8

Provincial Capital vs. Peasant Capital

A Subaltern Perspective on Urban Rise and Fall from Grace

Anne Parmly Toxey

INTRODUCTION

History is rarely recorded from the subaltern viewpoint. This is certainly true for the many histories written about the ancient city of Matera. Located deep in southern Italy, this city has been the prize of invading armies and the destination of incoming immigrant groups for millennia (figure 8.1). Situated in and on a cliff at the threshold between eastern coastal trading cities, such as Bari, and the remote, mountainous interior of the southern Italic peninsula, Matera's poised position has witnessed waves of human migration and settlement. Much of this observation of movement and change has come from *within* the cliff. Matera's most distinctive feature is its indigenous building form: cave structures excavated from the naturally cavernous ridge of soft limestone. Many of these grottoes were gradually augmented with rooms constructed in front of the caves, creating intricate spaces woven into and out of the cliff. An Escheresque network of steps connects thousands of complex spaces, now a UNESCO World Heritage Monument (figure 8.2).

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, most histories on Matera are generally not descriptions of this fascinating city and the lives of its residents but biographies of noble families. Stories and information about the uneducated, non-elite were relegated to oral tradition until recent times with compulsory education—although even now there is little interest in recording a humble and humiliating past. Due to unusual circumstances,

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Figure 8.1. *Map of Italy showing location of Matera in the deep south. (Credit: Patrick McMillan)*

however, Matera became a center of extensive academic research and political interest in the 1950s, which produced volumes of data, a history written by Francesco Nitti (a former member of the subaltern class), and recorded interviews with other members of this group.

Supplementing written accounts, the physical city itself—its urban landscape— provides an understanding of the city's social history.[1] It is the record of human actions. Defined as "the interaction of human thought and behavior with the physical environment," landscape "archives . . . social experience and cultural meaning" and therefore "has a cultural message imprinted."[2] Landscape

Figure 8.2. *Intricate layers of houses carved into and out of the limestone hillside. (Credit: Anne Parmly Toxey)*

also elucidates the relationship of geography and physical form to the creation of political authority and the enforcement of alterity. In other words, the materiality of place informs both social development and urban form.

In his publication, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities,* Adam T. Smith demonstrates the interdependence of political authority (politics and power) and geography (the landscape, city, individual buildings, and other spaces and places within the polity).[3] Rather than interpreting the built environment as a reflection of socioeconomic forces, he identifies it as a *cause* of a city's socioeconomic structure.

Diagrammed clearly in Matera, the phenomenon of physical setting influencing social form provides a locus for the current study as well as a textbook example of Smith's political landscape model, based on experience, perception, and imagination. Made tangible here are Smith's arguments that space and landscape are dynamic and influential and that politics, landscape, and civic values interrelate. However, this study shifts its focus away from analysis of how space has been used to create and wield power, to how the powerless perceive the space of the city and how it reinforces their lack of political authority.

Over the past approximately 350 millennia,[4] Matera stratigraphically evolved, both socially and physically. Phases of urban development and social change coincide with the rise and fall of the city's significance as an ecclesiastical and secular capital, especially over the past four centuries. While the story of capital status and resultant urban development is often told from the perspective of the ruling elite, this chapter considers the subaltern experience of crowding and shame that accompanied the lives of most Materan citizens as a result of the city's political successes. I posit that life in the "Capital of Peasant Civilization" (one of Matera's monikers) connoted ignominy for residents of the densely populated non-elite quarters, while life in the "Capital of the Province of Matera" (its concurrent title) connoted pride for residents of elite quarters, which also contained the apparatuses of civic and religious authority (the main piazza and the cathedral). In addition to Nitti's firsthand account of Materan history, official studies, outsider observations, and the physical transformations of the city provide circumstantial evidence of life in the peasant quarters (until their near total evacuation in the 1970s) of a city that waxed and waned in political importance.

PREHISTORIC ORIGINS AND CITY FORM

The beautiful integration and adaptation of human settlement to a natural setting achieved in Matera is noted in UNESCO's description of the site on

its World Heritage List: "This is the most outstanding, intact example of a troglodyte settlement in the Mediterranean region, perfectly adapted to its terrain and ecosystem. The first inhabited zone dates from the Palaeolithic, while later settlements illustrate a number of significant stages in human history."[5] Called the *Sassi*, two of the oldest sectors of the city are primarily composed of part-cave, part-constructed homes encrusting the cliff. In centuries and millennia past, residents expanded naturally formed caves and carved new ones into the soft limestone of the gently sloped cliff. They used the quarried stone to build additional rooms in front of the voids. In this vertical city, composed of about twelve levels, the street of one level provides the roof of structures below it. According to Pietro Laureano—architect and author of the UNESCO nomination—the caves, many of which slope downward as one enters, have been developed to maximize the low winter sun angle (figure 8.3).[6] Though humid, the constant-temperature caves provide thermal comfort: a cool respite in hot summer and a warm shelter in winter. The culture that developed here maximized the collection of rainwater through an intricate system of roof gutters, street canals, and cisterns, which augmented the two natural streams (called the *Grabaglioni*) that issue from the crest of the hill and bisect each of the cave sectors. This system provided year-round water to the extensive hanging gardens that graced the site and nourished residents through the early to mid-twentieth century, when the water-collection system was dismantled (figure 8.4).

Like UNESCO, I have so far described the site as an Italian Arcadia, as implied by its misty origins and sketchy prehistoric archaeological record. While the reuse of caves over time has resulted in the loss of diagnostic archaeological material, excavations in and around Matera nevertheless provide evidence of human occupation from the early, middle, and late Paleolithic; Neolithic; Eneolithic; early, middle, and late Bronze Age; and Iron Age. Pastoral tribes, such as the Ausoni, Enotri, Morgesi, Peuceti, Italioti, and Pelasgi, lived in and around these and nearby naturally formed caves and contributed to the development and settlement of the area. The site's architectural, archaeological, and written records become far more intact, however, beginning in the seventh to eighth centuries CE. From this time forward, evidence remains of the site's religious and social complexity intertwined and interrelated with its spatial complexity: a dizzying maze of thousands of cave homes dominated by aristocratic palaces and soaring churches lining the ridge above it. Located both inside and outside current-day Matera are hundreds of Byzantine cave chapels dating from as early as the seventh century. Chroniclers of Matera's early history note eighth- and ninth-century sieges by Goths, Longobards,

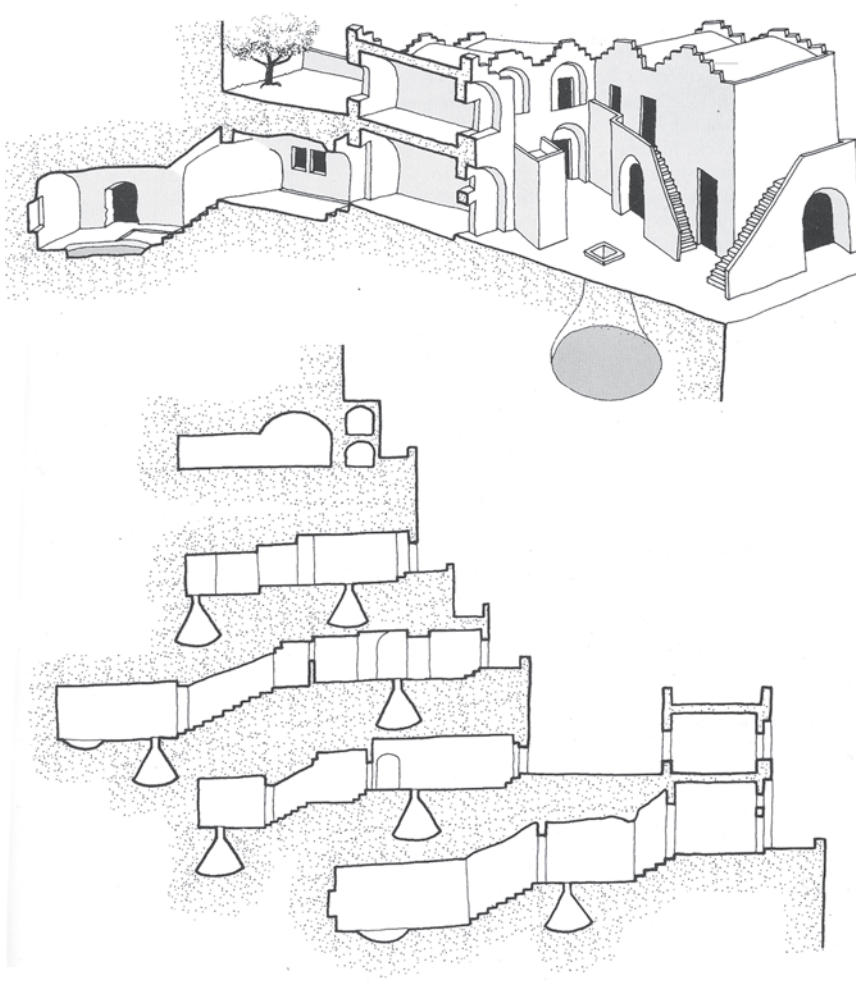

Figure 8.3. *Axonometric and section drawings illustrating sloping of cave structures into the hillside. (Credit: Pietro Laureano)*

Byzantines, and Saracens, placing the organization of the municipality in the eighth century or earlier.

