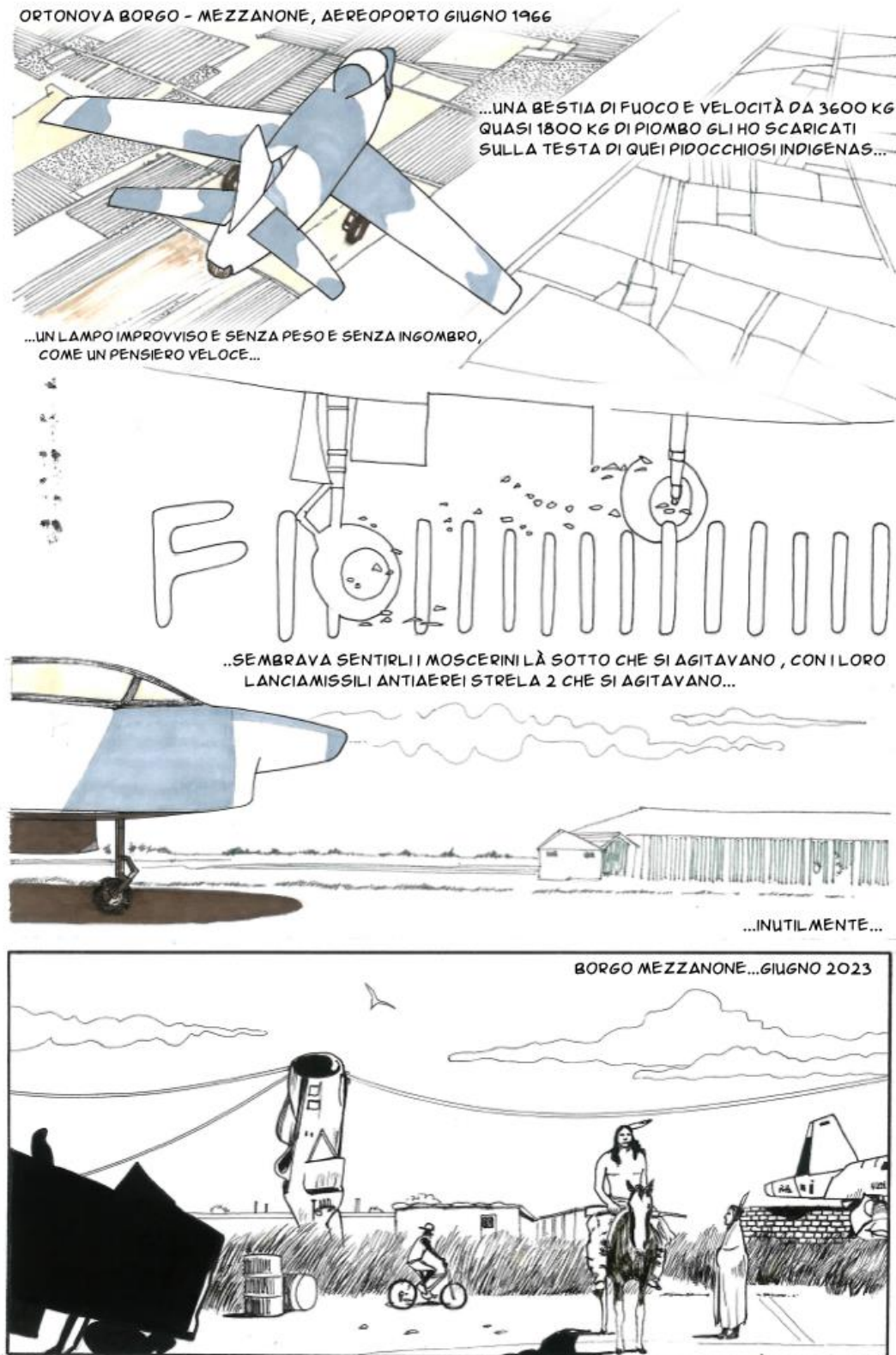


Figure 1 Rhizomatic Graphic Novel 1 - Drawing of Stefano Greco

This should be the opening of the graphic novel we have in mind, which is also a way to disseminate our previous ethnographic research experiences (Fravega and Queirolo Palmas 2022; Giliberti and Queirolo Palmas 2024) in the Borgo Mezzanone ghetto, known

by its inhabitants as "the runway". It is a large camp, a city of black people and day laborers in one of the main agro-industrial districts in Italy, and perhaps in the Mediterranean. Starting from the field diaries produced during our work, we would like to tell a story through images which can convey the complexity of the relationships that are generated in such an evocative context in a colonial situation (Balandier 2022). We are here to show our interlocutors some sketches, drafts of a story that has yet to be developed, and to conceive the project together. In recent months we have fantasized about hypothetical plots and our plan on how to document the lives of contemporary day laborers has expanded to stories of the past – the colonial era and its armaments – through images that refer to Western-movie aesthetics. We have also hypothesized invisible principles in the regulation of relationships and current events, evoking the genre which Gabriel Garcia Marquez had called magical realism.

As with the recent graphic novel "La Giacca" (Beneduce *et al.* 2025), we often start from a diary or from a collective ethnographic experience. Since we are not illustrators, we reassemble our field notes by separating the descriptive parts from the reflective and interpretative ones to build a storyboard for the illustrator, to whom we give these concise notes – a synopsis – to be reworked into drawings and a story. Here are some examples of this production process. The first one refers to ethnographic access, to a tourist context not far from the day laborers' camps, in which the researcher's subjectivity takes center stage. In the second one, we talk about a "return to the field" and, from within "the runway", we wonder about the transformations in relation to the previous phases of the research project.

Tap, Tap... Tap, Tap. In this seaside town, which I imagine is alive with tourism in the middle of the summer season, this sound and these gestures refer to something else.

A repeated, constant, dry noise that can be heard from a distance as if it reverberated on the white limestone walls; two men standing next to each other slam octopuses on the rocks following a precise rhythm. Tap, Tap... Tap, Tap. They are wearing an apron, stained with splashes of blood and flesh; little by little the same rocks get covered with a stain, a shroud. They each follow their own rhythm, but the sounds slowly converge, creating a harmony, some kind of mutual quotation. This procedure is mechanical and handcrafted at the same time.

Being beaten, so that the meat becomes more tender and therefore edible, looks like an anthropophagic metaphor of the production and reproduction of a social order in which force and violence are needed to impose oneself on people and things, but there is also that final, desperate, and persistent resistance, however doomed to fail, of what seems inanimate. Tap, Tap... Tap, Tap. As though resonating in space also opened up the possibility of resonating in time.

