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Reviews

Isabella Clough Marinaro (2022), *Inhabiting Liminal Spaces: Informalities in Governance, Housing and Economic Activity in Contemporary Italy* (London: Routledge), 232 pp., €136.94, ISBN: 9780367373634.

Isabella Clough Marinaro is professor of sociology and Italian Studies at John Cabot University in Rome. Her research moves between the study of the political and social conditions of Roma communities and a more general interest in criminality and informality. Her main fieldwork area is the city of Rome.

The book *Inhabiting Liminal Spaces* is a synthesis of different studies carried out between 2015 and 2020. It is a rather dense work whose ambition is to embrace different fields of informal activity in the city of Rome and propose a transversal analysis of the social and liminal conditions they produce. The book is organised around an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. As it is a compilation of different studies, each chapter can be read independently, especially the central ones (the second to sixth).

In the introduction and the first chapter, the author presents the originality of her approach in the context of the social sciences literature on informality.

First of all, the author defends a relational approach. Building on works that stress the importance of understanding informality from a micro-level, she proposes an ethnographic approach to informalities as everyday practices. Moreover, the choice of the capital of one of the largest European economies is a way of problematising and contesting the classical division between the Global North and South. These disciplinary positions allow the author to explore the relation between informal activities and formal regulations, their reciprocal adjustments through time and the liminal condition that this relation generates. Her main interest is to show how ‘informalities have become embedded in, and symbiotic with, governance dynamics that uphold the logics of neoliberal inequality’ (13).

The second approach is linked to Bourdieu’s theory of practice. The author defends the importance of reading informalities within specific contexts of power relations and economic interests. By contesting the critiques of determinism addressed towards the theory of practice, she stresses the importance of the analysis of informal social negotiations through the concept of capital (social, cultural, economic,

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political and symbolic). The originality of the book is to add a new category: temporal capital, as ‘a form of symbolic capital which rests on the longevity of a person’s activity in a given field’ (31).

The following four chapters present four different fields of informal activities: squatting and informal housing, street vending, informal moneylending and waste collection. Each chapter presents a historical overview of official regulations and informalities in the last sixty years. The author navigates heterogeneous and polyglot sources and realises some very complete portraits of complex local situations. These portraits have a double scientific value: they offer a literature review in English of specific Italian debates, as with the history of public housing in Rome; and they provide an original work of contemporary history, as with garbage management policies.

This analysis is followed by an ethnographic focus, sometimes well localised in time and space, as in the case of the Corviale public housing complex or Roman flea markets, sometimes less situated, as with moneylending and waste collection activities. These focuses are the key to understanding the relation between actors through the evolution of institutional decisions (from repression to formalisation) and the way in which actors adapt to them and manage their liminal conditions. Each time, the author gives us a temporal reading on the practices. The global analysis outlined is that the long-term physical presence of informal actors in a field allows them to develop legitimacy or forms of neoliberal entrepreneurship that give them more power in the negotiation with institutions. On the other hand, those who have been there for less time are disadvantaged and remain stuck in liminal conditions. This inequality appears to be linked to ethnic and racial stigmatisation.

Given the complexity and variety of fieldwork presented, it would have been interesting to give ethnographic material more place, especially in terms of spaces, atmospheres, subjects’ trajectories or collective situations of liminality. Nevertheless, some parts of the book are more embodied, as they correspond to the fields in which the author has been involved for a long time (Roma communities). The reader sometimes also lacks information on the specific conditions and methodologies of each study.

The sixth chapter is a counterpoint in terms of methodology. It presents the results of a statistical survey carried out in 2020 on the perception of informality among Rome’s inhabitants. The study is presented as a methodological essay on a small scale (with 172 participants). The preliminary results on the dichotomy between negative opinion and everyday acceptance of informality are very promising.

This book will definitely interest scholars and students in search of a valuable theoretical guide on critical approaches to informalities and on the contemporary history of urban policies in Rome. This work of Clough Marinaro's is a very interesting contribution to the study of the institutional production of informalities and its relation to neoliberal governance and urban inequalities.

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František Šístek (ed) (2021), *Imagining Bosnian Muslims in Central Europe: Representations, Transfers and Exchanges* (New York: Berghahn), 302 pp., \$145 ISBN: 9781789207743.

This volume, edited by Czech historian and anthropologist František Šístek, is a result of a research project titled 'Central Europe and Balkan Muslims: Relations, Images, Stereotypes' supported by the Czech Academy of Science, and represents more than a century of Czech academic interest in south-east Europe and the Balkans. At first, we may be surprised that Czech scholars are interested in the Muslim population of south-eastern Europe; however, very early in the volume we realise how intimately connected Czechs are with the Balkan Muslims, especially within the joint Austro-Hungarian history that has influenced even the contemporary Czech imagination and everyday life. The idea of the research project and this volume emerged from the dramatic development of the new wave of migration that was a significant topic in Europe in 2015. Today, in 2022, it is almost forgotten that in those days, political, academic and even everyday discourses were saturated by predictions of the 'end of Europe as we know it' because of 'new great migrations of people' unrecorded since the fall of the Roman Empire. People were especially worried about the arrival of Muslim populations that were too 'exotic', and memories of Ottoman conquest were awakened within Central Europe. Although Europe faces new challenges in 2022, this volume is not out of date. The political and social challenges that contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire region face, which also have a historical background, keep the volume relevant. In thirteen chapters, with an introduction and conclusion written by the editor, František Šístek, historians (Ladislav Hladký, Petr Stehlík, Martin Gabriel and Oliver Pejić), anthropologists (Božidar Jezernik, Bojan Baskar, Alenka Bartulović, Aldina Čemernica and Merima Šehagić), literary scholars