Conclusion

The Private Life of Political Cooperativism

Co-op Morals: Inside and Outside

This ethnography has brought to the fore a somehow underdiscussed issue in the scholarly approach to cooperatives. Taking labour seriously to appreciate the non-lateral character of cooperatives, it stresses co-op labour's co-articulation with the 'private' lives of co-op members; for instance, with kinship and indeed 'new' kinship idioms, gendered household economies and ideologies of community and friendship. Throughout the book's narrative, I set out to analyse the contradictions, incongruities and inherent differences running through anti-mafia cooperatives' multiple divisions of labour. As member differentiations are framed in moral terms, the ethnography has stressed this moralisation in the social life of cooperatives. Differences and hierarchies among members are equally associated to obligations and social networks *outside* the cooperative's framework as they are with activities performed *within* the framework of cooperative work itself. This constitutes a dialectic between work in the co-ops and social life around the co-ops – both in relation to each other and in relation to bearing new social complexities. This general finding stands as a contribution to our understanding of cooperatives as well as to our views on the embeddedness of labour in the sociocultural domain at large. People's participation in cooperativism is invested in and at times in conflict with their surrounding social framework.

Co-ops are suspended between being totalising institutions and organisations tightly tied to the management of material resources, in this case labour and land associated with a state's value, legality. This suspension brings tensions: it is at once the driving force and a realm of contentious relations over what is moral and how everyday life outside the co-op framework is in line with the regulations within it. Systems and idioms of kinship, household organisation and social memory of landscape and work build into this tension and often bring forward uncomfortable contiguity. This book brings concerns over household economic organisation, kinship practices and gendered views of the self to the fore of the

anthropological concern with cooperatives, cooperativism and cooperational work.

The familial configuration of cooperatives is central to this understanding of stratification that accommodated families and new models of relatedness, inclusive of labour and politics (anti-mafia families). This dynamic role of kinship proved a fundamental aspect of the cooperatives' conflicting complementarity. Strict divisions of labour, on the one hand, determined each team's relatedness idioms, which in turn reinforced the division; on the other hand, these idioms merged kinship with work, thus also contributing to the development of cooperativism. Anti-mafia cooperativism developed *through* distinctive kinship idioms rather than against them. Kinship and gender are central, albeit hidden, facets in constituting experiences of a work collective, which gender solidarity renders a 'second family' for members (Ashwin 1999: 146).

This book's narrative follows a basic principle: the ethnography shows how differentiations within cooperatives move beyond divisions of labour, expressed in an array of moral evaluations. These moral divides include different opinions and practices concerning material resources available to the co-ops, including labour and land. They also comprise, however, diverse practices and ethical stances regarding relational patterns of sociality, including reputation and kinship. These relational settings condition the cooperatives with regard to agents fully external, even theoretically inimical to them, including *mafiosi*. Members' different ideas over community, activism and indeed landed property, brought contradictory and uncomfortable relationalities to the social lives of the co-ops.

In anti-mafia cooperatives, workers moving between the co-ops' employment and local 'community' codes and informal practices *outside* the co-ops alleviated tensions *within* them in ways that prevented class conflict between administrative and workforce teams. Even more so, legality-oriented formal labour in cooperatives *secured* new informal livelihood opportunities for workers, such as welfare benefits. Informalities in workers' livelihoods developed not only alongside legality but also, often, *because* of it. The realms of mutuality – pregnant with claims to community – and of employment existed in interdependence. Encompassing systems accommodate different subsystems, undermining them in a potentially globalised total system (Hann and Hart 2011a: 162). Such systems can include politicised pockets of protected wage labour and diversified 'community' claims in an area thoroughly introduced in global processes of economy.

Ideologies of Enclaving, Practices of Embedding

The main tensions co-ops are suspended between are the claims that they are enclaves of good that are sin-proof (to provide an ecclesiastical metaphor), and the contrast this claim has with reality, that is the sets of practices of co-op members' embeddedness in the social realm. The conflict between embedding and enclaving has been central to the anti-mafia experiment. This conflict has been solidified, by and large, in an almost binary opposition within the labour division's system. In the move from clans to co-ops, divisions developed in close connection with food, anti-mafia, wage labour and reputational networks. The administrators' food activism, virtuous circles of networking, moral bordering of landed property and reputational use of gossip are all part of their attempts at protective seclusion. But this monograph does not operate on a sociological typology of 'power from above'/'resistance from below'. The exegesis pursued here allows for nuances to power, understanding the inegalitarian effects of cooperativism as embedded in broader stratifications and antagonisms of Sicilian society.

