

A TOWN ON THE MOVE THE NARRATIVE-REDRESSIVE PHASE OF SOCIAL DRAMA IN A CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

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The setting for our ethnographic research is Padua (*Padova*) a middle-sized northern Italian town well known for its ancient University and its basilica of Saint Anthony, *Il Santo*. In 1998 the municipality of Padua counted only 5,600 migrants, primarily from Nigeria, the Philippines and Morocco; by 2008 this number had quadrupled, comprising in large part people from Eastern Europe and the Balkans in search of work in Padua's lively tertiary and service sectors. In this context, we query whether Turner's concept of 'social drama' is an applicable model for exploring questions such as whether migrants have provoked a crisis that is upsetting the status quo in the region; whether such crisis is recognizable in the public sphere and, if so, how it is manifested and how it may be overcome. Above all, is Turner's model capable of unveiling the sense of what is occurring in our towns, in our neighbourhoods, in the tens of public speeches of the actors involved, both migrants and hosts? These are, in sum, the questions around which our work has been revolving in the past years, and to which we have attempted to provide an answer, here and elsewhere.

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Introduction

Social dramas, with much the same temporal or processual structure as I detected in the Ndembu case, can be isolated for study in societies at all levels of scale and complexity. This is particularly the case in political situations. (Victor W. Turner 1974: 33)

Contemporary Italy has been dramatically experiencing the profound changes imposed by a quick and consistent flow of immigration. Such changes appear more pronounced in those regions and towns where manpower needs and an ageing population are turning promises into concrete work opportunities for migrants, where short-term, individual residential projects are replaced by family reunifications in the host country, and where, up to a recent past, the local narrative was associated with the opposite image of the Italian emigrant with the cardboard suitcase, embarking for the Americas. In this transformational context, is Turner's 'social drama' still an applicable model for exploring relevant queries such as: are migrants provokers of a crisis that is upsetting the status quo intended as habitus-dictated ways of sharing the city's space? And if so, is such crisis recognizable in the

public sphere? How is it made visible and how is it overcome? And, above all, is Turner's model capable of unveiling the sense of what is occurring in our towns, in our neighbourhoods, in the tens of public speeches of the actors involved, both migrants and hosts? These are, in sum, the questions around which our work has been revolving in the past years, and to which we have attempted to provide an answer. In another contribution for this journal (Schmidt and Palutan 2007) we have focussed on the construction of political identities in an Italian town where the inflow of migrants has quadrupled in the last decade, calling upon the processual model offered by Victor Turner to capture a reality in becoming. In the present contribution Padua will be once more the city-stage where events take place, while a rereading of Turner's narrative and redressive phase will serve to cast new light on the sense of their unfolding.

The redressive phase as interpretative model

The arrival of newcomers wishful of recognition in the public space is undoubtedly a moment of crisis for a host society. Several studies lead in this direction of considering immigrants as a cause of profound turmoil in the status quo. Grillo and Pratt look at immigration as a "disembedding effect that gives rise to an 'uncomfortable self-examination' as Italians pondered the implications and consequences for their own identity and institutions" (2002: xiii). Dal Lago (1999) looks at the media and the public discourse representing the migrant as the stranger, the extraneous and "the enemy" as processes functional to a rediscovering of the nation or to never-forgotten regional nationalisms. Along the same lines, the political scientist Huysse (2006) sees the Lega Nord, one of the most popular parties in the Northeast, as the repository of the values of Padania¹, to be protected vis-à-vis the invasion of others. Zinn (1996) identifies in the "Albanian crisis"—when, in 1991, 40,000 Albanians fled their land for Italian shores—a particularly pregnant moment in the history of immigration, responsible for the striking rhetorical shift in Italian discourses on Albanians,² and by extension on the fleeing migrants.

Our thesis is that the irruption of migrants onto the local scene and into the national political agenda provokes not only a shake-up in everyday life, but more importantly, an urge for self-redefinition by the non-migrant majority and the migrant minority alike in a mutual effort to make sense of what is happening. In short, in our fieldwork³—which is polycentric, crowded with actors and rich in stories—we recognize Turner's social drama, and particularly its central phases of the crisis and the redress⁴. For Turner (1987) the 'crisis' is provoked by the breach, occurring whenever an exogenous element of any nature creates a rupture in the everyday routine. During the crisis—which is public since "it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself", and liminal "since it is a threshold (limen) between more or less stable phases of the social process" (1987: 4)—lurking antagonisms and unexpressed fears surface, and make clear what otherwise remains blurred and covert. Whenever a crisis is on its way, the breach widens and a change in the status quo may be expected.

In 2003, the year in which our narrative texts were collected, the town of Padua was the theatre of a large number of debates centred on the theme of immigration. These public events, organized in different locations and by different actors, were only apparently isolated; if considered in a larger temporal and spatial context, they unveil threads which make

actors and events intertwined and interdependent. 2003 is a year deeply engrossed by the transformation process embracing the whole country, and consequently affecting the regional and municipal level. In fact, the effects of the sharp political changes of the previous year started manifesting themselves: the assessment of the right-centre government, which won the elections against the centre-left, led to the reform—the so-called Bossi–Fini Act—of the previous 1998 centre-left immigration law, and to the introduction of a mass regularisation of more than 700,000 illegal immigrants, out of which 61,418 were in the Veneto Region and 13,364 in Padua.⁵ On the European front, that very same year witnessed the conceptualisation of migration as a security concern fostered by the spread and fear of international terrorism.

In a general context of fear and insecurity supposedly brought in by outsiders, the immigration ‘problem’ became central for the programmatic politics of the different political orientations representing different ideological stands, always in search of consensus, always ridden by the media: the Lega Nord led by Umberto Bossi which is the regionalist league, champion of a supposed Padana identity to be defended against the threat of Islam; the position of the Right parties centred on national values to be transmitted to, and through which to assimilate, the newcomers; the positions of the Left, engaged in an uneven and contradictory process, nevertheless eager for inclusion (Schmidt and Palutan 2007). On the other hand, the representatives of migrant communities looked with interest to forms of political participation able to enlarge and renew the concept of citizenship.

