Violence and space

A comparative ethnography of two Italian "badlands"

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Abstract: This paper compares two marginal neighbourhoods and Italian "badlands": the *Zona Espansione Nord* (ZEN) of Palermo and San Siro in Milan. It concerns multiple types of violence that affect them and their connections with different multi-scale processes. The two neighbourhoods emerge as the result of two urban histories that can be partly schematised in two dichotomous images: on the one side, the "non-Fordist" marginality of the ZEN, a social enclave of unemployment without a working-class past; on the other side, the "post-Fordist" marginality of San Siro, a multicultural socio-spatial configuration with a working-class past. Following the idea of the *continuum* of violence, we suggest that space is heuristically connected with violence and to this *continuum*. In order to illustrate this hypothesis, this paper introduces two case studies, drawing out their main common characteristics as urban badlands, and singling out the different traits that mark their specificity. It then links the *continuum* of violence to urban space, firstly in a synchronic perspective, mapping the different forms of violence that affect the two neighbourhoods today, and secondly on a diachronic perspective pointing to their different on-going dynamics, through the life stories of some of our interlocutors. Through this comparison, we illustrate how these two case studies combine and account for what we call the urban space-violence *continuum*.

Keywords: Comparative ethnography; Violence; Urban space; Palermo; Milan.

Introduction

In 2008, Ferdinando Fava completed a 13-year period of intensive research in the ZEN neighbourhood – a public housing project in the north of Palermo, Sicily, that is considered to be a paradigmatic case of urban decay in Italy (Fava 2012a)[1]. He then started to interrogate the relationship between violence and urban space, as well as the theoretical consequences and ethnographic practices demanded by this relationship (Fava 2010, 2012b, 2014a, 2017). He made use of the results of this reflection to set up a new research project in the city of Milan[2], together with Paolo Grassi, who had previously carried out urban ethnographic research on violence and gangs in Guatemala City (Grassi 2018a).

Taking into account both the global and local dynamics affecting contemporary Italian cities, such as urbanisation, international migration and socio-economic transformations – especially since 2007, when the global financial crisis began – this paper aims to analyse the multiple types of violence and their connections to two contemporary Italian "badlands" (Dikeç 2007), both as multi-faceted, scalar and spatial related phenomena.

Following the idea of a *continuum* of violence (Scheper-Hughes, Bourgois 2004), we suggest that space is heuristically connected to violence on a similar *continuum,* bounded by two poles: "the space" of the daily violence experienced *within* urban space and "the space" of the structural and symbolic violence "produced" *by* urban space itself (cfr. Fava 2014a). We try to combine these two elements, which are usually split within the social sciences. The first is the study of the micro-level violence in the city; the second is the study of the effects of violence *of* the city, both through a spatial lens. In the former, urban space seems to be just a passive background, a set stage; in the latter, urban space seems to disappear. However, just as violence refers not only to physical harm, urban space corresponds not only to visible walls, roads and buildings. Space is not just an adornment

on a micro-social scale: it can also have an agency on a macro scale, even if it is "invisible". This paper underlines the silent connection that mutually ties violence and space: if violence is something constitutive, creative and performative, it never happens only *in* the urban space. On the contrary, it always happens *in relation* to it. The theoretical contribution of this paper corresponds with our attempt to connect the *continuum* of violence with the insights of the anthropological "spatial turn", applying them both to our ethnographic experiences, linking the micro-social level with the structural one.

The following pages discuss the theoretical and ethnographic challenges posed by this relationship between violence and space, and outlines the provisional results of an on-going comparative research project. The ZEN and San Siro emerge not so much as epitomes of global conditions, but as results of two peculiar local histories (clearly influenced by the former): the non-Fordist ZEN, a social enclave on the one side, and the post-Fordist San Siro, a multicultural socio-spatial configuration with a working-class past.

Through a heuristic and multi-scalar comparison (i.e. a comparison related to interactions, institutional policies and urban structures), we illustrate how these two case studies show what we label as the urban space-violence *continuum*. The paper is divided into four parts: the first part introduces the two case studies, drawing out their main characteristics as urban badlands, and the different traits that mark their specificity. Here we start to map different forms of violence that affect the two neighbourhoods. The second part relates the *continuum* of violence to the case studies, also linking it to space. The third part focuses on the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of these spaces, starting from our ethnographies and the life stories of some interlocutors. We thereby show how the different types of violence that are affecting the residents of the two neighbourhoods have changed over time, affecting their agency. The conclusion builds on the analysis to expand the theoretical framework on the space-violence *continuum*.

Juxtaposing two Italian badlands through an ethnographic approach needs some clarification on our comparison procedure. Following the indications of a well-known text written by Andre Gingrich and Richard G. Fox (2002), we criticise a monolithic conception of comparison and claim a qualitative and non-theory-oriented process, along regional, historical and transnational dimensions. We are not interested in approaching discrete, homogeneous and unchanging units, but rather, in bringing together mutable elements, connected in a global system through certain structural forces. Comparison is thus heuristically aimed at illustrating the differences

in and the uniqueness of our case studies. We compare relationships between a number of their elements – not just the two places – because of their incomparable uniqueness (cfr. Simmel 1997: 18).

Two urban "Badlands": The Zen and San Siro

The ZEN – *Zona Espansione Nord* (Northern Zone of Expansion) – and San Siro are two Italian neighbourhoods of public housing, two marginalised places, and thus two urban badlands. Following Mustafa Dikeç, we define "badlands" as stigmatised places, signified as deviant and a threat to the prevailing social and moral order of the rest of the city (Dikeç 2007: 3-14). These socio-spatial configurations must be related – at one time – to their local histories and to differential response to similar national structural conditions: the economic crisis and the financial deregulations; the development of a tertiary sector; industrial collapse; increasing job flexibility and social inequalities; and a progressively weaker welfare system.