The book thus has not adopted, à la James Scott (1998; 2011), a sense of structures that (un)see local nuances or ungoverned agents that resist them. In fact, it is my conviction that no agent actually sees like a state: certainly not the administrators of the anti-mafia cooperatives, who claim that confiscated land and anti-mafia represent the state. Their own agency is conditioned by class belonging and the specifics of members' social situatedness. The same stands for the livelihoods of manual worker-members of the co-ops: their relative subordination but also their deviation from the paper tigers of legality and anti-mafia strictness regarding, say, kinship or community ideologies is in turn influenced by their belongings in webs of local obligation. Members' positions in the co-ops relate not only to labour tasks and divisions but to their broader relationships in their community, including a range of loyalties such as kinship, which thus becomes a crucial feature of cooperativism.

The divisions developing in cooperatives are then going way beyond a two-tiered scheme, revealing a multileveled relationality of difference that plays out not only in labour but also in ideas and practices beyond it. This relationality is the deepest crack in the wall that ideology builds around cooperatives, sealing them off from their environments as enclave economies of good. This is an approach that moves beyond an analytical axis of divisions of labour. It also challenges the normative sociological stress on how co-ops are becoming coopitalists (Sacchetto

and Emenzin 2016, Erratxi et al 2016) or the anthropological critique as to how institutions such as state(s) or market(s) impose stratification from above or from outside (see for instance Oakeshott 1978; Kasmir 1996; Smith 1999; Narotzky 2007; Stephen 2008; Vargas-Cetina 2011). Social stratification in egalitarian institutions is a political project that has a micro-life of everyday contradictions. This position's main ethnographic point is that members of lateral work institutions are embedded in many a relation outside their work environment. This social life of members around the co-ops impacts on relations within them; these relations are absorbed and reified in vested stratifications.

For instance, cooperatives' community participation retains the value of labour for labour, guaranteeing industrial democracy within them (V. Smith 2006). Community participation is hailed as cooperatives' democratic essence, enhancing the assumed emancipatory potentials of the social economy (MacPherson 2008: 640). The anthropological sympathy towards them takes place on the ground of their serving the/a community, distinguishing co-ops from capitalist corporations due to the latter's limited-liability shareholding (Vargas-Cetina 2011: 133). The community orientation of cooperatives is then related to their material accountability to local communities. This structure is reflected in their investment policy, as profits are invested only locally, suggesting an idea of development that, unlike expansive growth, endorses an intensive and productive channeling of capital and labour into local arrangements (Sapelli 2006).

The idea of co-ops as enclaves is often implicitly enhanced by the anthropology of co-ops. This is so even when dynamisms are recognised and co-ops are seen as ephemeral associations, highly context-dependent and in constant flux (Vargas-Cetina 2005: 246–47). The fluidity and labour insecurity that neoliberalism introduces to local communities is taken to mean that the desired community participation makes reform-oriented grassroots cooperatives a cause of resilience for communities (Ferry 2005). The idea of workers' control is stimulating (Dow 2003; Restakis 2010; Azzellini 2015); it is also forcing us to rethink how this control is in its turn controlled, or at least dependent on, market structures and local moralities in and through which co-ops operate. This forms part of a community striving for more autonomy from markets, an idea that, unlike autarky, brings co-ops into some relation with market exchange. This is at times a relation of 'closed' circuits of food production that protect local interests (Luetchford and Pratt 2013: 14–16).

The idea of open and closed economies is useful as it allows for mutability of relations. It can be enriched, however, with an attention to

ideology and the claims to (and ideological uses of) community that can obfuscate stratifications they profess to transgress. Claims to community, in Sicily, reflect and tie in with those presumably constituting good kinship or good food. They are not only mobilised as a democratic counter to external influences but are also often at the centre of already existing conflicts between factions within cooperatives.