In short, if the general scenario was characterized both by a diffused long-term crisis, and by a more identifiable time-specific crisis revolving around the year 2003, was the phase of redress also recognizable? If so, what forms did the latter assume and how was it faced and solved in a town like Padua, which along with other towns in the same region, was experiencing migrant-fostered change? The question is broad and dense—which is why we wrote a book to address it—however, in this contribution, referring to the specific ethnographic material in the form of narrative events presented in the pages below, we attempt to provide answers drawing from a re-reading of Victor Turner’s work.

Turner defines “the redressive phase, in which feedback is provided by the scanning mechanisms of law and religious ritual, as a time in which an interpretation is put upon the events leading up to and constituting the phase of crisis” (1987: 35). It is a crucial moment since, while the crisis may feed divisions and conflict, the group is called to take a stand on what is happening using the creativity and reflexivity contained in the narration and in the performance (the constitutive parts of the redress) to express the values with which it identifies, in search of a new equilibrium with the aim of overcoming the crisis. Thus, the redressive phase inevitably involves a scanning of, and reflection upon, the previous events leading up to the crisis now being faced and the identification of whose actions are to become the subject matter for scrutiny within the frame provided by institutional forms (1987: 6).

Narration is the clue moment of reflexivity in so far it gives sense to the crisis; it interprets it with reference to the past by means of a narrator reliving with the audience pregnant moments which Turner calls “root paradigms” (1974). The latter, reinterpreted by the narrator, give sense to the present, and at the same time, create the premises for possible future scenarios which are stories to be written, actors to be included, identities to be built. In consequence, narration is the moment of highest creativity: a reflexive creativity, in our

view, as opposed to the dynamic creativity of the crisis phase. In short, for narration to take place a past repertoire is needed from which to draw, and a narrator, or “star member”, able to understand on what to draw according to the circumstances. The star member, in turn, is aware that the moment relived with his performance could be the source of future narrative and performative acts (1982). To this dialogic relation we would add a third element, which Turner does not address: the role of the audience. The performance of the star member prompts the emotion and imagination of the audience which becomes an integral part of the process under way. Thus, the narrative event is a continuous recreation of a common feeling in which the persons involved identify themselves, and become active parts of the process of change. So intended, narration is a recreation of that *communitas* which, through a recognition of the narrated past, has the ability to imagine shared future scenarios.

The context

The setting for our ethnographic research is a middle-sized Italian town of around 215,000 inhabitants, thirty kilometres from Venice, well known for its ancient University, and as a religious centre with its basilica of Saint Anthony, *Il Santo*. In 1998 the municipality of Padua counted only 5,600 migrants coming primarily from Nigeria, the Philippines and Morocco; in 2008 it quadrupled its number reaching 27,000, coming primarily from Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The majority of migrants arrive in search of work since Padua has a lively tertiary sector and, in line with the trend of many other Italian towns, has an ageing population with a consequent demand for personal assistance and home care. Padua has a long history of voluntary associations, commonly known as ‘the third sector’, which were able to provide a variety of services for immigrants and which have acquired political visibility on a national scale by organising a yearly fair representing the non-profit sector, significantly called *Civitas*. During the fair one can visit the stands of hundreds of private associations and public institutions, and attend tens of thematic workshops.

In turn, local political authorities have moved to tackle the immigration issue by supporting: cultural mediators to assist people in using public services; the Council of Foreign Communities, a political body with consultative power before the Town Council; public debate to foster the vote for immigrants at local elections; and the Commission of Representation of Migrant Citizens, a body intended to give voice to migrants on all town related issues. Padua is located in Veneto, a region⁶ which hosts the third largest immigrant population in the country: if, in 1998, non-EU nationals comprised approximately 100,000 people, in 2008 their number was close to 400,000. This sudden increase occurred in a region where, over the years, the Northern League, Lega Nord, a party with secessionist aims, fiscal federalism programmes, anti-central government and xenophobe rhetoric has become more and more relevant, and whose electorate votes were crucial for the defeat of the central-left national government led by Romano Prodi in 2007. In this same region the memory of emigrants who left poverty-stricken, war-burdened families by the thousands is constantly revived by the right-wing governing party, Alleanza Nazionale, to recreate a Venetian identity to counter-oppose the recent immigrants’ identities.

City and migration studies

In contemporary European societies—markedly diversified, characterized by high mobility and in constant search of modes of cohabitation—recognizing the linkage between city and migration appears essential in order to grasp realities in becoming. In this scenario, which sees Italy as one of the countries with the quickest growth-rate of immigrant population on the continent, which is deeply differentiated and spread unevenly over the territory depending on specific structural needs, the role of local administrations as agents “able to transform heterogeneous and instable human aggregates into cohesive and harmonious societies” (José Luis Rhi Sausi 2007: 1) looks central. A plethora of EU-promoted conferences, networks, projects, agendas, and platforms⁷ converge in looking at the cited binominal, city and migration, as a bearer of cultural and economic richness and, at the same time, as a challenge for service provisions and social cohesiveness (Eurocities 2006). In short, no effective integration of immigrants and no proper attitude of locals can be achieved without the active involvement of cities. Both the studies considered in the concise review that follows concur with stressing that the image of the city as a ‘bounded entity’ should be abandoned for embracing other perspectives better equipped to analyse the adjustments and conflicts, the alliances and relations between established residents and newcomers (Goode 1989).

