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Fieldwork and changing scales

The analysis of different economic spaces

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ABSTRACT: How does the construction of fieldwork change when we expand beyond the “village” (in the sense of Malinowski), to investigate and assemble different scales of analysis? In this article, I explore the role of fieldwork as built and delimited by specific, historically and theoretically situated research practices, making use of evolutions in the framework of my approach to “economic spaces” during my early fieldwork in the south of Italy. I look back at the intellectual environment of anthropology in Rome during the 1980s, paying attention to the kind of fieldwork that we conducted within one of the traditions of Italian anthropological studies. I then examine the “expansion” of fieldwork from my own experience during the study of the economic aspects of social phenomena.

KEYWORDS: FIELDWORK, SPACES, SCALES, ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY, ITALY.

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How does the construction of fieldwork change when we expand beyond the “village” to investigate and assemble different scales of analysis? In this article, I explore the role of fieldwork as built and delimited by specific, historically and theoretically situated research practices, making use of evolutions in the framework of my approach to “economic spaces” during my early fieldwork in the south of Italy¹. Fieldwork is probably the first specific element, both distinctive and controversial, of anthropological practice. The empirical dimension is not a prerogative of anthropology; other social sciences also take qualitative and ethnographic approaches. The proximity with other qualitative postures requires us to clarify the relationship with the «reference reality» (Olivier de Sardan 2008) in each discipline. Malinowski considered and presented fieldwork as a unique moment in which anthropologists do anthropology, living with real people, sharing their activities and language:

In Ethnography, the writer is his own chronicler and the historian at the same time, while his sources are no doubt easily accessible, but also supremely elusive and complex; they are not embodied in fixed, material documents, but in the behaviour and in the memory of living men (Malinowski 1972 [1922]: 3).

The radical critique of anthropology during the 1980s involved writing and authorship, and also ethnography (Clifford, Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988), producing changes in the way we conceive fieldwork. Clarifying the conditions of research and taking into account the presence of the researcher in the analysis, are now seen as necessary elements to make the anthropological work credible (Kilani 1995): the field exists only through the presence of the researcher and by his extended observations. It is probably even more clear today that the field does not exist outside the delimitation and framing employed by the anthropologist during the research. This framing, which changes depending on the observer, the object, the theoretical perspective adopted, and the characteristics of the terrain itself, also reveals the arbitrariness of our ethnographic choices. But arbitrariness does not make this spatial and temporal fragment of reality less relevant for

1. This text is a rewriting of the first part of my *Habilitation à diriger des recherches*, defended at Aix-Marseille University in July 2017 (Siniscalchi 2017b). A first draft of this text was presented during the Third Biennial Anthropological Talks in South Tyrol, the symposium on *The Malinowskian Legacy in Ethnography* (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, September 21-22, 2017). I have been able to improve this text thanks to the exchanges we had during the symposium and the critical comments and suggestions of Susana Narotzky and Paolo Viazzo.

understanding social phenomena. In the late 1990s, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson extended the debate, analyzing the field as the site, method, and the specific location of the anthropologist (1997b, 1997c). Introducing the collective book *Anthropological Locations*, they asked «What are we to do with a discipline that loudly rejects received ideas of “the local”, even while ever more firmly insisting on a method that takes it for granted?» (1997c: 4). In this article I return to the intellectual environment of anthropology as it was practiced in Rome during the 1980s, with particular attention to the delimitation of the fieldwork that we conducted within one of the traditions of Italian anthropological studies. I then look at the “expansion” of the fieldwork in my own experience, realized through the study of the economic aspects of social phenomena, and through concepts of scale, economic space and industrial districts.

Going back the Roman school of ethnology

In 1986, when I began my studies at the University of Rome La Sapienza, the *Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia* offered Italy’s only ethno-anthropological program leading to a doctorate. The *Istituto di Etnologia* (Institute of Ethnology) was located on the ground floor of the main building of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. Its physical presence at the university constituted a visible mark reflecting the history of the discipline and its institutionalization in the university in Rome. In 1975, Vinigi Grottanelli – the first to hold the title of chair of ethnology of La Sapienza – changed the name of the *Istituto delle Civiltà primitive* (Institute of Primitive Civilizations) to the *Istituto di Etnologia*, but the ancient name was still inscribed above the entryway. He had contributed to its creation after the Second World War, in 1947, as well as that of the *Scuola di perfezionamento in scienze etnologiche* (a post-graduate school in ethnological studies). During several decades, the *Scuola di perfezionamento*, directed by Raffaele Petazzoni², had a similar function to the later doctorate of research³, and represented the anthropological training of a number of Italian scholars (Ernesto De Martino, among others). In the 1950s and 1960s, the *Istituto di Etnologia* of Sapienza thus became one of the important centers of Italian anthropology and

2. Raffaele Petazzoni held the chair of history of religions and that one of ethnological studies, before the creation of the first chair in this discipline.