With reference to the province of Palermo, in 2013 only 41% of people aged 20 to 64 were employed, 6.7% below the rate in 2007. In 2012, the income of families *per capita* was 13,687 euros – less than the figure for 2011 and significantly lower, compared to the national average (17.307 euros – *Servizio Statistica del Comune di* Palermo 2015). In contemporary Milan, 9% of the population holds over one-third of the city's total wealth. In 2019, 2,845 evictions were carried out (+593% compared to the previous year) throughout the province of Milan. 15,000 eligible families are listed, on the ranking of the Municipality, as waiting for public housing (Lareno 2019). In the last few years, living standards of the residents have worsened and social polarisation has been exacerbated, especially in San Siro (Cognetti, Padovani 2018), while the population of the Zen has always experienced a life of radical precariousness and uncertainty.

As is well known, Palermo and Milan are located in two very different contexts, with the former generally described by international observers as a less-developed, agricultural Italian south, and the latter as a "rich" north, dominated by private companies (cfr. CIA 2019). Considering these local and historical dynamics that continue to shape also San Siro and the ZEN, we have found some important differences, stemming from their past histories within – we could say, using two dichotomous images – a post-Fordist city and a non-Fordist city. In fact, while San Siro shows a multicultural and post-Fordist socio-spatial configuration, with long-standing inhabitants having a working-class past, the ZEN of Palermo is a social enclave without an industrial or working-class history, that is thus captured here as non-

Fordist. The ZEN has been constituted as a "social left-over" in the urban economy of Palermo. It is an in-between, connecting a "not-yet-industrial society" with a "no-more-industrial society". In fact, after the Second World War, industrialisation never resumed in Sicily, particularly in Palermo (Fava 2012a). Concomitantly, the tertiary sector developed massively. In this framework, the ZEN never represented an area for a reserve army of labour, cyclically absorbed by a Fordist economy, and cannot be classified today as an advanced, marginalised urban area (Wacquant 2008). We could also say – in Marxist terms – that the ZEN is a kind of contemporary spatialised *lumpenproletariat* (Fava 2012a; Bourdin 2013)[3].

Over the years, the two neighbourhoods evolved into paradigmatic examples of the endemic housing emergency in Italian cities. They were also represented, particularly by media, as the social "black hole" of the violence *in* the two cities of Palermo and Milan, that is, the urban areas where all the forms of urban violence are *localised*: drug dealing, abusive behaviours, racketeering, etc.

However, the local economic and political history of San Siro and the ZEN points to their distinctiveness. In fact, their reconfigurations are neither reducible to the mainstreaming taxonomy of contemporary badlands, nor to the ghetto – an urban area segregated on ethnic and racial grounds – nor to the advanced marginality developed through deproletarianisation processes, as in the ex-Parisian red belt (cfr. Fava 2008; Wacquant, Slater, Pereira 2014). In this respect, the ZEN of Palermo, a neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of the city, can be described as a typically run-down neighbourhood, the paradigm of degraded Italian peripheries for more than 30 years. San Siro, on the other hand, only gained a similar stigma in the last few years, after its foreign population grew significantly, with more than 45% coming from abroad. Although the majority of foreign residents arrived from Egypt and Morocco, overall 84 different nationalities were registered by ALER (*Azienda Lombarda Edilizia Residenziale*), the public institution that manages this urban space (Cognetti, Ranzini 2016). Thus, San Siro is characterised by a super-diversity that nourishes the division between this

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3. Deproletarianisation of wage labour, which is a characteristic of advanced marginality, did not have a direct effect on most of the residents of the ZEN. This was not only because industrialisation never began in Palermo, but, above all, because the inhabitants have always been employed in the casual economy: the building sector, services and retail trade. The building sector and retail trade entered into a deep crisis from which they did not emerge: In parallel, the tertiary sector developed at irregular intervals (Vento 2004). By 1981, this predominance of the tertiary sector was already related to the absence of employment opportunities in the industrial sector and not to a transition to a post-industrial society (Chubb 1981: 48).

urban space and the rest of the city (Vertovec 2007). For instance, San Siro has often been described as a "Kasbah", an Arab fortress in the centre of the capital of Lombardia (Grassi 2018b).

No public agency can give the exact figure for the population of the ZEN, but an estimated 30,000 people are now living in its Gregotti *insulae*[4]. Most residents are Sicilians, who illegally occupy the apartments, while non-Italians, the majority from Sri Lanka, constitute a small group[5]. Built between the late 1960s and early 1980s, its *maquette* was even exhibited in 1994, at New York's Guggenheim Museum, to attest to the excellence of Italian design (Fava 2009). Since then, the ZEN has evolved into an archetypal example of disrupted Italian public housing projects. San Siro, on the other hand, constitutes one of the largest publicly managed neighbourhoods of Milan, comprising almost 6,000 apartments, with approximately 11,000 inhabitants. It was built during the 1930s and 1940s in what was then a semi-rural area but is now centrally located in Milan. In April 2015, when the Piazzale Segesta subway station was opened at the northern border of the neighbourhood, the centralisation process reached its final stage thus far.

Both the ZEN and San Siro have, since their foundation, been characterised by and publicly known for continuous waves of illegal occupation. In the ZEN, illegal occupation started at the end of the 1970s and reached its climax at the beginning of the 1980s, even before the tenement houses were finalised and assigned to people[6]. Some apartments in

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4. Vittorio Gregotti is the modernist architect who designed the ZEN project in 1969.

5. The precise number of residents of the ZEN is difficult to obtain: the available statistical data of the census units are always aggregated and made public together with those of the higher administrative units (the *circoscrizioni*), thus making them unusable for the real measurement of the phenomena. They underestimate poverty by preventing correct understanding (Fava 2008).