Ralph Grillo’s study (2005) focuses on three aspects of the contemporary city which claim attention: “its diversity, its porosity, its governance”. If diversity is provided by heterogeneity, and an ever-increasing “mixity”, porosity derives through the interplay between local and global which results in a constant blurring of boundaries. How can the diversity and porosity be matched with governance? To answer, Grillo looks at the modes whereby majorities build and represent their relations with migrants in politics and public debates, in academic writing and in film in a number of countries in Europe, including Italy. In his view these modes can be summarized by four dominant images: multiculturalism, assimilation, integration, separatism. These may be interpreted as ideal types and shared perspectives or orientations which, however, more likely than not will be used according to the situation, “shifting from one to another as circumstances, personal and collective, change” (2005: 2). This shifting applies equally to authority and policy: various branches of the state may have different policies and projects, and national, regional and local levels different ends. So, both models and model shifting are bound to ever-changing contexts, and such contexts seem to fluctuate between diversity-oriented and multicultural modes and a desire to return to the older assimilative modes of the city. Grillo looks at these models as ambivalent representations since, on the one hand they “have represented actual or potential policy directions, and certainly as scenarios they have typically informed much policy discussion, and continue to do so”, but on the other hand they “might denote narratives or projects through which they describe themselves, debate whence they have come and whither they might go” (2005: 2). The latter aspect becomes of particular relevance in the interpretation of the narratives which constitute our ethnographic case.

Zygmunt Bauman in his *City of Fears, City of Hopes* (2003) looks at change as the major feature denoting the city, and states that “city and social change are almost synonymous. Change is the quality of city life and the mode of urban existence. Change and city may, and indeed should, be defined by reference to each other” (2003: 5). It is the density of

human communication, the opportunity to meet, which is the prime cause of the city's restlessness, and it is the newcomers, those whom the city attracts, who are in the main responsible for bringing new problems but also "new ways of solving old problems" (2003: 6), things that well-settled residents have stopped noticing because of their familiarity seem bizarre and call for explanation when seen through the eyes of a stranger. For strangers nothing in the city is 'natural'; nothing is taken for granted. To Bauman strangers are not an invention of modernity, but strangers who remain such for a long period of time certainly are. In fact if a self-reproduction mechanism able to "de-strange", to "domesticate", and ultimately to assimilate newcomers was active in the pre-modern city, the passage to the modern city was "about breaking the bonds of customary obligations and thus de-familiarising the familiar. Capitalism was a mass production of strangers to the point of promoting mutual estrangement to the rank of normal" (2003: 8). This new normality, which Bauman defines as "solid", was permeated by contradictory interests to be fought and negotiated. The contemporary scenario, however, differs from the modern one in so much as it appears "liquid", that is, a place where the countervailing forces remain as yet in contention. And for Bauman the two main contenders on the city's battlefield are power (inevitably global) on the one side, and politics with meanings and identities (inevitably local) on the other.

The contemporary liquid city is the setting for the confrontation between what Bauman calls the "space of flows", the global, and the "space of places", the one of meaning and identities, none of which is likely to be dismissed as alien. As Bauman notes:

Contrary to the widespread opinion, locally anchored meanings and identities are not the 'real reality' of the city assaulted, deformed or eroded by the cancerous spread of 'transnational' rootlessness. Their combat is not an interim condition from which one of them will eventually emerge victorious. (...) None of the two spaces can survive on its own. Both can live only in mutual embrace. (2003: 22)

The concept of mutuality mentioned by Bauman is particularly relevant in the present essay, and it is abundantly explored in other works by the authors (see Schmidt 2000; Schmidt and Palutan 2003; and especially Schmidt and Palutan forthcoming/2009). Mutuality implies that neither of the two subjects will be the same after meeting the other and, more importantly, that neither will any longer be able to construct itself without reference to the other. In the narratives presented in the pages that follow, the contradictions, negotiations and confrontations are all played at the local level, in the 'space of places', the place charged with meaning, where all the actors involved, both established settlers and newcomers—that is, natives and foreign immigrants—are equally engaged in rephrasing each other. Both perceive themselves as agents in the public space in a process of mutual construction of meaning. It is precisely on this uncertain terrain of politically constructed images, of publicly displayed narratives following, willy-nilly, the recognition of new actors on the city's scene, where Victor Turner comes to our support. Revisiting his explanatory model of social drama does not appear to us to be forcing an answer on contemporary dynamics, and even less does it appear merely an academic exercise. As we will see, the rhetoric used by the actors to recall the events and the passion displayed in the narratives suggest that something else, beyond the event itself, is *in fieri*. It is precisely this something else which we'll attempt to bring to the surface resorting to the interpretative tool provided by Turner.

*The narratives*1. *Oriundi*, new Venetians, third Veneto

Raffaele Zanon, Alleanza Nazionale, was the Councillor in charge of immigration policies in the Veneto Region.⁸ In the course of a number of meetings (conferences, workshops, talks) he had the chance to explain to the public his views regarding migrants and the host society. The following speech was collected during *Civitas*, the non-profit sector yearly fair, in a workshop organized by the Italian Christian trade union ACLI of which Zanon was the convenor. Although addressed to whomever cared to listen, the worktable was mainly attended by people working with migrants in private associations, in the trade unions or in the public sector.

In Veneto the saying was “leaving to catch good luck”, *a catar fortuna*, (...). It is important to tell a story that is almost forgotten, which text-books barely mention: the Venetian emigration counts 4.5 million people scattered in many parts of the world. Their experiences, often difficult, were not always told; the many tragedies of persons who, for a piece of bread, worked in coal mines or in factories where security was not an issue as it is today, were forgotten. Those many little stories have value for us. (...) Talking about emigration means going back over a path which saw the poorest region in Northern Italy, our own, evolve to the point of becoming one of the richest in the world, and this occurred also thanks to the workers’ remittances which allowed those who stayed to develop a model which is studied elsewhere. I believe that we should start from this story to face the theme of immigration investing our Region today; the answers which we should provide are the same expected by our people when going around the world, and are tied to the dignity of the person: a place to stay, a language to learn. We intend to invest in the latter because language is the mediation tool par excellence (...). Finally we have created a bridge with the community from Argentina: the return (*rientro*) of young Argentineans, now employed at the Zanussi factories, young men who have been integrated very well into our Region, and a majority of whom has already chosen Veneto as their life project. In a country with unemployment of 5 million, our Region considered its moral duty toward our community overseas to find a sort of solution; we’ll do it again, especially for the 5,000 Italian-Argentineans who have already arrived in our land. (Padua, May 2003).