In addition to the naturally cavernous site, which lent itself to rupestral habitation, the surrounding geography has greatly influenced the political and social history of the city and its resultant physical form. The city liminally clings to the western edge of the Apulian Murgia (the high eastern coastal plain)

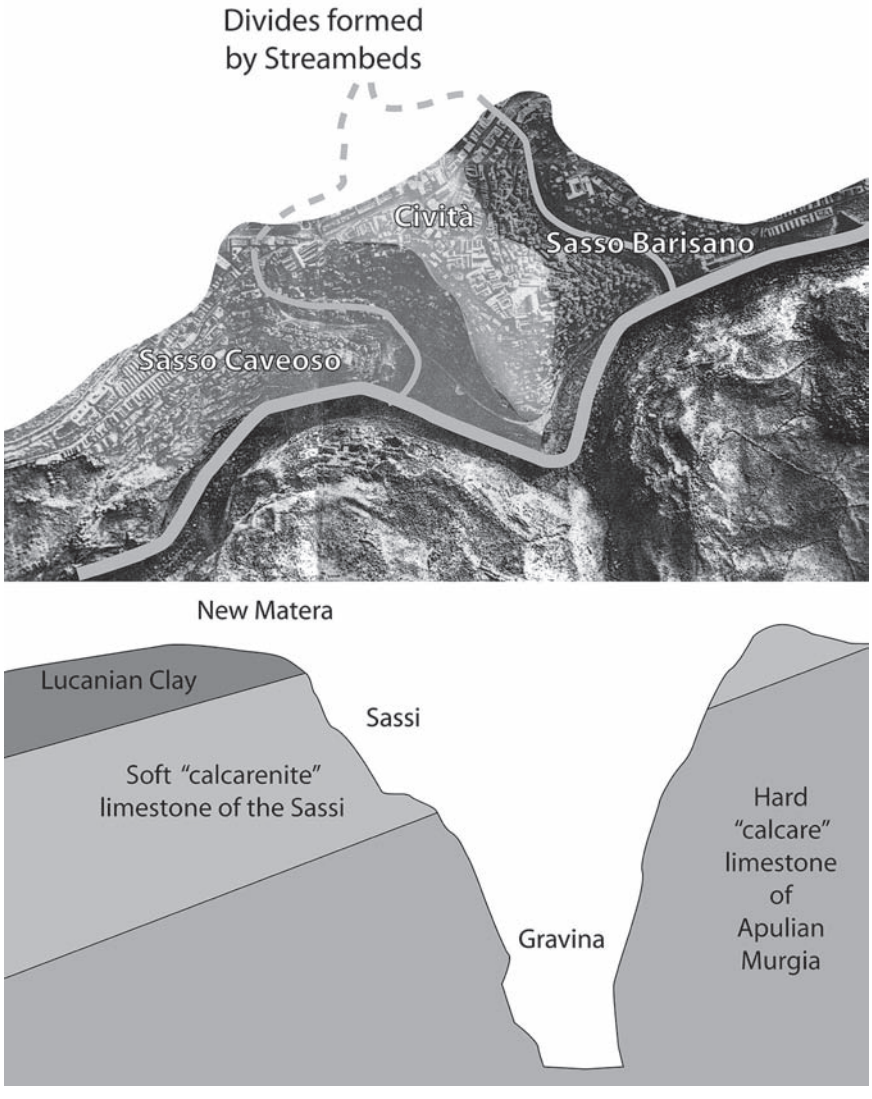

Figure 8.4. *Section and aerial illustration of the Sassi in relation to surrounding geography. (Credit: Patrick McMillan)*

at its boundary with the clay hills of Basilicata. This strategic position and the geographies that structure it have provided for the city's religious, political, and commercial importance, while also exposing it to siege as the quarry

of invading armies. In addition to having Byzantine and later rock churches, Matera has been the seat of a Latin archbishop for 800 years and has served as provincial and regional capital. Within these leadership roles, Matera has absorbed a diversity of immigrant groups seeking political and religious asylum.

Despite the cultural diversity that forms the fabric of the Materan population, citizens of this town associate their culture with distant indigenous tribes and with the Aragon rulers of the city's golden age during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. During the last century of this reign, the city enjoyed an important role in the kingdom as capital of the region of Basilicata. Its most lavish architecture was built at this time, and it is recorded in histories and chronicles as being a prosperous city with fine food and resources.

Though influenced by the Neapolitan seat of government—for example, in architectural details on governmental and ecclesiastical buildings constructed in Matera during this reign—Matera was and continues to be staunchly independent. Materans even collectively assassinated the king's appointed local ruler, Count Giancarlo Tramontano, in 1514 and local nobleman, Count Gattini, in 1860 (the former due to his unreasonable taxation and the latter due to political disagreement over national unification).

Italian national unity established in 1861 and 1871 has always been tenuous, and except when the nation as a whole is threatened (or is competing in international sporting events), Italian citizens feel strongest geographic bonds with their municipalities, a sentiment that diminishes with each larger geopolitical body: province, region, state, and now European Union. As a provincial capital, therefore, Matera exerts considerable political and cultural authority over its immediate surroundings and generates greater allegiance from provincial residents than does Rome (and previously Naples). Also, being the seat of an archbishop and the site of hundreds of churches and chapels (and previously numerous convents and monasteries), the city also imposes religious authority over a broad area.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, BOTH PHYSICAL AND METAPHORICAL

Located on a high spit of land separating the two cave zones is the *Civita*, the central stronghold of the city, which historically housed its rulers, noble families, a cathedral, and the archbishop's palace (figure 8.5). Like other citadels, this one was protected from attack by cliffs, defensive walls, towers, moats, gates, and drawbridges. A sixteenth-century traveler's journal describes Matera as a tripartite city (two Sassi divided by the Civita), whose three distinct zones