6. The ZEN was designed in the mid-1950s, when the Municipality of Palermo devoted a large area of the north of the city as residential. The first part, known as Borgo Pallavicino, consisted of around 300 houses. In the meantime, the construction of the second part of the neighbourhood (the ZEN 1) began in 1966, consisting of 10-storey buildings comprising more than 1,200 apartments. The third and final part of the settlement (ZEN 2) was designed in 1969 by a group of international architects headed by Vittorio Gregotti, winner of the tender issued by the Institute for Public Housing of the province of Palermo. Characteristic of this last phase are the *insulae*, made up of four buildings in line, separated by three internal roads: two for pedestrians and one for cars. The idea was to recreate the typical blocks of the intricate texture of the historic centre of the city. For a detailed and critical account of the complex events related to the realisation of the project, cfr. Sciascia 2003; for the history of the occupation, Fava 2012; for the political and administrative history of the ZEN within the urban history of Palermo, cfr. Pedone 2013.

San Siro were occupied after its foundation, when the first Italian labour migrants arrived in search for employment from the Italian south. An informal real-estate market currently prospers in both neighbourhoods.

Badlands are not only produced by similar social mechanisms, but also receive similar responses, in terms of security practices of surveillance, control, and improvement through interventions. The ZEN and San Siro have been at the centre of multiple projects of urban regeneration. Referring to the ZEN, in 1989 a national law ("*Decreto Sicilia*") provided the legal background to accomplish structural works, such as the rehabilitation of sewage and sanitation systems and power lines and the provision of drinking water. These works were completed only a decade later at the beginning of the 2000s. In the meantime, the apartments were mainly restored and maintained by the illegal occupants themselves. While the public administrative housing agency – *Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari* – was unable to provide funds for the works, innumerable social projects have been funded by the European Union since the late 1990s. These projects were implemented together with social initiatives. In particular, these actions targeted children and women in impoverished neighbourhoods, who had been pressurised with the mantra of the social regeneration and social cohesion.

Although an extended urban renewal programme was implemented in San Siro during the past 15 years, and while many apartments were internally restored by the oldest residents, many buildings are still in a serious state of deterioration: stripped plaster, old installation, humidity and cockroaches are part of the everyday problems that San Siro's inhabitants have to face. Many interlocutors – members of two local committees, social workers, and the residents themselves – additionally describe the "institutional abandonment" that would affect the neighbourhood since the end of the programme in 2015 (Grassi 2018c).

The continuum of violence in Palermo and Milan

The central issues of this paper involve a reconsideration of concepts of violence and urban space, their plausible relationships, the notions of causality, and the agency inscribed into their relationality, methodological dimensions and the consequences of these issues for the way we understand them. At the same time, the theoretical framework requires us to continuously return to the ground and thus to the ethnographic fields.

The main question is how to ethnographically tackle violence and urban space. On the one hand, witnessing violence acts (at any level) also raises – at the same time – epistemological and ethical dilemmas about definitional

issues, the point of view assumed by researchers (cfr. Riches 1986) and their interpretative instruments (Abbink 2000; Diez de Velasco 2005: 109; Schmidt 2011). Observing a violent act without doing anything about could be classified as a hit-and-run, or a failure to provide assistance (cfr. Bourgois 2001; Scheper-Hughes, Bourgois 2004). On the other hand, within urban space, ethnography is related to a micro-social here and now, while urban space consists of more than just the physical fabric, the roads and houses we c a n *see* and *experience*, or the place in which violent acts can happen. Ethnography thus faces a scalar challenge with respect to urban space, because it is always circumscribed to a micro-social and micro-local level. Thus, analysing urban space mainly from a structural level seems impossible.

Violence is a slippery, uncertain issue, which has a disintegrating effect on human life (Taussig 1987). Anthropology has experienced a considerable delay in studying violence. During the last century, many anthropologists interpreted conflictive elements as disturbing factors for their research (Dei 2005). From the 1950s, publications on warfare and violence increased (Otterbein 1999). Anthropologists began to acknowledge that violence is anything but uncommon. On the contrary, it is an existential dimension for millions of people, including residents of the marginal areas in cities, which, like other existential dimensions, are investigated by anthropologists, who themselves have to navigate while investigating the badlands (Whitehead 2004; Jütersonke, Muggah, Rodgers 2009). The definitional debate on violence, encompassing almost all areas of the social sciences and humanities, swings between a restricted notion of violence (Riches 1986) and another broader, and thus more inclusive, one (Henry 2000; Jackman 2002; Barak 2003; Quaderni di Sanità Pubblica 2003). The restricted notion considers violence as a physical and interpersonal activity intent on harming others. We think this characterisation it is insufficient, as it omits critical elements of harm:

> First, it excludes the emotional and psychological pain that results from the domination of some over others. Second, it tends to focus on the *visible*, intentional, interpersonal harm between individuals, while excluding harm against individuals by institutions or agencies. Third, it ignores the violence of social processes, which produce systematic social injury, such as violence perpetuated through institutionalized racism and sexism. Fourth, it excludes the 'symbolic violence' of domination, that ''gentle, *invisible* form of violence, which is never *recognised* as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety" (Bourdieu 1977: 192, cited in Henry 2000: 18).

We underline that the integration of these elements has consequences for the understanding of *violent acts*, expanding them from physical strength to symbolic constraint; of *damage*, from physical injury to deprivation; of *targets*, from the individual to the community. These shifts presuppose a multi-scalar approach, moving from micro-social to macro-social levels that must be taken into account by ethnographers. These levels include the visibility of violence, as well as its disappearance from perceptions – and this especially happens when punishments and suffering persist – and also the transition between different temporalities, from punctual events to more enduring processes.