This talk can be considered Councillor Zanon’s first attempt to build a regional model with respect to immigration. The dominant image refers to a blood tie which binds the offspring of Italian emigrants to the land of their fathers; it is to these second and third generations, and primarily to the Argentineans caught in the economic crisis, that the ‘comeback’ project, *Progetto Rientro*, is aimed.⁹ Thus, the *oriundi*, that is the Italian-origin immigrants, become the preferential immigrants in the Region’s rhetoric and policy. The *oriundi*, however, constituted only a tiny fraction of the migrant inflows in the Region and in the course of a workshop specifically delivered to local entrepreneurs and organized by FOREMA, a training work agency dependant on the Manufacturers’ Association, Councillor Zanon implicitly acknowledges as unfeasible the blood-based model. Here he resorts to a culture-based model which implies the adherence, on the part of immigrants, to the recreated values which, in the past as in the present, make up ‘Venetianness’, being Venetian: as representative of Alleanza Nazionale, the right-wing party with fascist ancestry, Zanon translates into local terms the concept of Italianness. To this purpose he creates the image of new Venetians, *nuovi veneti*, a powerful image of assimilation:

I believe that governing the migratory inflows is one of the strong themes our Region has to deal with, however cultural aspects are central: without these any kind of integration program would fail. This means not only setting targets, identifying strategies, setting up services, but also building a new culture for the new Venetians. I do not want them to be called non-Community immigrants (*extracomunitari*) any more: we are dealing with the new Veneto, the Veneto of future, even if “the men of cannons”¹⁰ or whoever keep building barriers, like it or not. It will be the Veneto we should build up together in recognition of diversity and different identities; only in this way might richness, economic but also cultural, increase. Veneto is a land of emigration which has maintained a double identity by living its traditions, roots and family ties in different contexts; these become the contexts of the future when offspring and families are born. (...) I have met many Italians in the world who maintain their identity, but at the same time love the countries where they have settled, where they carry on their activities and where their children live. We should succeed in transferring to the new Venetians this love toward our land: this is a challenge which does not appear in documents, programs and acts. Otherwise we risk reducing the complexity of questions to a simple matter of numbers and quotas. (Padua, June 19, 2003)

Venetianess is still provided, in the Councillor’s view, with a vital force: its values of solidarity, hard work, and social cohesion should not only converge into “the new Veneto”, the positive synthesis of globalisation, but should teach something to the whole country. Thus, the image of a new Veneto, made of old and new Venetians alike, is juxtaposed to the rest of the nation. In the following excerpt, recorded at the premises of the Chamber of Commerce of the Province in the course of the same event, Zanon clarifies the point:

Immigration today has become an issue so important that, if not faced competently, it would become ground for divisions jeopardizing civil coexistence and the tissue of values, solidarity, and social cohesion which have always distinguished our Region. This Region is not only about money (*scbei*); it did not reach today’s levels of performance only through economic skills, but rather because of a system of social cohesion which, I dare to say, has no equals in the national context. (Padua, June 19, 2003)

2. *From migrants to new citizens*

Flavio Zanonato, in the course of his long political career, has served three times as Padua’s mayor; in 2003, however, being between two terms, he was the leader of the Opposition in the Veneto Region, that is, the left party called Democratici di Sinistra. In the following excerpt, recorded during a public conference with the title “From migrants to citizens”, delivered in the historical premises of Caffè Pedrocchi,¹¹ he speaks as regional representative of his party:¹²

Why should we think that in a community like the city, the Province or the Region, citizens who work, pay taxes and use provisions, cannot contribute to the management of services that, directly or indirectly, they finance? An argument often used to justify the war in Iraq is that of democracy. Why then should we not give democracy—being among those democrats so convinced it should be brought by force¹³—to citizens living in our own territory? If we are so fond of democracy, so eager to arm and risk lives, why should not we start training the foreign citizens in Italy to live democratically? Let’s grant them the right to vote. One of the first tools in fighting criminality is to reduce all those elements leading to marginality: then, better to include, to bring in, to involve, to allow to vote. (...)

Controversial arguments are brought forward on this subject; I’ll mention two of them. The vote of Italians overseas: Italians could always vote, but they had to return home to do it. The new law gives

Italians abroad a small part of the Parliament, of the Senate, of the Chamber of Deputies: this is the novelty. My strong belief is that Italians who live and work abroad should vote abroad: cast their vote where they work and live, where they take part in the trade unions, where they carry on their activities because they know nothing or close to it of the Italian situation (...). This law was passed to stress the meaning of Italianness, (*italianità*). (...) According to the liberal principle, whoever pays taxes has the right to be represented, consequently the citizen who works here should be permitted to vote. Some people may object by saying: obtain citizenship, then vote. (...) However, after ten years of permanence in the country one has the chance, not the right, to become an Italian citizen; in the meantime why should one stay for ten, fifteen years deprived of a democratic right? (Padua, December 1, 2003)

The central argument of this piece is the image of citizenship with a clear-cut distinction between juridical and civic citizenship, the latter referring to the term *civis* (citizen), that is, being part of an active collectivity of people in a given historical period. It is on this concept that Zanonato lingers, stressing the double dimension of duties and rights embedded in the term. Granting civil citizenship equals supporting the principle of inclusion to be extended to all residents, with no distinction. Zanonato's position is further clarified with reference to Italians abroad: the latter, though eligible to cast their vote in their country of origin, should, in his view, take part in the town where they live and work, demonstrating their actual inclusion in the host society.