3. The doctorate of research in Italy was instituted later (see DPR 382, 11 July 1980). It was only in 1986 that the first doctorate in anthropology appeared in La Sapienza, with three positions. Few universities in Italy offered doctoral positions in anthropology. This number remained constant until the budget restrictions of recent years, making La Sapienza one of the important training centers for anthropological studies.

ethnology (Gaillard 2004: 201; see also Alliegro 2011; Viazzo 2017). In the 1980s, the institutes were absorbed by the university departments and no longer existed formally in the university's organization. But the places haven't changed: there, in the institute's cramped spaces, submerged in the books and journals that cover the main room's walls from floor to ceiling, the leap towards other societies and other universes was almost immediate.

At that time, the choice to frequent the *Istituto di Etnologia* was not simply the start of your training in anthropology. It was also the choice, unconscious, of an academic field – in Bourdieu's sense – precisely situated, that of ethnology of the *scuola romana d'etnologia* (Roman school of ethnology). This “branch” of Italian anthropology differed both intellectually and institutionally between the study of *tradizioni popolari* (the history of “popular traditions” or folklore) on one side, and the Italian cultural anthropology on the other⁴. For those who, like me, began their training in the framework of the Roman school of ethnology, the distance between these branches of Italian anthropology became evident gradually, over the course of the lessons and required reading that was primarily comprised of works from the literature in English and French.

It wasn't until several years later, after the retirement of Bernardo Bernardi – a well-known Africanist, specialized in age classes (see Bernardi 1990) who maintained an independent position at the heart of the Roman context – that the existence of factions became flagrant inside the *Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia*. An ideological and methodological border existed between the researchers associated with the *Istituto di Etnologia* and a second chair in ethnology. Bernardi was succeeded by another scholar, Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani, who was the nephew of folklorist Raffaele Lombardi Satriani, and likewise a specialist in popular traditions, and belonged to another academic faction. Two ways of conceiving and practicing anthropology faced each other on either of this border⁵. One was a product of the Italian trends in *demologia* (the study of popular traditions) inherited from Ernesto De Martino and studies on the studies following the tradition of historicism. It reflected a Gramscian reading of the “working/popular classes” and the Italian “ethnological” contexts. Signorini (1992: 21-24) denounced the near absence of field investigations in this branch of Italian anthropology, the

4. Represented by Tullio Tentori, who was strongly influenced by the North American *culture and personality* school at the time (see Viazzo 2017).

5. These clashes between specialists of “popular traditions” and “ethnologists” were not limited to the sole area of La Sapienza's *Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia*: they were the local expression of conflicts and power struggles nationally in recruitment policies and in the distribution of university positions (see Palumbo 2013).

demologia, and the application of rigid interpretative frameworks that did not allow us to grasp the contextual complexity of social studies. The tradition on the opposite side of the border was inscribed with the theoretical frameworks of British social anthropology, traditionally functionalist or structural-functionalist, oriented towards the English-speaking world, and partially to French anthropology. This second tradition considered history not as a human condition – the «being in history» of De Martino – but as an objectifiable history, an ensemble of the traces of the past (see Pavanello 2012: 18). It privileged fieldwork in countries outside of Europe, following that of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, and Raymond Firth. Italo Signorini – who supervised my *tesi di laurea* and then my PhD thesis – was a relentless defender of an anthropology founded on thorough knowledge of contexts, one that requires a rigorous study of the literature and extensive immersion on the terrain⁶. More generally, the most important element that this second tradition defended was a specific conception (and imagination) of fieldwork. This also acted as an element of differentiation from other Italian perspectives.

Ethnological missions: terrains of research and training

Italo Signorini led different *missioni etnologiche* (ethnological [research] missions, according to the “local” terminology), in Africa and in Mexico. In 1983, he opened one more, the *Missione etnologica nel Sannio*, in the Italian region of Campania. All these missions were conceived as collective terrains – even when some work was differentiated in time from others – in order to enable these students to advance new hypotheses in direct dialogue with the anthropological tradition that had preceded them. How was the South of Italy analyzed and what kind of place did it have in this particular anthropological framework? At the time, doing research on an Italian terrain was something new for the scholars of the Ethnological Institute. But for Italo Sgnorini, opening this research field did not indicate a rapprochement with the Italian approaches to the history of folklore (*demologia* and *storia delle tradizioni popolari*). This research location – particularly the small town of San Marco dei Cavoti – situated in the Apennines, less than 400 km from Rome, was primarily conceived as a nearby terrain for initiation and experimentation in Americanist and Africanist anthropological research methods. It was not specifically intended as an opportunity to examine

6. Starting at the end of the 1960s, Italo Sgnorini conducted his fieldwork on the Nzema in Ghana, the Hauve on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and then the Nahuatl in the Sierra Norte of Puebla, Mexico.

southern Italy with “exotic” perspectives. As Maria Minicuci remembers it, «[Italo Signorini] opened this type of space with the precise idea [...] that a certain research field and its confrontation with the [anthropological] tradition could contribute to a rethinking of the anthropological categories and concepts acquired elsewhere» (1994: 646).

