



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici

## Laboratorio demo-etno-antropologico

Lab



Dea

**Lunedì, 22 febbraio ore 14.30-16.30**

Palazzo Marcorà Malcanton, III piano, Sala Milone

e zoom <https://unive.zoom.us/j/82407999781>

**FILIPPO OSELLA**

(The University of Sussex),

terrà una conferenza su:

**The unbearable lightness of trust: trade, conviviality  
and the-life-world Indian export agents in Yiwu, China**

### Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic data collected in China, UAE and India, this article explores the life-world and practices of small-scale Indian export agents based in Yiwu (China), the world centre for the export of small commodities. It shows that in a market overdetermined by fast-moving goods, short-time gains, and low margins, export agents have to steer their way between acting with extreme caution or taking risks with their clients and suppliers. These apparently contradictory dispositions or orientations are negotiated by the judicious exercise of mistrust and suspicion. The article suggests not only that mistrust is valued and cultivated as an indispensable practical resource for success in Yiwu's export trade, but that contingent relations of trust between market players emerge at the interstices of a generalised mutual mistrust, via the mobilization of practices of hospitality, commensality and masculine conviviality. Indeed, feelings of amity and mutuality elicited by the performance of modalities of social intimacy become the affective terrain upon which divergent economic interests might be reconciled and taken forward. That is, mistrust might not lead to generalized distrust but a situational or contingent trust might actually emerge through the judicious exercise of mistrust.

### **Nota biografica**

Filippo Osella is a Professor of Social Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the University of Sussex, UK. For the last 30 years he has conducted research in south India, as well as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and a number of countries in the Arabian Peninsula. His work has focused on a number of connected themes, from processes of social mobility amongst ex-untouchable and socio-religious reform movements, to popular religiosity (within Hinduism and Islam), charity, migration and masculinity. His recent publications include an edited volume on the relationships between religiosity and market practices (*Religion and the Morality of the Market*, 2017, Cambridge University Press) and another on Islamic reform movements (*Islamic reforms in South Asia*, 2012 Cambridge University Press), as well as a journal special issue on charity and philanthropy (*Charity and philanthropy in South Asia*, 2018, *Modern Asian Studies*), and another on the anthropology of Islam (*Islam, politics and anthropology*, 2009, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*). Between 2018 and 2020, as part of an ERC-funded project, he conducted research on trading networks between India, China and the United Arab Emirates. From 2020 he has started a new research project on the lifeworlds of Catholic and Muslim artisanal fishers in South India.