In chapter 4, debating the moralities over food production in the co-ops, we saw how constant claims to food-activism principles had the seemingly paradoxical effect of intensifying inequalities and solidifying a seemingly two-tiered division of labour in the co-ops. This division was premised on the accessibility that members had towards making such principles an aspect of their everyday lives: experiencing food activism, that is. Further solidification of labour stratification was introduced according to anti-mafia norms regarding kinship, as explored in chapter 5. These ideas further divided people in the co-ops according to what positive or negative kinship circuit they could tap into.

Abstract principles like food activism or anti-kinship transparency are normative settings that promote a certain framework of operation for co-ops. On paper, they are points of departure for industrial democracy and labour egalitarianism. In actual fact, they have the opposite effect: their application on the grounded life of co-op participants has divisive outcomes as they feed in the valuation and valorisation measurements of cooperative members. They exacerbate existing social inequalities by promoting an *all things being equal* line, according to which people's work and worth is valued and valorised on the grade to which they can adhere to principles of food activism, anti-mafia kinship or moral ascription to landed property.

Like community, and to an extent drawing from the concept's connotation, food activism, 'clean' kinship and the idea of being uncontaminated by mafia are, in effect, ideologies understood in the Marxian sense (as per *The German Ideology*). In that respect, they obscure existing differences and operate on a twofold level in what they do with these differences in actual effect. On a quantitative level, they create more differences out of existing ones. On a qualitative level, their application makes for a leap in kind: they create divisions out of these differences, as they pose as evaluating mechanisms of the work and worth of co-op participants. They inform the division of labour in co-ops and eventually deepen those differential properties that hinder industrial democracy. On the one hand, this concerns the recognition of skill on a hierarchical basis (where management is seen as amenable to the abstract principles of food and anti-mafia activism, and is thus valued more). On the other, it

concerns the actual remuneration of people on the basis of this valuation, both in terms of the stability of work offered to them and in terms of the actual valorisation of their work for the co-op.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the encompassing ideological realm of 'community' – an issue that is at once an attempt at enclaving and at embedding. This abstract notion is forged in an idealised fashion in the lab of Libertà and the Consortium. These institutions, detached from San Giovanni's everyday life – the site being so close geographically to Palermo yet so far away in terms of stratification mechanisms – promote a specific view of community that has normative ambitions. This normativity is reflected in attitudes to material (as per land), immaterial (as per reputation) or relational (as per kinship) attributes of social life in and around the cooperatives.

I would need to stress that this finding does not promote ideas of agrarian labour institutions as harmonious hybrids; rather, it means that cooperatives operate within and among tensions. This is because they are *at once* personal and impersonal institutions, incorporating claims to market and mutuality as well as to economy and community. Members' claims to 'community participation' or their policing of the moral borders of a co-op do not always ease such tensions, as is often assumed, and can instead exacerbate them.

The case of the anti-mafia cooperatives brings together the contrasting views of Marx and Mauss. The Maussian perspective is that cooperatives become vectors for people's lived practice, models of economic activity that offer alternatives to hierarchies of power in labour relations. Cooperativism arose historically to combat wage labour and the associated division of labour, with the aim of correcting the resultant social inequalities. But it was also a response, already since Rochdale, to markets for labour (in the case of Sicily, conditioned by mafia) that often left people without regular work. It developed, often on moral grounds, by drawing on ideas of 'community', regionalism, and communalism – and in some cases, like Mondragón, politicised nationalism. The fact that anti-mafia cooperatives do not defy the state but involve positive engagements with it also confirms the Marxian critique that stresses their contradictions. In that respect, co-op horizontalism is framed in dynamic configurations 'between' the market and state policy.

'Cooperatives' is then not a self-explanatory term but one claimed and contested by varied groups, associated with different political and ideological allegiances and formed as a response to different problems and needs. Cooperatives arise in relation to a broad range of ideals and actors, from state to social movements, from fascist to communist or anarchist

ideologies. They are often outcomes of top-down planning rather than grassroots initiatives or experiences – not divorced from the local context but not derived from it either. Market structures and political ideas imposed from 'outside' shape and are shaped by members' everyday work experience and social relations. It is this experience that we need to pay attention to – appreciating the enclaving ideologies but focusing on the embedding aspect of co-op life.