San Marco dei Cavoti was effectively a research space conceived to be complementary to the Ghanaian and Mexican terrains. The anthropology practiced there needed to have the same characteristics as the research in foreign countries: as if we were working in Ghana or Mexico, we were required to spend longer periods in the field, aligning with Malinowski’s legacy on fieldwork (see Malinowski 1972 [1922]: 2-11)⁷. Our perspective was formed primarily from studying classic texts from British anthropology, such as Firth, Radcliffe Brown and Leach, but also Gluckman or Turner. These authors would allow us to find the best ethnographic distance within this close context, even if the geographic and cultural proximity of San Marco dei Cavoti was misleading⁸. The anthropology of the Mediterranean, as well as the ethnological works from France constituted our comparative framework⁹.

San Marco was not conceived simply as a training ground to familiarize students and scientists with the difficulties of ethnographic research. The choice of themes, “attributed” to one or the other, responded to a “monographical” finality. From the perspective of scientists in the Roman school, we were contributing to a recomposition of the puzzle of this society and this place. At a distance in time of a few years later, we were like other teams that had, in the same spirit, done this for the Huave (Signorini 1979) or the Nzema (Grottanelli 1977, 1978), following the model of what Vinigi Grottanelli called a «grande monografia etnica integrale» (a large, integral

7. «[...] As they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance» (Malinowski 1972 [1922]: 6).

8. San Marco dei Cavoti (alt. 700 m), around 4,000 inhabitants in 1990, is located 40 km from Benevento, in the center of the Campania region, close to Apulia. The difficulty and scarcity of roadways and railways between the capital and this small Samnium city, as well as the distinct dialect of the region, contributed to a pronounced *spaesamento* (disorientation).

9. If the works on France were included in this range of references (Zonabend, Verdier, Bromberger, Ravis Giordani, Augustins, Segalen, Salitot), those of Italian anthropologists on Italy (Lombardi Satriani, Faeta, Signorelli, Gallini, De Martino, etc.), except in some cases, were excluded. Even though they were not part of my training, I have read the studies of Italian anthropologists that worked in the theoretical framework of Marxist anthropology. The impression that I took away from these studies is that, in a part of them, often the fieldwork, only fed and confirmed the theoretical framework.

ethnic monograph) (Pavanello 2012: 20). This model influenced the general approach to fieldwork of researchers working inside these ethnological missions, including that one where I worked in southern Italy.

This terrain [San Marco dei Cavoti] became a center where diverse competencies and interests converged, where techniques, research perspectives, and different methods were tested. It is without a doubt the only community where, in recent times, we have the largest number of publications, new theses, articles, and monographic works, concerning the same place as seen from several angles (Minicuci 1994: 646).

We did not work in teams, and exchanges between us, when they existed, were based on friendship, or personal and intellectual relationships. Each researcher conducted her or his own fieldwork, and a chronological distance separated the work of one from that of the others. But the previous research conducted by those who had preceded us was considered a starting point for each of us in our own work. Thinking back to the work we did in the Samnium, we were actually operating within a framework that recalled Signorini's *Gente di laguna* (1979), even if the pieces that composed it were combined over time. Most likely, Italo Signorini had never thought of our research in a unitary way, nor had he really envisaged a *Gente di montagna*. More than a concrete editorial project, the case of San Marco represented a posture of research. But our ethnographies contributed to the construction and delimitation of San Marco as a "place" in itself¹⁰.

The missing element, or the place of economic anthropology

After the research on the local kinship system and the spiritual kinship (Palumbo 1991), other researchers were interested in local therapists, conceptions of the disease (Pandolfi 1991), and religious rituals in San Marco dei Cavoti¹¹. In this collective "monograph", one field remained unexplored: economic relationships and activities.

The work on economic anthropology – which can be traced to Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* – was most prolific and visible in the decades between 1950 and 1970. At the time, the controversies between substantivists and formalists focused the international debates

10. At that period, even if we read Geertz (1988) or Clifford and Marcus' works (1986) among others – this literature was progressively acquired by the library of the *Istituto di Etnologia* – the radical critique of anthropology was not still integrated in our training and in the fieldwork perspectives of the Roman school.

11. Other young scientists from the research team of Italo Signorini – as well as Signorini himself – conducted periods of research there before going to other countries.

around the possibility, or not, of exporting conceptual frameworks elaborated from the occidental market economics, and economic science, to contexts outside of the Europe. In Italy of the 1970s, the confrontation with Marxian theories structured the scenario that would be, over the course of the 1980s, characterized by a historiographical and anthropological interest in substantivist perspectives and later, in the publications and translations, of formalist works. French economic anthropology, which was a Marxist economic anthropology, received particular attention. Italian approaches found a fertile terrain in the studies of *demologia* that had already integrated the Marxian and Gramscian perspectives, producing theories (Cirese) and ethnographic research on economic anthropology issues (Papa, Solinas, Clemente, Angioni, Meloni; see Siniscalchi 2002). Sharecropping was one of the privileged fields of research.