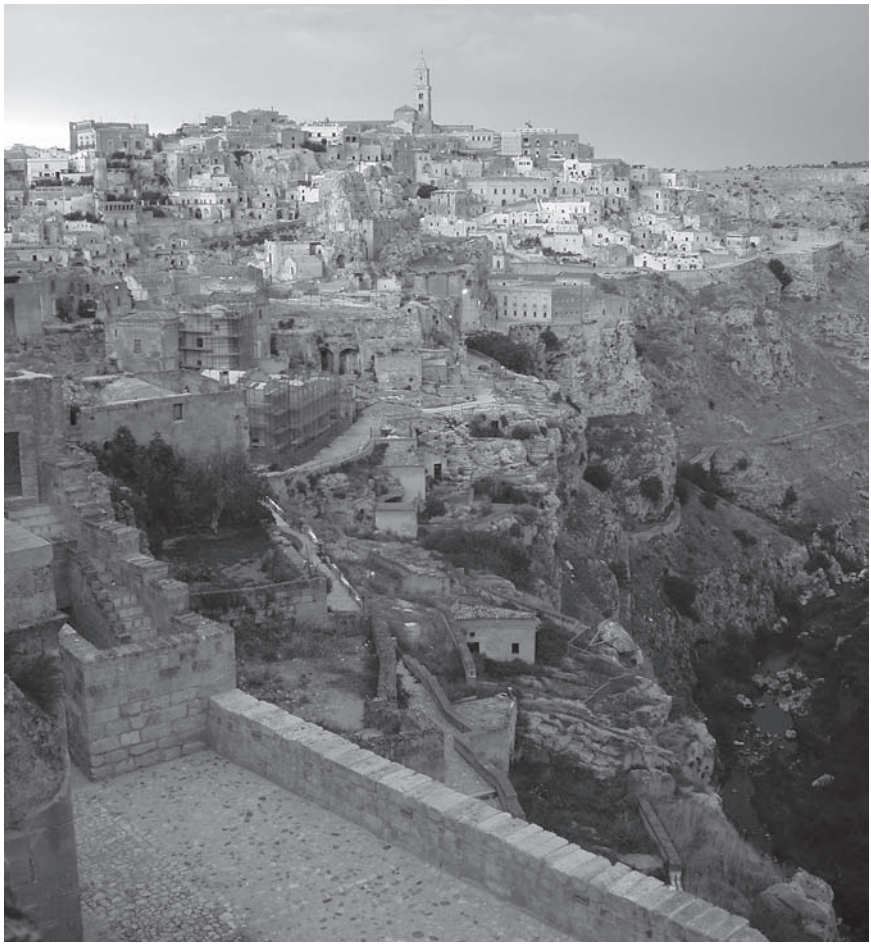

Figure 8.5. *Matera's cathedral dominates the Civita, which in turn towers above the Sassi. (Credit: Anne Parmly Toxey)*

had little communication.[7] Social stratification was enacted physically in this arrangement of rulers' palaces towering above the simple cave structures of their subjects. This arrangement vividly illustrates Smith's observation that the elite of a city create spaces that both produce and legitimize their authority—and, I add, that ensure the reproduction of alterity and lack of power among the citizenry—through the idiosyncratic use of landscape.

Between the late seventeenth century and the early twentieth century, three events dramatically impacted Matera's urban form. First, in 1668 the Spanish

Crown elevated Matera from a non-capital city within the coastal region of current-day Apulia to the capital of inland Basilicata. Then, in 1806 the Napoleonic Empire shifted the regional capital away from Matera, leaving this city abeyant and impoverished. Finally, in 1926 the Fascist regime again lifted Matera to a state of grace by naming it a provincial capital, a title that it holds today. Both events of being named capital ushered in periods of prosperity for the city—at least, for the well-to-do. The title brought to the city law courts, magistrates, regional government offices, powerful government families, functionaries, military, banks, commerce, contact with the external world, and prestige—privileges that were lost when the city lost its role as capital in the nineteenth century. Newcomers and new roles expanded the capital city's need for public and commercial structures, as well as houses for new residents.

With the Sassi and the Civita bounded by cliffs, physical growth was limited. During times of capital expansion, therefore, the Civita spread onto the flat ridge above the cave sectors. Hemming the Sassi from above—as the steep cliffs did from below—this physical change in the city's form reinforced the boundary between the elite and subaltern parts of the city and further restricted Sassi growth. This new area (now referred to as the *centro storico*, or historic center) is located on the geographic feature called the *Piano,* which means the plain or flat surface (as described in comparison to the perpendicular city of the Sassi).

Accompanying the first capital appointment, wealthy families living in the cave sectors (many in grand and lavishly ornamented houses and palaces) left for new development on the Piano above the Sassi, where they joined the aristocrats. The combined upper classes, called the *signori* (gentlemen), were composed of noblemen, professionals, functionaries, and landowners. Their departure from the Sassi resulted in a concentration of poorer people in these zones (largely tenant farmers and day-laborers but also artisans and small landholders) and a physical enactment of social stratification. Before this time, the city's small roster of noblemen lived in the Civita, but the great majority of the city with its range of wealth lived mixed in the Sassi. After the departure of the well-to-do, the subaltern left behind were condensed within the cave dwellings, while the signori lorded over them from palaces along the expansive ridge above.

With each wave of development, the city's population increased, both on the expanding ridge and in the packed Sassi, unable to grow due to physical constraints. Caves were dug deeper and constructions became denser to house the growing peasant population. Palaces abandoned by the wealthy were divided into smaller living units. Other structures, such as cisterns and

rock churches, winemaking spaces, stables, and gardens were transformed or redeveloped into houses—a process that continued into the twentieth century. As European standards of living rose, quality of life in the overcrowded Sassi sank—or at least perceptions of it sank. Although the living conditions of the Sassi's peasants were no worse than those of other rural Italian communities, the discrepancy between the haves and the have-nots was more evident in Matera, being a capital city. In this role, Matera was included on the itineraries of visiting clergy and dignitaries as well as wealthy tourists from northern countries. More visible than neighboring villages, the living conditions of the picturesque Sassi became ever more criticized in travel literature. It was Matera's political position that brought visibility to and contempt for these conditions, and it was Matera's political position that eventually brought change.

The extent of separation and segregation between the working and peasant classes in the Sassi and the growing upper classes on the Piano is described in historical texts and is visible in the urban fabric. Travelers' accounts starting in the sixteenth century and continuing through the early eighteenth century are complimentary of the city—its "fresh water," "delicate wine" and "very curious look" (the caves) resembling a "starry sky" at night.[8] They describe the cave structures, in which a majority of the people "still live," suggesting that cave-life was acceptable in the past but not present. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, observers unfavorably compare Sassi occupants with Piano occupants, speaking of the beauty of the latter and the "very ugly, dirty, tattered, wild" character of the former. Disease, delinquency, disorder, ignorance, barbarity, calamity, and abominable filth are attributed to the lifestyle they lead and the way they nourish themselves. Although rotting manure and garbage in the streets, open sewers, and rancid meat are largely blamed for the filth observed, the author criticizes the caves' darkness, humidity, and dangerous perch as contributing to human misery. Danger, not beauty or other advantage, is associated with the city's siting. Meanwhile, the author praises the bread, wine, and water of the city, presumably the Piano.[9]

Matera's presence in foreign travel literature nearly disappears in the nineteenth century along with its loss of title as regional capital and resultant waning importance. Guidebook accounts of Matera are cursory at best, and no aesthetic observations are made. Visitors' impressions of the city as a whole are tainted by the negative image of the Sassi. One author relates that the ancient caverns are said to house the lower classes, while another travel guide asserts that "Matera is a dirty town, and its lower classes are said to be the least civilized of the province of Basilicata."[10]

By the early twentieth century, Matera's squalor had entered academic and political discussions. However the city's presence in travel literature remained scant until the 1930s. Coinciding with the Fascist elevation of Matera to provincial capital and with Matera's growing presence in political and media discourse, the city makes a major comeback in guidebooks, which crown it from here after as "one of the most picturesque cities of Italy."

As the Piano developed from the late seventeenth century onward, measures were taken to exclude the lower classes from this elite realm. Exemplifying what Smith describes as "the insulation . . . from contact with the poor . . . by physically removing or intimidating the undesirable segment of the population,"[11] the urban fabric of the Piano physically reinforced the separation of the Sassi from the functioning of the city. A continuous wall of elite structures, called the *Quinta Settecentesca*,[12] separated the Sassi from the Piano and the rest of the city (both physically and visually) and continues to function today (figure 8.6). Windows and balconies from the elegant Quinta structures, however, were afforded magnificent panoramas of the Sassi and Gravina beyond. These private, panoptic views are referred to as seats at the theater, the spectacle being the Sassi below.

As the Piano was developed by the upper classes, caves that had previously extended the Sassi onto the Piano were either repurposed as cellars for new urban structures or were filled with clay and paved over. Between this act and the development of the Quinta, the dividing line between the Sassi and the Piano hardened, and Sassi residents, though representing the majority of the population, were excluded from the city's civic and religious centers on the Piano. Separate churches served the two populations, as did separate shops, separate roads, separate water fountains, and separate physical and spiritual worlds.