Thus, considering an inclusive and broad notion of violence, we started to record its different forms (social, political, symbolic, and structural) in the two badlands: our anthropological fields. A synchronic approach was employed during this phase. Nowadays, the two neighbourhoods suffer from a relatively similar violent framework. Squatting, theft, vandalism, dirty spaces and police round-ups are the common denominators of their "violent" urban texture[7]. Urban space emerges as a set for these phenomena, a place where these practices are implemented. At a different level, however, the ZEN and San Siro share a symbolic form of violence that corresponds with processes of stigmatisation that frame both as urban badlands (Fava 2012a, 2014b). The ZEN is a peculiar area, where it is possible to recognise how the political economy of the city and the social institutional apparatus, through social policy analysis, urban renewal planning and media communication, keeps structuring marginal urban spaces[8]. Also, the social border dividing San Siro from the rest of the city of Milan is constantly built and rebuilt by a stigma primarily created by local and national media. As we have already noted, in the past few years, San Siro has experienced hyper-visibility related to the presence of squatters linked both to a social movement

7. Clearly, we do not want to support sensationalist views describing the violent phenomena affecting the two neighbourhoods. Comparing them with other European and non-European contexts, the ZEN and San Siro are relatively safe, as "physical" violence does not seem to dominate everyday life. There are not specific data for the neighbourhoods, but – just to give an example – according to national statistics, in 2018 there were only 30 complaints of homicide, attempted murder and infanticide in Palermo, and 85 in Milan (data of the Minister of the Interior, elaborated by *Il Sole 24 Ore*, https://lab24.ilsole24ore.com/reati2018/, accessed on 01/07/2020).
8. The economy of Palermo from the post-war period to the present has been characterised by the hypertrophic development of the tertiary sector, which shows the struggle for daily survival among the poor, rather than indicating increasing levels of post-industrial wealth. Urban policies, real-estate market and part of civil society contribute to the construction of its urban marginality (Fava 2012).

that struggles for "the right of the city" and to a network of criminals. During 2017, at least three national television stations visited San Siro. The two main national newspapers (*Repubblica* and *Corriere della Sera*) often publish articles on the neighbourhood[9].

At a macro level, some important differences emerge. The contemporary common global and national dynamics – marked by several elements, such as: neoliberal politics, bad job conditions, low salaries at an economic level; increasing social inequality at a social level; decreasing state intervention and a weaker welfare state at a political level – are not sufficient to explain the specific characteristics of the two urban places. As we have observed, the two badlands are the result of very different historical processes: the non-Fordism of the ZEN and the post-Fordism of San Siro. A situational analysis of the two urban neighbourhoods shows very distinct processes, made relevant by the distinct way in which the economical, political and social histories unfold.

The concept of the *continuum* of violence enables us to connect the emphasised dimensions of violence and space in a common interpretative scheme (Scheper-Hughes 1996, 2007; Bourgois 2001; Scheper-Hughes, Bourgois 2004: 1-5). The description of violence as a *continuum* was first used by Liz Kelly, in 1988, to point out how abuse and "typical" male conduct are connected to specific social interactions, rather than being two opposed sets of behaviours (Kelly 1988: 74-136). In Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois' notion, different forms of violence, implying different emerging levels, are associated with each other more deeply, adopting an all-encompassing idea of violence (cfr. also Bourdieu 1998). In general, anthropologists and social scientists now recognise that "social violence" or "everyday violence" cannot be dissociated from political, institutional and economic violence (cfr. also Auyero, Bourgois, Scheper-Hughes 2015). They are inextricably linked. The *continuum* of violence allows us not only to identify different forms of violence, but also to look for the interconnections between them. It suggests that daily submission to structural violence, and the deprivation caused by it, sets the stage for the normalisation of more overt and visible forms of violence, ranging from criminal violence to police and state-directed violence. Thus, we can interpret the deviant acts that affect the ZEN and San Siro only by associating them with the stigmatisation processes and the structural characteristics already observed.

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9. Cfr. for example Brunella Giovara, Case Aler, viaggio nella casbah di San Siro tra rifiuti e case occupate, *La Repubblica*, 12/02/2018; Gianni Santucci, Rapine, vandali e occupazioni. "Noi anziani lasciati soli a San Siro", *Corriere della Sera*, 19/09/2016.

However, space is not explicitly considered in the *continuum* of violence but rather, is used as an indefinite background. Nevertheless, at least since the "spatial turn", anthropologists recognise that space is not neutral:

> [I]t is thought, constructed, analysed, and caught through different modalities and different temporalities into ideologies and social hierarchies. It works as a central operator of socio-cultural, political and economic systems. Moreover, together with technologies, it stabilies differential power relations (Fava 2014a: 29-30).

Space, and here more specifically urban space, is not simply a background, a set, a container or an empty box to be filled with human action. Urban space refers not only to the "built environments" (Low 1990), that is, the building stocks experienced by the social actors of the ZEN and of San Siro. Rather, it is inscribed in their very fabric, their design, and their geographical distribution.

These dimensions are not immediately perceivable through ethnographies. On this scale, the built environment is formed by urban spaces such as residential areas, workplaces, the provision of services (including rubbish collection, education, health or public institutions) and their differential positions in the cities. We label these arrangements as the city's texture. Transport infrastructures (road networks, public transport, and parking areas), as well as other urban infrastructures (sewage, power, drinking water supply), become relevant. There is an experiential and logical gap between the different elements we have to take into account, and ethnographers thus have to deal with different urban spaces: a) a sense-experienced urban space, the here and now of the isochronic situation of research (what we could call the ethnographic space); and b) a non-ethnographic urban space, that is, the urban space that we cannot see here and now, but which is possible to grasp, reconstitute and posit, for example, through maps, plans and photos[10]. The ethnographic urban space and the non-ethnographic urban space are both shaped by other processes, contributing to the social structure at a given time and place. Some processual connections can be identified with reference to the Lefebvrian triad (Lefebvre 1976): the sense-experienced urban space refers to the representational space, while the non-

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10. The difficulty of getting access to some spaces reflects a fundamental characteristic of ethnography. Its object is always partial: there is always a space or time that cannot be directly observed. There is always something else, something that is "out of the field", but which is correlated with the "here" and "now". Here we underline that we do not refer directly to hidden or interstitial urban spaces, but to a wider space that we cannot directly experience, because it is not connected to our senses and perceptions.

ethnographic urban space combines the representations of space and the spatial practices theorised by Lefebvre, an urban space being understood as a *conceptual* analytical object that is not directly experienced.