The research theme that I was “assigned” for my investigation in San Marco dei Cavoti concerned agrarian contracts – the contracts of *parsenale* – and the social relationships that support them or are formed by them. Linked by a contract of “co-participation” (tenant farming or sharecropping), the landowner and the farmer who works the land use the term *parsenale* to designate and address each other. The significance of a complex social framework in the contracts that I would study appeared implicitly in previously conducted works on spiritual kinship (Palumbo 1991). My research in San Marco responded to the need to study these aspects of the social system, and the network of complex relationships. Italo Signorini’s attitude toward the economic dimension – which had remained unexplored in San Marco – probably stemmed from the historical perspectives of economic anthropology in Italy and the predominance of Marxian interpretation frameworks from which he kept a safe distance. The ideological weight of those frameworks often prevailed over the fieldwork and seemed to prevent any fine understanding of the ethnographic contexts. This did not prevent him, however, from being sensitive to the social bonds that were established from economic activities and relations, and he considered economics as an important dimension for understanding local contexts, in the tradition of British structural-functionalist anthropology.

The relationships of *parsenale*, while approaching the links of spiritual kinship, were situated in the field of economic activities, and that of sharecropping in particular. In the specific form found in the Samnium, the proximity to the spiritual kinship system conferred a particular comparative interest to these agrarian relationships.

The agrarian contracts “naturally” pushed me to interact with other Italian anthropological traditions, primarily in the field of kinship and economic anthropology. The economy that I was preparing to study in southern Italy was an agricultural economy, the most “classic” sector of activity and the one most studied in both Mediterranean and economic anthropology. To venture towards southern Italy, it was necessary to know the classics of Mediterranean anthropology which filled the shelves of a small room of the *Istituto d’Etnologia*. Much of this work involved economic questions: tenant farming and financial relationships, social stratification, the “under-developed” economic conditions of southern Italy, and pastoralism.¹² At that period, the “long term” had become a fundamental tool of analysis and explanation for social, political, and economic configurations, influencing my own perspective. But I didn’t go to San Marco to study the memory of lost practices. The relationships of *parsenale* continued to equally regulate and structure both the local economic life and important aspects of social life. Malinowski’s *Coral Gardens and their magic* (1935), together with Firth’s *Primitive Polynesian Economy* (1939), still constituted a sort of fieldwork manual on economic issues that concerned agriculture, land tenure and the organization of rural space. But the research I conducted brought me closer to the study of African economies and the Marxist economic anthropology of North America, to which the seminars of Anthony Wade Brown, also a researcher at the *Istituto di Etnologia*, had introduced me.

The «Ethnological mission in Ghana»

San Marco dei Cavoti – where I spent six months in 1990, for my first period of research – gave me a taste of field research and the desire to extend the theme I had addressed to other aspects of the local society. At this time in my training, I had integrated the need to become a “true” anthropologist, to do research in distant societies. A large new national project – financed by the *Ministero dell’Università e della ricerca scientifica* – had been developed by three teams, in Pisa, Siena, and Rome. This project was aimed at reviving the research of the *Missione etnologica in Ghana* (ethnological mission in Ghana), initiated originally by Vinigi Grottanelli in the 1950s and situated in southern-occidental Ghana, in Beyin (district of Jomoro, Western Region), the capital of the ancient pre-colonial kingdom of Nzema. The reopening of the site was, in part, the opportunity to reaffirm

12. Among the studies concerning Italy, several works could be associated with political economy (see Roseberry 1988) and the world system theory of Wallerstein (1974).

continuity with the research tradition of the *scuola romana di etnologia*, and also a way of allowing the second generation of researchers, of which I was part, to elaborate new hypotheses and enrich the knowledge base, while simultaneously exchanging ideas with previous work. In the region of Benevento, during my first fieldwork, I was not only interested in agrarian contracts, but also in the model of stratification and social status. In light of this initial research, Ghana represented the occasion to approach another kinship system, not agnatic as in San Marco, but matrilineal combined with a patrilocal system of residence. Nzema's marriage and divorce as well as kinship terminology (Signorini), games, rituals, and power structures (Wade-Brown), the transmission of women's property (Rocchi), the linguistic system (Cardona), and agriculture (Lanternari and Cerulli) were progressively and systematically explored during the 1970s. In a more recent phase, a second generation of scholars (Pavanello, Palumbo, Valsecchi) focused on the land tenure system, the political system and property devolution. They were also interested in the strong presence of market crops (cash crops), and in questioning the effects of economic transformations on the kinship system, within the perspective of more recent work, especially Anglo-Saxon, on Akan populations. In this renewed ethnographic setting, my contribution once again concerned the economic sphere, while paying particular attention to the dimension of gender. The object of my research on *Women, Society and Power among the Nzema of Ghana* was the social, political, and economic organization as seen from the women's point of view. The aim was to investigate their status as well as their perceptions of the social and economic structure, with particular attention to the areas in which their role appeared to be central (genealogical memory and kinship management, marriage strategies, inheritance) or in which they seemed to have high degrees of autonomy (management of the domestic economy, food production, market activities). In the domestic economy, the cultivation and commercialization of food crops and the purchase of food for the "compounds" (groups of houses) were specifically female activities. I had planned to analyze the channels by which money arrived to the compound, along with women's market activities (such as the sale of smoked fish), but I was also interested in the wider trade channels, such as those related to the production of copra oil. The core of the research was no longer just a "village" but the circulations of goods, and the commercial and political networks established by women belonging to the same population and located in a large area on the Ghana coast.