Cooperative Futures as an Anthropological Concern

Arguably the most cited phrase in modern European literature regarding fin-de-siècle capacity for historical change comes from Tomasi di Lampedusa's Sicilian masterpiece *The Leopard*: 'Everything must change so that everything can stay the same' ('*Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è, bisogna che tutto cambi*', 2010: 23). A lot changed in Spicco Vallata, no doubt. This book's opening vignette, with a minor *mafioso* and Piero debating over labour, suggested that the pursuit of workers' rights in Spicco Vallata (through the co-ops) has had positive results. This may seem to be undermined by what the ethnography has shown about the fissures and contradictions of this endeavour, underlining the richness of local life (unfolding in bars, in confiscated land plots and in the cooperatives themselves), which proved impossible to contain in strict jural categories.

Nonetheless, the cooperatives *did* introduce significant positive changes to the lives of an increasing number of people in Sicily and, by now, southern Italy at large. The confiscation of assets owned by mafias and organised crime is debated in many fora outside Italy – including the European Parliament – to possibly be adopted as a micro-developmental project across the European Union. What is more, the values the cooperatives represent (albeit in dynamic relation – and conflict – with local ones) still count as the most tangible success of the anti-mafia movement in Italy. It is up to future developments to see whether this configuration of cooperativism within broader neoliberal developments, and indeed in a time of austerity for Italy, will further affect people's livelihoods in Spicco Vallata and elsewhere in Sicily, and it is also for them to decide how such effects can be beneficial.

It is also for this reason (studying livelihoods as an anthropological drive) that, to re-establish cooperativism as an anthropological concern, we need to return it to the subjective experience of participating in 'it'. The idea of cooperation as non-ideological and experienced is a start,

but tracing where this experience is deployed is a necessary next step. Members' practices outside politicised cooperative contexts deserve more attention in order to comprehend not only their livelihoods but also inequalities of cooperatives. As co-ops' aim and praxis generally cannot engulf members' lives altogether – in the holistic sense institutions like monasteries do – members' lives and livelihoods around and outside their co-op life matter as much as cooperativist ideologies – like 'anti-mafia'. In anti-mafia cooperatives, the political project of curbing mafia was defined in terms of disembedding cooperative economic activity from certain traditions.

Class position was informed by members' different negotiations of the local arrangements in which resources (land, labour) were embedded, especially regarding local obligations and networks (e.g., mutual aid work) that are not in line with the movement's political principles. The movement from clans to state to co-ops has some clan residues in it: inertia brings them along the stream of centralisation and 'standardisation' (the idea that opened this book, in Gianpiero's words). While consolidating cooperatives' internal division of labour, the tension between different values also indicated the dynamic nature of workers' kinship relations or the use of local codes (gossip) by administrators. In Spicco Vallata, the realm of standardised employment and jural codification of property in land was both contested and complemented, in members' experience, by local values, which unfolded in informal economic activity in a project seemingly 'protectionist' for labour.

The major breakthrough of anti-mafia cooperatives, recognised by the majority of informants, was the creation of jobs in an area of chronic informal economic activity and unemployment. Cooperative employment, however, converged with continuities on the ground and often intensified informal ideas about recruitment, work and land among cooperative participants, developing alongside informal economy practices (e.g., benefit fraud and *lavoro nero,* ie. informal and hidden labour). Locals' livelihoods integrated the stable income from cooperatives' waged employment, maintaining community schemes of 'mutual aid' through which households informally exchanged money for (unregistered) work. Moreover, the moral connotations of ownership constantly challenged the rigid framework that sought to contain confiscated land within new property boundaries.

This is not a matter of Lampedusa's fatalism vis-à-vis change. It is about admitting that cooperatives are, willy-nilly, embedded in a particular social context which, for historical, economic and political reasons, does not 'fit' their ideology – though the cooperatives' pragmatic support in

the form of jobs is appreciated. As 'cooperatives', like 'livelihoods', are entangled in broad social realities, the future development of cooperatives should be more appreciative of local context, attentive to local livelihood models, codes and kinship in order to contribute to deeper and more enduring social change.