With Doreen Massey, we recognise that (urban) space – including the non-ethnographic type – is always the product of interrelations and that is always "under construction" (2005). However, through our reflection, we would like to underline its plurality, or more correctly, its differential comprehension, its varying understanding, its changing signification according to the points of view of the social actors and the scales considered by the research. After all, Massey also recognises this distinction in another essay. For this author, places are always connected to elsewhere: they are "constructed out of articulations of social relations […] which are not only internal to that local" (1995: 183). By highlighting different urban spaces, we try to show how the built environment is also both a product and an actor of social relations and, moreover, how it intertwines with everyday life. Our work aims to show how these two spatial poles are results and mediators of interactions. For this reason, space, like violence, *emerges* as a distinct phenomenon on different scales, assuming specific characteristics that cannot be reduced to those which contribute to its constitution.

Thus, the theoretical contribution of this paper corresponds to our attempt to connect the *continuum* of violence with the insights of the anthropological "spatial turn", applying them to our ethnographic experiences, linking the micro-social level with the structural level, or, in other words, with the scalability of social life. The *continuum* of violence allows violence to be connected to (urban) space, and thus to ethnographically capture and analyse situations where the urban space is the object of violent gestures and situations, in which the visibility of violent actions disappears, but where violence still dominates the life of its dwellers. Ranging from everyday violence to structural violence requires space to change its position from constituting mainly the background for violence to becoming itself an invisible actor. While violence may become less and less visible, space itself can become violent.

This relationship is not deterministic, in the sense that a certain space causes certain forms of violence. Rather, it is a circular process. The agency attributed to space in relation to violence remains complex, as for example built space can simultaneously become a background for violence and an agent. For instance, a wall built along a border can affect the practices of different social actors and *simultaneously* provide the background scene, a

stage for different forms of daily violence. Space is never neutral[11], but is always in the background. Violence, however, is at the fore. Space can become an actor primarily on a different scale – at the non-ethnographic level, as we have pointed out. It refers to the possibility of promoting or inhibiting individual and collective agency. We intend our scheme to be a flexible frame with which to interpret our fields. In this way, the *continuum* of violence becomes a *continuum* of violence and space, or a *continuum* that tries to keep together and point to the social dimensions of violence and space. Despite these clarifications, we prefer to use the *continuum* category, because it seems for now that it allows us to heuristically indicate not only the link between violence and space, but also the link between different internal levels (social, political, symbolical, structural, and also infra-structural, cfr. O'Neill, Rodgers 2012).

To concretise the violence-space connection, we will return to and analyse the ethnographic context of two specific urban fields introduced above as badlands. First, we focus on the illegal occupations of the ZEN, which we interpret as a response both to abusive personal relations and to structural violence. Totò, Ciro and Vita (all names are fictional) are three residents who – through their own narratives – introduce the different entanglements of violence and space and outline their personal ways to cope with it. Second, we move to a specific group in San Siro, the neighbourhood committee, and a specific life story of one of its members, whom we call Anna. The committee's practices and Anna's life trajectory testify to the interaction between the different dimensions of violence and will recover a diachronic component sacrificed in the above outlined comparative perspective. The badlands of the ZEN and San Siro single out visible and invisible violent constraints that their residents have to deal with. Their bonds with the environment and their everyday practices are the dimensions in which the invisible, the structural and symbolic violence of the city operates. The invisible forms of violence are often reinforced by sophisticated hermeneutics of urban professionals who fail to recognise the residents as autonomous individuals, as well as failing to recognise their performative competence in space, and their meanings in regard to violence (cfr. Fava 2014c).

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11. Referring to the agency of materiality, it is also worth mentioning the Actor-Network theory of Bruno Latour: "[A]ny thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor – or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant. Thus, the questions to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not? Is there some trial that allows someone to detect this difference?" (Latour 2005: 71).

From violence to space and return

Palermo: Illegal occupation as a response to violence

The narratives of illegal occupants that Ferdinando Fava collected, in more than 10 years of fieldwork at the ZEN of Palermo, underline personal responses to different scales of violence. We consider three different forms of violence – social, political and structural – but start with the spatial experience of some of the interlocutors.

First, let us consider Totò and the social violence he has experienced. Totò has been living on the first floor of via Joe Di Maggio since he arrived in the ZEN in 1984. Since the death of his mother in 1985, he has been living alone. During the week he works as an illegal parking attendant, and during weekends he works as a guard in a game room. He also sells baits to fishermen on summer evenings at the docks of Mondello, a port close to Palermo. His economic situation is very precarious. His apartment in the ZEN is desolated and neglected: part of the dividing wall that separates the kitchen from the entrance has fallen down; the walls of the rooms are black and dirty; the furniture is covered in rubbish; some windows are broken; and a makeshift curtain made from empty cigarettes packets held together with tape shields the apartment from sunlight. Dirty clothes and plastic bags are scattered throughout the apartment. Even before he arrived in the ZEN, Totò was used to substandard, deteriorated housing. The owner of his previous apartment in the historical centre of the city refused to repair it:

> I had to leave my house because I was there illegally, for the law. I was an illegal occupant, because the house was about to collapse. The policemen and the firemen came twice; they saw the conditions of the house. It was dangerous. They told us: "You can stay here no more, because the house is being confiscated"[12].

Totò's experience testifies to his suffering due to unhealthy housing conditions and abusive personal relations with the owner of his apartment. His illegal move into the ZEN tenements is the answer to an unpleasant relationship.

The unfinished houses also testify to the battle between illegal occupants and municipal housing policies. In this regard, the experiences of a second interlocutor, Ciro, show the perversion of policies regulating housing assignments of the city agency, and point out to a form of institutional violence against the ZEN's inhabitants. Ciro worked as a clerk at the Italian

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12. All the interviews were literally translated from Italian to English, trying to keep some contextual and social connotations.