Research sometimes takes unexpected paths, and that project never materialized because of the premature death of Italo Signorini¹³. Thus I decided to develop a different PhD project, but still focusing on the economic dimension of social relations. Even though the related fieldwork in Ghana remained at the stage of a potential project, the comparison – explicit and implicit – between southern Italy, where finally I conducted my PhD research, and the African contexts, were real, and not only with respect to kinship, but also to economic activities and the place of women in society. What I had meant to do in Africa – investigate with the methodological and theoretical tools of my first Italian fieldwork – I was finally able to do in the fieldwork in southern Italy, taking advantage of the Africanist knowledge that I had acquired during the first two years of my PhD training. When I returned to San Marco, having worked on the Africanist literature and a research project that was not located in a specific locality but was designed to observe economic and social circulation, encouraged me to explore not simply a “place” but the economic network extending beyond the “limits” of the municipality. At the same time, I no longer considered that I was investigating a specific “cultural area” delimited by these circulations and economic links. The social history and the Italian *microstoria* gave me a first model for how to work on different scales of analysis (Grendi 1977, Levi 1985, 1991, Revel 1996).

Practices and representations of the economy

A second long investigation in San Marco dei Cavoti began in 1994. The objective of my PhD research project was the analysis of the social and economic organization, beginning with the study of a set of exchange circuits – for goods, work, provisioning, services – that appeared to link the family groups and the different social strata in the local population. In particular, I envisioned analyzing the form and function of the economic relationships and exchange systems, and exploring the logics that organized them. My interest in the systems of exchange grew out of the study of the *parsenale* relationships. The farming families proved to be capable of using the tenant farming and sharecropping contracts in a strategic fashion and in different periods of the developmental cycle. The work of Gluckman and Leach, and their attention to social changes, had encouraged me to consider the perpetual instability of agreements between individuals or groups. I

13. The funding of the national project he directed, which should have financed my fieldwork was blocked for several months.

interpreted social stratification as a language allowing individuals to place themselves in the local social scene in a situational and conjunctural way, to negotiate and confront each other in a process of permanent redefinition of identities and social relationships (Siniscalchi 1993). I showed that the *parsenale* represented an economic and relational mechanism, not simply a category of farmers, but a link that goes beyond the strictly contractual limits generally prioritized by the majority of anthropological and historiographical work dedicated to agrarian co-participation in southern Italy (Siniscalchi 1995, 1996). Moreover, these particular agrarian relationships seemed to be a part of a system of broader social and economic relationships between families and individuals. I wanted to address the “challenge” of producing a true work of economic anthropology in a context situated in southern Italy, long marked in terms of underdevelopment by the interpretations of classical analyses of the history of the Mezzogiorno presented by certain branches of Italian anthropology and by the anthropological studies of the Mediterranean. Marxist economic anthropology – the prevailing French (Meillassoux, Terray, Godelier), but even more, the North Americans (Wolf) – was an important reference for considering the relationship between human groups and their environment in terms of constraints and adaptation. The «world system» of Wallerstein helped me understand the economic relationships, the overlaps between town centers and the peripheries, and the role of the semi-periphery played by the regions of southern Italy until recently. Most of the approaches to the political economy concentrated on larger dynamics and the historical dimension of social phenomena. Eric Wolf’s analyses of “peasantry” which take account of social, economic, and political institutions as well as exterior forces, in the (peasant) context, was particularly pertinent¹⁴. The comparisons with the Alpine regions were also useful for different scales in the analysis of practices. Studying the “hidden” frontier that separates the region of Trentino from that of South Tyrol (1974), John Cole and Eric Wolf exposed the relationships that link the economy, ecology, and politics. In doing so they underlined the need to situate practices (economic, place of residence, kinship, and inheritance) and local ideologies into broader frameworks, incorporating a diachronic and spatial viewpoint from which they take their meanings. Notably, they also emphasized situating these