Until the 1930s, access to the Sassi was limited to obscure, narrow stairways disappearing between Quinta houses and used by the peasants and their mules. When a paved road was finally built through the Sassi under the Fascist regime to ease the peasants' hard lives, Piano residents lobbied for the road to bypass the Piano, keeping the peasants and their dirty mules and wagons off the elegant streets of the city center—and reinforcing the segregation of these two populations (figure 8.7).[13] Oral histories recount that from this time forward the two opposed worlds of the Sassi and the Piano no longer met or interacted.

During the Fascist era, when Matera rose to the position of provincial capital, this segregation largely remained intact. The regime's modernization work in the Sassi—culvertizing the *Grabaglioni*, paving them over with the road, developing a sewerage system, and constructing fountains in the Sassi to bring fresh water here from the Apulian Aqueduct (making the cistern system

Figure 8.6. *This line of buildings forms the Quinta, which separates the Sassi (background) from the Piano (foreground). (Credit: Anne Parmly Toxey)*

redundant)—resulted in displacement of some residents for the public works projects. For these people, new housing on the Piano was provided, leading to a small amount of desegregation. Despite promises of demolishing the insalubrious Sassi housing and providing new homes for most residents, the Fascist regime focused its construction energies on quadrupling the size of the Piano. To accommodate the new administrative functions of the capital city and the newcomers moving to Matera to fill bureaucratic roles, extensive public buildings and new houses were constructed, as well as a local railroad line. Even though the Sassi improvements only assuaged the harsh lifestyle maintained there without addressing overcrowding, former Sassi residents often praise Mussolini for these modernization efforts. These represented the first phase of a much larger Fascist modernization plan for Matera tied to his rural expansion and agricultural reform programs.

The fact that the lower classes lived physically below the upper classes—and in houses that were associated with primordial existence, even though more than half of the Sassi spaces were not cavernous by that time—kept them

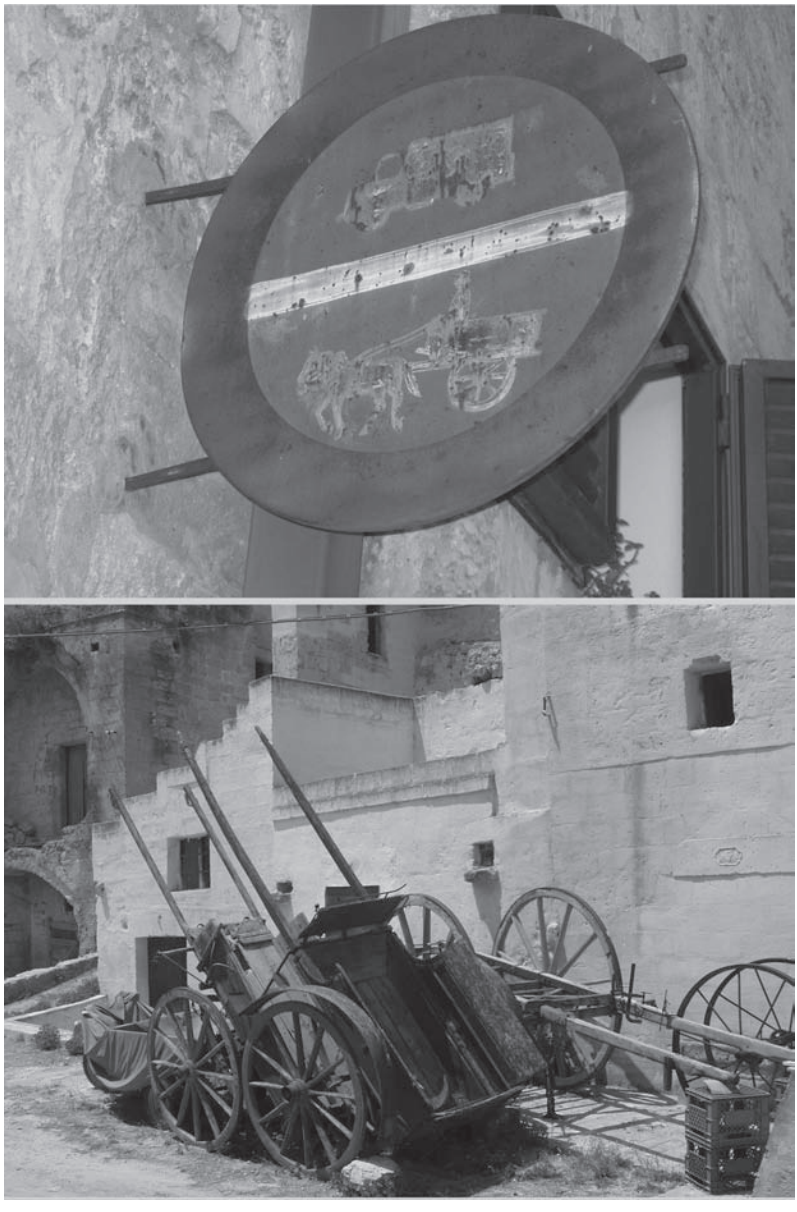

Figure 8.7. *Top: Faded but still visible traffic sign from the mid-twentieth century indicating that merchant trucks and horse-drawn peasant wagons are not allowed in this location. Bottom: Reproductions of peasant wagons in the Sassi today. (Credit: Anne Parmly Toxey)*

subordinate to the elite. In other words, the geography of the site contributed to the social stratification and political organization of the city, just as the geography of the site had previously made it hospitable for human settlement with natural resources and natural defenses. Another contrast between the Sassi and the Piano that is ordained by landscape is the unplanned, haphazard, irregular street arrangement and layout of houses in the Sassi (associated with wildness, irrationality, and femininity) compared with the long, straight streets, and orderly, highly planned nature of the Piano (associated with rationality, civility, and masculinity), which here dominates, subordinates, and controls the barbaric Sassi below. The planned, regular streets of the governing Piano were developed during the city's tenure as a capital.

Though condemned by observers, including the national government, the Sassi situation had been abided because of its similarity with other communities. When Matera became a provincial capital in 1926, however, the city was distinguished from surrounding towns. As a capital city, its backwardness could no longer be tolerated. The mayor of Matera announced in 1926, "the state will not be able to ignore the unusual conditions of the city of Matera. It realizes the urgent need to supply to these the order and decorum of civil life that are thrust upon this city, which is also today becoming a Provincial Capital."[14] According to these words, civil order and decorum are not expected of non-capital towns. Matera's change in status made only *this* city's living conditions unacceptable to the government but did not affect the poverty of neighboring towns. Although the government did follow through and address some of the problems, the increased activity, jobs, and money that accompanied Matera's new role swelled the population, aggravating overcrowding in the physically confined Sassi.[15]

VIEW FROM BELOW

The most powerful critique of the squalor held in the Sassi was made by Carlo Levi in his famous book, *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (first published in Italian in 1946). His perspective was not that of a traveler but of a political activist who had been exiled to the South by the Fascist regime. Unlike guidebooks, his book criticized *not* the peasants and their lifestyle but the ruling classes and political leaders whom he held responsible for their inferior living conditions, illnesses, poverty, and lack of education. Living among peasants in a village near Matera and recounting his sister's direct contact with Sassi residents, he writes from the perspective of the peasant. Wildly popular and translated into several languages, this book brought world attention to the

conditions forced onto Sassi dwellers by wealthy landowners who watched them from above.

Levi greatly esteemed southern Italian peasants and their singular culture; however, he deplored the southern ruling class, whom he blamed for the peasants' plight—especially residents of the Sassi. With lurid descriptions—supplied by Levi's sister, who passed through Matera on her way to visit him—he amplified the circumstances of Sassi residents in order to villainize their overlords as well as the Fascist regime, despite the comforts and improvements that the Fascists had brought to Matera and the Sassi. He spoke of filth, lice, dysentery, starvation, distended stomachs, malaria, black fever, and flies crawling on the swollen eyelids of children with trachoma.