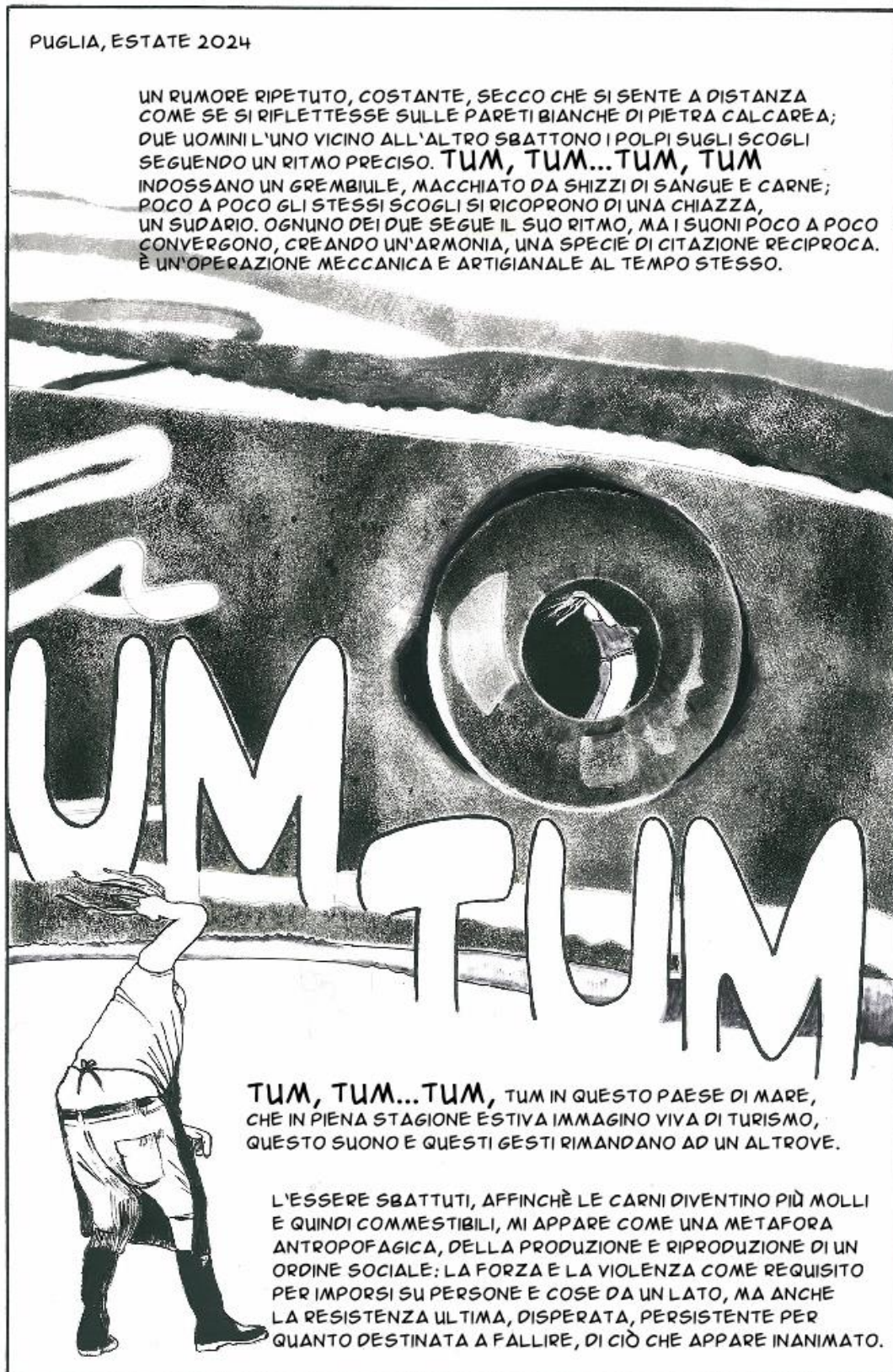


Figure 2 Rhizomatic Graphic Novel 2 - Drawing of Stefano Greco

It's 12 o'clock and the sun is hot on the flat countryside; the horizon is green. We see little low cars with black men wandering around the fields. They could be on a golf course or in a children's playground, but they are sowers. Then there are bars, butchers, stray dogs, people selling all sorts of things, churches, mechanics, electricians, the mayor, writings on the walls, sex workers, carpenters, multi-ethnic neighborhoods, restrooms, and burnt houses. There are little novelties, like water fountains where residents go with their bins, a car wash, a cultivated field surrounded by fences with chickens scratching around, a CGIL (trade union) flag, and a trade union information center. So, agricultural mechanization has not arrived and the runway is still there, a city with its informal services that is alive all year round and grows exponentially during the summer season, hosting workers from far and wide and providing essential services to land owners and to the large retailers that govern the agricultural market.

In this field, having a car is a sign of class distinctions between those who can organize a work team and those who can't, those who can move around the area and have relations with land owners and those who can't, those who can sell transport services and those who must buy them or suffer.

And, like the last time we were there, here work starts at 5 in the morning, when the teams leave, and ends after 8 hours by 1 or 2 p.m.

These are the extracts from the diary which the illustrator used to imagine the drawings without really knowing the place (he had never been to Borgo Mezzanone). The text from the diary is just an outline, a take-off runway following the beginning of the story, in which the past (the colony) plunges into a disorienting present (exploitation and segregation in the agricultural market), juxtaposing allusions to the lyrics of a pacifist song by Italian singer-songwriter Francesco De Gregori with a Western-movie aesthetic and an Indian reservation. These juxtapositions testify to the openness of images at the time when ethnographic writing, which is true fiction (Clifford and Marcus 1986) in and of itself, loses the hegemony of narrative and language.

Nothing is a given. We are working in unsaturated spaces and on fragmented time. The assemblage process has already begun, authors and subjects are multiplying, the text has already gone "through the outside and on the outside" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 4).

What to do next? The drawings we brought with us evoke pieces of colonial history and land on the table of the bar run by Jo, who is also a day laborer with a car, a bar as his home, and a small work team (according to an anthropology lexicon we want to unsettle, he is also an "informant"). They land there like a plane crashing on the runway.