14. The variability of situation and historical realities prompted Wolf (1966, 2001) to refrain from considering “peasants” as “category of class” nor the rural farming populations as “closed corporate communities” except under certain historical conditions.

practices in the long history of economic relationships, relationships with the market and the successive periods of political domination to which the region was subjected. Taking account of the *long durée* seemed important to me for considering the diversity of political and economic situations that characterize Italy. Although I largely shared the perspectives of political economy and the need to look at the interrelations (political and economic), I wanted to understand the point of view of the social actors, their daily practices, and the meanings they gave to their economic practices. The analysis of economic networks connecting families and social groups revealed different dynamics of agnatic logics, and it allowed me to highlight some of the regulatory mechanisms of economic interactions, particularly the relationship of solidarity among family interests and commercial interests (Gudeman 1986; Gudeman, Rivera 1991).

“New” economies

This was also the beginning of a change in my approach to the research: I became more attentive to both the extended temporalities and the overlaps among different analytical scales¹⁵. I no longer considered this place of research independently from the larger social, political, and economic contexts in which it was situated. At the same time, the spatial and temporal expansion (involved in my fieldwork) led me to look beyond the monographic framework in which I had initiated my investigation in southern Italy. The death of Italo Signorini marked the end of this “collective” research period that had lasted more than fifteen years. I was the last researcher working in the framework of the *Missione etnologica nel Sannio*. This position of being “alone” on the terrain allowed me to alter the perspective even more. My research took a different direction, far from the idea of the «grande monografia etnica integrale», allowing me to go beyond the limits of the small town. Situated in the North East of the Campania region, this terrain was at the junction of several “historical” and administrative areas that deserved to be considered. Between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, at the *Ecole française* in Rome, the seminars of the EHESS coordinated by Gérard Delille constituted a rich space of dialogue between anthropologists and historians that encouraged me to always be attentive to historical processes. The agricultural practices,

15. Not only in the sense of the *microstoria*, but also of the political economy (cf. Roseberry 1988, Wolf 1990, 2001); see also the collective work on Puerto Rico (Steward *et al.* 1956) where the notion of scale was already used.

political logistics and exchange networks, have encouraged me to constantly compare my research with the works of economic history (Giorgetti, Gribaudo, Grendi), as well as with the new approaches of the Historiography of the Mezzogiorno (IMES) and the *microstoria* (Levi, Raggio, Ramella, Merzario) developed in that period¹⁶. Moreover, they required me to address the different scales, ranging from the community and the province in which it was situated to the Campania Region and to the European Parliament.

Little by little, I began to explore other economic areas, such as the industrial sector where I had never dared to venture at the beginning of my ethnographic work. Collectively, at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, we had never envisioned the expansion into those sectors as possible or practicable. However, in spite of the major significance of agriculture, other sectors of activity were more characteristic of San Marco's economy in the second half of the 1990s.

The most dynamic sector was that of confectionery, which began developing at the end of the 1970s with the birth of a dozen artisanal factories specialized in the production of nougat. This trend continued with the addition of two factories at the turn of the twenty-first century. This was followed by the textile sector, which began developing in the 1980s when the large industrial production in central and North Eastern Italy was being relocated. In the second half of the 1990s, the notion of industrial district began to be used to analyze certain phenomena of the South of Italy where a concentration of small and medium-sized enterprises were appearing, which until then had been almost invisible¹⁷. Some years later, the notion of “industrial district” became a label, too. After my PhD thesis, the analysis of the establishment of an “industrial district” led me to pay more and more

16. For a presentation and a recent analysis of that literature, see Revel 2006. The book is partially a translation of the previous *Jeux d'échelles*, published in France in 1996, but some chapters were added in the Italian translation, ten years later. Among others, see Palumbo 2006, in this collection.

17. According to the definitions developed from the analysis of specific Italian regions and in the wake of what Marshall had highlighted for the English districts, a district is a geographical area within which the production cycles are divided into phases. Small and medium-sized enterprises, independent from one another from the economic point of view, but interdependent as regards the organization of production work and each one with a specific role in the production system constitute a district (among others see Bagnasco 1977, 1988; Becattini 1998; Trigilia 1988). The Italian economists and economic sociologists studying the industrial districts in the North and Central Italy underlined the links between history, “cultural traditions” and economic dimensions in these areas, in a problematic way from an anthropological point of view (Siniscalchi 2010).

attention to the spatial dimension of this phenomenon. These transformations were not the result of an interruption or brutal rupture of “modernization” in an “archaic” context as certain recent works in other areas of southern Italy seem to suggest. They were situated on a longer timeline, and needed to be understood as a process.