Even if reported here accurately, which is debatable, the abjection and suffering felt in the Sassi were less extreme than some other locations in the South,[16] probably due to Matera's position as an affluent, capital city, although this situation also increased crowding in the Sassi. The fact that Matera's premodern lifestyle took place in a site associated with caves made the story all the more poignant and alarming. And the fact that this took place in a capital city made its situation all the more visible and all the more disgraceful when contrasted to the city's sumptuous and modern architecture on the Piano. Demonstrating the deficit between the premodern conditions of the Sassi and the elevated modern standards of postwar Europe, Levi (whose involvement in Matera continued through the mid-1970s) made an example of Matera, which became known throughout Italy as "the national shame" *(la vergogna nazionale)*. Levi is also credited with branding the city as "the Capital of Peasant Civilization."

Levi was a member of the privileged class but was an outsider to Matera and the South. His attack on this city—which eventually led to the evacuation of the Sassi and the physical and social reorganization of the city—can be compared to the conquests described by Adam T. Smith, such as those of the Urartian regime on surrounding provinces, also resulting in their evacuation.[17] One significant difference, however, is that Levi's war was waged with published words, a weapon not available to Smith's early complex polities. The fact that this conquest, which had powerful physical, social, economic, and political impacts on the city, took place in the non-spatialized world of words is significant. It does not disprove Smith's thesis or diminish his contributions to the study of society and place, but it does complicate the analysis.

Political discussions about what to do for Matera had been taking place for half a century before the appearance of Levi's book; however, this publication and the shame that it wrought catalyzed political and media debates

and influenced postwar elections. A series of laws were passed to renovate the Sassi homes. In the end, however, the Sassi were largely evacuated and the residents moved to new housing on the Piano. This decision was made based on the overwhelming desire to bury the Sassi and the shame that they brought to the nation. In addition, it leveled the playing court, quite literally, by erasing the vertical segregation that was built into the old city.

Moved by Levi's book and intrigued by the concept of a *metropoli dei cavernicoli* (metropolis of cave dwellers) in twentieth-century Europe, scholars flocked to Matera in the 1950s, wanting to study the troglodyte culture and to improve the lives of residents. Coalescing under postwar funding agencies—including the Marshall Plan and *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (INU: National Institute for Planning)—one group of researchers carried out a landmark survey of the lives of Sassi occupants. Nitti's efforts belong to this group, which was led by Friedrich George Friedmann, a philosophy professor from the University of Arkansas. After meeting with Levi in Rome, Friedmann arrived in Matera with a Fulbright fellowship to study "the philosophy of life of Italian peasants." Other members of the group, all of whom were noted scholars or professionals, mostly from Rome, included Riccardo Musatti, Giuseppe Isnardi, Francesco Nitti, Tullio Tentori, Federico Gorio, Ludovico Quaroni, Rocco Mazzarone, Lidia De Rita, Giuseppe Orlando, Gilberto Marselli, and Eleonora Bracco. In addition, Adriano Olivetti was involved with the work as a mentor and ideological guide. Their official name was the *Commissione per lo studio della città e dell'agro di Matera,* but they were known as the *Gruppo-Studi* (Study Group).

Working as a team, each member brought a different perspective and field of study to the survey, including philosophy, journalism, geography, history, ethnology, architecture, planning, demography, psychology, economy, palaeoethnology, and engineering. They produced a series of documents in 1956, including that of Nitti. Published by UNRRA-Casas (the Italian sector of the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Administration, which was a conduit for US aid and idealism into the Italian countryside), this study incorporated other data collected by UNRRA-Casas from 1946 until 1951, when Friedmann's Study Group joined forces.

Their approach was interdisciplinary, rigorous, scientific, and objective, yet also flexible. They humanized the more clinical studies previously conducted on Matera by using an empathetic methodology that approached participant-observation. To better describe their approach, Friedmann called it an "encounter" with the people as opposed to a "study" of them. By "interpreting and penetrating the reality" of the culture through direct

contact and experience, the scholars felt that they achieved a more objective and inclusive understanding of the society.[18] Self-described as "the first organic Italian example of an 'integral study of a community,'" the "dignified" work analyzed the "social, ethical, physical, and economic situation." Their intent was to document the Materan peasant's lifestyle and devise ways of maintaining this culture within modern housing. In other words, the intent behind the study was not abstract but practical: to be used to make interventions and concrete changes in lives. In addition the researchers and their funders hoped to develop a socioeconomic solution that could apply to the rest of Italy's agricultural South.

The model town that resulted from the study was called La Martella, built a few miles from Matera. Forecast as an exemplar, classless, rural village—a southern utopia—the town failed to live up to its goals of preserving the peasant culture. In fact, it failed even as a town due to political problems at the national level, which neglected to provide the services and agricultural fields necessary to support the population moved there from the Sassi. Nevertheless, the Study Group's work influenced much postwar housing in the South, legislation that provided new or modernized housing for Sassi residents, and the creation of a new urban development plan for Matera. The study is also valued today for its meticulous record of southern Italian peasant culture in the mid-twentieth century.

Friedmann describes the Materan peasant's perspective as "a confusing tangle of emotions (that go from shame to pride), [resulting from] the strident contrast among the objective conditions of life (of the peasant) and the nobility of his reactions. This contrast symbolizes to the visitor . . . that *misery* represents rather more than a state of material conditions; it is instead an exasperation of poverty, a way of life, a philosophy."[19] Friedmann's descriptions of the culture are filled with these binaries. Like Levi, he saw the southern Italian peasant as Rousseau's noble savage, living in a world of contrasts: miserable yet dignified, ignorant yet wise, eloquently silent, an unrecognized divinity living in a cave metropolis and possessing a peasant philosophy.[20] He admits the romanticism of his engagement with the research when he writes in 1956: "Today it is clear to me that I was attracted to the epic grandiosity of the fate of peasants, that I was romantically yearning to merge with the very ancient roots of their closed existence, that I wanted to learn their wisdom, and in exchange help provide them some of the ease and hope of the modern world."[21] Friedmann's desire to help was certainly genuine; however, his paternalistic attitude foreshadowed the welfare conditions that developed here at this time and continue today.

One reason for the emotional confusion described by Friedmann is explained in the volume by Tullio Tentori, which is probably the first ethnology of Materan culture. He describes the society as it was through the mid-nineteenth century: composed of two antithetical and impenetrable worlds: that of the privileged (the signori) and that of the subaltern.

> So ingrained was the idea of this polarization of society that even the Church seemed to have adopted different bells to announce the birth or death of a nobleman or of a "poor Christian." Only bonds of dependence and servitude united the two human categories in the structure of the community. The signori were, as conceived by the subaltern world, those able to enjoy life, those with whom no "cafone" [crude term for peasant or boor] was permitted to quarrel or liken himself. And the signori, in reality, felt above the subaltern world by nature and by uncontestable right. Their way of eating, dressing, marrying, adhering to social and religious norms, their way of living, therefore, was clearly different from that of the humble . . . Idleness assumed the value of a symbol, the symbol of being a gentleman; in contrast, the idea of work was associated with weight and condemnation . . . The term *subaltern world* means the human sector that lives in a state of recognized inferiority with respect to the society of noblemen and signori. The principal activities of the subaltern were agricultural [grain production] and pastoral [sheep herding] on which the community was economically based.[22]

Tentori notes, however, this rigid system began to fissure in 1861 with the unification of Italy. At this time, education became more accessible (by law); a democratic electoral system was introduced, as were labor unions; land redistribution programs (begun under Napoleon) were revived; new work opportunities arose with the new centralized national government; and contact with other regions became much stronger and brought new ideas and new fashions to Matera, which had lost contact with the outside world when it lost its position as regional capital in 1806. Leading to more jobs, new commerce was also introduced at this time with the arrival of such modern comforts as transportation and communication services, electric lights, radio, cinema, newspapers, and heating gas. These novelties led to the stirring of new ideas, a growing consciousness of political and social injustice, and an organized peasant movement.