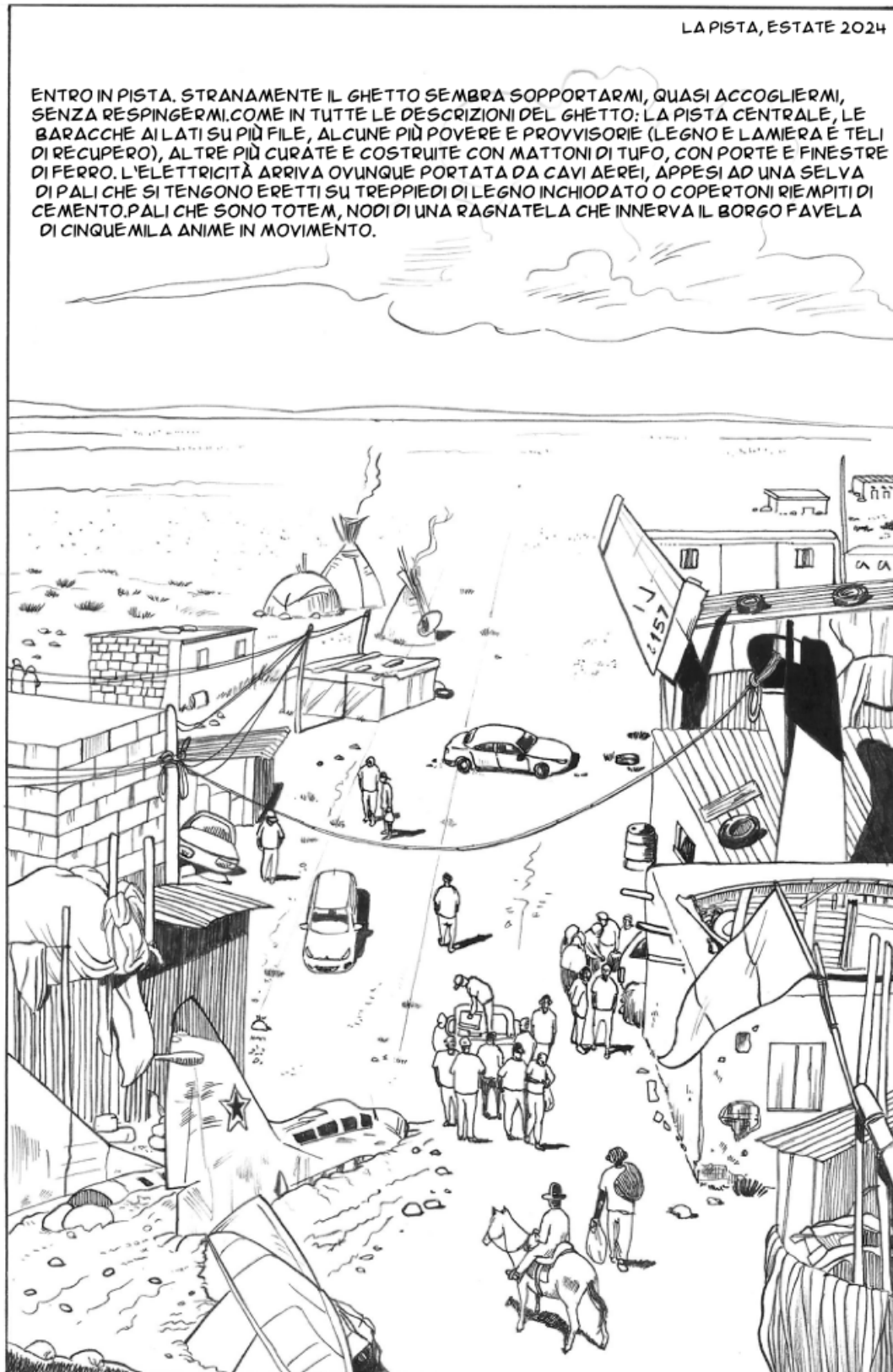


Figure 3 Rhizomatic Graphic Novel 3 - Drawing of Stefano Greco

Chronicle of a day on fieldwork

We are here to see the consequences of this crash. Our voices and our drawings become entangled in a swarm of discursive lines, lines of physical presence, musical lines, staggering dogs, fish cut into pieces on the counters of the places where people are cooking Senegalese dishes, machines that have been looted and remodeled, garbage, shacks, metal sheets, rivulets of water coming out of puddles and cisterns that run out of water before their time. Let's try to recount the different parts of our ethnographic encounter.

First access - 1 p.m.

"The zone where the natives live is not complementary to the zone inhabited by the settlers... the settlers' town is a strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about... the streets of [the settler's] town are clean and even, with no holes or stones... The town belonging to the colonized people... the Negro village... the reservation... is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute... It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other". (Fanon 1963: 38-9)

Today we are going to the runway with a researcher who carries out administrative paperwork support work for those who live in another ghetto. It is clear that she has been there for a long time; the way she greets people is telling and, through her precise gestures and local pronunciation, she introduces us to her specific world on that island surrounded by fields. With two of her Gambian friends, we talk about the relationship between mobility and the difficulty of building lasting emotional relationships when you are far away from home for too long. This conversation highlights a clear sense of existential precarity through the tone of someone who always has to renegotiate their timeframe, place, and way of life while continuing to feel that they are the protagonists of their own lives. In a small space, between a double bed and a sink with burners (but with no running water... only small ever-present trash cans), there is a huge screen broadcasting a Nigerian soap opera. They offer us a cup of tea while we keep discussing documents and residence permits. Yet, we are talking to people who have been in Italy for nearly 10 years.

Hospitality, exchange, and recognition come naturally. The volume of the soap opera is really high compared to the voices of the boys living in the house; their whispered words are difficult to hold back.

Production accidents - 4 p.m.

"The thing which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself". (Fanon 1965: 36-37)

We have known Jo since the first time we went to the runway; his bar is a hangout in that part of the camp. People greet each other affectionately, with handshakes, smiles, and

hugs; the atmosphere is that of a reunion, with people telling anecdotes about the meetings that happened in the previous months. At the table next to ours, three boys are drinking their usual Peronis, listening to Bob Marley and singing the songs' choruses. The conversation flows smoothly and of course we are talking about Mali and West Africa; we have recently returned from Mauritania where we met dozens of Malian miners who were looking for gold in Chami, in the meanders of a land that swallows everything and rejects low-cost illusions (Queirolo Palmas & Cassarini 2024). It is always the *toubab* who get rich. We talk about the beautiful things from Mali (Mopti, Djenne, Niafunké, the great blues guitarist Ali Farka Touré, Timbuktu), but Jo knows little about them because he left right after high school, at the age of 25. It is often the case that the *toubab* know more places than the locals; it is because of tourism, *race*, and class.

It is precisely this unfair distance (a reflection of the persistence of the colony in the form of tourism) between him, a Malian man who does not know places in his country, and us who can mention some, that gives rise to a long conversation on the resources that the French have plundered from Africa. J talks about persisting colonialism, current politics, the need for a strong man – a man who is not involved in the political games that keep Africans subjugated – to break these chains once and for all. It is clear that the colony he is talking about had a starting point and then developed in different forms, which still exist to this day. This has fossilized everything, forcing us to continuously come to terms with it, every time a white man encounters a black man. And we researchers are in it up to our necks. To proudly claim a sense of belonging among other things, Jo shows us a map from which one can tell that in pre-colonial times Mali had access to the sea in what is now Mauritanian territory; the French then squared off these territories, creating a geography of power, throwing these peoples, who were often nomads, into state reservations.

We show Jo the drawings that Stefano Greco, our illustrator, had started to put together, choosing a Western-movie setting for the ghetto and the day laborers – gold rush, saloons, tumbleweed... a pop composition. However, Jo is drawn to a specific drawing, full of words, the only one in which the images are not predominant. He tries to read them... but his poor command of written Italian makes it hard. He starts to get annoyed, saying he sees nothing good in this story and asking us why we had transcribed his words about the lives of runaway workers. Why did we, *toubab*, transcribe his secrets? His reasoning? His knowledge? What for? Had we already published that work? Were we making money from it? Were we once again robbing the Malian, the black man, of his riches to transfer them into our economy, betraying the relationship of trust with him and exposing him to the gaze of others in the ghetto? He emphasizes that his is just one voice, that he cannot speak for others, and he repeats that he does not want to use his voice to get rich from his brothers' sweat. How can we move, how can we proceed in this regime of persisting coloniality, which is clearly embodied in the very segregation of the camp and its inhabitants away from the white people's city? The graphic novel as a project and illusion of co-narration has already crashed on the runway. And that is for the best. Our minds go back to *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 8): "An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily

changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure... There are only lines”.