The interpretative frameworks that I derived from reading the work of Jane and Peter Schneider on Sicily, or John Cole and Eric Wolf on the Alps protected me from the spread of dichotomous visions that had begun in the late 1990s when the industrial development in San Marco and other areas of southern Italy became noticeable. The South seemed to be cornered between two stereotypes: one of underdevelopment, which had characterized numerous interpretations of the Mezzogiorno, and another of a sort of redemption that this unexpected industrial development seemed to incarnate (see Meldolesi 1998, among others). The notions of a «world system» and «world economy» encouraged me to examine the economic and political reasons that have allowed the appearance of workshops and then textile factories in a region where there seemed to be no existing base favorable to industrial development. I explored the logics of this industrialization: the internal dynamics in the social context (the strong agricultural presence that industry did not completely replace, a longstanding peasant smallholder ownership of land and property, the role of women in the economy, etc.), and the pressures linked to the larger context (the political and economic situation at the end of the 1970s and the 1980s, the Northern companies' need to reduce production costs, etc.). During the same period, other “industrial areas”, often specialized in textiles, developed in diverse regions of the Mezzogiorno. These forms of industrialization were perceived as “original” forms of the economic “development” of Mezzogiorno. But in order to understand these industrial spaces and re-situate them in the history of these regions, it was necessary to take into account the intermediary analytical scales that are found “between” local and global. These scales are often forgotten in approaches to the phenomena of globalization, but they can help us to discern the more “obscure parts” of economic changes. To understand the careers of entrepreneurs and their strategies, it was very important to change the analytical scale and follow their links with other productive area in Campania or other regions bordering it. “Playing with scales” allowed the placement of an accent on the interconnections between different economic areas. I approached the study of the economic phenomena in the South by questioning the way social groups were formed, as well as the role of individuals and their capacities of action within political, professional, and

kinship networks, and by trying to connect the local and supra-local dimensions of the (political and economic) phenomena I observed. At the end of my PhD thesis, my approach to fieldwork changed again: San Marco remained the center of my observations, but increasingly, I included the surrounding communities in a more conscious way than at the beginning of my research. It is precisely this exercise of changing perspectives and scales of analysis, which meant taking account of the dynamics occurring in other economic regions and the ways they overlap directly and indirectly with my research terrain, that led me to expand the notion of "economic space".

The growing and unexpected development of industrial activities in these southern regions could be interpreted as an irruption of modernity destined to profoundly alter the local society, or as some economists thought at the time, perhaps it was the result of the creativity of these same regions. But an ethnographic approach made it possible to go into the factories and analyze the logics and practices of the workers and entrepreneurs, as well as the close links with other sectors of the local economy. It also made it possible to reveal the know-how of illegality – based on some forms of circumvention of the law (tax rules and workers' social security) – which was an important element of this recent industrial development in the South (Siniscalchi 2010). By adopting a linear perspective, the development of industries as well as of tourism in the late 1990s could have been interpreted as the last stage of a predictable evolution of contemporary capitalism. But the construction of the town of San Marco and its history as a specific economic place (through the label of "industrial district") could not be studied simply in terms of tourism or linear development: it was linked to deeper changes in local politics and to structural relations of power (Wolf 1990, 2001; Siniscalchi 2012)¹⁸.

Economic spaces in Europe

In the 2000s, the analysis of the process of spatial construction as a political and economic issue led me towards my second fieldwork. This fieldwork in southern France allowed me to elaborate and refine an anthropology of economic spaces. In the French Alps, I explored the political and economic mechanisms of the construction of spaces and places, moving to another level of analysis that was based on a "province" (the *department* of Hautes-Alpes) rather than a small town. In this new fieldwork undertaken

18. Wolf analyzes "structural power" as a kind of power «that not only operates within settings or domains but that also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the distribution and direction of energy flows» (1990: 586).

to analyze political and social transformations, the main points of observation were the processes of envisioning and constructing places through a redefinition of history, urban space, and the economy. Focusing on the construction of the territory, this new ethnographic research required learning about French policies and legal regimes that were different from those that I had known in Italy; these required even more cross analysis and variation in scales. At the time, questions relative to the “location,” “localities,” and the production of spaces and places animated the anthropological debate in Europe and across the Atlantic. Close to the perspectives of Appadurai (1996) Gupta and Ferguson (1997a, 1997c), Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003), I interpreted location and affiliation as being relational and contextual, constantly subject to changes in shape, tensions and conflicts (Siniscalchi 2003, 2008). By studying the dynamics of power in protected areas, I examined the relationships between the State, institutions, and social groups in their processual dimension (Donnan, Wilson 2003; Tsing 2005), using the different aspects of the economy to define the territory. It was at this moment that what I call today an anthropology of economic spaces began to take form.

I use the notion of economic space not only for analyzing the construction of places or the spatiality of economic forms, but also, and above all, as an analytical instrument that allows me to define the spaces of economic and political action, and study their connections. I consider it as a flexible tool that helps me look at the economic and social transformations in shorter temporalities (than those considered by Wallerstein 1974, 1981)¹⁹.