In line with the national political rhetoric of his party, Zanonato talks about inclusion as the way to defeat deviance, juxtaposing the two images: inclusion and citizenship versus exclusion and resulting deviance. At a wider level, with reference to an international context engaged in the Iraqi war, the DS leader dwells on civic citizenship as an exercise in democracy for newcomers. Many diverse images are lined up in Zanonato's argument: the fact that migrants come from non-democratic countries; that they are Muslim; that their exclusion will play against the interests of the host society.

Two years later, when serving his term as mayor, Zanonato was still a strong believer in the power of the vote as a tool of democracy. In the following excerpt, recorded during a speech in the municipal Council of district municipality, he tries his best to convince the established citizens not to be afraid to grant it:

In seven, eight years these debates will look strange to us since ultimately granting to people settled in a territory the rights of natives is an unrelenting process. (...) In Italy sixty years ago women were finally allowed to vote; in Turkey they got this right fifteen years earlier. In other words, Italy, a Western country, does not necessarily grant rights before other countries. (...) The arguments adopted against the right to vote on the part of citizens coming from other countries are similar to those aimed to exclude women in the past: only Italian males could vote. Today such an argument would make us laugh. When, in the past, this right was granted only to well-to-do citizens the reason given to exclude all the others was their lack of the maturity required to govern and administer a town. Today, we smile at it. Universal suffrage will be adopted in a reasonable time also in our country; we need to take on ourselves the very important task of convincing the majority of our citizens of its utility, and to work for this to be accepted smoothly inside our community. This is the first step: to state our desire to grant this right, then we'll do our best to change the Constitution. The Constitution is not "written in stone and impossible to modify". However, here the Constitution is used as excuse which hides a negative willingness.

(...) We should make an effort to explain the potential of this tool: first of all, it is a very powerful integration mechanism. Then, it is a tool which necessitates the obligation to face problems: the

housing issue and many others will be object of more attention since these citizens, with their vote, will be evaluating the results. (...) All of us like to have a city and a world where we can live quietly, each with our own habits, curious about those of our neighbours, maybe copying them, in any event with a positive collaborative attitude, in peace rather than in a situation of confrontation. The major effort we should undertake is one of cultural conquest: get the message across to everybody, especially to our Paduan fellow-citizens, that voting is an opportunity for all which does not reduce one's rights, but increases them. We are explaining such things in the different town districts; during these meetings migrant citizens who take the stand demonstrate their competence in Italian culture, their fluency in the language, their integration, and their activism in the trade union associations. (...) These meetings provide opportunities for mutual understanding. We should have more of them because in so doing we exercise a bit of our right to discuss, to confront, to argue. This cultural battle sees us on the right side: we claim there are no differences among citizens, in line with the Italian Constitution which states the absolute equality of rights. (Padua, September 2005)

3. Not only worker or citizen, but also father and ancestor

Jean-Pierre Piessut is the African-born president of the Anolf-Cisl in Verona, a trade union association actively engaged in migrants' rights. In the dense piece presented below, recorded during the *Civitas* fair in a workshop entitled "Veneto between Emigration and Immigration: a forgotten story", Piessut offers us a series of images and reflections directed to all citizens, both migrants and hosts:

I am here today with this conviction: we, migrant citizens, and you, Italian and European citizens, should find a space in which to talk to each other. It is not true that Europeans do not know immigrants since the majority of countries where the latter come from once were colonies where historical relations were established, often wrong, unbalanced, and inconsiderate of the cultures encountered.

As the title of this meeting implies, recovering historical roots is important both for Italians and for us migrant citizens. I like to define us as citizens since we are such in almost all respects; I say almost because something is still missing. We want to consider ourselves as citizens with recognized rights and a space wherein to express our duties and responsibilities.

The Bossi-Fini Law has not only concentrated the fears of part of the society, it has blocked a path. Negative effects will be seen in the years to come, for instance in family reunification, an important aspect of our living here. (...) We, migrant citizens, should remember that we are not the first to come to Veneto, to Italy or to Europe. Those many who came before us, particularly in France and in Britain, produced a cultural movement, which later became a political movement contributing to decolonizing their countries. This movement was *Negritude*: the poet Leopold Senghor and Aimè Césaire were the founders, their goal being the equal valuation of all the diversities present in France.

Aimè Césaire wrote a very good book which depicted all the things a person does before leaving his own country: children's games, the moments of socializing, relations with the elderly, with the village, with the environment. It was nostalgic but it fostered a cultural path. As a migrant in Veneto I cannot help going back to the past and considering what tomorrow may bring. Migrant citizens like to relate how they feel in Veneto and how they feel they are perceived, how they live and how they feel understood, how they see the territory they inhabit and the seven Provinces which comprise our Region.

The migrant citizen from Albania, Togo, Morocco wants to have his image accepted and acceptable. He likes to express his visibility through his remembering, his music, his dressing, his way of speaking

his language. Talking about language, I often ask myself: what language will be spoken by the second or third generation of migrants? Will they forget their native language: Ashanti, Yoruba, Hausa, Wolof, Swahili, Arabic? Will they feel disoriented because they are able to speak only Italian? When they return to Africa or to India will they still be able to meet their people? What questions will be asked? Will they be able to grasp the situation there without feeling confused? When going back to Ghana or the Ivory Coast could these sons of migrants still pour some drops of water on the ground in memory of their ancestors? And will their own fathers be remembered as ancestors? This is a crucial question.

Let us give the opportunity to these fathers to live on in the memory of the future generations. What opportunities can we provide? In our culture, to be recognized as an ancestor, a person has to leave behind a tangible sign of positive evidence, a series of peaceful relations, the values of solidarity and brotherhood. Only in this way, when he is no more, will he be recalled in the memory of the living, entering into the memories of his children and grandchildren as ancestor.

To these adult migrants, do we offer this chance politically, culturally, socially in our Veneto? Partly we do it through the world of associations and voluntary organizations, of sensitive souls who have grasped that plurality is richness and a challenge for us all. It is a challenge for those who come from different cultural horizons: what can I share of my culture with others? What is sharable, what universal, what exportable? What can I offer and what can I receive? (...)