One step back: Respectable cities

“Out-of-places are first and foremost constituted as outsides, located on the edge or at the limit of the normal order of things... they are characterized from the outset by confinement and a certain extraterritoriality. This is achieved through a double exclusion from locality: exclusion from the places of origin... and exclusion from the local people's space where the camps and transit areas are... Their positions are negotiated and relations are established between refugees or displaced people and local people - work relations in the camps or conflicts regarding the temporary use of the land owned by the villagers” (Agier 2020: 102)

Going into the ghetto is like entering another world. You need a contact, a clear and visible reason.

At the Rignano ghetto, the day before the incident with Jo, we met a boy who lived there and was walking back, hitchhiking along the road. Fo, an activist and researcher, was waiting for us inside, but performing an act of solidarity on our way in was just as important; even as we were heading to Borgo Mezzanone, we stopped to offer help to a man who was stacking an inappropriate number of more or less reusable tiles on his scooter.

The runway is an element along which urban informal development is organized in two main directions, with most businesses overlooking it; it is a built-up area that develops lengthwise, unlike Rignano which appears more stratified and surrounded by a road that delimits it into a semicircle from the outside. Built structures anywhere in the ghettos are made of metal sheet, wood, planks, tiles, and salvaged materials; scraps become precious. In Borgo some built structures have been consolidated with bricks and have been more or less plastered. There are dogs staggering around or lying down with their legs stretched out and a patchy fur coat. They look like they are dying. The music coming out of the bars is loud; the soundscape is modern African music, with a lot of Nigerian Afrobeat. The runway pushes the horizon away and there is a whole lot of sky.

There is no running water, electricity comes through informal connections, and gas comes in tanks. There are big blue plastic tanks that quickly run out of water. There is garbage everywhere. People wander around the runway. There is an incredible number of cars from which people have taken every piece that can be used to fix those that are needed as taxis to take workers to the fields. There are carcasses of cars, vans, and stacked tires.

Two Steps Back: Moral Regions

"These areas are formed by dividing people based on their origin, ethnicity or possibly social class, through progressive agglomerations which depend on affinities or, conversely, on people's reaction to prejudices... for Robert Park, these areas progressively turn into moral environments and subsequently into "moral regions". The concept of moral region made it possible to understand the segregated organization of cities as a mosaic made up of distinct urban ethos" (Agier 2020: 53)

In Rignano, the Senegalese woman who runs the bar on the way into the settlement is talking about her children and the process of regularization. One of them is in Russia, he graduated in chemistry; another one is working. The youngest, who is 11 years old, was staying with a friend's family in Naples; his mother hoped to offer him a different perspective in a big city, she hoped he could have a better adolescence. Unfortunately, he ended up in prison at the age of 15 for stabbing one of his peers. He had been lured by the image of local street kids – scooters, running around, wearing designer clothes. Inside the bar it is hot, and the neon lights define its silhouette from the street in front of it, where there is a man leaning against his car. The pot is on low heat. On the shelves there are many packs of few products. Peach, apricot, custard, chocolate croissants, all the same. They probably have a chemical, sticky taste. How could she think of giving her children that fate, her fate? Taussig (2004: 67) speaks of "the existential strength of mind that monotony requires". Fo, the activist, comments on this case: "Had he been here, things might have been better. Nothing works here, but they would have kept an eye on him, he would have understood how to live respecting others. There are values that hold communities together and one learns the dignity of having a job." The thing is that here you cannot see a future; the past hangs over you, the present emerges, and then the night rises.

Representatives and representations - 5 p.m.

"The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available – always $n - 1$... Subtract the unique from the multiplicity to be constituted; write at $n - 1$ dimensions. A system of this kind could be called a rhizome". (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 6)

Jo gets up, sits down again, and calls one of the members of the Board of Representatives in Borgo. There is a Board made up of representatives from each group, francophone, anglophone, Malian, Senegalese, Nigerian... it is used to make decisions on organizational matters and to deal with conflicts. "We talk and sort things out", says Jo, "this matter must be brought to the Board. Since the Board was established, we have solved many problems, quarrels, even fires. If they're still there, it's because they're accidental." This may be a fire, too, or it could turn into one. He reiterates that he feels robbed – it is clear that we are the specters of the settlers. Transcribing his narration of the secrets he shared with the *toubab* was an act of theft in his eyes; this is what he believes to have happened, although it is not so.

The incriminated text that accompanies the drawings had been entirely written by us as a sort of archaeological history of that space. It was a history of the runway as an air base for the planes which were then used in military operations against some African countries woven together with extracts from our diary on the city of Foggia focusing on how its young white proletarian population could not see the world of black day laborers. We had not made any drawings on how the ghetto functioned, on the secrets that were shared with us. The drawings denounced the same story that Jo was talking about. Yet, they had aroused his suspicion and anger. This is about method and specters. As is always the case in these unbalanced relationships, history comes back in all its harshness. Beneduce (2010: 45) states that:

"When History is interwoven with violence and humiliation, when History is witchcraft or a tragedy, the spiral of resentment and suspicion seems to have no end and anything can bring back the pain or mortification of an unredeemed past. (...) This is the post-colony, a regime ruled by guilt and shame, in which even research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the lexicon of the indigenous world, as it breeds silence and evokes dark memories, eliciting knowing and distrustful smiles".

Jo has all the right to be suspicious of the intentions and purposes of our operation. So, to show our understanding, we tear up the drawings and ask him to start over together. "That's it, this is what we must do, things must be done properly, we'll talk about it during the Board meeting, we'll meet and talk about it together, we must do things together, we live here." In the meantime, a Board member has arrived, taken a quick look at the drawings, and postponed the discussion until later.

We are part of the Institution and, as much as we have friendly intentions, it is fair for us to have to deal with historical and colonial legacy, which means we are at the receiving end of legitimately suspicious behavior. The world of research, the University, and the Health Service are all contiguous with the same institutions that leave the ghetto isolated, floating precariously in the midst of the fields where its inhabitants work the land with their hands; if subordinates are the ones who always remain on the margins of their superiors' discourse, then we must work together to rethink the ways, times, and spaces in which we meet and write. How can we write together with Jo? After all, that is what we came here to do - bring provisional drawings, paper shreds, to see the effects they would have and imagine ways and forms of co-narration.

Intermission: young Italians and migrant day laborers

"Principles of connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be... Collective assemblages of enunciation function directly within machinic assemblages; it is not impossible to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects". (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 7)

On a bench in the town of Borgo Mezzanone, where the dirt track leading to the runway branches out from the paved road, we meet three pensioners who are talking about corruption, Toti (the former Governor of the Region of Liguria), market logics, and the

absence of the state. A former construction worker says: "We're on our own, sometimes they come to have some demonstration for migrants, which is right, but then they leave us alone, us and them. You can't work for that little, it's barely enough to survive. With my pension I can't buy certain products if prices go up at the supermarket. The Italian guys there, Italians... get paid €1,400 a month and then they have to give 400 back to their employer. With €1,000 per month they have to keep living with their parents. To keep prices low, everyone is exploited. This is not life. The day laborers are at the bottom of the chain, but it's the same chain." Perhaps the chain is not exactly the same, but with regard to their reasoning on class issues we are pleasantly surprised to come across this perspective which places young Italians, pensioners, and migrants in the same regime of precarity. His friend, who used to work in a pasta factory, replies: "Anyway, now they (*black people*) no longer work for less than 8 euros per hour." These are the same things Fo had told us in Rignano, which is a sign that workers are in short supply and there is a strength which was partly rekindled by this relative scarcity.