Losing its position as regional capital in 1806, Matera lost its momentum, its military, law courts, functionaries, and contact with the changing world. Deprived of these functions and their associations with the external world, Matera was left behind during the modernizing nineteenth century, its feudal

social orders and mores becoming entrenched in the city's limestone walls. It was only due to unification that Matera was awakened from its slumber and acquainted with the modern world. When Mussolini reinstated Matera as a capital city in 1926, the modernization process accelerated, and another major period of building began, new residents with different ideals flooded the city, and a middle class was born. By the 1950s when the Study Group was analyzing the society, these modernizing changes had already made considerable impact. Despite the romanticism of some of the group's members, such as Friedmann, whose impressions of the city were based on Levi's pitiable descriptions, they were not dealing with an untouched, premodern society but one that was already in the throes of modernization—though still far behind the Western world's urban norms. Suspended between the past and the modern, Matera appeared to Tentori as being in a state of uneasiness. The Study Group's modernization interventions would not be the first experienced by this population, but they would steer some of the changes in motion into positive results.

The extent of change already occurring here in the 1950s can be discerned from some of the written responses that Tentori received from Sassi residents in a survey he conducted of their houses. Although they expose living conditions that were disdained by modern Western standards, the fact that the Sassi residents also disparage them reflects a change in consciousness, a sense of oppression, and a need for retribution. Considered acceptable in centuries past, the conditions that Sassi residents had learned to scorn included family members of different sexes sharing beds and bedrooms, use of one room for multiple purposes, lodging mules in the deepest part of their houses, and, in general, living in crowded spaces, about half of which were humid caves with limited natural light (figures 8.8–8.10). Tentori writes:

> Misery, felt and suffered like an injustice (though not suffered this way in the past due to a lack of consciousness), is stimulating the establishment of justice and releasing the movement to transform society. In all people there is a strong desire for justice, a desire that manifests in a thousand voices and a thousand events. Old, young, babies, men, women implore, pray, beg, and demand justice.
>
> . . . A 15-year-old girl asserted that . . . "we children all sleep on the floor, especially in summer, where we are scared of the animals that cross the house: lizards, roaches, and other insects that enter from the floor and roof of the house, which also drips water all day. Please come see our poor need of help."
>
> A father wrote: "on this little piece of paper I believe it appropriate to express my desire, which is to want a more comfortable and more decent house, being

Figure 8.8. *Interior of a peasant home in the Sassi with mule in background and chicken near the beds, ca. 1950. (Credit: Enzo Viti Collection)*

that this one is first of all too small and then very humid. In addition, it is not fair that some people have so many rooms: a dining room, a living room, a studio, while other people do everything in one room: cook, eat, sleep. It is also an impossible thing that we have to sleep in a very humid house because of all the diseases it brings us, also because the house is situated on weak ground, namely a canal that produced humidity . . . the house was sold and the owner of the house chased us out . . ."

A father of seven children describes his conditions: "my house is humid, insufficient for the needs of a family of nine. It is composed of only one room where we must sleep, men and women. It is an old cave that was turned into a house, therefore excessive humidity threatens our health, especially that of the children. It is about 200 meters from the closest little fountain, and it is heavy to transport water, especially because of all the stairs in between. The school for children is very distant. In addition to all this, there isn't a toilet or a window for ventilation. It is necessary that this house not even be used for animals because even these would suffer if living in this burrow. I have been unemployed for a long time and in addition to not being able to find a new house, I couldn't pay the rent for one. Only one of my sons works (a 16 year old) and is paid 200 lire a day. My wife is sick . . . and has no help, and I do not have the ability to help her. Neither the city, nor the mutual aid fund, nor social security gives me

Figure 8.9. *Interior of a Sassi home showing large, prosperous family dining, ca. 1950. (Credit: Enzo Viti Collection)*

> anything. I harbor no trust in that which is being discussed [public housing for Sassi residents], I'll only believe it when I have a house."[23]

Giuseppe Isnardi, geographer of the Study Group, also noticed transformations occurring here and elsewhere when he wrote: "Today things have changed, as all of Basilicata is changing, particularly the poorest and most remote, as witnessed by the notoriety and frequency of visitors, both Italian and non-Italian. The lifting of Matera to capital city in 1927 [sic] (which was in reality only a partial reinstating) was a decisive part in all this."[24]

Friedmann, too, noted: "A new kind of consciousness is forming in the peasant. For one thing, he sees the satisfaction of having his basic needs met . . . Once isolated, the respective possibilities to satisfy needs are confronted abstractly and quantitatively, working out the question: 'why to them and not to me?' Also forming is a new sense of justice (since the concept of justice is tied to the degree of ease or difficulty by which we, compared with others, can satisfy our basic needs)."[25]

Despite the optimism revealed by these observers and evidence of changes in consciousness and in lifestyles witnessed in Tentori's interviews, Nitti's

Figure 8.10. *Sassi residents collecting water from a well, ca. 1950. (Credit: Enzo Viti Collection)*

work betrays deep sadness and pessimism. Having personally experienced the poverty of the Sassi, his history of Matera written from the perspective of the peasant is not that of an objective scholar. His passionate study focuses on the sacrifices of the populace and the overbearing signori, who trampled the peasants living beneath them in the Sassi. Without mincing words, he describes the signori as "people worn out politically and deprived of education and culture," and the nobles as people "deprived of ideals and corrupted by spiritual misery stagnated from conceit and arrogance."[26]

Commenting on and quoting from Nitti's work from the perspective of the present, historian Giovanni Caserta writes:

> centuries of iniquity, deafness, oppression, slavery, arrogance, and ignorance seemed to Nitti to have signaled at an anthropological level that the Materan community—between vice and virtue—revealed "a certain incapacity to conform to the modern, tumultuous life of the big city; a very slow and little-developed industrial consciousness; an indistinct need to flee from the uproar of political life." With intellectual courage, especially ardent for a small community searching for glory even where there is not any, Nitti, abandoning all municipal concern, revealed that the populous part of Matera was completely absent of all liberal activity in the nineteenth century. Wonder and disdain grew for the behavior of the "ruling" class (that is the "*galantuomini*" [gentlemen] and the "signori") who, in the tradition of the worst southern nobility, maneuvered between the old and the new, believing that all changes without anything really changing. "In their logic as landowners, the galantuomini found a way to moderate the diverse and contrasting exigencies of liberalism and national unity on one side and of the of conservation of ancient privilege on the other." In this cultural and social scene, privilege was a natural right. However, class consciousness among the populace would sporadically explode in anarchy until the advent of 1945, namely, the dawn of the "democratic Republic founded on work." . . . Regarding government provision of culture and education, Nitti claimed that these were not bread and medicine, and that their provision would only render the nobility more proud and arrogant. In this way, culture and education could widen the gap and accentuate contempt among the peasants. [27]

Despite the overtones of grief and resentment in his work, Nitti concludes on a more optimistic note, based on changes being experienced at that time. He writes:

> The characteristics hitherto alluded to in the Materan community—low standard of living of the rural population, primitiveness of communications and of

transportation, social and moral atmosphere typically patriarchal, feudal agricultural organization, scarcity of commerce and absence of industry, backwardness of craftsmanship, persisting existence of illiteracy, lack of a serious technical culture—explain the reasons of an insufficiency of the sense of a connected life . . .

No surprise, therefore, if the reforms, partially implemented, do not succeed in removing the old social arrangement and end by creating instead a completely new and more complicated bureaucracy with a centralization of power that renders ever more invisible the work of the State, which continues to appear useless because it is an outside and abstract entity, because it is expressed from the outside and is aimed to modify the forms of life of a society that resists all innovative experiments.

But the lowest levels no longer remain estranged to the new events and to the interventions of the State, and are becoming ever more conscious of proper function. It is the new fact of the peasant movement, all an underground world in ferment, having passed through the postwar phases of hindrance and a major consciousness of the problems, and a better organization of trade unions and political parties, and to a more accentuated inclination to action framed within limits of legality, to a major interest in politics . . .

The peasants are a force that cannot continue to be ignored and that can no longer be governed from the outside, even paternalistically, ignoring their collaboration, their real interests, and especially their willingness. [28]

By analyzing the premodern social system, the Study Group accelerated its demise and the rebirth of the modern Materan citizen. The scholars' work led to the literal and figurative elevation of the lower classes to the new middle class living on a level (literally, the Piano) with the upper classes, and leaving their learned shame and misery behind to crumble in the mostly empty Sassi. These sentiments of disdain continue to inform the communal memory. A reluctance to admit family ties to the Sassi even today manifests the shame associated with the place and with these people's previously perceived social inferiority.