I'd like to pose another problem: immigrants living in Veneto today do not want to be perceived only as hard workers: "I accept you because you are a good worker, but when I see you crossing a street or walking with your girlfriend or your wife or your son, you start creating a problem for me". It is a question of visibility: migrant citizens, who are here to work in the tanneries, in assisting the elderly, want to be perceived as visible citizens, and to express this visibility in the different sectors of society: professing their religion, sharing an associative moment or a party, accompanying their dead, celebrating funerals in our soft, quiet, musical way. These are the moments in which migrant citizens want to be visible and to be seen as enriching subjects in our territory. And migrant women, on their way back from work at the bus stop do not want to be seen as prostitutes with clients stopping to ask for a price. They want to be considered normal workers of a civil society or as women looking after their children.

This richness needs to be married to everyday life issues: the need for a house, the residency permit. The latter is often a permit to life: those without it feel embarrassment with their own people, they feel judged, suspected. We all should experience the feeling of wandering in a town, in a neighbourhood and wordlessly being perceived as a suspect: is he going to steal? There is a Brazilian saying: a falling tree makes more noise than a growing forest. Let us commit ourselves to allowing the forest to grow with all its shade, its flowers and plants, baobabs, palms. Let us grow all the plants in the forest, let them develop with our sensibility, against reticence, judgment.

Italians who work with us and believe in the plurality of this world find themselves in difficulty; they are sort of cultural dissidents. Collective thought lies in another direction: the immigrant stranger frightens. We need to disagree in this as well as we need to disagree with those who consider tradition a closed box to be passed on without the chance to be opened and enriched by new elements and incentives.

I conclude my talk with the plea that we enlarge our frontiers to meet the persons, very many of them, who do not share our views, who thoughtlessly shut their eyes on reality. I would like to create a permanent debate on the forgotten memory of emigration-immigration so that those who return to their countries of origin have the chance to tell people there how life is lived in another country. Like the *griots*, the storytellers in our countries who tell stories and pass them on.

I would like to finish with a poem by a nun sister from Eritrea, Elisa Kidanè: “The wall fell down, do you remember? Yes, the one in Berlin. And from its ruins, slowly, irresistibly, other walls, higher, thicker, more invisible are rising up everywhere”.¹⁴ (Padua, May 2003)

The first powerful image that comes out from Piessut’s reflection differs markedly from the images presented by Councillor Zanon or Mayor Zanonato: certainly migrants are citizens, surely migrants are workers, but first of all they are the fathers of the new generations born or raised abroad. His thoughts go to these children of the diaspora who, in order to be future young adults aware and proud of their origin, need to keep alive the memory of their ancestry. To have an ancestry means to have an identity, hence the necessity to keep producing ancestors: only in this way the bond with African relatives will not be cut and communication with them will be still possible without embarrassment. The plurality of languages, which is the tangible sign of different origins and experiences, is nevertheless accompanied by a shared horizon of values centred on the family. In this light a movement like negritude, which stressed common bonds in order to build a proud future, still makes sense. Negritude appears as a poetics of migration which should be known and used by the new generations in order to feel these bonds, not to feel alone. Piessut appeals to the host society to allow these children of Africa to manifest these bonds freely, visibly, the way they like to, with dress, music, religion. To maintain these bonds will make them better citizens. The Veneto Region, which Piessut calls “our Veneto” can serve as common space wherein to meet, where the migrants’ ‘we’ and the hosts’ ‘you’ of the first sentence of Piessut’s talk merge into ‘our’: both hosts and newcomers are equally responsible for enlarging frontiers and tearing down walls.

We easily recognize in the conjuncture of the narratives presented Turner’s redressive phase. Councillor Zanon, responsible for immigration policies, brings to the scene the memory of the Venetian emigrant in search of good luck overseas. It is a shared memory of a recent past which is the premise sine qua non through which the situation of the present-day immigrant becomes understandable. Mayor Zanonato relives with the audience the extension of the vote to women and ordinary people, a founding moment of democracy which should find its parallel in the present-day concept of inclusive citizenship. For Piessut the historical movement of negritude should be the common heritage of any contemporary African immigrant, a way to reconcile diversity with the shared image of the centrality of the ancestors, through whom the present immigration has a direction. All the three narrators resort to historical events, Turner’s “root paradigms”, in their personal interpretation of present processes, and in their sharing them with the audience.

All three narrators are “star members” in a position of responsibility; they behave as leaders taking on themselves the task of making the founding paradigms of a collective memory surface in order to recreate a collective identity in a moment in which the latter appears confused. For Zanon this new identity is Venetianness, *venedità*, for Zanonato it is inclusive citizenship, for Piessut it is family-centred community. The “root paradigms” are a necessary condition not only for making sense of the scenario of the present, but for imagining the scenario of the future. Turner’s “should be phase”, as he defines redress, is the power of imagining the future scenarios. Councillor Zanon is imagining first the *oriundo*, that is, the Italian origin immigrant, then the new Venetians, finally “the third Veneto”, *terzo Veneto*, a positive synthesis of globalisation; mayor Zanonato is seeing the right to vote as the basis of a civic community; Piessut is looking at the future through the second

generation. Whereas for the councillor and for the mayor the future should lead in a positive direction, Piessut does not take it for granted by evoking the image of walls, concrete and symbolic, which could be our future if we are not watchful, and if we do not make the effort to find space for communicating.

In sum, for Turner, the dialogue past-present-future is a process of making sense of what has happened and of production of sense for what may happen.