In Borgo, pensioners take for granted that work is divided along racial lines. "Our youths work in supermarkets or factories; black people work in the fields." Yet, the words of these ex-workers always convey a feeling of abandonment, of not being seen. Žižek calls it *envy*, a term he uses precisely to describe the condition of those who do not feel that they are being seen and want to be seen. This is why they definitely vote for the right, they believe in Salvini and Meloni, and unions are a distant subject: "Landini (the general secretary of CGIL, a major Italian trade union) only cares about black people" they tell us. We went to the CGIL branch in Borgo, where we were welcomed by local children involved in an after-school club who were curious about the summer activities of the black children with whom they sometimes end up playing. "Mohammed left, he went to France." And France almost sounds like a mysterious and fascinating space station. Then the walls bear the traces of an Italian-language school for day laborers – a project funded with the proceeds of a film that was shot on the runway and that has left behind this positive legacy².

Interconnections - 6 p.m.

"An assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections. There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure... There are only lines". (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 8)

Jo agrees to relaunch the graphic novel operation and work on it collectively, which is approved by the Board. The colonial misunderstanding was a valuable experience. J had become attached to those unknown, dangerous words. Each letter had become part of his body.

Not only does the representation of the Other (that is, of day laborers in the *toubab's* world) display them in the public space, but it is also a line which questions and destabilizes their private space. Researchers, like social workers, must constantly

²See: <https://willmedia.it/cosa-facciamo/one-day-one-day/>

negotiate positions, gazes, and the grammar of their encounters; they work ceaselessly.

Besides, needless to say, Jo has relations within the ghetto and Ka, who had been our interlocutor in the previous phases and with whom we had negotiated the operation, is now back in Africa; Ka has significant cultural capital within the ghetto, since he has already published an autobiographical book. Surely his relationship with researchers is completely different from Jo's, who in the fields' jargon is known as a *caponero*, that is a day laborer who organizes work teams. There is a delicate balance in the ghetto, much like elsewhere, involving power dynamics, visibility, accumulation of wealth, and individual growth which, however, must be considered in relation to community alliances. Ka's capital is cultural capital but it cannot be converted into economic capital; his life revolves around the camp. Jo's capital is social capital – he knows where to get work from the Italians – which turns into relative economic capital – he gives work to a few black brothers, he has a car and a bar, but he also toils in the fields. Envy and what is controlled by it come to mind once again. What looks will we be getting when we leave Jo's bar? How will Jo be looked at after a long conversation with the *toubab*? The man who, a few hours ago, had looked at us angrily exclaiming: "It's always like this with you *toubab*! We can't trust you!" It is very difficult to assess the effects which follow an operation involving a representation of the Other. Speaking for them and building a space of subjective expression with them are issues we often discuss...

Life on the runway goes on, with its dust, emaciated dogs, garbage everywhere, modern African music, girls standing in front of the brothels, an Italian girl high on crack, the tire dealer putting air in the tires of a child's bicycle. Some cars have stopped, others have been looted or are ready to go. According to Agier (2020:107) "in the camps, there is no room for any collective memory of the place to emerge, since their residents are just waiting to leave".

The morning after: openings and suspicions

"Principle of asignifying rupture: against the oversignifying breaks separating structures or cutting across a single structure. A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines". (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 9)

We receive a voice message from Jo: he says he spoke to the Board the previous night and they agree to meet with us when we return in a month. They propose to decide together what to say in the graphic novel. If it is done this way, the operation sounds interesting to them. We still decide to go back to the ghetto before leaving, cross the sea of fields, go up on the island, go to the bar, and say goodbye to J. Greeting him is a sign of respect. It does not take long, just a hug. But it is loaded with meaning. It is a symbolic farewell.

Then we call K, who is abroad and whom we had kept informed about what was happening in his absence. He questions the relevance, even the existence of the Board and its function in this situation and the last thing he says is about Jo: " You can't do the graphic novel with him.", reminding us of the extent to which cultural capital stratifies each and every world, even the most subaltern. However, K makes himself available to come

to the meeting; he wants to be part of the process. The field has broadened and relationships are now more complex. We are more involved in the inner workings of relationships among residents of the ghetto. Galinier states that in relationships with informants it is necessary to recognize the difference between "external exegesis, that is, the statements produced by informants at the outsider's request, and internal exegesis, which includes all the comments which are offered spontaneously during a specific event..." (in Beneduce 2010: 22).

1 month later at Jo's bar - a Saturday in July, 5 p.m.

Getting to the runway by car is more difficult; the rain has turned the dirt road full of potholes into mud. Last time we were told that this land requires so many day laborers that it cannot give in to mechanization.

At Jo's bar we are told that he is not there, he will arrive. We stick around and wait for him. A Nigerian guy starts ranting when he sees us in there: "This place ain't for you, this is Africa, you gotta get out, you don't wanna change Africa, do you?!?" We are two white men in a black men's bar, in a black men's town. A black men's town in the middle of the fields, like an island without a treasure.

Jo arrives, gives us a warm welcome, and sets up a table and chairs in front of the bar, because it is too hot inside; we drink (warm) beer accompanied by corn on the cob. Now there are five of us white men and one black man at the table, surrounded only by black people and dogs, most of them white. Colors matter a lot here.

Jo jokes: "So, how's the Netflix production going?" We say: "See, we stuck to our agreement and came to talk to you and the Great Board". Jo is smiling in his own way, not completely at ease in his role as mediator/representative of the Great Board (henceforth GB), very calm as a guest. It is his place, his bar, he talks to everyone, he gives orders, people come to say hi to him, you can tell he has made something of himself. Then the Gambian representative of the GB, whose grandparents are from Guinea Bissau, calls us and we tell him about the project, specifically about the history of the runway; he is astounded that there can be a past connection between today's runway and yesterday's colonial occupation: "I knew it was a military runway, but I didn't know about its history, it's interesting and I don't think anyone knows about it around here". There is an opening, some interest. Lazzari (2022: 13) states that "history does not speak for itself, it is subjects that make it speak and, at best, challenge the way it is interpreted by historians and politicians..."

Shortly after we are also joined by L, who is from Nigeria and has been living on the runway for a few years while his wife and daughters aged three and five are in Bari; he is here to work and occasionally goes back to Bari for four or five days to be with them. He did four years in jail, he has been out for two years, and in one year he will clean up his criminal record and get a residence permit for his family, since their daughters were born in Italy. We tell him about the graphic novel project, but he is understandably interested in the legal matters related to the residence permits.