This situation is gradually beginning to change, thanks to international accolades that have triggered the arrival of tourists to Matera. In addition to being inscribed on the World Heritage List and defined as a national monument, Matera has been named the European Capital of Culture for 2019. These titles and the resulting public and institutional support of preservation efforts are again tied to the city's capital status. Surrounding towns with similar cave structures have not received this attention. With the closure of local industries and the current national economic crisis, the government and community of Matera are placing their hope in the Sassi's tourist draw to float the local economy.

Despite the revived title of Capital of Peasant Civilization used for marketing purposes, the occupants of the Sassi today are wealthy, cosmopolitan residents and tourists. In fact, much of the real estate is being claimed for elite cultural tourism. Apart from a few peasant-themed restaurants and museums, most of the spaces are being elegantly renovated to meet the sybaritic tastes and expectations of the new occupants. The contradiction intensifies with the city's preservation guidelines, which allow dramatic internal changes and modernization to Sassi spaces while rehistoricizing exteriors. Not considered to belong to the site's architectural history, twentieth-century exterior changes to the Sassi are being removed through such efforts as replacing aluminum window frames with new wooden ones (that require painting and maintenance) and requiring doors and shutters to be painted green or brown (often replacing old, hand-made wooden doors and shutters in a variety of colors with new, industrially made ones, painted green).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

While Matera's importance as a tourist center grows, so does its role as a capital city. More and more regional government offices are being established or expanded here, and the young local branch of the regional university is expanding quickly. In large part to attract and satisfy tourists, the city is rapidly becoming a cultural Mecca with significant museums and musical offerings—to the extent that Matera has been chosen as the 2019 European Capital of Culture. Preservation of the Sassi (which is bringing both world attention and money to the city) married with Matera's political role within the region is directly responsible for these changes.[29]

Although not a literal case of colonialism, the example of Matera illustrates the words of Jane M. Jacobs, who writes, "these expressions and negotiations of imperialism do not just occur *in* space. This is a politics of identity and power that articulates itself *through* space and is, fundamentally, *about* space . . . The politics produced by places in the process of becoming or being made anew is, then, also a politics of identity in which ideas of race, class, community and gender are formed."[30]

Pre-1950s Matera graphically demonstrated how social structures are constituted geographically. Here, space became intertwined with concepts of status and class, which were then reified in the physical place, in social behavior, and in cognitive structures. Clothing, food, lifestyles—all aspects of social being—were determined by where a person lived. Physical barriers of geography became social barriers. Over time, Matera became a three-dimensional

class model of social stratification. These physical and cognitive barriers limited physical and social mobility of the Sassi dwellers, whose presence was unwelcome on the elegant Piano.

It took several decades for the forced social leveling that occurred in the mid-twentieth century to dismantle the old hierarchy and restructure Materan society into a single middle class with relatively equal privileges, all living on a level plane. Although displays of social status are less visible than before, there remains a consciousness of historical class division—an awareness of where one's grandparents lived: on the Piano or in the Sassi. Ironically, those without ties to the Sassi (former Piano residents and newcomers) are the ones who embrace this site today, value it, and invest in its preservation, while those with previous ties to the Sassi have been less enthusiastic about the renovation taking place, many refusing to return there even for a visit. Their middle-class status depends upon this physical and emotional distancing of the Sassi from their lives.

We see repeated in the present and in the past the operation of politics through landscape. The materiality of Matera—its physical geography as well as the social order witnessed by its architecture—continues to inform the cultural politics of the city. Its cave structures, the physically enacted social stratification that developed from these, and the city's capital status led to the popularity of Levi's book and the events of the 1950s that completely redefined the culture, economy, and physical city of Matera. Vestiges of the old order, however, remain intact in the city's geographic imagination. While Matera's hierarchical landscape no longer reflects its power structure, the inequality of this long-lived experience remains alive in the collective memory, if not in practice. Attempts to erase these bitter memories are tied to the refusal to own this history and, in fact, to annihilate the Sassi, or at least to keep the Quinta intact so as to keep the view of the Sassi removed from the city. By physically avoiding the Sassi and trying to forget their histories there, some former residents allow the space of the Sassi to exert power over them and influence their movements and thoughts.

Landscape is not inert. It is a social construct that is constantly being negotiated. It is an active field of appropriation and identity creation.[31] Even the refusal to engage with the Sassi is a spatial act and one that informs the ex-Sassi group's identity. Matera's politics of identity and place have upturned the previous equation and transformed the Sassi into a tense and contested space, a social battlefield. The Sassi have become a status symbol of antiquity and Old World architectural prowess for yuppies, doctors, professors, writers, artists, architects, and other aesthetes and intellectuals, while the site is tainted

and continues to hold shame and contempt for other members of the population. When associated with Matera's subaltern population, the space of the Sassi was one of political impotence imposed by the ruling elite of the Piano. Through the narratives of world heritage and architectural mastery, the same landscape is now creating political and social authority for the new occupants. The continued power of the elite can be seen in this ability to reorganize space and exert control over social reproduction.

Can Smith's formulations of the influence of the physical landscape on the production of political authority accommodate the Sassi's complete reversal from a villainized site of alterity to an embraced site of privilege and cultural production? I believe that the answer to this question involves time and the fact that sociopolitical changes in Matera are occurring faster than physical changes in the landscape. While Smith's intent to spatialize political authority verges on environmental determinism, he does introduce a temporal element, which allows for change over time.[32] The transformation of the Sassi from an integral part of the city to a marginalized one took place over several centuries and was tied to Matera's rise and fall as a capital city—a process that beautifully illustrates Smith's landscape argument. However, the Sassi's rapid recent changes—first the evacuation of the Sassi and social leveling that accompanied this, then the Sassi's about-face from a site of national shame to one of world heritage—occurred within mere decades and do not reflect a shift in the city's capital status. I do not believe that Smith's construction can adapt to this change, as it is not formulated to study the impact of words on landscape. If politics are embedded in the physical environment, which, according to Smith, exerts an influence on experience, perception, and imagination, then how can the Sassi change meaning through a speech act: the passage of a national law (lifting the Sassi from shame to monument) or the publication of Levi's book? Admittedly, the tainted perception of the site by Materans has not adapted as quickly, but it is changing nonetheless. This, significantly, is not due to physical, social, or political changes but is largely due to the Sassi's role as an economic engine of the city through the tourist trade. In the face of the city's loss of manufacturing as the foundation of its economy, the tourism industry is rapidly growing in importance.

The complete reversal in social meaning attached to the urban geography of the Sassi (from the viewpoint of the elite) exemplifies the fact that although geography *contributes* to and *influences* social structuring and the shaping of social processes, it does not in itself *determine* these processes. The lesson of Matera refutes any residual claims of environmental determinism. Different social forces interacting with the spaces of the Sassi and the Piano led to

different social structures and social relations. Returning to the definition of landscape, we see inscribed in the continually contested and reworked urban form of Matera the rich and continuous record of human engagement.

NOTES

1. For a thorough development of the urban history of Matera, see Anne Parmly Toxey, *Materan Contradictions: Architecture, Preservation and Politics* (London: Ashgate, 2011).

2. Robert B. Riley, "The Visible, the Visual, and the Vicarious: Questions about Vision, Landscape, and Experience," 203; and Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," 4, in *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

3. Adam T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

4. This date was used by Pietro Laureano in his nomination of Matera for the UNESCO World Heritage List. To arrive at this date, he averaged the carbon dating of human settlements in Matera and surrounding caves (which ranged from 100,000 to 700,000 years BP). These data were developed by scientists working for the Ridola National Archaeological Museum in Matera.

5. http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/670, accessed November 26, 2011.

6. Pietro Laureano, *Giardini di Pietra: I Sassi di Matera e la Civiltà Mediterranea* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993), 69.

7. Leandro Alberti, *Descrittione di tutta l'Italia et isole pertinenti ad essa* (Venice: Paulo Ugolino, 1596), 223.

8. Giovanni Battista Pacichelli, *Il Regno di Napoli in Prospettiva*, vol. 1. (Sala Bolognese: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1975, reprinted from original 1702 publication), 266–267.