In 2006, I started to sketch out a new research program to analyze the forms of action in the field of food production and consumption, and the emergence of mobilizations (farmers, anti-OGM, consumers, etc.) and transnational political movements aimed at elaborating new economic forms. Whatever the scale – local, national or international – the mobilizations and protests linked to food bring together a large range of practices from collective actions of producers or consumers to social movements and structured politics. The places of production and consumption become places that elaborate social and political values, resulting in new economic forms. I chose to examine these questions through a case study of Slow Food. The work on the Slow Food movement, carried out first with the French Slow Food association and then inside the

19. For a economic interpretation of the notion of economic space see Perroux 1950. According to Perroux, an economic space is defined by economic relations, and therefore the balance of power. For a review of Perroux’s work and geographical uses of this notion, reintroducing the material dimension of space, see Couzon 2003.

movement's headquarters in Northern Italy and various international hubs, obliged me to again change the focus and the places of my research (even if the main part of the fieldwork was conducted inside the movement's headquarters)²⁰. I began to question the political definition of production spaces through the labeling projects implemented by Slow Food. The Slow Food movement encourages the production of spaces through different types of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991). These “communities” are made up of groups of consumers (known as *condotte* in Italy or “convivium” in the rest of the world), and a global network of producers associated with objectivized and localized products (known as “presidia” production or “presidia”). The articulation of these levels permitted an understanding of the relationships between the new economic forms, the relationships of power (at the heart of the movement as well) and the modalities of resource control (Siniscalchi 2013, 2017a; Counihan and Siniscalchi 2014). The spatial dimension also revealed its usefulness as an analytical key to understand the political forms that the movement assumed on the terrain. I have not attempted here to do more than outline these two field studies. What interests me is to highlight how these different studies have continued to affect the way I approach fieldwork and how this has changed over the course of my research. This is particularly visible when returning to observe San Marco today.

Moving economic spaces

At the end of the 2000s, the sub-contracting system in southern Italy was in crisis and most factories closed or activated the *cassa integrazione* (technical unemployment). Today, many buildings constructed with State subsidies have been abandoned and only a few workshops still resist. Although the industrial income lost in this crisis had previously contributed to maintaining family agricultural activities, agriculture is still a structuring element that represents solidity in the local economic and social system. Individuals, while maintaining close symbolic and economic relations with agriculture, have been able to move from one economy to another in a back-and-forth that demonstrates as an ability to reconvert, to grasp opportunities, and to absorb constraints. At the same time, looking at these phenomena through the notion of economic space(s) allows us to put the

20. The fieldwork itself was conducted on several sites: in Bra (in Piedmont), at the national and international headquarters of Slow Food where 170 employees work, and where its private university and publishing house are located; with the political authorities of the movement, located at different sites in Italy and abroad; at the offices of the board of directors of the French structure as well as two of its local units.

accent on the structural relationships of power and the interconnections between different economic areas. The industrial activities which disappeared from the district of San Marco have now moved further south to North Africa or to the east toward Romania, Moldavia, or China. The confines of centers and peripheries are constantly moving, producing new forms of inequity and new economic relations and power (Wolf 1990; Comaroff, Comaroff 2000; Narotzky, Smith 2006). In the same fashion, the boundaries between economic spaces also change.

The notion of “economic space” appears useful for analyzing the construction of places or the spatiality of economic activities, but above all it can be an analytical instrument for defining the limits of economic and political action²¹. Then it becomes a useful tool for thinking about the interrelationships between different geographical areas and for identifying and comprehending the connections and reconfigurations of the economy at different scales. It is a flexible analytical instrument that helps to understand diverse and localized phenomena by situating them in larger contexts. It makes it possible to simultaneously take into account both the industrial development in the interstices of southern Italy in the 1990s and the shift of productive activities in Eastern Europe twenty years later, or the conflicts and reconfigurations in the field of artisanal and agricultural productions. It makes it possible to grasp the links between productive spaces and political arenas in which networks of actors negotiate and fight to define, regulate, and circulate goods and merchandise.

«Small places, large issues» suggests Thomas H. Eriksen with the title of one of his works (2001), where he affirms the capacity of anthropological approaches to seize a broad range of questioning from a micro scale. Even if we continue to practice fieldwork according to some of Malinowski’s principles, and even if we look at articulations and connections, we can no longer conceive fieldwork today as Malinowski did. Starting from local case studies is not (or no longer) synonymous with the artificial creation of social isolates. It is rather a way to “weave the threads” of social complexity, in an effort to get us as close as possible to the perspective and the logic of the individuals who are the subject of our observations.

The world as it is studied by anthropologists is not characterised by clear, “digital” or binary boundaries, but rather by grey zones and differences in degree – analogic differences. It is not an archipelago of isolated cultures, but an unbounded system of multiple interrelationships (Eriksen 2001: 305).

21. See MacLeod (2001) among others, for a recent reflection from the new regional geography on the politics of scales and economic spaces.

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Fieldwork and changing scales: The analysis of different economic spaces

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