It is getting late. It is night and we feel even more out of place. It is as if this place became more hostile to us *toubab*. Jo suggests arranging a meeting with the GB at the

end of the work day.

Wandering and bewilderment - a Sunday in July, 4 p.m.

On Sunday afternoon we go to the Rignano ghetto, where day laborers unionized by USB have occupied state land to produce fair-trade tomatoes. Along the main road, some inquire about who we are; our guide is wearing a vest which reads "lower your weapons, raise our wages". At the edge of the camp, we see a shack wrapped in cellophane; a boy - Zak - walks out of it wearing a woolly hat and the usual US tank top. We stop to talk to him after exchanging ritual greetings. What have you been up to today? He whispers... I worked out and drank water. He shows us a bottle with a teabag inside and says "It comes from Burkina, from Ouagadougou, it's good for your gut." We move close to the shack because the wind makes it difficult for him to smoke and because his voice is lower than that of the wind.

He looks inside, his eyes are very sweet, it is as if they are smiling; we play with our phone and show him his image with the selfie setting. He smiles and stares deep into his own eyes. He wants his photo, then he writes down his name and date of birth for us; we are going to mail it to him since he does not have a cell phone. Everything is very slow. The wind blows on the heat, the fields, the sky, his gaze, and his hands of a different age. "What year is it?" he asks. He has been here since 2015, he has two brothers. Who knows how he sees himself when he looks ahead. "What do you think your future will be like?" He smiles and says "A boat for food, to transport food; I will cross the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific." It is an image that compels us, perhaps because it also appears to describe his present. The time that is to come seems so connected to the space where he is now - a shack isolated from life in the ghetto, next to the fields occupied by others like him and different from him, who see the trade union as a space of possibility. Marx wrote about "class in itself" and "class for itself".

We should be questioning our categories which define the idea of the flow of life in a linear and progressive way, focused on improvement if possible. Thoughts and hopes are two different things. What makes us exist in this world? Existing in this world requires a domestic world in which people can settle and the fundamental notion of existing in this world is having to be there (De Martino 1959). Being with him involves a process of dematerialization, our bodies begin to lose themselves and our gaze is focused on his hands... they seem to belong to a man who is getting old. We had to find our place along different temporal and spatial coordinates, learn different ways of sharing. We all know that these are subjective categories of existence and we will have further proof of this with Jo; the challenge is managing to live within them together with those who have established them.

Experiences of encounters which took place at different times and in different spaces, between Borgo and Rignano, between the "anarchist" ghetto and the "trade union" ghetto, start speaking to each other; they are two sides of the same coin. We think that in Rignano it would have been easier to produce a graphic novel. You can play at home: party, trade union, activists, "raise our wages, lower your weapons"... in short, pieces of a familiar world.

The image of the future painted by Zac's words materializes in what we see: him, his boat, the sea of green and yellow fields, the sky, and the wind. It is future, present, drifting, and a dream. It is a meta-historical plan generated with special tones of the voice, of the gaze, of the rhythm of speech, and of gestures. When we leave, he reminds us about the bottle with the gut concoction he had given us – the gift and all its contents. Then our guide regains his focus: his account is accurate, clear, and all its passages are well articulated in fluent Italian. He gets to Rignano with €10 and at once he immerses himself in the organization, in the development of relationships between day laborers and employers, landowners. All of this, thanks to his language skills which have immediately turned into social capital. We feel that it has become easier to interpret the processes of this ghetto, which now has its own established narrative, perfectly conveyed by our guide who is an official representative of this place – some call him *mayor*, others *president*. We ask him "What is the ghetto for you?" "My America" he replies, while on the walls of the trade union headquarters we see some posters praising new pan-African sovereigntisms. AES, the association of Sahel states, is the name of the new political project that brings together Mali, Niger, and Burkina to respond to the need of anti-colonial strongmen evoked by Jo. What kind of text and what kind of writing will characterize the graphic novel if it ever comes to fruition? We go back to Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 11) as we make our way back to the runway to meet with the Great Board: "contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can)."

Our appointment with the Great Board – 8 p.m.

As we get on the runway we make it through the mud on the road; people are in high spirits, the evening is here. Being there at that time of the day is already a privilege. Our white car, surrounded by that landscape in which every ruin is salvaged and salvageable, makes us stand out. Anyway, we are the *toubab*, regardless of what car we have. We are the *toubab* because we are white, we are wealthy because we are white, we have a colonial background because we are white, we have certain powers to access the black people's city because we are white.

Jo is at a Nigerian wedding in Foggia. We wait at the bar; the beer is warm and there is corn on the cob roasting around the fire. We talk to the people who are sitting there. A Nigerian Rastafarian who comes from Ascoli Piceno says: "Here you get work every day; there with the City Council you never got any work." We ask him about the future: "I don't think about the future, I can't know about it. I'm here because I accrue experience and learn this job as a day laborer. Every place has its own way." We talk about music, about politics in the music of Fela Kuti, about the sea: "Is it close? Is it far?" he asks. He tries to measure the distance based on how many hours it takes to get to the water. The Senegalese man next to him shows us his documents: "I had a permit (subsidiary?) that burned up in the hut when it caught fire... can you help me get it back? I trust you, I give you my identity card (*he actually does that*), then you call me, and I do everything you tell

me...". We are the *toubab* to whom the relationship with papers and state documents is delegated.

Unveiling - 10 p.m.

Meanwhile, Jo arrives; he was at the Nigerian wedding with the other members of the GB which is therefore postponed tonight. We think about the fact that we came from Genoa specifically for this meeting. But we are not really surprised. We would have been surprised at the opposite; we were curious to see, to deal with a power entity in and from the camp. We are glad that Jo came, it was the sign we were looking for; the GB is a boundary that Jo has put between us and his words, between us, white gatherers-predators, and him, a black gatherer... of what? He is an entrepreneur in an informal economy which is linked to large-scale agro-industrial distribution after a thousand intermediate steps; he has a bar with a kitchen, he rents out rooms to sex-workers in the back, he has a car and puts together work teams that go to the fields with him. It is also thanks to Jo that we have tomatoes on our tables.

Censorship is about who profits from whom, who says what about and for whom, who has power and where. Unlike in the Rignano camp, the runway does not "turn white"; it keeps its distance from any political, cultural or trade union project. Jo is playing with his cell phone and then suddenly he takes us for a stroll; we walk along the runway together. We arrive at the headquarters of the GB, a stone-made house. On the door there is a poster advertising a planned meeting with the CGIL, which might prove that there is a higher entity of which he is part and that represents a constriction. We might be going past this in a fragmented and informal way, without any solemnity. We talk among ourselves about the impressions we have of that world – is this an expression of a past or are these the premises of a future? It is just a *toubab* game that tries to situate space in time and time in space; the bodies that inhabit it every day block this need we have and collapse the categories with which we play. Our modes and parameters evaporate. The same research project falls apart every time we try to redefine it, as discourses open up which run along multiple planes; the graphic novel is buried. We focus on two questions. What is in it for them? In the name of what are we there? These questions remain unanswered. As Lazali (2022) pointed out, society is the receptacle for the different forms of violence to which it exposes subjects. Their fragility is exacerbated when they come into contact... with us, researchers, institutions, white people; to limit the exposure to danger, they would rather retreat and disengage.