9. Abate Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio nel Regno di Napoli* (ca. 1780).

10. John Murray, *A Handbook for Travellers in Southern Italy; Being a Guide for the Provinces Formerly Constituting the Continental Portion of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies* (London: John Murray, 1868).

11. Smith, *Political Landscape*, 8.

12. *Quinta* is a theatrical term for backstage. In architecture, it means an edge. *Quinta Settecentesca* means the eighteenth-century edge and refers to the boundary between the Piano, or city, and the Sassi.

13. Alfonso Pontrandolfi, *La Vergogna Cancellata: Matera negli Anni dello Sfollamento dei Sassi* (Matera: Altrimedia Edizioni, 2002), 24.

14. Pontrandolfi, *La Vergogna Cancellata*, 21.

15. The population increased by 70 percent between 1921 and 1951, rising from 17,900 to 30,390 residents. Between 1936 and 1951, agricultural jobs rose from 4,542 to 4,910, industrial jobs rose from 2,308 to 3,931, commercial jobs rose from 452 to 545, and "other" jobs rose from 895 to 2,021 positions. Livia Bertelli, *International Competition for the Arrangement of the "Sassi" of Matera: Historical-Urbanistic Architectural Investigations on the "Sassi"* (Matera: BMG/Italian Republic Ministry of Public Works, 1974), 20, 22.

16. See, for example, Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture, 1944–1985* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 25; Graeme Barker, *A Mediterranean Valley: Landscape Archaeology and Annales History in the Biferno Valley* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1995), 298; Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 122, describing conditions of Calabria that are obviously worse than Matera; Luigi Piccinato, "Matera: i Sassi, i nuovi borghi e il Piano regolatore," *Urbanistica* 15–16 (1955): 147; and in his introduction, Cid Corman, *Sun, Rock, Man* (New York: New Directions Book, 1970), n.p., similarly describes Matera's affluence in relation to the "undisguised, unmitigated" poverty of neighboring villages.

17. Smith, *Political Landscape*, 156–164.

18. Riccardo Musatti, "Motivi e Vicende dello Studio," in *Saggi Introduttivi (1): Commissione per lo Studio della Citta e dell' Agro di Matera*, edited by Federico G. Friedmann, Riccardo Musatti, and Giuseppe Isnardi (Rome: UNRRA-Casas, 1956), 3. All translations made by Anne Parmly Toxey.

19. Federico Friedmann, "Osservazioni sul mondo contadino dell'Italia Meridionale," in *Quaderni di sociologia* 3 (winter 1952), 149, quoted in Musatti, *Motivi*, 7.

20. For examples of his binaries, see Federico G. Friedmann, "Un Incontro: Matera," in *Sassi Introduttivi (1): Commissione per lo Studio della Città e dell' Agro di Matera*, by Riccardo Musatti, Federico G. Friedmann, and Giuseppe Isnardi (Rome: UNRRA-Casas, 1956), 11–12. See also Musatti, *Motivi*, 7; and Carlo Aymonino, "Matera: mito e realtà," *Casabella Continuità* 231 (1959), viii.

21. Friedmann, *Sassi Introduttivi*, 11.

22. Tullio Tentori, *Il Sistema di Vita della Comunità Materana: Riassunto di un'inchiesta etnologica* (Rome: UNRRA-Casas, 1956), 5.

23. Tentori, *Il Sistema*, 25–26. His survey continues with the following:

> An even more precise description of his living conditions was given by another father: "the house where I live with my wife and my three young children is truly a doghouse and not [fit] for civil people. Think of a house situated 50 meters from the Gravina torrential stream, at the point where all the city's sewage is released, forming a cascade of all manner of stuff that falls into the torrent below, where it stagnates until a rain carries it away, by which time it is old. The stable in this same house, other than being dangerous for serious injuries, is completely deprived of all comforts.

Due to insufficient space, the three children, aged 12, 8, and 6, sleep in one bed, sexes mixed. It is so humid that water collects under the beds when it rains a lot. There is no bathroom, not even a drain for disposing of wastewater. Think of the morning, after five people have used a terra cotta chamber pot. This filth must be conserved at least until two the next morning to empty it into a black well (uncovered) located 60 meters from the house (at other hours one is not allowed to dispose of waste without facing severe fines). For lack of space, this filth—a meal for flies, conserved for at least a day—is kept either in the kitchen or in a corner of the house, or even under the bed, covered with rags to muffle the stench and to hide it from view when visitors come by. Because of all this filth, which is greater than I've described, we are continually plagued and even infested by roaches, rats, salamanders, and other small disgusting creatures that crawl across our beds at night. Not to mention flies, living with which has become a habit. Think also of the serious problem of water that I transport with jugs a distance of 200 meters. One can't obtain a jug of water without waiting in line for at least half an hour or more at a public fountain . . . To avoid this, I lose several hours of sleep to go get water from the fountain at 3 AM. To conserve water, which costs effort and sacrifice, I wash with water used by my child to wash. I have three children, each of which has suffered from diseases attributed to a dirty house, like malaria, smallpox, conjunctivitis, diphtheria, typhoid, and paratyphoid B. After all this, the owner succeeded in evicting me because the judge admitted the urgent conditions of the house. At the end of the legal extension, I will be given the house. This is a serious problem. The local authorities, with the exception of the Hygiene Office that comes to give vaccinations and distributes anti-typhoid pills, etc., do nothing concrete to deal with all this human misery. The allocation of public housing along via Passarelli aroused such discontent among the really needy population because the houses were assigned to people who already had comfortable homes but who were constrained by large families or who paid high rents. In my opinion, for the allocation of public housing, the commission should give preference to those who live beneath animals, because the major part of the people who were allocated houses were not forced to conserve chamber pots under their beds. I hear talk of much construction and of the abolition of the Sassi: this would be a really big job. This has been discussed for years. Even my deceased grandmother told me that during her life she always heard talk of demolishing the Sassi, and effectively, I have seen some new constructions built. I believe that one day the eternal plague of the Sassi of Matera will be healed." (26)

24. Giuseppe Isnardi, "L'Ambiente Geografico," in *Sassi Introduttivi (1): Commissione per lo Studio della Citta e dell' Agro di Matera*, ed. Federico G. Friedmann, Riccardo Musatti, and Giuseppe Isnardi (Rome: UNRRA-Casas, 1956), 25.

25. Friedmann, *Sassi Introduttivi*, 12–13.

26. Quoted in Giovanni Caserta, "Introduzione," in *Matera 55: Radiografia di una Città del Sud tra Antico e Moderno*, by R. Musatti, F. Friedmann, G. Isnardi, F. Nitti, and T. Tentori (Matera: Edizioni Gianatelli, 1996), 15.

27. Caserta, "Introduzione," 16–17. Mention of anarchy references Matera's history of assassination of noblemen (namely Count Tramontano in 1514 and Count Gatini and his companions in 1860) and the citizens' involvement in southern peasant revolts in the first half of the twentieth century.

28. Francesco Nitti, *Una Città del Sud: Saggio Storico* (Rome: UNRRA-Casas-Prima Giunta, 1956), 55–56. He further states:

> If the bourgeoisie, more or less consciously, is for the State and from the State awaits solutions to the problems of the South, then the peasants are against the State, because the State to them appears to be tyrannical and distant. The true and more evident sign of the conflict between the two classes is here between the Sassi and the Piano (which is the new part of the city), between old and modern: these two cities in one [are] two aspects of a civilization.
>
> Many things have happened to bring together the peasants of the Sassi and the "civilized" of the Piano. The strengthening of the economic state of the peasants—even if this is always less than needed—the development of democratic institutions, the new studies and the surveys of the socio-economic conditions of the city, with particular regard to the state of the peasants, the construction of rural villages for the evacuation of the Sassi, a certain thirst for progress that accompanies the desire (sometimes confused by escape from the closed circle of the small and wretched provincial life)—all this signifies that this peasant society is in movement.

29.Toxey, *Materan Contradictions* analyzes the effects of preservation on Matera and its surroundings.

30. Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–2.

31. See Barbara Bender, "Introduction," in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 3.

32. Smith, *Political Landscape*, 10–11, 105–111, and in particular, Fernand Braudel's concept of *longue durée* on 48–49.