Post Agency. He lived most of his life in a precarious condition, until he was hired by the Post Agency when he was around 50. Before that, he worked as an upholsterer, then in a theatre of Palermo, and was unemployed for a while. He lived in an old and unwholesome house, whose owner did not maintain it properly. The house was in via Castro, at the centre of Palermo. The earthquake pushed him eventually to occupy an apartment at the ZEN. Ciro has two married daughters: one is a teacher of philosophy at a high school and the other is a primary teacher:

> Consider that the owners of the house didn't spend money, they didn't fix these houses, they didn't repair shit, *chisti di cca* [these ones]. Therefore, these houses decayed. There are infiltrations. They began "to make and to say". This house became this, with broken beams [...] we live in a trap… it is a human trap, but I live here. It is a trap. There are broken beams [...] the *case popolari* [public housing]… it was very close to me… but in the *case popolari* lived… *'u* [the] policeman, *'u* employee, *'u* marshal, *'u* schoolteacher [...] they gave the public housing to them. Fuck you, did they give it to you? No, they didn't! You could make 100,000 applications but what did they give to you? [...] *Sta minchia* [bullshit, nothing], do you understand? Public housing was allocated through nepotism.

Ciro not only has to deal with an abusive relationship with the owners of the house, but he has also to deal – this is the point we want to underline – with the perverse effects of policies and their nepotistic applications regarding housing assignments. He speaks mainly about the institutional mechanisms that prevented him from getting public housing. His experience attests to an institutional level of violence, which bypasses the threshold of personal intentionality.

The third interlocutor speaks of the structural constraints of the real-estate market and of labour wages and their historical transformations. Vita is 47 years old. She, too, illegally occupies an apartment, and she and her family also live in a very precarious situation. When Ferdinando got to know the family, Vita's husband, Francesco, was officially unemployed. However, he informally worked as a mechanic in a garage of the *insula*, located under their apartment. During Ferdinando's fieldwork, Francesco was hired as a bricklayer in a local company which, after some months, was forced to close, because of troubles with anti-mafia certifications[13]:

> I did not come here to save money [...] I came here 12 years ago, during the first occupation [...] I stayed half a day and then I escaped. My husband worked in a factory in De Simone; my husband earned [around] 400,000 *liras* a month. I rented a house… in via Dante and then in via Pallavicino. My husband earned 250,000 *liras* a week [...] I could save money and think: "Tomorrow I will buy

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13. In order to get pubic contracts, any company needs to certify that its shareholders and directors have no restrictions, limitations or bans according to anti-Mafia regulations.

> my detached house", not... here. I was forced to come here [...] When my hus-
> band constructed [repaired] this apartment, I cried and I went away [...] I didn't
> know how they did it, I didn't know anything [she was forced to move to the
> ZEN because she was evicted from her house]... the eviction [...] my husband
> did not work, my husband was unemployed for three years... just small un-
> skilled jobs... and we arrived here for that. If he had been at least a paid worker
> [...] Look, my husband worked only a year and half with a safe salary... now is
> unemployed: how can you pay a rent?

Vita and Francesco have to cope with a lack of affordable tenements, low-skilled and low-paid jobs, and a corrupt political and economic context, connected to the mafia and criminal gangs. The Mafia controlled the urban space of the Zen, to sell drugs in the streets of the neighbourhood, or for dealing in stolen goods. The "illegal occupants" were the first ones to be affected by this violence and by the stigma related to it. These criminal activities limit the space and the time of the residents who have to face the effects of these conditions. These elements also refer to another scale of phenomena, different from those described above. They struggle with the effects of structural forces, without being able to ascribe them to any personal intentionality.

The job market and the real-estate market of Palermo, as well as the reduction of welfare provisions and benefits, point to a scale and a spatial dimension that is not immediately visible at the micro-social level. Instead, the cases of Totò, Ciro, Vita, and Francesco show how it is possible to track their constraints on different scales through their experiences as residents of one badland. Their illegal occupation of and devotion to the houses of the ZEN describe the socio-economic constraints that pushed them to this place. These constraints continue to affect their life. Totò, Ciro, Vita, and Francesco continue to negotiate with them. Illegal occupation and devotion to the domestic space can be read as tactics or a form of resistance to Palermo's economic and symbolic dynamics which marginalise them. The example of Totò illustrates the agency of a sense-experienced urban space (he had to cope with a humid and crumbling dwelling, and a bad relationship with the owner of the apartment in the historical centre), while the experiences of Ciro, Vita and Francesco point to agency of a non-ethnographic space (they cope with the effect of a structural space related to the real-estate and job markets, as well as particular institutional regulations). The duality of space as set for violent interactions and of space as actor (in the ethnographic and non-ethnographic spaces) is evident. In these three different experiences – all of them on a micro-social scale – we can directly disclose their reaction to cope with dissimilar but individual types of violence, where space "acts" differently.

The division between different types of space and violence may seem too schematic. Surely, different levels interact. However, we think that each example can show an issue and a predominant concern, respectively. In the next section, we turn to San Siro and its neighbourhood committee. While Ferdinando Fava's ethnography underlines personal responses to different scales of violence, Paolo's case shows a more organised strategy for coping with them. The life story of one of its members – whom we will call Anna – demonstrates again the space-violence *continuum* and its relationship with an urban badland. Anna's life trajectory will also help us to take the rigidity out of the analytical scheme, making it smoother and more fluid.