Walking. Redefining our relationship - 12 a.m.

"Principle of cartography and decalcomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure... that genetic axis and profound structure are above all infinitely reproducible principles of tracing... The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing... What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real... It fosters connections between fields, the removal of blockages on bodies without organs, the maximum opening of bodies without organs onto a plane of consistency". (Deleuze and

Guattari 1987: 12)

It is difficult to think of the product of research in this dissolution of form; it is better to breathe in this state of things.

Jo is very kind, polite in some way, and we feel his kindness as we take that walk which recreates another way of continuing that relationship. Jo is accompanying us, he is validating us, he is greeting people, he is greeted by a lot of people, we see that, we are safe and relaxed; the night is less hot than the day and it almost seems brighter. There are music lights and fires from many small parties everywhere. We see and stand on the brink between the street and the interiors, the hustle and bustle of dozens of bars and businesses of all kinds.

We walk without feeling anxious about censorship or bargaining; are we learning how to be there? We remember Fanon's words that we had superimposed on the figure of a migrant who was being hunted down at the gates of Briançon in the graphic novel *La Giacca*: "All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and to help build it together" (Fanon 1986: 85).

We do not know how to build something together either. What? Build a world that was ours? Jo seems more clear-headed than us in this proposition, more willing to show his helplessness in the face of this tension that we ourselves cannot sustain. So we leave, saying goodbye in a simple way, until next time, without any words. We exit through the end of the paved runway and take off with a handful of research hypotheses and interpretations.

Back to the Introduction

After all, Jo had only censored us. The proposal to create a graphic novel to tell as many people as possible, elderly people and children, about the long history triggered by the runway's fighter-bombers up to the shreds of Africa that today have reassembled on the same runway did not seem to be Jo's priority. There is something invisible that regulates power and economic relations within the runway; it is probably something invisible that lies in the folds between subjects and their community. That might be where the device of censorship is inserted. When we showed the drawings to Jo we were in a place that is a bar, a brothel, and a labor market all in one, but is removed from its real location; perhaps the relationship between black and white people had moved it from a present spatial dimension to a past temporal dimension, from the current relevance of what is visible and what is knowable to the temporality of the colony. We can try to question the extent to which research can overcome these relational boundaries, placing them on planes of evanescence which are articulated between subjectivity/community/History and what is visible/invisible. As Deleuze and Guattari put it (1987: 23): "There is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity... What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history... Write to the n th power, the $n - 1$ power, write with slogans: Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when

standing still! ... Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions”.

Back to the Methodology

This text is primarily intended as a self-reflection on fieldwork. In ethnography, the diary is the primary tool for keeping track of encounters, documenting the developments of a discourse, but also doubts, disorientation, and contradictions. Although central to ethnographic practice and tradition, such materials are not usually published. Furthermore, as Clifford and Marcus (1986) has taught us, ethnographic *truths* are inherently partial: biased and incomplete. Describing the backstage of research helps to bring out this dimension. The diary is an intimate and sometimes uncomfortable text, because it enters the cracks of reality, often providing interpretations that are not peaceful; Furthermore, by allowing frictions and contradictions to emerge, precisely because of its descriptive and at the same time analytical nature, the diary intensifies the critical and *back translation* character of a "set of data", of an object initially intended only as an archive, as a *backstage*, as a repository for intimate and private reflection. Making fieldwork diaries public means, on the one hand, revealing a fundamental moment in the production of theory and research, which then appears in more codified terms in books and articles. On the other hand, this operation implies a bet on the literary value that writing in the social sciences can assume: distilling materials extracted from a composite research archive into narrative form, at times through a work of montage; expanding their evocative capacity thanks to the power of artistic imagination. The diary can be a manageable and transformable device with which to build connections and co-authorship with visual artists, illustrators, and filmmakers. From this perspective, the diary form—which is itself a collage of different materials, such as transcripts of conversations and experiences, theoretical and emotional reflections in the making of the research—constitutes a possible script on which to trigger other projects of translation and cultural expansion. The ethnography we practice, in Borgo Mezzanone as elsewhere, follows in the footsteps of what Back and Puwar [2012] have called the *live method*, seeking ways in which social science can, on the one hand, be embodied in works capable of interesting audiences beyond the academic sphere and, on the other, make use of artistic languages as research tools that are more effective in generating new knowledge. A now vast literature allows us to place graphic ethnography (Della Puppa and Moretti 2024, 2025; Gruning and Scavarda 2025, Rumsby 2020; Taussig 2011; Dennison 2015) within the field of diverse and legitimate research practices. For us, the “naïve” exercise of graphic ethnography was primarily a way to reflect on the contradictions of (our) way of acting when doing research, insofar as it seeks to operate in a participatory manner. We have been doing fieldwork in Borgo Mezzanone since June 2023 and are still building relationships with some of the inhabitants of that space. The graphic novel, as an unpredictable rhizome, is still under discussion with our interlocutors.

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I Disconosciuti. Vivere e sopravvivere al di fuori del sistema di accoglienza.

An ethno-graphic novel by Francesco Della Puppa, Alessandro Lise, Francesco Matteuzzi, Francesco Saresin e Giulia Storaro. Padova: BeccoGiallo. Review by Caterina Borelli