At every moment, and especially in the redressed of crises, the meaning of the past is assessed by reference to the present and, of the present by reference to the past; the resultant 'meaningful' decision modifies the group's orientation to or even plans for the future, and these in turn react upon its evaluation of the past. Thus the apprehension of the meaning of life is always relative, and involved in perpetual change. (1987: 35)

The audience is particularly relevant in our discourse. Certainly, in each of the meetings considered, the public was made up of local politicians, entrepreneurs, members of voluntary associations and trade unions, that is, people directly engaged in the migrant sector. During these public events all these people came to listen, but also to meet and publicly express their own views, in a word to interact. In a mid-size town like Padua this frequent flow of ideological stances, allowed by the events, was at least as important as the event itself, and it was meant to have an impact beyond it. First of all the narrative event was never confined to the audience physically present, but it was also directed to an ideal audience, often mentioned in the course of the reported speeches: Councillor Zanon refers to the radical stances of the Lega Nord, incidentally member of the same political coalition, or to the supposed lack of integration models of the centre-left Opposition; Zanonato addresses both his fellow citizens and the nation-wide citizenry urging them to allow migrants to vote. Secondly the audience is never a passive receptor of policies: the real or imagined audience has the power to welcome, refuse or reinterpret them by casting its vote, by participating in trade unions or associations, by fostering other counter events. In short, if the main actors are engaged in building sense of what is happening, the audience, in turn, is actively engaged in the process.

Concluding remarks

Let us return to the opening question: is Turner's notion of social drama still an applicable model to explore what is happening in the urban scenario of our contemporary towns where migrants enter the political scene and upset the status quo? To answer we need to step back and recover the development of the concept; we need to look at this analytical model as in a state of constant becoming. In fact Turner did not dwell upon it in *Schism and Continuity* (1957) where it first appeared, although the latter was obviously its starting point, but he kept lingering on it in *The Ritual Process* (1969), in *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (1974), in *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982) and finally in *The Anthropology of Performance* (1987). In short, the concept represents a long process of development, not a one-time formula.

Our reflection on Turner's works, if diachronically considered, leads us to observe that his model has been losing the neatness of the rigid and interrelated quadriphasic sequence, that it has been let loose to dissolve in a flow not easily divisible by clearly distinctive parts

where process has become the main agent. On the other hand the model has been acquiring increased internal complexity revolving around the features of reflexivity, indeterminacy, and universality. No matter the outcome of the crisis—that is, the restoration of peace or the fission of the parties involved—the social drama may be seen positively since, during the redressive phase, the group considers the causes of the crisis reflexively, thus allowing a collective recognition of what has happened. In line with Jules Rosette Bennetta, we look at this collective reflexivity as the main features of redress—“reflexivity interrupts the flow of social drama, particularly at the redressive stage just prior to its resolution. At this point, participants stop to review the consequences of past actions” (1994: 173)¹⁵ —a feature which becomes particularly relevant in the form of the actors’ narratives.

As far as universality is concerned, it is Turner himself who extends his model from the Ndembu and African societies to contemporary settings by stating that analysis in terms of the notion of social drama reveals a processual intrinsic character which maintains its cogency both in a macro and in a micro historical event: it is a spontaneous fact of the social process experienced in any human society (1982). Indeterminacy is the other feature which enables the concept to capture contexts in transformation: in the essay “Anthropology of Performance”, contained in the homonymous collection, Turner adopts Sally Falk Moore’s notion of social system:

It contains arenas of continuous competition. It proceeds in a context of an ever-shifting set of persons, changing moments in time, altering situations and partially improvised interactions. Established rules, customs, and symbolic frameworks exist, but they operate in the presence of areas of indeterminacy, of ambiguity, of uncertainty, and manipulability. Order never fully takes over, nor could it. (Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Meyerhoff (eds) 1977, *Secular Ritual*, 1977. Quoted in Turner 1987)

It is this version of Turner’s approach—processual, universal, indeterminacy inclined—in which we are interested. It is the Turner who perceives social reality as fluid and conflict-permeated, who increasingly emphasizes redress as a process, who considers process as attributing meaning to events and relations. It is the Turner who considers collective reflexivity, gained through the tool of narration, the means to attaining group self representation, self-understanding, and ultimately self-agency. (1986 [1982]: 141.) Finally, it is the Turner who preludes the postmodern turn, (see Kapferer, Preface in Turner 1996), liminal himself since caught between structural functionalist certainties and new sensibilities.

Returning to our case study: the public meetings which we have observed, recorded, and analyzed have been looked on as spaces of public reflexivity opening up in a town invested by the critical moment of change, prompted by the irruption on the political scene of immigrant subjects. It was in these spaces that the actors displayed, by means of narration, their world views, or *Weltanschauung* in Wilhelm Dilthey’s word, and hence their perception of the local and town’s history. Narrative events allowed us to see how actors attempted to solve their crisis. By following this collective, slow, painful process of imagining a model of coexistence we turned to the concept of social drama as an hermeneutic tool to face the complexity of contemporary cities: there are instances in which the opaqueness of every-day routine is unveiled, and we are allowed to glimpse the values and interests running through and below our towns. These instances are precious because they give us a sense of what is happening, what it is at stake, what is in becoming. As Holston and Appadurai state: “Cities are challenging, diverging from and even replacing nations as

the important space of citizenship—as the lived space not only of its uncertainties but also of its emergent forms” (1996: 189). Or as we say: as the karstic river flows, concealed to the gaze, over underground rocks and dolinas, and shows itself only in intervals and only if the observer knows where to stand, in the same way the sense of what is occurring in our towns and neighbourhoods in the course of moments of public interaction between migrants and locals undoubtedly is there but remains, mainly, concealed. Turner, scholar of transition, orients the researcher’s view below the surface of city transformation processes.

NOTES

¹ With the term ‘Padania’ the Lega Nord refers to the geographical and cultural area which includes the Padana Plain along the River Po. Although not invented by the Lega Nord, the term was used to contrast the supposedly native inhabitants of the area with all the others, in particular foreign migrants.