San Siro: The neighbourhood committee

Paolo's fieldwork in San Siro proceeds along several directions of analysis, focusing on a specific group: the neighbourhood committee [*Comitato di quartiere*], and the strategies developed by its members to deal with what they perceive as violent urban space. The neighbourhood committee is one of two local committees (the second being the "Committee of the residents" [*Comitato abitanti*], is linked to a Milanese social movement that fights for the right to housing), which has been in the neighbourhood for about 20 years. It was founded by a woman, a former militant of the Italian Communist Party and a resident of San Siro from the 1930s. Today the committee has about 15 members, mostly elderly Italians. Every Wednesday, the members of the committee meet in a room owned by ALER, the public agency for social housing in the department of Milan. Usually, someone visits the committee: policemen, politicians from both the local and national level, ALER's managers, or members of *Azienda Milanese Servizi Ambientali*, a waste collection company. A public show takes place during the meetings: purposes, objectives and intentions are expressed, but nothing really changes. The committee focuses its activity on an indiscriminate struggle against illegal occupation. Whether executed by illegal actors (an ambiguous racketeering network probably managed by several small criminal groups), or by a social movement that explicitly fights for the right to the city, squatting is the public enemy against which members of the committee fight on a daily basis. Certainly, squatting is not a violent phenomenon *per se*. However, some practices related to the appropriation of the empty apartments of San Siro (cracking locks, removing doors, and in some cases, tearing down walls) are perceived as extremely brutal, especially by the elderly residents. As one member of the committee explained: "Believe me! That door that they remove with a crowbar [...] If you are at home, you feel sick! It hurts you, at a psychological level. You feel a violence, as they do it against you"[14].

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14. All the interviews presented in this paragraph were carried out in February and March 2017.

The institutional interlocutors (Municipality, ALER, etc.) approve the committee's strategy. Obviously, it allows them to shift attention from structural weaknesses, bad management and economic deficits to the everyday social violence that elderly Italians in the housing projects have to face. A local politician explained:

> This [San Siro] is a social housing project, the situation is scary there, concerning the *security*, because, obviously, you find illegal activities of all kinds that I have repeatedly reported, from drug dealers to prostitution. There are illegal occupations – I think there are more squatters than regular residents there...[15]

Often, the committee meetings end with a sort of press review, edited by a member of the committee. The review includes articles about marginal areas in Milan, ALER and criminality, but also about migrants or the refugee crisis, as well as other more social themes. Apart from the weekly meetings, the committee's members take action. For example, in the past few years, they have organised night patrols, and installed alarms in their houses and CCTV in their courtyards. They have also given interviews to journalists, social workers and researchers.

Through their "talk of crime" (Caldeira 1992) and the strategic use of a rhetoric of fear (Cohen 1980), their meetings and a securitising practice, such as implementing surveillance technology, the committee of San Siro tries to signify the radical changes that have transformed their neighbourhood in the past few years and the violence they experience, as a result, in their everyday lives. Their common feeling is expressed by one committee member: "We are a ghetto in the ghetto"[16]. Committee members perceive themselves as an Italian minority in a marginalised area that is increasingly inhabited by foreigners. They perceive themselves as the rightful residents of an urban badland. San Siro influences and affects their lives. The committee provides an answer, a challenge against an urban evolution experienced as violent by a specific social group of San Siro.

The institutional abandonment of San Siro puts in place the end of the meta-narratives that structured most of the lives of these old women and men. San Siro's proletarian tradition is over, and the Communist Party these people grew up with no longer exists. The factories of Milan are closed down and replaced by an advanced tertiary sector comprising transnational companies, including the fashion industry, and design agencies. The members of the committee do not recognise their "own" urban neighbourhood. From their point of view, their home has turned into a violent and unsafe place.

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15. Interview with a politician, member of the Municipality of Milan.
16. Interview with a resident who was a committee member.

And paradoxically, they try to resist this process by embracing the same conservative and racist rhetoric they fought during their politically engaged youth.

If we turn our attention to the individual trajectories of the members of the committee, the ethnographic gesture reveals, in all its complexity, the space-violence *continuum* explored above. Anna is a member of the committee, but she does not completely agree with its vision. The committee provides her with a place in which she can maintain social relationships. However, her own life story seems to challenge some of the committee's actions. Anna was a squatter herself, an illegal occupant of a public house; thus, she herself has represented the public enemy that the committee is now fighting against. Anna is not the only former squatter in the committee. This apparently paradoxical situation testifies to a multifaceted and hidden history of the neighbourhood, characterised by poverty and exclusion. In the same way, the public image of the committee – based on its conservative and racist rhetoric – contrasts with the more inclusive and tolerant everyday practices of its members.

Anna was born close to San Siro, in a *casa minima* – a very deprived public housing project based on Rationalist ideas. Anna is poor among the poor. Sometimes, the place where she was born is used by other members of the committee to distinguish themselves from her: "She's got a *casa minima* mentality", someone once said.

Anna approached Paolo herself, asking him if she could give an interview. In this way, she involved him, creating a relationship through an anthropological gesture, organising a projective scheme to narrate herself (Althabe 1969). She wanted to tell her story: "Come and talk to me," she said. They sat down in her tiny living room in San Siro, drinking espresso. Her narrative focused on two elements: the place where she was born, and her violent and alcoholic ex-husband:

> My life… It's like the story of the Little Match Girl. Something like that […] I came from the lowest level, the level zero. After me, only gypsies: *casa minima*, one room, four, five people. I am the first of five sisters […] My mother had the last one when I got married. I was pregnant. They forced me. At that time, I didn't know men. I met this one. He used to wait for me for hours while I was working […] I thought: "Poor man!". I didn't like him so much. Then my mother quarrelled with me. She went away for Christmas. She went to her sister's house. I was alone. It was cold. He called me: "What are you doing?" […] He came and he turned the stove on. He was like an angel for me. I was wrong. He was a beast, a BEAST. He mistreated me my whole life. He beat my children. My son is now sick.

Anna was born in 1939, the year in which the Second World War began. Her mother came from southern Italy to look for a new life in Milan: "I was extremely poor, I lived among thieves and bitches". At 10, Anna finished primary school. She could not continue her studies, because the monthly ticket for public transport was too expensive. She started to work. This was the single moment in which Anna cried during the interview. She got married at 19. She moved to San Siro with her husband and their first child. She lived in her parents-in-law's house for a while, then occupied an apartment in her mother's neighbourhood before she went back to San Siro. She moved a couple of times before she moving in with her in-laws and eventually succeeded in formalising her situation, that is, she got a rent contract for the same house.