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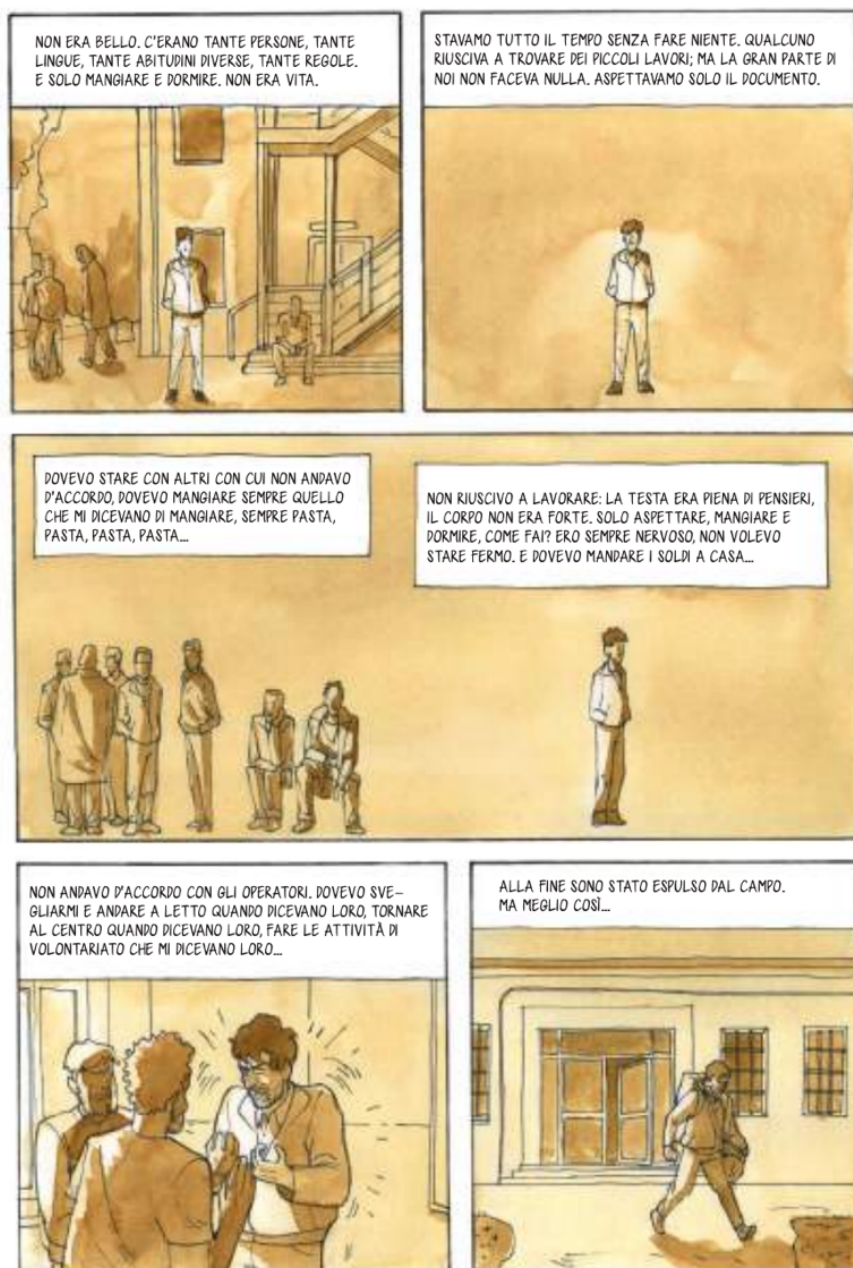
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The ethno-graphic novel *I Disconosciuti* ("The disavowed") is a recount of the life of asylum seekers who were expelled – or never made it into – the Italian reception system. It is the second work of this kind by Francesco Della Puppa, who teaches Sociology at the University of Venice. A few years ago, he decided to translate his research on the onward migration of Italo-Bangladeshis to the United Kingdom into a narrative language more creative than academic writing and more appealing to a non-expert audience: the comic format. The result was *La linea dell'orizzonte* ("The horizon line", 2021), written in collaboration with the screenwriter Francesco Matteuzzi and illustrated by Francesco Saresin. The experiment was quite unique within the social sciences, or at least in the Italian scenario, where the only clear antecedent is, to my knowledge, *The King of Bangkok*, by Claudio Sopranzetti, Sara Fabbri and Chiara Natalucci, to which we might add the reflections on drawing as an ethnographic method recently brought forward by Letizia Bonanno. The book was well-received in a variety of settings, both within academia and beyond. The more informal medium proved to favour the dissemination of research, which was appreciated by comic book lovers who thus were drawn into sociology and migration studies, as well as by those interested in the social phenomenon, whom an abstruse academic text would have otherwise put off. The success of that first test convinced the author to continue along this path of narrative experimentation.

In this new endeavour, the story unfolds in an anonymous, medium-sized northern town. The specific location is less critical than its atmosphere, a point the book emphasises by opening with the line: "Every city has its own temperament, its own character" (p. 13), accompanied by an aerial view of a small urban centre spread out between a river and the green mountains in the background. As we move through the pages, the impression is that the character of the setting plays a significant role in adding a subtle yet sharp contrast to the narrative between the neatness and calm order reigning among the city streets and the shelter under the bridge where migrants have settled. Most of them have been expelled from, or were never admitted into, the reception system addressed at asylum seekers and holders of international protection. Other left it on their own will, in search of a space of autonomy far from the state's technology of care and control.



P. 21: Farad recounts his days at the reception centre: "It wasn't nice. There were many people, many languages, many different customs, many rules. Just eating and sleeping. That wasn't life. We used to spend the whole time doing nothing. Someone would find some tiny job; but most of us wouldn't do anything, just wait for the papers. I had to live with other people with whom I didn't get along, eat what I was told to eat, always pasta, pasta, pasta, pasta... I couldn't work: my head was full of thoughts, my body was weak. Just waiting, eating, and sleeping. How can you live like that? I was always nervous, couldn't stay still. And I had to send money home... I didn't get along with the social workers. I had to wake up and go to bed when they said so, do the volunteering activities they told me to... Eventually, I was expelled from the camp, but it was better that way..."

The story is narrated from the perspective of Anna (Giulia Storaro's alter ego), a young researcher supervised by Stefano (Della Puppa's stand-in). The plot develops along two intertwined narrative lines. On the one hand, it is a detailed recount of Anna's fieldwork

encounters with migrants living at the fringes of society, sleeping under bridges or in homeless shelters, eating at soup kitchens, working odd jobs when possible, otherwise struggling to fill an apparently infinite temporal and existential void. They are forced into these margins because building a new home in a foreign country is an almost impossible goal to achieve for racialised people with a liminal legal status, or no status at all. The book effectively highlights how structural obstacles to entering the housing and labour market severely hinder social inclusion, thereby reproducing vicious circles of marginalisation. Crucially, however, urban margins seem to provide Anna's interlocutors some protection as well, and a time-space where they can escape the receiving society's expectations on how a "deserving migrant" should behave.



P. 36: Anna and Alieu walk through a park: "Nice, isn't it? During the day there is plenty of people, but at night... At night, there is no one, so we don't bother anyone. That's why they leave us alone. At night everything is ours ah ah ah!"



P. 41: Farad shows Anna his spot under the bridge: "My bed" "How long have you been living here?" "I have spent here the whole summer. Here no one sees what we do. It is isolated. In other areas, we are more exposed. If we hang our things out in the air, they say it is neglect. And if something happens, it is always our fault."

On the other hand, the book charts the ups and downs of conducting research, showing moments of self-doubt and impasse, sudden turning points, the overlapping of work and private life, and the inevitable moment when a researcher must acknowledge they have done all they could within the allotted time, and the research must conclude. It speaks to the contradictions and moral dilemmas of dealing with one's relative privilege vis-à-vis situations of profound discomfort, unmasking the triviality of our "first-world

problems”, while establishing at the same time some unexpected correspondences between different precariousities and rootednesses.



P: 87: Anna says goodbye to Farad, who is about to leave for Portugal in search of a job: “Well, I hope you will be able to find what you are looking for, and a place to feel at home” “Yes... you too.”

The effectiveness of *I Disconosciuti*, much like Della Puppa's previous work, lies in its ability to translate complex fieldwork dilemmas and the lived experiences of migration into a visual and direct language. This capacity for public engagement and dissemination is precisely why the medium is gaining crucial attention and academic legitimisation. Della Puppa's continued commitment to this innovative format confirms its growing importance: the volume he recently edited with Veronica Moretti, *The Social Genres of Comics: Impact and Innovation of Comics in Social Sciences* (published by Palgrave Macmillan), represents a major effort to academically formalise the discussion around the impact and potential of comics in social sciences. Ultimately, *I Disconosciuti* stands as compelling evidence that the graphic narrative is not merely a creative tool, but a crucial new vehicle for ethnographic critique and public sociology.