² “From an initial depiction of the Albanians as ‘Adriatic brothers’ and ‘noble savages’ who validated the ideal of western democracy against Communism, over the course of the crisis they became increasingly represented as merely savage and ‘non-European’. Additionally, the article considers the self reflection stimulated in Italy in the wake of the Albanian Crisis, which problematized Italy’s own rightful position alongside other European nations.” (Zinn 1996)

³ Although the present contribution focuses on the year 2003, field research was conducted from 1998 to 2007; it mainly involved our participation in a variety of public events where migrant-related issues were discussed. The narrative part of the event was recorded, transcribed, and, in some cases, translated. Since the accent was on the rhetoric displayed in public, personal interviews and comments as well as moments of intimacy with several of the actors were not included in the ethnographical text.

⁴ For Turner the social drama is “a process of converting particular values and ends, distributed over a range of actors, into a system (which may be temporary or provisional) of shared or consensual meaning” (1987: 35). It has four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration/schism. It manifests as “a breach of regular, norm-governed social relations. (...) in reality, a ‘symbolic trigger of confrontation or encounter’ to use Frederic Bailey’s terms. (...) Following breach, a phase of mounting crisis supervenes, during which, unless the breach can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and extend until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parts belong. (...) Each public crisis has what I now call liminal characteristics, since it is a threshold (limen) between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not usually a sacred limen, hedged around by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary it takes up its menacing stance in the forum itself, and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. (...) In order to limit the spread of the crisis, certain adjustive and redressive ‘mechanisms’ informal or formal, institutionalized or ad hoc, are swiftly brought into operation by leading or structurally representative members of the disturbed social system. These mechanisms vary in type and complexity (...) They may range from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and (...) to the performance of public ritual” (1974: 38–39).

⁵ From 2001 to 2006 the number of legal immigrants in Italy doubled, passing from 1,300,000 to over 2,600,000.

⁶ In short: Italy is divided into 20 Regions; each Region is comprises a number of Provinces; each Province has a large number of municipalities. Padua is one of the seven Provinces of the Veneto Region and includes the municipality of Padua along with 103 smaller municipalities.

⁷ Ongoing programmes include the project ‘Multicultural Policies and Modes of Citizenship in European Cities’ (MPMC) (<http://www.unesco.org/most/p97.htm>), whose foundation (1992) rests in the collaborative research network of social scientists who undertake research and comparative analyses within selected urban contexts characterised by a substantial presence and activity of immigrant and ethnic

minority groups. Working with policymakers and members of local organizations, their task is to assess the development and interplay of both 'bottom-up' initiatives and 'top-down' (municipality-created) policies aimed at better integrating immigrant and ethnic minorities in public decision-making processes. The project concerns ways in which immigrant and minority groups have gained access (or been confronted with obstacles) to decision-making processes and other ways of participating in the municipal public sphere. This includes the comparative examination of the evolution of local authority frameworks (consultative bodies, forums, ombudsmen), immigrant or ethnic minority associations, and the forms and experiences of liaison between these with regard to matters such as access to welfare, to public funding, business and other forms of economic development, cultural policy and specific elements urban regeneration. The analysis includes the dynamics of the local with other levels of administration, as far as relevant. The MPMC project was formally adopted by the UNESCO-MOST programme in July 1996.⁸ The Regions are given increasing relevance with regard to immigration governance (on the subject see for instance Caponio and Pastore 2003). Councillor Zanon, as well as the Governor of the Region, is a representative of *Alleanza Nazionale*, the right-wing party.

⁹ The Rientro Project was started in 2002 by Councillor Zanon who was responsible for immigration and social security in the Veneto Region (*Assessorato alla sicurezza e ai flussi migratori*), with the specific goal of fostering the return of emigrants of Venetian origin, particularly from Argentina and Chile. The project, although locally interpreted, is based on article 17 of the Immigration Law 189/2002, passed by the centre-right government. The article assigns a quota of entry specifically reserved for workers of Italian origin resident in non EU countries.

¹⁰ Councillor Zanon refers to the provocative interview by Umberto Bossi, the leader of the *Lega Nord*, stating his intention to use cannons (*cannonate*) to stop immigrants' boats approaching Italian coasts.

¹¹ Caffè Pedrocchi is a large building located in very core of Padua. Besides being a town café, it traditionally provides venues for all sorts of meetings, exhibits, and concerts. The conference was addressed to all citizens, and it was considered as a sort of manifesto in view of the forthcoming local as well as national elections. In the chosen excerpt, where Zanonato's speech is reported, it is clear that the integration of migrants would be a relevant issue for the local administration.

¹² Besides Democratici di Sinistra, the Opposition included Margherita (centre), Italia dei Valori (centre), Rifondazione Comunista (left), Verdi (the greens). All these parties converged into the centre left coalition known as Ulivo. The majority in power was the centre-right coalition called *Casa della Libertà*, which at the time included *Forza Italia*, (whose leader was Silvio Berlusconi), *Alleanza Nazionale* (whose leader was Gianfranco Fini), and *Lega Nord* (whose leader was Umberto Bossi), and other rightist-oriented Parties.

¹³ Zanonato is openly critical toward the Majority, and toward all those who backed the U.S. President George W. Bush in sending troops to Iraq to defend democracy and freedom.

¹⁴ Here we should mention the wall in Via Anelli, a degraded neighbourhood which acquired national media attention as Padua's ghetto (see Schmidt and Palutan 2007).

¹⁵ Turner rephrases the concept of reflexivity from personal responsibility to collective and cultural codification in *From Ritual to Theatre*. The concept is then widened in *The Anthropology of Performance*: "I see the social drama, in its full formal development, its full phase structure, as a process of converting particular values and ends, distributed over a range of actors, into a system (which may be temporary or provisional) of shared or consensual meaning. The redressive phase, in which feedback is provided by the scanning mechanisms of law and religious ritual, is a time in which an interpretation is put upon the events leading up to and constituting the phase of crisis. Here the meaning of the social life informs the apprehension of itself; the object to be apprehended enters into and determines the apprehending subject. Sociological and anthropological functionalism, whose aim is to state the conditions of social equilibrium among the components of a social system at a given time, cannot deal with meaning, which always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history." (1987: 33)

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