After 16 years of marriage, she got a divorce. Her husband is still alive. He has never paid for his abuses:

> One day he told me I was a bitch: "Hey, if I was a bitch, I would get more money than you. I could cover you with my money. You were a thief; I was not a bitch. So, I am still in the ghetto. You got out, but you have the ghetto here inside [in the head]".

After her divorce, Anna was "reborn". The Communist Party became her relief. Meetings, demonstrations, fairs: the party gave her the opportunity to develop social relations, to start a new life, meet other men and to fall in love.

Anna does not like her neighbourhood, but she does not feel unsafe:

> I came here when I was 20 years old. Now I am getting to know that this place is horrible. I thought it was nicer than *casa minima*, but it is not [...] My mother is from Sicily: "Why did she come here?" I started to work at 12, they exploited me. Fuck you. Studying in Sicily would have been better [...] My family developed there. Here, one relative died in the mountains [during the Second World War], the others did not go to school [...] They were poor, very poor. My grandfather came here because he had four daughters. He had to prepare the *dote* [dowry] for them. These horrible choices kill you, then.

Anna's story exemplifies the intersectional relation between different types of violence embodied in a singular biography through 80 years of change: migration, the war, political struggles, the death of the big Italian parties and their ideologies, the evolution of a marginal neighbourhood within Milan. Anna's story testifies to the structural constraints that blocked her life opportunities and made her experience poverty, brutality and sexual abuse. Anna experienced physical violence from her husband, and a structural violence that forced her to react by abandoning education and

getting a job. Her membership of the committee helped her, replacing her political affiliation, providing her with the means to combat loneliness. The city of Milan is the urban space where Anna experienced her deprivation. At the same time, Milan, or more precisely, certain areas of Milan, are some of the actors of her biography: from the house where she was born, to San Siro, urban space concurred in constructing her representations and the ways other social actors saw her – that *casa minima* stereotype against which she has fought all her life, that "territorial stigma" (Wacquant 2008), which began with her. Anna's life story is the combination of her (violent) experiences and the urban spaces she crossed.

Conclusion: Built environment and social bonds

In this paper, we "unsystematically" mapped and compared the different types of violence of the ZEN and of San Siro on different scales. More specifically, we considered illegal occupation at a social level, stigmatisation at a symbolic level, and poverty, deprivation and economic crisis at a structural level, trying to interpret their relationship with space as a historic, political, economic, and social product, using two dichotomous images: the post-Fordist socio-spatial configuration of San Siro and the non-Fordist spatial configuration of the ZEN. Moreover, we conducted a comparative analysis, starting with urban space, analysing the way in which these socio-spatial configurations can be considered violent, and how and why. We stated that while violence may become increasingly visible, space itself can become violent. We repeat that this relationship is not deterministic, in the sense that a certain space causes certain forms of violence. Instead, the agency attributed to space in relation to violence remains complex. We tried to show how – within ethnography – it is possible to interpret these forms of violence and their connection to different forms of space.

We showed how different types of violence affect the residents of the two neighbourhoods, changing over time. First, we described the illegal occupations of the ZEN through the narratives of three interlocutors whom we called Totò, Ciro and Vita. We interpreted them essentially as responses to abusive personal relations on a micro scale, as responses to policies and regulations on a mid-scale, and as responses to structural violence on a macro scale. We compared this to a specific group from San Siro, the neighbourhood committee, and a peculiar life story of one of its members whom we called Anna. Totò, Ciro, Vita and Anna confirmed the interaction between the different dimensions of violence and urban space, in both synchronic and diachronic ways.

Through their stories, we tried to demonstrate that urban space is not just the set for violent action. It is also an actor and "produces" violence itself. This happens on different scales. Moving from social violence to symbolic, political and structural violence, space seems to fade. However, space is also an actor; it influences everyday life. For example, stigmatisation affects the ZEN and San Siro as a whole, as a homogeneous unity. Our interlocutors entangled their life stories with their experiences and the spaces they occupied. Thus, different levels of violence and different spaces seem to influence each other.

How do we identify the traces of structural constraints and causal powers (the traces of the macro-systemic scale)? This was possible by unwrapping the different types of constrictions present in the narrative interaction with our interlocutors, or in its background: they are the effects that limit the individual initiatives with which they struggle, but which cannot be attributed either to violent or unequal and coactive interpersonal relationships on a micro scale, nor to explicitly penalising or discriminating institutional policies on a macro scale. In our fields, unfortunately, relegation is often the sum of these effects on these two scales: individual trajectories intertwined with reported violence, discrimination and systemic political-economic mechanisms that maintain inequalities, and political omissions or absences. Violent causal powers manifest themselves when the agency desires of our interlocutor rise or are stopped, limited or eradicated.

Two very different case studies share some elements that allow us to introduce an anthropological comparison, built on a theoretical framework concerning violence and urban space. Moving from a synchronic description of the forms of violence registered in two Italian urban badlands, we connected them through what we labelled the space-violence *continuum* and interrogated this *continuum* through a diachronic analysis of various individual and group responses.

At the centre of the relationship between urban space and violence is the old question concerning the relationships between the built environment and social bonds, and the causation of the former and its determination by the latter. Also, a radical cognitive conversion is needed to go beyond Hume's notion of cause, to the opposition between methodological individualism and holism, to understand the *effets de lieu*, and to explore the conditions under which we are allowed to talk about the agency of the urban space, without falling into a spatial fetish, or relying on yet another spatial metaphor. In the 1970s, Henry Lefebvre led the way in starting to answer these questions without being trapped in a dualism of built environment and

society. The built environment is the material form of social organisation and, as such, is never neutral, but rather, is the place where asymmetric power relations confront each other.

Contemporary cities provide relevant insights into the linkages of macro-dynamics with the texture of the human experience. In other words, the spatial dimension has changed, creating new kinds of relations that combine urban spaces and global processes. This paper is just the first step in an ongoing process. As we have tried to explain, we are comparing the results of our research and trying to extract elements upon which to build broader theoretical questions that allow us to identify deep regional and historical processes and structural factors from the rich ethnographic details provided by such studies.

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